

THE  
FOREST OF BOURG-MARIE

BY

S. FRANCES HARRISON

(SERANUS)

AUTHOR OF 'PINE, ROSE, AND FLEUR-DE-LIS,' ETC.

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# THE FOREST OF BOURG-MARIE



## CHAPTER I.

### ALL ABOUT MAGLOIRE.

‘A man was famous according as he had lifted up axes upon the thick trees.’

BORDERING the mighty river of the Yamachiche there are three notable forests, dark, uncleared, untrodden, and unfrequented by man, lofty as Atlas, lonely as Lethe, sombre as Hades. In their Plutonian shades stalk spectral shapes of trapper and voyageur, Algonquin and Iroquois, Breton and Highlander, Saxon and Celt. Through their inmost recesses range spirits who revisit, say the imaginative peasantry, the scene of their former labours, wood-cutting, tree-felling, bark-tapping, bait-setting—a race of strange and sturdy men, afraid of nothing except shadows, strongly and deeply religious, drinkers of the open air, silent, inscrutable, wary. The three

forests are, respectively, the Forest of Lafontaine, the Forest of Fournier, and the Forest of Bourg-Marie, and upon their outskirts dwell the descendants of the hardy trappers, the dashing voyageurs, the slim, refined Frenchmen from the Breton coast, and mixed British—phlegmatic Scotch, impulsive Irish, grotesque Welsh—with an occasional Teutonic or Hungarian contribution,

The Forest of Bourg-Marie is the darkest, the deepest, the most impenetrable, the most forbidding of the three. The stars of spring that light up other woods seem here rarely to pierce through the cold, hard ground to the sun: the sun itself seldom penetrates the thick branches of fir and pine and hemlock. The tints of autumn that beautify the death of the year in other places are absent from its partially-cleared fringe of pine-tasselled ground; there seems no colour, no motion, no warmth anywhere. Fitting soil for fable and legend, for the tale of Dead Man's Tree, for the livelier story of ill-fated Rose Latulippe, for countless minor myths that the old women and the old men, even the young men and maidens, have at their fingers' ends, and which, once started, they will recount all day and half the night for the interested traveller. Fitting haunt for the famous beast or bogey known as the Loup-Garou, a thing so hateful, so terrible, that for all the countryside the name is fraught with curious yet awful fear. Fitting habitation—the entire valley—for bear and

snake and salmon and deer—for all things that court the solitude and exclusion of the almost primeval, the undisturbed, the unfrequented.

Mikel Caron, forest-ranger for the County of Yamachiche, was, in all probability, the only man who, within the memory of those living, had thoroughly explored these haunted arches, and pressed towards the crescent of light that bounded them on the other side. This Mikel Caron, unusually tall, painfully thin, with furrowed brown face, ferret's eyes, and slouching gait, is the walking observatory, the weather-prophet of his county. He knows every tree by name and by sight on the outskirts and well into the middle of the three great forests. He knows every sign of peeling bark, of shifting soil, of running or drying sap, of outgoing bird, of ingoing skunk and squirrel, of fading or budding flower, of unset blossom, of hardening fruit, of ice-scratched boulder, of drifting leaf, of sodden hoof-mark, of lofty nest, of lowly burrow. This Mikel Caron is the great-grandson of a son of Messire Jules-Gaspard-Noël-Ovide Delaunay-Colombière Caron, who held at one time the Seigniorship of Bourg-Marie, extending along the western bank of the Yamachiche for 900 *arpents*—a fief granted, according to the mouldy and rat-gnawed parchment of the 'Actes du Foy et Hommage,' to its first holder in the year 1668. The fief has slowly but surely dwindled, till, in the hands of Mikel Caron,

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shorn of his long array of high-sounding names as well as of glebe and wood and river, it is represented chiefly by the immense Forest of Bourg-Marie.

This fact rarely troubled Mikel. Of what use was land to an old and childless man like himself, and such land—acres of bog, acres of forest, miles of river, ranges of mountains!

If Magloire had come back, then—but Magloire would never come back. That Eldorado, the States, had attracted him. See how the quick lad early learns to hate the inconceivable dullness, slowness, inclemency, roughness, misery of the life! From his tenth year he had actually dared to array his little person and his childish opinions against the curé, who lived at Yamachiche, his uncle, and the rustic minds of his native countryside. Mikel had helped too—Mikel who had slapped Magloire on the back, and cried that he would be a great man some day and go up to Quebec and speak in the Council; Mikel, who now would give all his ancient lineage and his right to Plutonian Bourg-Marie for a glimpse of Magloire's sleek little black head and the sound of his sharp falsetto voice. No; it was certain Magloire would never come back. So Mikel's philosophy—learnt from Nature, from brooding twilight glooms, from diamonded midnight vigils spent in eluding heavy-breathing bear or sly russet fox, from hot, sleepy noons in a canoe on the sparkling river, from cool, dewy dawns in the lumber-

men's camp or shanty; such wisdom, borrowed from furred and plumed, erect, creeping and prowling creatures, and from stone and sap and soil and stump as well—upheld him and comforted him in his lonely life. From the eagle he got his easy soaring to thoughts as to heights the curé himself could hardly follow; from the bear his indomitable dogged pluck, which neither Arctic blasts nor torrid waves ever affected; from fish and snake and small birds the habits of attention, minute and accurate observation; the alert eye, the sensitive ear, the rapid motion. To go without food for four or five days, and without drink for three, content with moistening his lips with snow or sucking occasional icicles; to sleep in a hole in the snow, with more snow for blankets and quilt; to face blinding storms and buffeting winds, hail, rain and frost, wild beasts, murderous half-breeds, suspicious Indians—all this was easy to Mikel, because his early training had fitted him to endure, and even to enjoy, what he never dreamed of designating as hardship. In this life had the great-grandson of the son of Jules-Gaspard-Noël-Ovide Delaunay-Colombière Caron grown old.

And there were two seasons in that lonely land when Mikel, and with him all other old men, felt the pressure of years most bitterly. One was when the leaves of sudden spring made green waves in the valley, flooding with verdure, sunshine, and

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melody the dismal banks of the half-frozen river, when birds returned, and cascades leapt, and the waxen pyrola gleamed at the foot of the tallest tree. Again, when the leaves of brilliant autumn have floated to the ground, floated, shrivelled, and been caught up in a whirlwind of fire, which consumes their beautiful souls and consigns them again to the dry dust by the wayside. Not that Mikel was troubled by poetic apprehensions and fanciful analogies, the comparing of human life and perishing mortality to withered leaf and flying dust, but that his sense of coming impotence, perhaps dependence on others, inability to cope with Joncas\* and Laurière, powerlessness in face of the axe, the saw, the gun, the knife, fear when confronted with slow-moving bear or lithe brown fox, impressed him deeply with aversion of the approaching winter. Stoical, like the Russian, the old-time Greek, the Highlander, the well-born Englishman, Mikel had more than a passing trace of the voluptuous French, nursed, not in hardy Basque province, or by the shore of sea-washed Normandy, but in the rich, plentiful, vine-clad, corn-gilded inland meadows and valleys of the Haut Campagne.

It was on an autumn evening, about six o'clock, and very dark indeed for even a dark October, that old Mikel, returning from an extended examination of more than twenty-five bear-traps, set in the obscure

\* Pronounced 'Joncasse.'



shadow of Bourg-Marie, found Nicolas\* Laurière awaiting him—Nicolas Laurière, straight, slim, pale, young, with broad shoulders, brown eyes, and a handsome moustache; Nicolas Laurière, twenty-five, only a stripling, yet the bravest, most intrepid, and most skilful of all the Yamachiche trappers.

Mikel, hastening moodily home, almost walked into Laurière, as the latter stood leaning against the low fence surrounding Mikel's house and clearing.

'It is I—Laurière,' said the younger man, moving aside and opening the little gate for Mikel, that the latter, weighed down as he was by tools and pieces of wood, might pass through the more easily. 'It grows cold, dark, and at home I am not wanted. I can help you perhaps, Mikel, you who work always, even when other men sleep.'

Mikel was displeased, and swung the gate to behind him, forgetting the friendly purpose of his visitor for a moment; then, with an effort to sink the touchy feeling in one less selfish, opened it again and motioned to Laurière to enter.

'There is work—yes, there is work, if you are so ready for it. Certainly, one can always find work near Bourg-Marie. So enter; find it; do your will. There is supper enough for two.'

Laurière silently followed Caron into the kitchen, already illuminated by the glowing logs, that revealed

\* Pronounced 'Nicolasse.'

a grateful warmth and radiance when the older man opened the end door of the long black stove.

Mikel was unmistakably sullen. He grumbled at the bad wick of his one lamp. He shot inquiring yet moody glances at Laurière.

'Say, you,' he said, getting out some cracked cups and plates, bread, tobacco, a dish of cold beans and cabbage, and some whisky, 'why do you come to-night—you, Laurière? Is there news?'

Laurière sat down and warmed his hands well before he spoke.

'Well,' he said at length, 'there is—a little, a very little—in the village.'

There was an immediate change in the old man which might have manifested itself in a more vulgar nature by the smashing of delf or other clumsy self-betrayal. In Mikel, however, such was his power of self-control and stoical command or suppression of the emotions, that this change was confined to a lighting up of the wrinkled visage, and a corresponding improvement in his voice. He grew almost gracious.

'I thought you would not come for nothing. There is nothing else that need bring you, eh, Laurière?'

The younger man laughed deprecatingly. He would have to humour old Caron.

'No, no,' he said; and very politely he half rose from his chair.

Mikel was a recognised person in his neighbour-

hood, and it was well known that he was in truth a seigneur, and, as such, worthy of the respect and courtesy of the valley.

'Well, now,' said Mikel, sitting down in front of the stove and regarding his visitor shrewdly, 'what is this news? Is it, now, of bears, or of foxes, or of squirrels? Is it, now, of smuggled spirits, or weather omens, or dances up at Madame Delorme's? Ah-h-h, you will all be found out some day—smuggling, jesting, dancing, drinking! Keep cool and quiet, like me—like me! Come, the news!'

'How well he acted!' thought Laurière admiringly. 'With his heart beating as if it would burst beneath that shaggy fur waistcoat, and his yellow teeth anxiously biting his blackened lips—old fox, old man-of-the-woods, old bird of prey, still wary, cautious, controlled!' But Laurière was made of much the same stuff—Mikel's pupil he called himself.

'I thought,' said Laurière timidly, slowly, and raising his eyes deferentially to Caron's inquiring, yet not over-eager face, 'that you would guess the news, for it is of something better than bears, or dogs, or foxes; of something nearer than Mother Delorme and René the smuggler. It is news of Magloire.'

Mikel lowered his eyes, but did not move. Laurière, divining he had permission to speak, continued in a more natural and sprightly tone, warming with his subject:

'Yes, of Magloire. There are those who have

seen him, spoken with him, over where he is gone, in these States. They say he has grown very tall—taller than I am—as tall as Jules Blondeau, who married the sister of Joncas; he who caught the fifty bears last winter.'

Little need to remind Mikel of this fact.

'I remember,' he said with unmoved face. 'Speak on—of Magloire. He has been seen and spoken with? By whom? This Blondeau?'

'No,' said Laurière, always carefully, but more familiarly than at first. 'By two men who left Bourg-Marie. It is four years since they will have left and gone to Milwaukee.' He accented the final syllable. 'These men, they were the sons of *la veuve Péron*. The brothers, Louis and Jack, they were in Milwaukee, without work, and without anything to eat. They were saying how much better it was in Bourg-Marie, how the potatoes, and beans, and whisky were there all the year round, and how kind the neighbours always were to one another; and they spoke of many things as we did them here, and of Joncas, and of the Mother Péron, Madame Marie-Louise, and the church, and of you. Oh yes, it was of you they spoke often, wondering what the winter was going to be like that year, and how you could tell them in a minute if you were only there by just seeing a bird wheel across the sky, or the bark and moss on the outside of the great logs of wood going on the carts to rich men's houses.'

‘Quiet, thou!’ growled Mikel impatiently. ‘Speak on, but of Magloire, and not of these, thy friends—fools! Of Magloire, speak!’

‘Well, Louis and Jack, they will have been hungry for a long time, and sorry they ever left Bourg-Marie. The people of that town are all English, and speak only their own tongue; and it is all strange to these men, who are called “Canuck” and “Frenchy.” This would displease anyone but Louis and Jack. Everyone knows they do not like *names* at all, and this day that they were most tired and hungry, all at once, driving past them in a sleigh of the handsomest, with fine dashing horses, they heard the man who was driving them singing aloud one of our own songs, “C’est François Marcotte.”’

Undeniably excited, and worked upon by Laurière’s perverse slowness of recital and delay in coming to the point, Mikel allowed an exclamation to escape his quivering lips.

‘That was he! That was Magloire?’

Laurière inclined his head.

‘It was himself—Magloire. But they—Louis and Jack—did not know it was he. See, then, how long since he was at home, here, with you, amongst his friends. No, they could not tell that it was Magloire. But when they heard the voice and the song, they knew it was someone from the county, or at least from here, from Canada, and they waited, day

after day, till they saw him again, and then they stopped him. It was Magloire Caron, of Bourg-Marie, and your grandson. He was tall, as I have said, healthy, well-dressed, and amiable; gave his name at once, had forgotten nothing, nor—nor anybody, and promised to do all he could for Louis and Jack. But that was four years ago.' Laurière, feeling himself drawing near the end of his simple narrative, stole a look at Mikel, and concluded in a tone which would have rung false to anyone less absorbed than the old and often disappointed trapper, so laconic was the inflection. 'He has prospered, for sure, Magloire.'

'Prospered! Magloire! You are certain it was himself? These are true men, this Louis and Jack? Prospered, and he has never written!—prospered, and I have had to toil and drudge!—prospered, and not even remembered the good father, and the church of the holy St. Anne!' The old man was entirely off his guard now, and clutched at his waistcoat with trembling hands. 'Driving, you say—driving—his own horses—Magloire! Well, it is as it should be, were he only dutiful enough to remember me and—and Father Labelle. Well, but it is a wonderful country, that States.'

Between wrath and importunity, delight and wild reproach, jealousy and parental affection, Mikel was beside himself and ill-prepared for Laurière's next statement. The younger man, playing nervously

with his knitted tuque between his hands, had no idea of sparing his co-worker and patron, however much he might admire and respect him. The instinct of the hunter, the trapper, pursued him even more than he was aware.

'Well,' he said, in that deliberate, laconic half-voice which should have warned the older man—'well, he has prospered, *ouai*\*—yes, much, but not so much as that. Those horses, they were not his own, not Magloire's. No; they belonged to his master, to a—gentleman. Magloire, he was the driver, the coachman, when Louis and Jack Péron see him there in Milwaukee—the coachman. Ah *ouai*, he has prospered, that one; but you will recollect we always said he would prosper. *Bien ouai*, that is all about Magloire.'

Laurière was no coward; his life had surely proved his prowess. But in face of Mikel Caron, his elder and superior, torn and distorted, rent asunder by stern, awful and conflicting pains, he assuredly quailed, although he sat outwardly quiet on his chair by the big black stove, for Mikel was horribly angry, embittered, disappointed. Magloire, *his* grandson, heir of the Colombière Carons of Bourg-Marie, a *coachman* in the employ of some well-to-do tradesman or pork-packer of the West—Magloire, waiting on other men, instead of having other men to wait on him, servile, dependent, debased.

\* For *oui*.

Laurière rose to go.

‘If he were to come back—back to Bourg-Marie—you would see him, would you not?’

Mikel drew a deep breath.

‘Do they say that he will come back?’

‘Louis and Jack Péron? Well—yes. They have heard that he is likely to come back some day.’

‘Why should he do so?’ said old Mikel stolidly. His transport of rage over, he disdained expressing emotion or even interest. ‘There are no carriages here. He would be nobody here, not even a coachman, in Bourg-Marie.’

‘That is true,’ said Laurière politely; ‘and now I will bid you good-evening; and when I see these Pérons—they are with their mother for a holiday—I will tell them I have seen you, and that you know all about Magloire.’

‘*Bien ouai!* All about Magloire!’

Mikel was quite himself—cold, collected, a trifle satirical, and very authoritative. Laurière had reached the door, when the older man called him back.

‘Stop, Nicolas Laurière!’ he said. ‘You are going without your supper.’

Laurière opened his hands, and gave a slight shrug of the shoulders; but Mikel insisted, and the two men sat down together and supped in almost total silence, for Laurière, not very lively among men of his own age, became abnormally taciturn



and reticent in the presence of the leathern-visaged, crusty, aristocratic and venerable Caron. A magnate is another being, and one easier to meet ; but an equal who is yet more than an equal, for he knows your business better than you know it yourself, is sometimes difficult to encounter.

Laurière stayed only to eat his share of the meal, and left. It was about eight o'clock, and a fine web of moonbeams began to spread over the dark autumnal skies. Both men scanned the night.

'No bear to-night,' said Caron.

'Well, no,' replied Laurière. 'Wait awhile ; there will come plenty, eh ?'


The owner of Bourg-Marie nodded, and shut the door. In a few moments Laurière was out of sight and hearing, and the most profound silence prevailed.

## CHAPTER II.

### MAGLOIRE HIMSELF.

‘ The simple inherit folly.’

THE little narrative which the young man Nicolas Laurière had told old Caron was quite true. He himself rather envied Magloire. Two or three times he had been on the point of relinquishing the plain fare, the hard work, the inclement climate, to try for a living somewhere else. He was not the enthusiast Mikel was. He and Joncas were trappers because their fathers had been trappers—they had to be ; there was nothing else for them to be. Yes, he quite envied Magloire, though he understood fully that whereas at Bourg-Marie one was one’s own master, that would be all very different in another place. About the same age as Magloire, at the time of the latter’s disappearance the same temptations attracted him, for tidings of the great world outside were slowly colouring the life and minds of his native countryside. Here and there



an ambitious maiden of eighteen, who found her way up to the large English-speaking towns and became a waitress, a nursemaid, a maid-of-all-work, would return at rare intervals and pour into the ears of her family tales of the opulence, the size, and the population of Three Rivers or St. John's.\* Sometimes a paper would arrive bearing in rough-marked edges witness of a young stripling from a farm or 'shanty' who had found friends and fortune in the Upper Province or in the States, and this paper would be handed about from house to house as the rarest of literary treasures. And whenever this kind of thing overtook Laurière he would grow restive and moody, walk away from the company, and, staring blankly at the flat dull landscape, go for a walk of ten miles to Mad Dog Creek, and return hungry and cured.

On this cold night Nicolas was discontented, although no distinctions of caste troubled him. He strode away from the ranger's little dwelling along the hard gray rutted road at a great pace. On either side of him stretched the forest, dark, inscrutable, yet not forbidding to one who so often, both with Caron and by himself, had threaded the edge of its cavernous recesses. The road lay perfectly straight for a mile, then turned sharply round, disclosing the sullen river, not yet frozen, but soon to be, so black and opaque it lay beneath the faintly glimmering stars. A dog appeared, running swiftly.

\* St. John's, P. q.

It approached Laurière, smelt him, seemed to approve, wagged his tail, and returned whence he came, followed by the trapper. In a few moments the red light of one window appeared sharply in the gloom, and Nicolas, vaulting over the low snake-fence, rapped upon the door of the cabin belonging to the widow Péron, the mother of Louis and Jack, the travellers who were now home for a holiday from the high pressure and other modern disabilities of life in Milwaukee. The door was opened by Pacifique, the third and youngest son. He had never left his mother nor his native valley, and bore with Nicolas a striking contrast to the other three young men who were lounging in the small kitchen. The shortest of these was Jack Péron, fat, olive-skinned almost to lividness, with podgy hands and a laughing mouth. The next to him was his brother Louis, thinner, slightly gaunt and weird, with a suggestion of the traditional stage Lucifer in his pointed eyebrows, beard, and chin. The tallest of the three, however, Magloire Caron himself, exceeded his companions in appointments, dress, and general bearing, as much as in height. He was, indeed, unusually and exceptionally tall. His hair, of that harsh jet-black stiff kind so frequently found among his countrymen, was parted in the middle, and, after being drawn away to either side in two well-marked horns, was plastered down everywhere else with the newest thing in pomatum, a preparation of castor-

oil, bay-rum, and attar of roses. His costume was an English tweed of not unprepossessing pattern, considered alongside the preposterous gray and claret check that Louis and Jack had both chosen as best calculated to display their knowledge of correct fashion, and to please their devoted mother. His cravat (Magloire's) was of pale pink linen, worn over a striped navy-blue and white cotton shirt. His jewellery was very much *en évidence*, and a silk handkerchief, in which purple figured on a saffron ground, completed the iridescent nature of his apparel. And although this quasi-picturesque garb did not offend so keenly in his case as it would have done in that of a more purely prosaic type, still, on comparing his pretentious vulgarity with the admirably careless and characteristic appearance of Laurière, it seemed a pity that his magnificent proportions, his glistening teeth, his night-black hair, and his sombre but healthful complexion, were lost, if not indeed made ridiculous, by his affectation of a foreign style. In the sombrero and cloak of the Mexican, in the jacket and cap of the Spaniard, in the ample linen and glowing sash of the Greek, or even in the high-crowned hat wound round by a scarlet ribbon, the flannel shirt and earrings of his own despised countrymen, he had been handsome. In his imported English cheviot, his cheap jewellery, and his ill-assorted colours, he narrowly escaped being absurd.

Yet he was very much admired. Louis and Jack,

who had done well in Milwaukee, but not as well as Magloire himself, admired him intensely, and, it might be added, despairingly. In fact, after that meeting on the main street, when the vision of their old friend and playmate flashed past them, clothed in black bearskins and importance, the brothers made an idol of him, and formed themselves upon him in every respect.

Pacifique admired him. So tall, and Pacifique was short; so regular-featured, and Pacifique was crooked; so self-possessed and graceful, and Pacifique was stunted, crippled, worn, and shy. The *veuve* Péron admired him. Had he not been the means of setting up her own boys? and, although they did not appear to have brought home very much ready-money, still they were beautifully dressed, and altogether different from the young men in the village, and spoke about an account in the savings-bank. What more could the widow ask? Admire Magloire? *Bien ouai*—for a splendid fellow!

Nicolas Laurière admired him perhaps most of all. As Magloire was, so he, Laurière, should be some day. He had no grandfather with medieval notions to threaten his peace or interfere with his projects. He would leave this place, come what might. And just as he reached this decision—for the hundredth time—Magloire, seeing him enter, beckoned him to his side by the fire, around which the little circle was

gathered. His manner was nonchalant, yet assertive, and impressed Laurière more than ever with its novelty and importance.

'Say, then, you,' he said, 'Nicolas Laurière,' relapsing into his native Franco-Canadian, for he spoke English all the time when in Milwaukee, 'have you seen the grandfather?'

Laurière recounted in the same tongue the outlines of the conversation. Delicacy for, and admiration of, Magloire prevented him from disclosing the whole state of the old man's feelings. But Magloire was quick, and able to see through a simple type like Laurière at once. He laughed, and his laugh was not altogether pleasant to hear. He crossed his long legs in evident comfort before the widow's fire, and taking from his pocket a penknife, commenced to cut and clean his nails. He had been reminded of a little dirt in them by the sight of the aggregate contained in those of Laurière. 'Speak English,' he said to the latter.

'We don't hear much French out West, do we, Jack? So my grandfather knows I was a coachman that time. Well, I tell him myself yet as well as you tell him for me. He was angry, eh?'

Laurière nodded. He watched his friend clean, pare, file, and polish his finger-nails without it ever occurring to him similarly to treat his own. A law unto himself is every man in Bourg-Marie.

'Why,' said Magloire, finishing his nail-toilet, and

beginning on a cigar, which he produced with a grand air from an inner mysterious pocket, and lit with a perfumed match, 'you are all behind here, and that is the truth. Me and other fellows that goes to the States, we see life, we see the world, we grow, we improve, we watch, we find out how things are done. We do not care to stop in Bourg-Marie all our lives, nor even in Three Rivers. Ah!—bah! that is a small place, that Three Rivers, anyhow!'

Rank heresy in the ears of Widow Péron and Nicolas Laurière; yet, only half comprehending the foreign tongue, they listen respectfully, timidly. Pacifique squats by the corner of the fireplace. He does not understand the English at all, but is thinking what present he can make Magloire when he leaves them. Snowshoes—*raquettes*?—no; a carved pipe?—no, that young gentleman buys cigars. Well, it will come into his head, his stupid head, presently.

'Me and other fellows,' continues Magloire, conscious of his admiring audience, 'well, such as Jack, and Louis. And there was one Amable Blondeau—*le cousin*——'

'Ah, *ouai!*' exclaimed the widow hurriedly; 'le cousin de notre Blondeau.'

She stopped apologetically, and Magloire condescendingly went on:

'The cousin of this Blondeau the trapper. Well, we have learnt a great deal since we go to the States.



There every man is free! You understand that. There is no man that is not free. That is, he can do, he can go, just *as* he likes, just *where* he likes. That is a fine country, and there are many places to go to. There is lots of fun. And the *bizness*—ah! that is the place for the *bizness*.'

'What you do all de time?' asked Laurière uneasily. 'Dhrive all de time. Well—sure, I like dat too well, for a little. I get cold—me. I—custom—walk—much—all de time.'

Magloire laughed again.

'Cold!—when you are all dressed in fur! Get out, you, Laurière! Ask Louis and Jack if they ever seen me cold, eh?—nose red, eyes water—no, no. I have nice coat—real bear—like the ones you shoot yourself. Look here, Nicolas Laurière, how old are you? As old as I am almost. Well, I sit on top a handsome sleigh; I wear black bearskin. I am a member of two societies—yes, certain. I go to the races. I have fine time. You—you walk about day after day; you watch till you sleep, night after night; you shoot or you trap plenty fine bear. What do you with him, eh?'

Laurière was silent. The picture was too true.

'Well, I tell you what you do: You sell them to the traders, to the fur-merchants *en haut*. They travel up, up, and up, change hands, cross the frontier, till they are on my back, keeping me warm—so-so.'

‘You make much money?’ queried Laurière.

‘What do you think?’ I wear good suit, handsome overcoat; I have a watch and two rings. The watch—well, that is not finished to be paid for yet. There is a way they have there in these States that I will tell you. The stores, they have each a man who is honest, and wants much something to do. So they give him a large box, full of watches, or books, or images, or perhaps coats and furs, and they tell him to take this box to every house and to every person on certain streets, and to get them to promise to buy one watch, or one book, or one image. I was one of these men when I first got work in Milwaukee—yes, sir, I was with a picture-store, and carried round large painting—so—all framed in gold, like those you have seen in the church at the side of the altar.’

Laurière and the brothers Péron looked at one another in dismay, but admiration. The widow had stopped knitting, and moved her lips from time to time in speechless ecstasy. Pacifique was still hunting in his clouded mind for a suitable present for Magloire.

‘So I know all about that kind of bizness,’ continued the latter. ‘Yes, these men they leave the watch or book at your house, if you will pay a little of the price, and then they call again whenever you like for the rest. That is easy and nice all round.’

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‘When you have de money!’ said the fat Péron, who thought this very clever, and began to laugh.

‘Well,’ said Laurière cautiously, ‘I suppose you will be for seeing Mikel as soon as you can. He will be away soon—two week, three week. When will you go?’

But Magloire was not uneasy.

‘Oh! Well, there, you, Nicolas Laurière, you are afraid of my grandfather. Yes, yes, I see, I understand, you are all afraid of him—the old fox, the old man-of-the-woods!’

Laurière did not protest. His race, though garrulous, noisy, and eager in towns, is quieter, more self-contained, more absolutely truthful in the country.

‘Then you will go see Joncas?’

‘My uncle?’ said Magloire. ‘I will see about him. I think he should come and see me first. That is the way we do it in these States.’

‘And the whole of the village,’ continued Laurière. ‘Everyone glad to see you back, Magloire—sure. Rich man—in bizness—so tall, so straight, so handsome.’

His admiration was genuine, and Magloire laid his hand for a second lightly on the other’s shoulder, as he mentally considered the various aspects of his home-coming.

‘Will you go with me to see old Mikel again?’ he asked.

Laurière shook his head.

'Mikel—he not fond of me. Well, he is old man ; soon he hunt and catch bears no more. I, all my life yet to catch him. Well, I can't help dat. Dat is right, dat is naturelle.'

'All your life before you yet, and you're going to waste it in these woods going after bears! Look now, Nicolas Laurière'—and seductively Magloire's arm stole around the latter's neck—'you don't know what you say. Look at me, and Jack and Louis Péron! We are going back to Milwaukee in a little while—few days. See! You come with us. Eh! Make rich man of you, marry you to pretty American girl, go to the races with me, learn to speak fine English, wear fine new clothes. Well, now, there's a chance for you, Nicolas Laurière.'

The circle had broken up by this time, the widow being engaged in building up the fire for the night, and the three brothers talking quietly in French apart from Magloire, although still about him and his varied accomplishments.

Now that a chance seemed to offer itself, Laurière felt peculiarly embarrassed. Unaccustomed to any introspection or analysis of the emotions, he did not know that what filled him with hesitation was the fact that he was being tempted to forfeit his nationality and forego his country. Too ignorant to estimate accurately the correct and actual status of Magloire as an American citizen or as an English-

born subject of Franco-Canadian descent, he yet experienced something which, subtly, but stupidly, seemed to confuse and cloud his power of will, to bias his preferences. He had longed passionately to go until Magloire had asked him, and then a something struck at his heart and his mental vision so that he could not place, nor could he answer even at random its solemn questionings.

He grew sheepish, shuffled his feet, picked at the tassel of the tuque, and faltered in his reply.

‘Well, I don’t know,’ he said. ‘I have ver’ little money to take me to dat place. I would—oh, I don’t see how I could go. There is work here, and Mikel and Joncas cannot do it all. There was ninety bear killed last year—Mikel and Joncas. Well, when old bear come out and smell around, they will want me too. No, I don’t know. I will see. You are ver’ good. Well, Magloire, I will see.’

Magloire was all fire and attention.

‘Ninety bears killed in one season! That was pretty good work, wasn’t it? Say, where are those skins? Do you know?’

‘The skins? Well, Mikel; he will know. Yes, Mikel; he send them to the Government. I don’t know. But, ninety; dat was not many bear. One man alone year before dat, he kill fifty by himself.’

Magloire whistled.

‘I guess that isn’t so bad if he got the money

for the skins. How much does one skin get in Quebec ?'

Laurière scarcely understood him. He did not know the value of fur in the least.

'I don't know,' he said stupidly. 'But Mikel, he know. Ask him when you go see him.'

Magloire regarded Laurière thoughtfully.

'I will,' he said, 'and I will go to-morrow.' He stood in the middle of the kitchen, the others all regarding him with latent awe and much affection as his handsome face broke into a good-humoured smile, and the firelight travelled over his highly-glazed linen and gaudy jewellery. 'I have only a little while to stay, perhaps, and I must see my grandfather—eh? Will he be surprised, think you, at the little Magloire grown so tall, and wearing fine clothes and a watch?' And he swung it aloft as he spoke. 'Then I will go to the village, and make some presents to the people. To you, Louis and Jack, I give nothing, since we are arrived together. To you, Madame Marie-Louise Péron, I will give—well, you shall see. Perhaps a picture of the Virgin in a car drawn by angels, roses at her feet, framed in gold—*bien*, madame, you can hang it over the fire. To you, Nicolas Laurière, a little book of the views of Milwaukee, and a pair of studs. Here, stay! look! these very ones—on the condition that when I go back, you shall go with me. And to my grandfather, why, a picture like yours, madame. And so

the return of Magloire to his native village will not be altogether an empty-handed one.'

With that the young man clapped Laurière heartily on the back, and wished him good-night, for Nicolas had three miles yet to walk home, and was about leaving in great trouble and perplexity of mind.

Had Magloire forgotten anybody in his list of expectant and delighted acquaintances ?

Only Pacifique.

### CHAPTER III.

MR. MURRAY CARSON.

‘ A foolish son is the calamity of his father. ’

MAGLOIRE, being accommodated by the widow Péron with a *paillasse*, had chosen to remain at her house until he had seen his grandfather. The prospect of the interview did not trouble him in the least, and he set forth, clad in his irreproachable tweeds, swinging a cane, whistling, not a *habitant* song, minor and true and tender, but the vulgar refrain of a chorus he had heard in a Milwaukee oyster-bar, where a female orchestra enlivened the tedium of the proceedings.

Had he had keener susceptibilities, or, in fact, any susceptibilities at all, he would have felt dimly that this refrain ill-suited the primeval majesty and beauty of the solitude of Bourg-Marie. The hour was ten. A warm October sun caught the rich colours of the still leafy trees, and threw strange glories around on road, and stump, and stone.



Magloire, however, thought it all intensely lonely and gloomy. The continual contemplation of Nature drives some men to commit crimes; of others it makes poets and gentle thinkers. Magloire belonged to the first class. Nature could never do anything for him. So he walked along quickly, regretting the lively streets of Milwaukee, the oyster-saloons, the election carts, the polling-booths, the gay windows of the harness shops, the hotel steps crowded with drovers—men of all kinds smoking, chewing; the beautiful young ladies, to marry one of whom he aspired in his secret heart; the girls who sold flowers—tubs of hothouse roses and marguerites at the corners—and who were good enough to wink at and buy from; the music-hall with the half-moon of gas-lamps over the entrance, like false gigantic pearls on the forehead of an abandoned beauty.

All these things were in his mind as he quickly made the two miles between his grandfather's cabin and that of Madame Péron. A slight beating of the heart would not be set aside or controlled as he approached the gate, and as he walked up the little path, and knocked at the one red door, he recognised the fact that, spite of previous unbroken courage and confidence in himself, he was horribly nervous. His hand shook, and his knees almost gave way.

'It is nine years,' he said to himself. 'It is a long time. Will he know me?' He brought forth an embroidered card-case from an outer pocket of

his light overcoat, and drew from it a card, which read :

MR. MURRAY CARSON,

*Hallam House.*

*Expert in Horseflesh.*

And this he held in his hand, which, since he had thought of this *coup* to gain time, gradually ceased shaking. But he knocked twice, thrice, four or five times in vain, for the elder Caron was absent about a quarter of a mile in the direction of an old and untenanted stone house in a lonely and almost inaccessible part of the high rocky ground overlooking Bourg-Marie, known as the Manoir, and belonging to himself.

Magloire waited some time, then, turning, half in relief, half in disappointment, back towards the gate, perceived his grandfather coming along the road. The delay had reinstated the younger man in courage. Holding the card out, he drew a long breath as Mikel approached, nearer, nearer, now at the gate, lifting up furry and angry brows at the intruder, reading him all over, trying to place him, to make him out, wondering one minute if it could be Magloire, then resolving the next that Magloire could never look like that, till, as the gate swung to, and the men faced each other, Magloire presented the card with a bow, partly to hide a smile, and partly in recognition of the age and bearing of the

old trapper. Any doubts which the latter had had on first view of the stranger vanished on reading the card, for Mikel would be at any time a difficult man to deceive, and there is always something in blood that speaks through many a disguise. He read the card aloud in stumbling English accents, and again looked his grandson over. It was a searching look, but Magloire was now quite at ease. Yet he hesitated to speak, knowing his voice must betray him, and for reasons of his own he preferred to maintain his incognito. Mikel noted with amazement the natty suit, the sparkling ornaments, the perfume, the polished nails, the mixture of colours, the indescribably jaunty, slightly trivial, and impertinent air that country-bred people very frequently acquire after a limited experience of life in cities. At least, Mikel felt all this, although he could not have put it into words, chiefly because he had no words to put it into. But if his vocabulary was limited, his convictions were unalterable. It struck him at once that this person was not of the village. Though he seldom went into it, he knew, and had known, all its types, and this was not one. The word 'expert' passed his comprehension entirely; he had, perhaps, never seen it before. 'Horseflesh' was almost as bad. The name was English, and the bearer of it, to be supposed, an Englishman, or, more correctly, English-Canadian. And Mikel did not greatly favour the English-Canadians, and would never

speak more than was absolutely necessary in the foreign and difficult tongue. In French he now addressed the interloper with the glaring pink cravat and mother-of-pearl studs, size of a half-dollar, whom his heart yearned to welcome as the truant Magloire, but whom his mind half rejected on account of his appearance and his name. Being asked what he was doing there, Magloire had nothing for it but to reply, and the very first word he let drop, his grandfather knew him — knew him, even in the ridiculous garb and the western veneer of cheap culture, even though the pasteboard he held in his hand belied his name and descent ; knew him, even while something, a shadow of distrust, of repugnance, of hostility, crept between him and his own kin, the prodigal who had been absent so long ! But he gave no sign of recognition. The venerable trapper was a better actor than the youthful 'expert in horseflesh.'

'Well,' said the latter, still swinging his cane in an easy manner, and opening his overcoat for air as well as to display his pink cravat to perfection, 'I have come to this part of the country almost entirely about horses. I am staying in the village ; but I hear you have plenty other animals round here, and I am also buying furs. Ah, yes ! I am a horse-trader. I buy whenever I see a good horse ; that is my trade, my occupation—and furs. Well, shall we go in ?'

Old Mikel showed no sign of resenting the fact that an impertinent and preposterously-dressed youngster was inviting him to enter his own house. He silently led the way. Presently they were seated, Magloire now occupying the same chair that Laurière had sat in the night before.

‘You want something of me?’ said the old man. ‘Well, that is all right. If it is horses, I have none. I do all my work without horses. I am my own horse. See, you—you have come to the wrong place, then, for horses. There is Messire Jean Thibideau, or *le docteur* Pligny, in the village, they will have horses to sell, not me. No, I have never owned a horse, and yet I am, or should be, seigneur of Bourg-Marie—of the whole valley. That is strange, you think? Well, yes, it is a little strange.’

There was small discomfiture on Magloire’s part, because he was not one to be easily discomfited, to be at a loss, to be worsted in conversation, in business, in anything. He smiled and took off his overcoat, sitting down again and spreading out his long legs till they appeared, together with those of the elder man, completely to fill the small kitchen. He hesitated, however, a good deal in his speech, for although his English was still imperfect and broken, it was more fluent than his French. He began to wish that his grandfather had recognised him. He had hoped to impress the old man very much with his clothes, and his appearance, and his general

important and prosperous self. But Mikel betrayed no admiration. The others—Laurière, Pacifique, his mother, the simple twins, Louis and Jack—admired him. He was even intensely admired out West by the waitresses at the Hallam House, and the chorus-girls at the Opéra Comique; but here, among the primitive and forbidding glooms of the arching pine-forest, and the rush and roar of shimmering torrents, here he was somehow at fault in Mikel's eyes, though not in his own. And he never dreamt but that Mikel did admire him, but was too ignorant to know why, and too ill-natured to say so.

'Well,' he began again, 'it is clear I get no horses here. Well, that is all right. I can go and see Messire Thibideau in the village, and *le docteur* as well. But now as to furs.'

'Well, then, as to furs,' repeated Mikel.

'You have, I believe, many kinds of fur? You have bear-skins, for example?'

'For example, I have bear-skins.'

'A large number, without doubt?'

'More than I can count.'

'Undoubtedly fine, handsome, glossy?'

'As you have said.'

'Black or brown?'

'Both.'

'The black are considered the most handsome and the most valuable?'

Mikel appeared to be considering.

‘Not always. There is a brown skin, with an under layer of bronze, as it were, in the colour, that will always fetch a large sum, for it is rare. But the black is most in use.’

‘I myself,’ said Magloire, with superb yet studied carelessness, ‘have a fine cape and gauntlets of black bear. I wear them driving.’

‘Messire Carson is rich, without doubt?’

‘I have made some money. It is in a bank. I have very little with me here. I should be afraid to bring a large amount *here*.’ And Magloire pointed with his thumb in the direction of the road and forest.

‘And why?’

‘Why? Because no man can be safe here in a wilderness like this—rocks, and stones, and trees, and a very desert of snow, I suppose, after a while. What a country! What a place to live in, to die in! Bah! I shiver already all down my back. I see the dark mornings, the white dazzling noons, the haunted nights, the frost-bound panes, all the horrible winter. I live in better place’ (here he relapsed into English), ‘in Milwaukee.’

‘Ah!’ said Mikel calmly. ‘Then you may have heard of my grandson, Magloire Caron, who, I believe, is in the same town, and doing very well too. Magloire—yes; let me see, it will have been seven years that he has been away—seven.’

Magloire lost presence of mind. 'Nine!' he said, half jumping from his chair. Intolerable to think this old man had actually forgotten the number of years he had voluntarily absented himself!

'Well—you know him, I see—perhaps nine. I am old—I am likely to forget. What is he like—Magloire?'

'Ah! like—he resembles such a one as me,' said Magloire, tapping his chest, sticking his thumbs in his waistcoat, and crossing one leg over the other. 'He is a fine fellow—in fact, he is now a gentleman, a man of importance, of business. He is a free man, and the citizen of a free country. He is a good *Américain*.'

'Well,' said Mikel, quite gravely, 'when you see him, Messire Murray Carson, you may tell him you have seen his grandfather, old Mikel Caron, forest-ranger for the County of Yamachiche and seigneur of the valley. Say he is grown old in years, in mind, and in knowledge, but that his arm is still strong to fell a tree, to mark a bear in an ugly way that lasts him till he die, and that his eye and ear and legs and nose haven't failed him yet. Nor his appetite; nor his temper—he is ugly when he is crossed. Nor his candour; for, to be candid, Messire Carson, if my grandson Magloire be such a one as you, if he dress like you, if he talk like you—a bad French, which is not made better by a frequent bad English, as I understand it is likely to be—I care



not if I never see him again, and he is better to remain in his Milwaukee and his States than to return here to Bourq-Marie. It will be, doubtless, that he too would find the winters horrible, the summers stifling, the forests gloomy, the houses poor and uncomfortable, and the people—common. As for gentlemen—*ma foi!*—there have been no gentlemen here since Champlain died. But as for freedom, we are quite free. Make no mistake, the *Canadien* is no serf, no slave, no prisoner. We live, it is true, under English rule. Well, it is comfortable. I—I myself do not like these English, but I have nothing to do with them. I leave them alone. I know three words of their language—*Government, bear, and damn*. They do not molest me, and I ignore them. How are you free, and how is my grandson Magloire free, that *I* am not free—you cannot show me, for there is nothing to show. Well, you can tell Magloire. Perhaps he will laugh.'

But Magloire did not laugh. He was angry.

'What!' he said, in an insulting way that fired even Mikel's grave and self-contained temper. 'You, an old man, grown old in the depth of this frightful forest, in this hole of a hut, fed on bear's meat and onions, and saying your prayers to a sly dog of a priest, why, you are no better than a savage, let alone a serf! You are mad to talk to me like that! Come, about these skins—I want to purchase some. Let me see them.'

'They are not here,' said the imperturbable Mikel.

'Where are they, then?'

'I do not tell where they are. It is not my custom.'

'Will you tell me the price of one?'

'They are not for sale.'

'Not to anyone?'

'They might be to someone.'

'And that one?'

Mikel remained silent.

'It will be to the Government you sell, I see,' said Magloire composedly.

He still had the *grand coup* left. Were a sight or a share of the furs denied him as an American trader, as a Government emissary, as an interested individual, all he had to do was to stand up, proclaim his origin, extend his arms, and clasp his loving grandfather in them, and the furs were his.

'I do not intend to buy alone for myself,' he went on. 'I have a partner, who will be equally anxious that I should procure some of these rich skins in which your country abounds. Without doubt I must write to my friends at Quebec, who are in the Government offices, for an order to see your furs. I do not wish to leave the country without a chance of seeing and perhaps buying some. I have several friends who are of the Government. That will be easy.'

'At least, it will not be difficult,' said Mikel.

'When I hear from these friends then I shall

come again, pay you another visit, and you will show me the furs, eh ?'

'I have not said so.'

'But you are of that intention ?'

'Of a certainty, no. I have already told you, Messire Murray Carson, that it is not my custom to sell or show my furs to anyone.'

'Unless of the Government ?'

'Have I said so ?'

A moment's silence, then Magloire chose to make his *grand coup*. He rose, and turned his really handsome and engaging countenance towards the old man, and said in his sweetest tones, and with all the oratory natural to the French, which it takes a very long domestication abroad to eradicate :

'*Mon père*' (my father), 'look at me. Regard well thou thy son, *le p'tit* Magloire. It will have been better, perhaps, that I spoke at first. But I thought—the trouble, the misery of the heart, the sorrow—and caused by me ! *Mon père*, forgive me ! In truth, 'tis I, *le p'tit* Magloire, your grandson.'

There was every symptom of joy, every sign of genuineness, every indication of filial love and reverence in the glowing countenance, the smiling mouth, the glistening eyes, the outstretched arms. These French are the finest natural comedians in the world, and can play more than two parts at once. But where was the trembling, grateful, appalled, and overjoyed recipient of these oratorical favours ?

Mikel simply cast up the whites of his eyes to the smoke-blackened ceiling, and brought his pipe out of his pocket.

'You were a foolish child always,' he said, 'and you are no wiser now. Did you carry away with you nothing more of my character than to suppose for a moment that I could be deluded into thinking Messire Murray Carson a different person from Magloire Caron, coachman? If so, you should have known better. You were fourteen when you ran away. That is a good age for a boy. He ought to be able to judge a little—well, of those with whom he has lived, those who have fed and housed and educated him—well, it was not a school, but it was better than a school, perhaps—who would have educated him.'

Magloire, surprised, defeated, though not in the least humiliated, succumbed to defeat as gracefully as he had thought to conquer, and simply shrugging his shoulders, sat down again, having not folded his aged relative in his long and sinewy arms as he had expected to do.

'Well,' he said, 'I was away so long—it will be nine years that I have been in those States—and I thought—Mikel, he will not know me again, and that will be funny. I can talk to him as if I were another man, perhaps about myself—funny too—and there will be no trouble. And I thought, it will be the more easy and pleasant way for both after so long an

absence. Well, all that, there was nothing wrong in that.'

'No,' said his grandfather, who was by this time placidly smoking, though still furtively engaged in noting the extraordinary attire and appearance of the prodigal. 'I have not said that there was anything wrong. One is quite free at your age—to do as he wishes. For example, your business, your affairs. You have prospered, Laurière has said. I am glad of that; that cannot fail to give me joy, as it renders me no longer responsible for you. For instance, when I thought of your coming home at all, I thought sometimes of you as coming home poor.'

'In that case?' said Magloire.

'In that case, I could do nothing for you. I am not a rich man.'

'These furs, skins, these forests, rivers—they are all yours.'

'They do not make me rich. They do not constitute wealth.'

'They should.'

'They might in the hands of another man; not in mine. And if I were a rich man, I should do nothing for you if you were poor.'

'Because I ran away?'

'Of a truth, because you ran away. It is true that I care little for companions. My companions are the stars, the streams, the trees in the forest, the

boulders in the valley. Under these I sometimes sleep ; against them I lean. I look up at them as at old and trusted friends. I wade through them, loving their clear and cold sparkling depths. When I have these, then I want no man. And should I want a man, I have him. There is your uncle, Joncas ; there are one or two others. Yes, I have companions. Therefore I do not want you ; nor did I ever want you. But you did wrong, all the same, to run away, for you were my heir.'

'Your what ?' said Magloire, in astonishment, and he added, in English, 'This is too much ! Well, I bet you I make him tell me what I get when he die. There will be, it is likely, more than furs and skins.'

The old man caught the sense of this remark.

'Yes,' he said ; 'without a single skin you would still inherit something : the forest itself, the valley, the banks of the Yamachiche—well, the village, the old Manoir, the cleared acre and a half, and all that lives and roams in and throughout this district. Think well ; that is what you have lost, and with it the title of seigneur.'

'A fine title!' said Magloire, though satirically, yet without bitterness. It was inconceivable that a young man who had aspired to be a bar-tender in Minneapolis, a waiter in Chicago, a barber's assistant in Kalamazoo, and a coachman in Milwaukee, should entertain any dream of becoming seigneur of a

desolate, gloomy, bear-haunted tract of uncleared forest and lonely river in Lower Canada. 'A pretty title!' repeated Magloire. 'Why, I would rather black boots and run messages in the States! I should be freer than call myself seigneur of this miserable hole.'

'That is to your own taste,' said Mikel. 'It would not be to mine.'

'Because, of a truth, you have never known anything else,' said the grandson. 'Because you know nothing of the world. I, now, I have seen a good deal. You live in Canada, in this place, all your life. You see nothing, you hear nothing, you meet nobody. The curé is your oracle; you do not even read a paper. You and your race—even the English know this—are priest-ridden, chained, made slaves, prisoners. Nothing you have is your own; it is all for the Government or the priest. Well, I, now, I myself when I left here, I was like that, too. When I went first from here I stop at Quebec. There was the money you gave me to pay Joncas in the village—that little debt, you remember—and I did not pay, but took the money and went to Quebec. There I, too, sought out a priest, and told him I was alone and without work or place in the world, and was tired of Bourg-Marie. And he was very kind, as such men can be, and found me where I could board. But he took the rest of my money—*ma foi*, yes, he did that, and said it would be in trust for me when

I came back, safe in the Church's care; for I had met with a party of Americans, young men from the shanties who were going out to Michigan. *Yes, sir.* Well, I make friends quick—they call me fool for staying in Canada—and I went with them. But I never got that money back from the priest.'

'And this card, this name of Messire Murray Carson. This will be your partner, without doubt?'

'Ah no,' replied Magloire. 'Of a truth, that is my own name, the name I have just lately taken out in Milwaukee. My affairs—see—well, the English name serves me better.'

'Possibly, your own not being good enough.'

'It is French, it is French. And I have found lately that it was against me, my being French.'

'That is a pity.'

'But I shall soon correct that. You will perceive that already I do not speak so good French as you, although, indeed, it is but poor French anyone speaks here. It is not French at all.'

'How do you call it, then? It is the language bequeathed us by our ancestors. I speak as spoke Champlain, as spoke my great-great-grandfather. It satisfies me, and I have heard a traveller say that it is very pure, though, without doubt, very old French, and free from intrusions of English idiom.'

But these remarks of the old man were totally beyond the comprehension of Magloire, as might be expected. While his grandfather spoke, upholding



the tradition of his mother-tongue, Magloire was surveying the room and wondering where the skins, if they really existed, and were not the figment of a dream evolved from Laurière's luxurious fancy, could be hidden. Although he did not quit his chair, old Mikel followed his gaze, comprehending perfectly its intent.

'They are not here,' he said.

'Well, is it kind to treat me so like a stranger whom you cannot trust? I only want to see them.'

'You have said that your partner has required of you to purchase some. You are not truthful. Nor do I yet understand what your affairs are. Laurière, he has told me, Nicolas Laurière, that you were a coachman. You show me this card, you speak of trading in horses, then you wish to purchase furs.'

'It is all true;' and Magloire nodded. 'I am not of one thing, but of many. That is the way one prospers in these States. One has to try many things, prove one's self, find what one can do best, refuse nothing, accept anything, fail often, begin over again. *Enfin*—one hits the right nail. Yes, sir, I have much business, I am in demand, everyone knows me; I belong to two societies, I walk in their processions, I speak in a crowded hall. I have brains, ideas; I am not afraid to speak out; they all listen to me. I shall speak here. I wish to take the large room at Delorme's next Friday, and address there the village.'

‘ Will it be in English, or in French, this address ?’

Magloire stared. His grandfather’s sarcasm was too quiet for him to resent, too subtle for him to fully grasp.

‘ It will be in French, without doubt.’

‘ And the subject ?’

‘ *L’émancipation !*’ Magloire flourished his right hand in the air, while with the other he produced from his coat a thick packet of newspapers tied with a string. ‘ At least you will attend there ? You will assist with your presence ?’

‘ It is possible.’

Magloire laughed in secret. The old fox, old weasel, old man-of-the-woods, was jealous. He, Magloire, had come back well, gaily dressed, a gentleman—or as good as one—able to read, and write, and speak in public, address and move his fellow-countrymen, and the old man was jealous of his ability, his education, his appearance. Magloire laughed aloud and rose to depart.

‘ Since you do not show me the furs to-day, I will go,’ said he. ‘ Some other time, eh ?’

Mikel gave no answer whatever at first.

‘ When do you leave ?’ he said finally.

‘ Well, I do not know. I shall wait for that order from Quebec, for other things. My partner, he may join me here. I cannot tell when I go. I walk, now when I leave you, to see my Uncle Joncas and

the rest in the village. I shall find it just the same?’

‘There will be no change.’

‘Of that there is no fear. It waits for me, Magloire Caron, does it not, to change it?’

Old Mikel rose and drew himself up. He was fully as tall as his grandson, when not laden with weapons or tools, and the two men faced each other.

‘It waits for no such person, for no such person exists. There is no Magloire Caron. It waits, say you yourself, for *Messire Murray Carson*.’

An angry look crept in Magloire’s keen eyes.

‘You cannot rob me of my name.’

‘You have robbed yourself.’

‘Even if I choose to take an English name, I may yet require to use my French one.’

‘You may indeed.’

‘Then, if so, I shall use it.’

‘Good. I have no objection. There may easily be more than one Magloire Caron in the world.’

‘You will then disown me?’

‘You shall see.’

Upon this, Magloire, with a final shrug—a habit his residence in a foreign country had not yet counteracted—lit a cigar and took his leave. There did not seem to offer any excuse for his remaining. His grandfather was old, foolish, out of his head a little, obstinate, angry, jealous—jealous! Very well; there was plenty of time. He would try again. All

would come in time. Old people were all like that.

Mikel waited till Magloire had entirely disappeared in the direction of the village, straight along the road that led back from where he had started—the widow Péron's cabin—waited silently, with listening ear and bated breath, as so often his mode of life led him to wait for stealthy, gliding animal, or swift fish, or wheeling bird, until he told himself Magloire had certainly gone to the village. So keen already was his sense of hostility, and so small his belief in the straightforwardness of his grandson, so true was his perception, not blunted by use nor at fault through myriad daily abuses, and so rapid his conclusions, formed maybe hastily, but founded on impulses which were natural, simple, and untainted. Such a life and occupation as Mikel's made and left him simple, but sound. No multitude of daily trivial complexities had ever crossed and recrossed the clear sky of his life as the modern net-works of electric lines obscure the daylight in crowded city thoroughfares. All about him was open in reality, although much of it had to do with a system of ambush, decoy, and destruction that might have perverted a nature less rigidly virtuous, truthful, and consistent. But, nevertheless, he had one secret.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE OLD MANOIR.

‘ Mine age is departed, and is removed from me as a shepherd’s tent. I have cut off, like a weaver, my life.’

MAGLOIRE, then, had returned, and his grandfather pondered long over the singular alteration in him, not sharing with the others in their admiration of his arrogant manner and gaudy attire. He condemned his jewellery, his choice of colours, his pungent cigar, as much as he condemned his opinions.

Waiting till Magloire was out of sight, he carefully locked his door, and, going out of the back enclosure, proceeded stealthily through a fir plantation to the old and deserted stone building known as the Manoir. There were two ways of approaching it, and he had now chosen the one most inaccessible to others, the path being rarely trodden by anyone but himself, and completely hidden from the frequenters of the ordinary highroad that led before his front-door to the village on one hand,

and through the forest on the other. Along this footpath—it was no wider—Mikel walked with a heavier weight upon his heart and brain than he had ever borne upon back and shoulders up that ever-increasing declivity. For the path, growing steeper and steeper, though still cut through thick-growing firs and hemlocks, emerged at length upon a triangular garden—a kind of ‘close,’ in fact, shut in on two sides by trees sloping almost imperceptibly in the direction of the third side, which was bounded by the long, irregular low stone mansion built about the year of our Lord 1670, and called the Manoir.

In this stone house had the Chevalier Jules-Gaspard - Noël - Ovide Delaunay - Colombière Caron lived for fifty-five scorching summers and Arctic winters, sudden and magical springs, and luminous, hazy, and golden autumns. Here had he witnessed the slow but steady decline of all the prerogatives and prejudices dear to the aristocratic French mind of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Here had he struggled in spite of inclement climatic forces, of few and suspicious neighbours, and of a constantly changing and unsettled country, to maintain the dignity and state due to the person of a French gentleman, well born, town bred—for the ancient family seat in France was inside the famous city of Rouen, and is still to be seen, a feudal manor, one half in ruins, the other half turned into a charity school—and possessed of much of the varied and

quaint learning, and all the airs and graces of the time. A friend of that M. D'Avaugour who wrote from Canada, 'La Nouvelle France,' in 1661, 'I have seen nothing to equal the beauty of the River St. Lawrence,' he, in company with many other enthusiasts, emigrated partly to soothe the wounded feelings which Colbert, 'cet homme de marbre,' as he was called by Gui Patin, 'avec des yeux creux, ses sourcils épais et noirs, esprit solide mais pesant,' had, to do him justice, unwittingly outraged by a presentation of a financial post at Rheims to Le Caron's elder brother, and partly from a desire to distinguish himself in a new and not overcrowded land. Even in 1668 the world—at least, that part of it that surged and strove and whined and cajoled and fought and elbowed and cursed and smiled and intrigued and blasphemed and prayed—all in the same breath—around that Court of Louis XIV.—began to find itself in its own way and its own sphere all too small. Of the delights, the temptations, the pains, the shames of such a life, had Colombière Caron already tasted. The young King very soon recognised his character and abilities, and, judging correctly that he was at heart disinclined to the dangerous pleasures of a Court, and by a simple seriousness of mind and disposition quite as unfitted for the perilous posts within the gift of that Court, held out promises of fortune, land, and distinction in the new France across the water.

In reality, however cruel the deception may have proved to be in one or two ways, the action of Louis was a kind one. Le Caron embarked not without misgivings, but with more than a tincture of hope. He knew well that he was not the first French gentleman of a noble house and distinguished line to settle in the primeval glooms and snowy fastnesses of 'La Nouvelle France.'

Sieur D'Avagour's opinion weighed much with him. No country so exquisitely beautiful as he had depicted in his letters home (Baron Pierre Dubois D'Avagour, Governor of New France from 1661-1663) could hold discomforts so great as those sketched, say, in the relations of the Jesuits and other missionary records. The illustrious Champlain's memory survived even in the mêlée of those latter days under the Great Louis. What he had borne another French gentleman could.

Le Caron, yielding to pressure of many kinds, sailed at last for the land of snow and pines, to be followed by many another scion of the *haute noblesse*—witness the names that constantly recur in the documents relating to the old French régime on from that time up to the taking of Quebec in 1759—Le Gardeur de St. Pierre, Le Baron de Longueuil, Le Chevalier St. Ours, Le Chevalier de Niverville, De Ramezay, D'Argenteuille Daillesbout, Le Verrier, Livaudière Péan, and scores of others of varying rank, age, celebrity, ability, and fortune. But at



the time when Mikel's ancestor arrived one stormy March in a vessel called *Le Chameau*—though not the vessel of that name which was wrecked in 1725 with the Intendant de Chazel on board—he was one of a very small number indeed of cultivated and courtly gentlemen grafted with all the French virtues and not a few of the French vices upon the new and struggling colony. Le Caron, however, was singularly destitute of vices, and, quickly resigning himself to his future abode and surroundings, and calling upon his family to preserve the like equanimity, he took possession according to letters patent recently delivered to him by permission of His Most Gracious Majesty of the fief and grant of land consisting of the Plutonian realms of forest, and the half-frozen river of the Yamachiche, just stirring beneath its icy hood to life and conscious beauty. Like all pioneers, the sudden change to a green and lustrous spring enchanted him. The fresh untired, untried earth took on for him a truly celestial hue. Nothing came amiss, not even the heat of July and August. The only thing he and his family and servants dreaded was the cold, and so, wintering in military quarters at Quebec, they escaped the tortures of the first year's frost, while by the time the second winter was upon them, behold, the Manoir was sufficiently advanced to permit of occupation.

No wonder that old Mikel, the forest-ranger of the nineteenth century, should so reverence and

adore the habitation of his ancestors, built in the seventeenth. The triangular garden was sodded, carefully swept clean of fallen leaves, in itself no light task, inasmuch as the October winds were playing sad havoc with maple and oak and brown pine tassel, and bore in its centre a kind of piled-up grotto of most beautiful rough blocks of serpentine and native marble that only required polishing to render them highly lustrous, smooth, and of the richest colours. Upon the top of this cairn, or grotto—it was neither the one nor the other, yet something like both—stood an image of a Cupid, rudely carved from the same gray stone that composed the dwelling-house and offices. The Cupid was sadly out of place in this remote and lonely region. But he doubtless served to carry the memory back to the gay gardens of the luxurious France from which his creator had come. This was no less a person than Père Chaletot, the chaplain and confidential friend of Messire Jules-Gaspard-Noël-Ovide Delaunay-Colombière Caron, a character whose fame had reached old Mikel by word of mouth and document, who had been steward, priest, carver, dispenser, tutor, purveyor, overseer, draughtsman, gamekeeper, and physician, all in one. Carved seats that had originally been stumps of gigantic trees surrounded the grotto, also the work of the accomplished Père Chaletot, and the greatest care and wealth of imagination had

evidently been spent on their production. One was an armchair, deep, capacious, luxurious, and, in place of cushions, large growths of moss, emerald green, brown, and gray, filled in all its corners. Another was a sentry-box open at the roof; this one having clearly been adapted from the hollow trunk of a decaying tree, and furnished now with a seat inside, and more cushions of moss for the back and shoulders. A third was as much as possible like a box at the opera, having a horseshoe-shaped ledge in front, upon which it used doubtless to please the Reverend Father and his pupils and protégés to lean, under the impression that they were about to witness a performance of a new comedy or an airy *ballet du cour*. Whitened, some of them, by rain and storm and old age, ant-eaten and mouldering the others, these strange carven seats seemed always waiting for the arrival of guests who never came, guests who, when they did appear, might prove but ghosts.

The Cupid, wan and cold and wizened, gazed ruefully—or so it seemed—upon the circle of fast-decaying seats that had not been occupied for so long, not since the grandson of Sieur Jules-Gaspard le Caron celebrated his coming of age by trying to work a fountain under the grotto, and inducing all the household to come down and give the invention welcome. Alas! the birthday was in November, and the water froze while the guests sat around shivering, waiting for the first glittering drops to fall, catching

the light as they fell, and reminding them of the sparkling jets some of the older ones had seen in the country of the fleur-de-lis, now receding further and further into oblivion. The birthday was in November, and Cupid looked as he felt, intensely cold, and would have been glad of some straw tied about him as they tied up the urns and flowers in France, but nobody thought of it.

At the apex of the triangle of sward, just where Mikel's footpath came to an end, stood a little shrine or raised crucifix, with a rudely-carved figure of the Saviour upon it, also the work of the gifted Chaletot. At one time the crucifix had been gilded, and some touches of colour had been added to the face of the suffering Christ; but in Mikel's time, though he had looked often and carefully, he had never been able to detect either gold-leaf or carmine upon its wasted and unsymmetrical proportions. A gravel-walk bordered the sward, separating it from the thick plantation and the long terrace that swept from one end to the other of the Manoir itself. Three flower-beds cut in the shape of the royal lilies of France—beloved France! according to Sir William Temple, 'Ce noble et fertile royaume, le plus favorisé par la nature de tous ceux qui soit au monde'—and a fourth representing a crown, testified to the unimpeached loyalty of the high-bred gentleman under whose supervision they had probably been cut out in Canadian turf.

But neither curious carven seat, nor design of crown and lily, nor shape of stone crucifix, recalled to the mind the fair country seats of France so much as the long Manoir itself; nearly two hundred feet from end to end, and its two tall towers at either side seventy feet in height. The exact miniature of many a French château in style, it was only a miniature after all, its dimensions being far inferior to those of the Château of Pierrefonds, for example, built in feudal times and restored by the late Napoleon III., or the magnificent Château of Vincennes, surrounded by the orthodox towered wall and moat, or the smaller Château of Luynes, in which died its owner, Albert de Luynes, in the year 1621, of fever. It was over the body of this Albert de Luynes that two of his *valets de chambre* fought at cards while they were feeding the horses which were carrying him to his burial. The terrace, the two end towers, rounded in true feudal fashion, the central cluster of similar turrets or towers, and the innumerable small windows, doors, steps and pointed rods on the roof that once had borne flags, were all more or less faithful reproductions of the country châteaux that dotted the beautiful plains, and crowned the wooded hills, and nestled in the corn-clad valleys of France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But while the plan was correct, the building itself had been evidently far from satisfactory in the matter of duly quarrying, laying, cementing and piling the stone,

and in details of measurement, allowance for shrinkage, and proportion. Gaps in the cold gray stone were frequent, and the whole building had sunk a foot or more beneath the original level of the turf. The walls, though enormously thick in some places, had all fallen away from the perpendicular, and but little glass, and that, of course, of a rude description, could be found in the windows. The upper portion was the best preserved, and if a line had been drawn cutting off the ten feet at the top, the lower part would have passed for some vacated farm or battered grange, so ordinary was that section of the building where the long windows opened on the wooden terrace.

The result of the inefficient architectural ability of the builders and masons who emigrated with Mikel's ancestor was that the present ruin, for practically it was little more, presented an older appearance than many of the châteaux in France built seventy or a hundred years before. The absence of friendly green, too, debarred it from ever assuming the softened and venerable aspect of the ivy-clad ruins of France. Like the old age of poverty, there were here none of the caressing and becoming laces of Nature which resemble the soft gems and placid satins attendant on age in riches. The house was like a hag, shorn of youth, and without old age's charms. Despite the human sentiment that clung around it, one could hardly

deem it haunted, for few spirits would care to revisit a spot so desolate, so open, so barren, so forbidding. Yet there may have been occasions when the spirit of Sieur Jules-Gaspard-Noël-Ovide Delaunay-Colombière Caron revisited in glimpses of a cold, relentless, bitter Canadian moon, the place where so many dreams had been lived down, so many plans overruled, so many hardships endured, so much quiet heroism displayed, so much tenderness, chivalry, honour, true courtesy and loyal sentiment shown to women, to children, to old age, to voyageur, to *coureur du bois*, to missionary, to trader, to soldier, to peasant ; and so much honest religion practised, from Sunday morning at half-past six, when Père Chaletot rang a bell himself, summoning the family and servants to early Mass in a room commonly called the chapel, till Saturday night, when a kind of valedictory service for the entire week was held at seven o'clock in the same place. Every morning the good father roused his colony in like manner, and many and fervent were the prayers offered up for ships at sea, for friends and retainers many miles distant in wood or upon water, against fever, against Iroquois, against famine, against war, and thanksgiving hearty for the daily food that, killed by gun and rod and ready knife and net, made up in quantity what the epicurean tastes of the whole household demanded in quality.

To this exceptionally interesting structure, then,

did old Mikel now turn his steps, his head bowed on his breast, and his entire appearance characterized by deep dejection and misery. He walked across from the footpath to the central door opening on the mouldering terrace, and unlocking it with a huge key, the largest that hung on a bunch of old and rusty keys he held in his hand, entered a hall, quite destitute of furniture or other tokens of whilom human habitation. Where the trophies of chase and hunt, many-hued tapestry, and glass and oaken settles and chairs all should have combined to render the interior at once imposing and satisfactory, there were only cobwebs and cracked plaster, stains of mildew and discoloration, cold and empty silences ; yet all was scrupulously clean. No staircase was visible, standing in the hall, and the doors of the apartments on either side were locked. But Mikel, the owner of all this dubious and shattered masonry, the rightful seigneur of the whole fertile, though remote, valley, knew the ways of the curious old mansion, and, after standing a few moments in the desolate entrance-hall, thinking still of Magloire, he opened with a key the room on the right-hand side and entered, closing and locking the door carefully.

This room contained Mikel's secret.

For, long and lofty, and lighted by five windows, covered now with double sheets of thick brown paper, it was strewn with numerous skins of various fur-bearing animals. The glossy black and the rich



brown of bear, the golden russet-red of fox, the gray and mottled brownish-gray of the Canada lynx, two or three superb buffalo hides, and beaver, otter, hare, and other small skins in bewildering variety covered every inch of the floor. The foot sank deeper and deeper at each advancing step in the middle of these rich warm furs, softer than the most luxurious carpet, yielding as moss, and displaying the most perfect gamut of colour and glossiness, from the black of the bear and brown of the skunk to the silver-white of the shining breast of the eider-duck. And not only the floor, but the walls, windows, and the ceiling were also covered with these rare and beautiful products, nailed or tacked on by invisible means, and merging one into another in every possible gradation of lustrous, luminous glossiness and colour. The effect was worthy of a Czar, that is, worthy of a mind regally Russian, semi-barbaric, yet given to artistic impulses, that only some such characteristic display as this, which often met Mikel's eyes, but which no one else had ever witnessed, could satisfy. Even the seductively soft skin of the seal was present, strewn in careless profusion over that of weasel, marten, and squirrel; and the accumulated value of the whole number of these handsome and perfect furs, not one of which was damaged, imperfect in any way, moth-eaten or mouldy, would doubtless have reached a very high figure in the hands of an expert. Not an inch of

plaster, or of stone, or of wood could be seen. The furs covered every point of floor, walls, and ceiling, and a cleverly-stuffed lynx and a red-eyed fox kept watch at the corners of the room opposite the door through which Mikel had entered. Giving now but a hasty glance around at his wealth, to assure himself that it was all there, he gently slid one of the hanging brown bear-skins along the wall (it was sewn to rings passed over a common rod, very much like ordinary draperies), and disappeared into another and inner room, this containing no windows at all, but where three blocked-up recesses told of the windows that had been included in the original design of the château. This, too, was hung, carpeted, and curtained close and warm with furs of every description, the ceiling here being partly covered with the snowy skin of a polar bear, forming an unexpected and startling foil to the surrounding and prevailing hues of brown, gray, and black. Mikel's rude lantern threw strange shadows in this strange apartment, in the centre of which, directly beneath the skin of the once savage Arctic bear, was placed a table, capable of holding about twenty people, and covered with delicate fine damask, the pattern of which was the royal lily of France, intertwined with the monogram of the illustrious Sieur Le Caron—Jules-Gaspard-Noël-Ovide. This damask may have once rivalled in whiteness the curious ceiling above, but was now yellow with age.

In this lonely region, in this remote ruin, in this strange fur-draped salon, without light, without air, without fire, a dinner-table was laid. An antique vessel of gold, silver, and glass occupied the middle, being flanked by four tall and branching candelabra of bronze. Various small dishes of foreign glass, some cracked, others without handles, but all of great value and interest, were set at proper intervals around, while the plate was solid silver, antique, and handsome in design. Where the host might have sat a great dish of Florentine enamel ware stood, something like a wassail-bowl in shape and size, and at the other end two little cracked cups of most delicate pale-green china, without saucers, bore a silent and pathetic testimony to the presence in spirit of the lady of the Manoir, the gentle genius who, long before the days of afternoon tea, may have presided with ineffable and high-bred grace over the cup that contained, if not chocolate or coffee, the greatest of all luxuries in a new and semi-savage colony, at least bouillon or home-made liqueur. There were but two chairs in the room, one at the head of the table, and the other at the right hand of the host, as if in expectation of an honoured guest; but they were magnificently carved from oaks that had grown in the forests of the Duchy of Vendôme, for they, too, had emigrated with their owner in the *Chameau* from Havre in 1668.

Nothing else did the room contain, if the thickly-

hanging curtains of fur might be depended on for not obscuring more than wall and ceiling and floor. Mikel, drawing out the chair at the head of the richly-appointed table, sat down wearily, and leant back, closing his eyes upon the strange but familiar spectacle, his lantern being set on the floor beside him.

This display of fur and plate, and the remaining relics of an age of feudalism, chivalry, and petty state, constituted his secret. The inhabitants of the valley knew of the existence of the ruined Manoir; but not a soul beside himself had any conception of the curious treasure shut up within its walls.

Feudalism was now long since banished, the seignorial system abolished, chivalry a dream of the past, military exploits no longer possible; all glories tarnished, all affections dead, all hopes blighted, all resolutions in vain. Old Mikel, by turns staring at the monogram of his illustrious sires, and dreaming of the recreant Magloire, felt indeed a bitterness akin to death. Outside, the warm October sun flooded the windy valley. The habitant felled his trees, or busied himself in providing against the inclemency of the coming month in his own frugal and thrifty ways. Magloire, despising every inch of the ground he trod on, strode down to Delorme's and engaged the room for his lecture. And noon passed; three, four o'clock came, and still Mikel sat in the black oak chair.

Strange shadows swarmed before, behind, all around him. Once he roused himself, but it was only to take from an inner and very small pocket in his vest of shaggy hide a ring of matchless form and workmanship and containing a stone of great brilliancy and size. This stone was a diamond, brought from the East by a crusading knight of his family; and presently it gleamed upon the brown and withered finger of the trapper.

It needed but the presence of this gem to complete the singular picture of the descendant of an illustrious line absorbed in the contemplation of his family relics; while outside the mouldering Manoir blew the fresh, strong wind of lusty autumn, and whirled through the hazy amber air the shrivelling leaves of the primeval forest.


So he remained, lost in thought, the diamond on his forefinger, the lantern gleaming spectrally and yellow and always fainter and fainter, until it expired suddenly, and gem, gold and silver and damask all merged into black and total darkness.

## CHAPTER V.

### AT DELORME'S.

'As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying, so the curse causeless shall not come.'

MAGLOIRE received a grand welcome 'down at Delorme's.' His gaudy attire and general insouciance were thoroughly admired there. Louis and Jack were at the door when he arrived, and, communicating the fact to the men within, Magloire was received with a degree of ecstasy and appreciation that in nowise can be said to have flattered him, as he simply took it as his due, having expected it before he came. Pacifique limped in the background. Magloire was altogether too glorious a being for him to address. Laurière, who had tossed half the night on his hard bed, thinking over Magloire's tempting offer, was there too, glancing in wonder and dismay at Magloire and Magloire's hat. For, the morning being bright and sunny, and not so cold as the previous day had been—his first day in Bourg-



Marie after nine years' absence—Magloire had donned a tall silk hat, which, with his spring overcoat, flash tie and cane, completely subjugated Delorme's. He wore the hat just a little on one side, and was as airy as possible, the meeting with old Mikel being speedily forgotten in the joy of making a fine impression on the gaping habitants.

The day was a fine one. That crisp intoxication which sometimes precedes the Indian summer, with the quality of latent frost in the air, precludes all lassitude and fatigue, and makes of the shortest walk an Elysian pilgrimage fitted to overthrow all base longings. Or, as an old *trouvère* puts it,

‘ Car ils ôtent le noir penser,  
Deuil et ennui font oublier.’

But little of this emotion was experienced by the loungers at Delorme's. As long ago as the year 1727, Hocquart, Intendant, wrote home to France the following correct estimate of the Canadien: ‘ They love to be distinguished and caressed, and are extremely sensitive to contempt or the smallest punishment. . . . They are all attached to their religion. There are but few criminals. They are flighty and self-conceited, and hence they do not succeed as they might in the arts, agriculture and trade. To this must be added idleness, which is induced by the long and rigorous winter.’

As perfect specimens of this enforced idleness

might be taken now the men grouped outside the door at Delorme's, and occupied with Magloire. In every village there are some idle people, but it is only in such a village as that of Bourg-Marie that those who have the highest reputation for order, system, sobriety, and hard-working habits of frugality and neatness can be induced to leave whatever they are at and gather at such a place as Delorme's. They will assemble at any hour, in any weather, in any costume, and for any cause. Paul Ladislasky and his fat yellow brute of a dancing-bear will bring them, so will a 'strayed reveller' with a French piano. They will swarm in hordes to view a passing bicycle or a party of tourists on foot, or another wandering minstrel from the land that boasts the fatal gift of beauty, carrying a basket of gilded images on his head. The social instinct is the one which prevails over all others among this people, so cursed by Fate as to have been sphered where Nature is all in all, and society a dead-letter. We have seen how totally foreign to Magloire le Caron's temperament were any impulses of religion, of emotion, of affection, of longing after higher and better things, suggested by contact with the grand though gloomy forests and the eternal golden silence around him as he walked over to old Mikel's dwelling earlier that morning; and as it was with him, so was it with many of the inhabitants of Bourg-Marie, though in a different form.



The men who leaned in the doorway and lounged in the room that was kitchen and bar in one were nearly all labourers from the fields and from the three great forests of Lafontaine, Fournier, and Bourg-Marie, clad in strange but picturesque mixtures of flannel, leather, and fur. Two men sported earrings—large hoops of brass that bobbed against their cheeks when they walked; and Laurière displayed a brilliant dash of scarlet at the edge of his dark trousers, where they were turned up with a lining of red morocco. This splash of colour made him unspeakably happy, though he could not have told you why.

Magloire saluted his compatriots with a careless bow. For the labourers he affected a slight disdain. He looked to see the *cultivateurs*, the farmers—there were three in that district; the *épiciier*; his uncle Joncas, the veteran trapper; the *docteur*, Pligny; the rich M. Thibideau, who owned a mine; Prévost, the cobbler, known to be wealthy, and a great character; Palissier, the flour-merchant; Brandeau—Messire Jules Brandeau, notary; Father Labelle himself. He strode past the labourers up to the bar and asked in English for a glass of whisky.

Meanwhile many comments were made on his return and his appearance. Old Prévost, grown enormously fat, toddled over from his shop, almost directly opposite, and embraced him, ordering another glass of whisky in honour of the occasion.

The notary did not present himself, neither did the priest; and rich M. Thibideau was absent in Three Rivers. Magloire's audience was therefore slimmer and less distinguished than he would have liked. But his uncle, Emile-Sylvestre Joncas, M. Palissier, and young Docteur Pligny assembled in grand style and greeted him with effusive hilarity and increasingly rapid tongues. Indeed, the flow of Canadian-French was at first alarming to Magloire, who found that he had forgotten much of it. When the uproar was somewhat subsided, he mounted a chair—a proceeding which brought his head almost to the top of the room—and implored silence.

'My friends,' he began, 'it is true I am come back. *Je suis de retour*. I am a great man. I am no longer *le p'tit* Magloire. I have made a success—yes, this is all true. Yet I am come back. I am come back that I may see my relations. There is my grandfather——'

'Ah ouai! His grandfather, old Le Caron, well, he is good, that child; he will not forget anyone. Vive Magloire!'

'Vive Magloire!' and the interruption and the answering shout amused Magloire extremely, though still he was not flattered. Nothing they could do in this wretched hole of a village could be interpreted as flattery of one so distinguished, so great a man in his own right.

'And I am come back that I may see another—my uncle!'

He was again interrupted.

'His uncle! Regard thou the good child. He forgets not his uncle. Joncas, 'tis thou! Press through—advance! Make way there for his uncle—for Joncas! Ah! a pity! He grows to look old! See there, *le brav' enfant!* Vive Magloire, Magloire le Caron!'

'I embrace you, my uncle. I weep, but not with mourning, not with regret. No. It is with joy—with joy. Then, as well as my uncle, there will be my friends in the village. Louis and Jack, well, I see them in my new country, in Milwaukee; it will not be of them I speak. Dame Delorme, I salute you. M. le docteur Pligny, I salute you; and you, M. Palissier. You are all my compatriots, my brothers, my friends.'

This climax of patriotic affection was received with a cheer. Magloire's position seemed now secure.

'See now,' he went on, 'I'm going to tell you all about things. I shall speak here next Friday, if I may have the large room—well, that is all right—that goes well, and you will all come and hear me.'

The excitement changed. It became interest, and therefore moderated.

'What things?'

'He is *Américain*.'

'Not he. He is Magloire le Caron. He is clever; has been away for nine years. Let us listen.'

'For why must he speak? It is no election.'

'That is all the better. He will speak of himself; tell us what he has seen. I shall go—I.'

'Will Père Dominique come?'

'Yes, yes, of a truth he will. He is the great friend of old Mikel. Why, he has said that Mikel is the seigneur of all the valley. If so, then we should hearken Magloire.'

'He is *Américain*, I tell you.'

'He is English, a little. He will have forgotten his language here and there, yet the brave child, to remember his grandfather! How old is he?'

Such was the buzz of wonder and interested ejaculations that surrounded Magloire on his improvised platform. *M. le docteur* Pligny and Palissier had not joined in the last outburst of clamour. They had been questioning Louis and Jack Péron as to their life in Milwaukee, and Magloire's prosperity. Being partly educated men, and desirous of progressing in the world, they appreciated the move made by the brothers in removing to the States; but Magloire's flash appearance had not altogether imposed upon them; they found it dubious, although they hesitated to pronounce it spurious. Pligny himself was a thinker. He had formed a plan for moving to Three Rivers, and becoming a Member of Parliament. He had in his youth edited a small *rouge* journal in Montreal when completing his college course. It was difficult, he found, to place Magloire, whom he did not remember.

'Grandson of old Le Caron,' he was saying to Palissier. 'That will be the forest-ranger, who keeps the old Manoir in order. Are you sure?'

Palissier, a red-faced, sturdy type of Frenchman, always more or less floury about the ears and shoulders, was, on the contrary, thoroughly imbued with a sense of Magloire's striking resemblance to his grandfather.

'Sure?' he repeated scornfully. 'Why, regard him—you—sceptic, unbeliever in all things. Look at his height, his long figure—rack-stretched, like the pictures in the old books *chez M. le Curé*—look at the eye, the way the hair lies on the forehead, even the fall of the lip. Yes, 'tis Mikel himself grown young. One can doubt no longer. Listen! He is a funny child—he is a rascal, that Magloire! How he speaks! That is what I want to hear. Now, what is it he says?'

And Palissier, leaving the young doctor at the door, bustled forward till he reached the front of the ring of fifteen or twenty men who had surrounded Magloire. But the latter had descended from his rostrum, finding the strain of so much French beginning to tell upon his oratorical powers. Palissier seized him by the hand—a Pumblechook in flour, brown 'duck,' and eighteenth-century French.

'Tis Magloire, *le p'tit* Magloire, grandson of old Mikel! There is no doubt of that. Come! You are welcome once more to Bourg-Marie. V'la boys,

this is old Mikel's grandson—Mikel, who owns the old Manoir, and is, in truth, seigneur for all the valley.'

Any doubts the crowd had were now set at rest.

'There is M. Palissier. Hear him. He is a brave one. He knows what he says. Vive Magloire!'

And once more the cry of 'Long live Magloire!' resounded through the shabby hotel.

Magloire himself had found that one of his audience, Platte, a horse-trader, smelling strongly of vile tobacco, and carrying one arm in a red cotton sling, spoke English, and in sheer relief fastened upon him.

'Say! I bet you I get out of this place quick—soon. This is the worst bizness yet.'

Platte answered in a similar drawl. He was flattered by Magloire's recognition. The latter had made friends with him on the train which brought him East a few days before, and had kept him in his mind as a convenient 'partner' should old Mikel prove too curious.

'Get out of this? You bet I do, as soon as ever I can. I am your man every time. Well, come, drink another glass of whisky. Let's treat the boys, as we say in Milwaukee.'

Magloire's speech was more fluent, but not so correct. Platte had been born and 'raised' in the States, whereas Magloire, after all, had lived the first fourteen years of his life in almost utter unconsciousness of the English tongue.

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' Say, you, Jim Platte ! you've got to come hear me speak next Friday. Do you hear ? I'll give them boss speech. Down with the Jesuits, down with the Pope, down with all religion ! " Bob " himself won't speak it better. Down with the Government, down with class, down with monopolies of all kinds ! I'll speak out. I'm not afraid. Platte, did I ever tell you that I was secretary—yes, sir—of the Universal Leveller Society, headquarters Chicago ? Well, I am. That post was offered me when I was driving Colonel Swabey's horses first month, in Milwaukee. I learnt a lot through being that. I'm not afraid of no man. I'll speak to the curé. There is no one I am afraid of. Say, you, Jim Platte, how quiet you are !'

Platte, who had good reasons of his own for hanging around Magloire, and who divined that the villainous whisky or high wines were mounting to his head, for in common Magloire drank very little, managed adroitly to draw him outside after this dangerous speech, which was, however, not understood by the enthusiastic crowd. The latter made way for the newly-discovered hero, a few becoming thoroughly drunk on the premises, and having to be ejected by the widow Delorme.

Among the crowd were two who did not fall victims to the bad whisky, probably because they were well seasoned to it already—Pacifique, the stunted cripple, and Nicolas Laurière. Not com-

prehending in the least the manner of Magloire's sudden disappearance, they instinctively turned an inquiring gaze upon each other. Laurière, tall, firm, sinewy-chested, and a trapper by profession, had never noticed till lately the third son of the widow Péron. But now some strange bond seemed to bring them together. Laurière's gaze, directed to Pacifique, divined that the latter was thinking only of Magloire. He drew nearer, and half put out his large, lean, strong brown hand ; then he let it fall.

'Ah!' he said, 'Louis and Jack, they are good fellows. You will be glad to see them at home again. But they are not Magloire.'

'No, no,' eagerly repeated Pacifique, his whole frame trembling, and his small dark eyes dilating with pleasure and longing. 'Magloire is—oh! there is none to be named with him. He is a great man, and we shall never be like him—at least, I shall never be ; you might.'

'He has asked me to go back with him when he goes.'

'You, Nicolas Laurière! Ah! how proud you must be! You will go, without a doubt. Oh yes, I see you will go, and be coming home, too, some day, dressed like him, *only*, not like him.'

Laurière's simplicity was greater than his sensitiveness, otherwise he might have found this remark embarrassing.

'I shall never be like him, of course. But then, I



should be something better than I am now. At least, I have often thought so. Still, it is a great step to take. I have always thought that I would end in going somewhere away from Bourg-Marie, yet, now that Magloire has come back and speaks of it, I am puzzled ; I am always thinking, thinking ; I do not know how to settle it.'

To his surprise, Pacifique broke out with passionate words to the same effect.

'To sit in the house—it is not the country for people to sit in the house, it is too cold. And I cannot walk in the fields, nor sleep all night in the forests, like other men. It is Louis and Jack who can do all that. It is they who should have remained here, and I—I should have gone. For there are things that I can do, and they cannot, and things that are of no use to me here.'

Laurière understood at once. He had often heard the exquisite voice of the cripple raised in the parish church of Yamachiche, Bourg-Marie having no church of its own yet.

'You, too?' he said. 'But it would be hard for one like you, perhaps. It might be some time before you got your voice heard, and in the meantime, what would you do?'

Pacifique flashed into rapid speech.

'I should do very well. It is not every day they hear a voice like mine. I know that well, for it is Messire le Curé who has told me. And to be ugly

like me does not matter, he has said, for in the big churches in the towns up the river they put the singers up over the heads of the people, where they cannot be seen; and the voice of a man may be found to be more like the voice of an angel that way than if they saw him and knew for certain that he was a man singing. Nicolas Laurière, all that is true; and if I could go with you and Magloire le Caron to these places I should fare very well, as well as Louis and Jack. They have not brought back too much money. It will be last night that they were telling our mother about these things. They had put—it is true, this that I say—a little money into the bank—there is a bank in that town, that Milwaukee; but that they might travel all the way from there to Bourg-Marie they took it nearly all out, and now, when they go back, they must work hard again to make more.'

Laurière knit his fine black brows, and gazed at the stunted figure.

'But they returned that they might see the good mother, and Père Dominique, the holy man, and say their prayers once more in their own church.'

Pacifique broke in with excited gestures.

'Which is their own church? It is that they have no longer any church, neither they nor Magloire. I have found that out, but they do not know, and if they did, they would but call me "Little fool!" and "Blast Canuck!" Oh yes, they have no longer any

church. They have found out that there is no need of a church, nor of the priest, nor of the Sacrament.'

Laurière clapped his hand over the other's mouth, and brought him by the arm out of Delorme's into the deserted street, just as Jim Platte had marched Magloire a few moments before away from danger.

'What have you heard them say?'

'All that I have said, and more.'

'The rest! What was it?'

'Well, it is true they are no longer good Catholics.'

Laurière had dimly understood in his youth when he went to the curé's school that there were other beliefs.

'They may be good—other people.'

It was now Pacifique's turn to regard with wonder the perplexed visage of the mild Laurière.

'That is impossible, Nicolas Laurière. Do you think what they say is true?'

Laurière noted a party of smoking, semi-drunken men coming along the road. The hour was noon, and others would soon be issuing from the small and straggling shops and houses. He put an arm through Pacifique's, and together they entered a little wood that bordered the highroad on one side—a kind of outpost of the gigantic forest that towered further on. Laurière's one object was to get from Pacifique everything about Magloire, while Pacifique's desire was so to conciliate himself with Nicolas Laurière that should the latter actually return with

his brothers and Magloire to Milwaukee, he would consent to let him—Pacifique—bear him company. Both men were warm, although more than a hint of frost was in the air. Laurière threw himself down on some bronze and purple mats of fern and vetch, and lay full length on his face for a few seconds. Pacifique, seated on a stone, plucked blossoms of the vivid golden-rod—plucked them, smelt at them, then, disappointed, began rubbing them to powder between his hands. Laurière, looking up, saw him.

‘ Say, Pacifique, why do you do that ?’

‘ I do not like any flower that has no smell.’

‘ Well, that is funny. I like all blue flowers ; I don’t like the yellow ones at all. If you go out to Milwaukee, you will see very few flowers, Pacifique.’

The cripple laughed.

‘ That is all you know, “ Mister ” Laurière. I have heard of such things as a barrel of red roses—like the ones on the altar—and tubs of white ones. I have heard—they have told me—that when people die, their friends pay much money—large sums—for flowers to bury with them. As if the dead knew the flowers were there ! That is a strange thing, that.’

‘ And where is this ?’

‘ In those States—in Milwaukee.’

‘ It is Magloire who will have told you that, and Louis and Jack ?’

Pacifique grinned.

'Magloire most. He has lots of friends there who sell flowers. Nicolas Laurière, if there is no God, who made these flowers?'

Laurière sat up, and his face was very awful to see. He crossed himself, and prayed inwardly for the erring soul of the recreant Pacifique. The latter was still grinding to pollen-like dust the once waving blossoms of the graceful golden-rod. To Laurière, on whose calm brow and in whose sedate eyes 'Believer' was undeniably written, there was something fatal, horrible, significant of death and doom in this action of his companion.

'Stop, Pacifique Péron!' he said; and his tone reminded one of old Mikel's in its authority and its resonant ring.

Laurière's voice was a voice that suited best the open air, a voice to resound and re-echo and command, a voice to summon and to silence at once.

'Stop, Pacifique Péron!' it said; and the cripple stopped, regarded Laurière's stern gaze a moment, and from that time put himself on his guard.

'Is it that you no longer believe in God?' said the thunderstruck Laurière. 'Leave the flowers alone—they would have pleased some children or Bonhomme Peter—and answer me.'

'There is nothing to say. I have thought of these things, that is all. I do not wish to live just like a cat or a child—be given my food, be told what

is good and bad, and never act for myself. One may act for one's self, surely.'

'One may do nothing of the kind. It is not right. Who has told you all this lie? If it is Magloire—but, of course, it can be no one else—he has heard all that in this new country. What else has he told you?'

'I tell you, Nicolas Laurière, there is nothing else. Magloire has talked—why would he not?—and he has read a great deal, and he is to be believed over such as—you, "Mister" Laurière, and even, they say, over the curé, who has lived in Bourg-Marie all his life. Are we not always cold in the winter and too hot in the summer? Have we not coarse, ugly clothes, and some of us wooden shoes? Is not our food sometimes frozen? and is not our whole life a miserable one, compared to that which my brothers and Magloire will lead when they return to those States? Bah! Nicolas Laurière, you know what I say is true; and every man in Bourg-Marie knows the same thing, if he thinks, if he is not *à moitié fou*.'

Laurière heard all this, and recognised his own sentiments. Just in this manner had he thought and felt for four long years, ever since Louis and Jack Péron left the countryside. But now, when it escaped, all this flood of pent-up longing and conviction, from the lips of another, it struck him as horrible, diseased, morbid, and blasphemous.

'Does Magloire dare to say that there is no God?'

Pacifique had grown cunning.

'No, no! Look, Laurière, it is not so bad as that. There may be a God, and it may be wise and pleasant to keep up the churches and to go to them sometimes—I, for one, I myself, who sing, would be sorry to find no churches to sing in, look thou—but what one hears there one is not bound to believe.'

So the 'tall twin towers of the grim *église*,' piercing the dull opaque gray or the brilliant blue of an over-arching sky, the blazing gold of the cross shining afar off for all the valley, the open doors, from which sounded the musical intonations of the priest's veiled voice, the crowd of eager, fervent, joyous, humble worshippers—all this a dream! Inside, the well-worn pews, the *eau bénie*, the poor old men and women in rags, the neat, awestruck children, the dim roof peopled in the imagination of the young by choirs of angel faces, wings dropping azure and rose, brows breathing amaranth and myrrh, the pictures of virgins, martyrs, prophets, saints, the glowing recess where the altar, divine, effulgent, iridescent, bathed in glories of light and flowers and flame, represents God drawn near to man; upon the steps man, in positive and actual torture of abnegation, drawing near to God—all this a dream! The service beginning, the hush, the suspense, the wonder, the fear, the forgetfulness of self, the abandonment of the human, the dim realization of the Divine, the supreme moment when the

fragrant incense is wafted over the kneeling crowd—  
all this a dream !

God of hearts, of souls, of life, and death, and judgment, by the side of these dread realities, Sin, Conscience, Strife, Lust, Pain, there is only, to some minds, one Church which is a reality, too, and that is the Church of Rome !

Laurière's heart beats with a dull, yet excited, boom, his eyes stare vacantly at the leaves blowing down from the trees, fluttering absently to the ground, covering by degrees his large straw hat beside him. All that a dream ! Those trees and leaves a dream ! The freshening breeze, the amber airs, the flushing maples, the cawing crows, the dark-blue kingfisher darting like a jewelled arrow to its nest in the river-bank, the road just a yard or two behind them resounding now with the sound of men's voices returning from work—Bonhomme Peter, the village 'wag' Dorien, Lafitte, Archambault, Joncas, all the rest, singing good-humouredly, though in semi-drunken bursts, 'Je sais un paysan'—all these a dream, if you will ; the very heart bursting in his body, the very blood coursing through his veins, anything you like—fiction, figment, fancy, poetry, make-believe, sham, counterfeit, delusion, hallucination—so long as the Church, the priest, the Sacrament, and God are left real.

Pacifique had committed a crime—or, rather, Magloire. Both had slain the Ideal. But Laurière's



faith, though dismayed and perturbed, was not shaken. Was it not his sister, living now at L'Assomption, and mother of a large family, who for years had suffered with her spine, but was at last cured by making the pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Anne, leaving her crutch behind her, to join the pyramid of sticks, canes, crutches of all kinds, that is kept there as a witness through the centuries? Witness to what? To the miracles yet done on earth, despite modern tongues and pens to the contrary. The thought of that sister calmed him directly.

'You do not answer, Nicolas Laurière,' said the cripple.

'I was thinking,' said Laurière slowly, and bringing his stern, dark gaze to bear straight upon Pacifique's rather narrow and cold gray eyes, 'of my sister, Aspasia, she who married Lévizac at L'Assomption. There was a long time she was a sufferer; she had a bad back and could not lie down. Never did my sister Aspasia lie down as we all do to go to sleep, but she would have to sit up in her cushions, till she went with the pilgrims to the shrine of the holy St. Anne seven years ago. A cripple she went, and nothing was done to her, and nothing was given to her, save the grace that is from Mary and the infant Jesus above, and straight and well and sound she came back.'

Laurière's voice was sepulchral. Pacifique's

emotional nature yielded to its solemn force. He shivered and grew pale. Fear fell upon him. He had blasphemed, perhaps.

‘Don’t look at me that way, Nicolas Laurière,’ he said. ‘Your sister Aspasia is one, and I am another. I have said nothing against her, nothing against the holy St. Anne. That may be all as you say. I do not know. I cannot tell or understand any of those things.’

‘And you would seek to lift your voice in a church, you who boast that you do not believe in God?’

‘I did not boast. I was but saying that all that was as Magloire had said, how they talked of those things in that other country.’

‘All might be well with you yet, if you would but go too, as my sister Aspasia did, with the pilgrims next spring to the holy St. Anne. Do you not believe that?’

Pacifique had recovered his assurance.

‘You have no right to ask me that question, Nicolas Laurière. There is only the father who has that right.’

‘Do you believe that?’

Laurière extended a long arm and grasped Pacifique’s shoulder. The cripple started up and flung the arm off. He was defiant now.

‘No!’ he cried, ‘I do not believe it! Your sister Aspasia, Madame Lévizac of L’Assomption, may believe it—you, Nicolas Laurière, may believe it—but I do not. See here, look! Go you yourself to

Father Labelle and ask him how it is done ; tell him that the whole world outside talks of it and says it cannot be true, that it is well known there is some trick, that only in such ignorant places as Bourg-Marie and the village of St. Anne itself is the thing believed in. Urge him to tell you the truth, and hear what he has to say. Bah ! he will say nothing. I might go there year after year, humble myself, eat dust, and wear the stones out kneeling, and I would never be cured—never ! Your sister had a bad back, but it was only bad in feeling, not in shape. Tell me that, Laurière, was not her back straight ?'

Laurière assented, pained and shocked to a degree of which he had had no conception.

'I said so ; her back was straight. Therefore was she cured, and that easily. The journey, the excitement, the fresh air, the strangeness of it all, the effort, the resolution, cured her. But I, once crooked, always crooked. Not all the priests in the Church, not all the churches in the land, could make my back straight, being crooked. And this I knew before Magloire ever came back. This I knew of myself, Nicolas Laurière, and this is why I am tired of this place, with nothing but hard work and few holidays, no money, and too much church. I shall go back with Magloire or with you when you go, and get money with my voice. Listen, now !' and he sang in a clear, vibrating tenor the melody of a

Mozart Mass he had heard on one occasion only—but, then, he had an unerring ear—in the parish church at Yamachiche.

Laurière loathed him as he sang. As the voice soared higher and sweeter and more powerfully among the drifting leaves of the October wood, so did Laurière's fear and contempt for the daring cripple increase every moment.

'Go away!' he cried, 'you, Pacifique Péron, son of the devil! Go, or stop singing. It is accursed, vile, infamous! for you mock at what you sing. I tell you now—go!'

And Pacifique went, half scared, half amused, wholly defiant and roused.

Laurière threw himself down on his face among the drifted red and brown leaves. At one o'clock Bonhomme Peter, Archambault, and the rest returned along the road. This time they were singing 'Pimpanipole,' and had their hats decked out with golden-rod and crimson Virginia-creeper. They passed very close to Laurière, but their progress did not arouse him. It was not that he was sleeping. It was that his heart still kept beating as if it would break, and hot tears occasionally welled from his eyes. Something had happened to him, pained him, shocked him. He was suffering. And he was to suffer more.

## CHAPTER VI.

## 'THE BIZNESS.'

'I discerned among the youths a young man void of understanding. Passing through the street near her corner, and he went the way to her house. In the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night.'

IT was by a curious coincidence, or, at least, so it would be considered in the eyes of the unthinking, to whom only the real is fictitious, and who persist in finding fiction truer than truth, that on the same day, almost at the same hour, old Mikel le Caron and his associate and companion, Nicolas Laurière, had received that species of moral shock which, in both cases, proceeded, directly and indirectly, from Magloire. Had the latter realized this fact, it would have much amused him. As it was, confident of making, sooner or later, an impression more favourable than he had already done on his grandfather, and satisfied that the village, so to speak, was absolutely at his beck and call, he wisely refrained

from seeing the old seigneur again till his lecture on 'Emancipation' at Delorme's was over, and his abilities proclaimed throughout the valley, 'When,' thought Magloire, 'he will be proud of me.'

Mikel, old and simple in some things as he was, had yet been the only one who had penetrated into the real heart of his grandson, and divined the important fact that the latter was in want of money. Magloire's description of himself as one who was 'of many things' was true, but if he had gone a little further, and pronounced himself as one who had taken up one thing too many, he would have been more strictly veracious. That thing was gambling. Everything by turns, and witnessing all kinds of society and all forms of civilization, it was not surprising that the susceptible Gallic temperament, aided by the national love of money and pride of acquisition, had led Magloire far from the path of virtue and a fairly long way along another path—that of speculation, restless, feverish, often painful, but oftener enthralling. To pay for flash clothes, lodgings, opera-tickets, lunches for flower-girls, ballet-dancers, and milliners, sporting papers, cabs to the races, cigars and whisky, he had conceived the idea of visiting his grandfather, and getting from him adequate funds for those humane and charming purposes. Louis and Jack Péron had brought him many a tale of old Mikel's parsimony, thrift, stealthy, cautious, exclusive mode of life, his success in

trapping, his occasional bargains with the Quebec fur-traders, and he well remembered the remoteness and wildness of the district. Money he must have, whether he made it, or found it, or gambled it up from unholy depths, or forced it from old Mikel's mean dwelling, in some crevice of which it surely lay. Louis and Jack had no suspicion of this. They, regarding Magloire as an entirely prosperous and affluent man, drew their simple conclusions from his mode of living, dress, and amusements, and rated him accordingly. He was no longer a coachman. Colonel Swabey, a millionaire in pork, had suddenly suffered eclipse—there were trichinæ in the pork—his business had collapsed, and Magloire, thrown out of employment the fourth time, by accident and not his own fault, entered into partnership with an Irishman; and what their business was they could hardly have told themselves. They occupied the ground-floor under one of the hotels, and carried on a mixture of trades in the front-room, while Magloire slept in the one at the back. The Irishman ran a shooting-gallery across the way and a bowling-alley next door, while Magloire had an 'office,' in which he sat at a small desk in a large revolving chair, always with his hat on one side, his legs very wide apart, some kind of showy flower in his buttonhole, and an expensive cigar in his mouth. The name of Mr. Murray Carson appeared over the door and in china letters on the window, which was

partly filled with race-posters, photographs of pets of the turf, spurious dollar-bills posted on paper, bills of houses to let, theatrical pictures, and a couple of revolvers. But no matter how many interesting relics filled the window, it was always possible to see Mr. Murray Carson inside, waiting for 'bizness' to turn up, or picking his teeth with his pen and pocket-knife, an elegant habit he had acquired in his adopted country.

That was the life he liked, and he looked back to it now, in the middle of the dense glooms of Bourg-Marie, with love and longing. His partner's wife, once upon a time a raw Irish girl, fair-haired, freckled, unformed, bony and ignorant, had developed under the influences of the New World into a well-built, showily-dressed woman of thirty-five, with hair elaborately frizzed and coiled and puffed, its colour deepened and enhanced by cautious applications of 'blondine,' and with a fine blooming complexion, also artificially attained. This pretty Mrs. Rylands (Ryan her husband's name, her own Kitty Maguire) lived in sumptuous quarters in the hotel above the office, and did nothing but dress herself, eat, 'go shopping,' spend Rylands' money (and Magloire's), sleep, yawn, walk down Main Street twice a day, read Sunday papers, then dress herself again. Her accent was the purest American imaginable, every trace of brogue having been carefully obliterated, along with the freckles and the bones and a few other



things. She wore plush dresses, peacock-blue, garnet and golden-brown, to the theatre, with a sealskin sacque cut in the latest fashion down to her heels, and a high bonnet on the top of her Psyche twist. When Rylands could not accompany her, Magloire did. One foolish thing he did was to make her a little present of a diamond solitaire—all the women out there wear them, therefore this act of itself was not anything to make a fuss about, only, as Magloire had to pay for it out of the proceeds of the '*bizness*,' and Rylands handled the capital, Rylands '*got mad*.'

Magloire did not fall in love with Kitty; in fact, he was too fond of himself to fall in love with any woman; but he rendered himself necessary to her, and found her presence at times necessary to him. The shop-girls—or, shall we say, sales ladies—flower-girls, and ballet-dancers, served only to keep his egotism alive, while Kitty Rylands answered a more æsthetic purpose. When he took her out driving, what a handsome pair they looked, in fur-trimmed garments, diamond studs and solitaire rings worn outside the glove, behind the fastest horse in Milwaukee, on bright Sunday afternoons! Rylands, who had been the means of setting Carson up, allowed the latter full play to his Gallic propensities for a year and a half, at the end of which time it was evident to Kitty that a crisis was imminent.

One evening in July, hot, insupportably hot and oppressive, she coaxed Magloire to take her to a per-

formance of light opera at the Vaudeville, and afterwards to a lager-beer garden they were in the habit of frequenting. Magloire went. The theatre was stifling, and Kitty Rylands, even in a rich dress of India muslin and Valenciennes edging, grew faint with the bad air. Long before the second act was over they rose and made their way out to Reichenburg and Jonas's little tables under the electric light, where Kitty presently ordered lager-beer and plenty of ice for herself and companion. The tables were on a veranda at the back of a large dining-room, and looked on a square of turf called garden, where there were more tables, all occupied with hot, thirsty, garrulous Germans and Western Americans. It was interesting to observe how carefully Kitty chose her table, the one nearest the wall and most in shadow, and how she placed Magloire with his back to that wall, and herself opposite the large saloon, so that she might see who entered and who passed out.

Mr. Reichenburg, a swarthy little American-Dutch-Jew, born in Montreal, but raised in Minneapolis, regarded Kitty with admiration as she swept past the counter in muslin skirts, diamonds, and a cloak of red silk covered with black lace, and made her a profound bow. Mr. Jonas, in apron, and with exactly twenty-six tall lager-beer glasses held between his ten thin, dirty fingers, bowed to her too, and so did many of the men at the little tables. One lady in pale-blue satin, bare head and arms, and dirty

opera-cloak, stared at her contemptuously, and then whispered to her companion, a man in a long linen duster of bright yellow, who kept his hat on all the time, and, while he waited for his share of the Teutonic beverage, cleaned his nails with the prongs of his fork. This couple had ordered viands with their lager-beer, for they were hungry, both being country journalists who were in doing the town. Mrs. Virginia E. Corbett-Smith recognised Kitty Rylands at once as the person who had opened a milliner's shop in West Rapids several years ago, got into debt and left hurriedly, though not ignominiously, since Corbett-Smith and three other gentlemen had seen her to the train, kissed their hands to her, and paid some of her creditors. It was after this that Mrs. Virginia E. Corbett-Smith took to journalism and to Horace Y. Chandler, with whom she edited a paper, and travelled around the State.

Another lady, very fat, and dressed in thin black satin that looked like paper, seemed to regard Kitty as an old and favourite acquaintance, for she got as far as, 'Well! My! Why, ef it tain't Kitty Maguire! And dressed just splendid!' when Mrs. Kate Rylands (*née* Maguire) gave her a glance that silenced her—not too soon, for the history of this fat lady was one which could not be touched upon in this narrative.

Magloire keenly appreciated the pleasures of his position. Something like passion began to kindle in his narrow and self-enslaved breast as he watched

the admiring glances of the men and the contemptuous ones of the women. He thought he knew why Kitty should be disliked by her own sex ; she was too beautiful.

Certainly she was a remarkable and handsome woman, possessing an almost perfect contour, and a great variety of expression. Her mouth was Irish and large, but sweet and mobile, her eyes large and full, her manner at times imperious, yet always fascinating. While the self-made men of the West are often vulgar, uninteresting, pretentious, heavy and common, the women are mostly singularly seductive and winning, bright and facile, quick to understand and perceive, and making up for what they lacked in early education in general aptitude, tact, and power of pleasing. No profounder qualities than these have gained for American women their reputation of cleverness, versatility and charm.

As Magloire watched his solitaire sparkle on Mrs. Rylands' finger, and saw her round arm through the filmy lace of her hanging sleeve, and inhaled the heavy perfumes of Lubin, Rimmel and Co. that emanated from her person, he distinctly experienced something akin to a thrill of passion, and when he spoke, felt a huskiness in his throat that was new to him ; and Kitty understood and smiled.

'Shall you pay the bill, or shall I?' said she, as she swept her skirts down beside her, and gave Magloire her cloak to hang over a chair.

Magloire, or Mr. Murray Carson, hung the cloak hurriedly over his own chair and dived into his pocket. Cool as he was, he was dismayed to find it empty, swept and garnished, though there had been ten dollars and some loose change in it after he had paid for the theatre tickets an hour before.

'Damn!' said he, 'someone has gone pick my pocket. That Vaudeville, it is a low place. I shall go there no more. But how—see, I was next you at the end of the seat—how could it happen? Well, I'm d——d!'

Mrs. Rylands first looked incredulous, then amused.

'Where do you carry your money? My dear man, if you will keep it in your coat-pocket, you are sure to be fleeced. I guess Rylands never does that. He keeps his in his pants.' And a rippling laugh recalled Magloire to a sense of his proximity to so much fairness.

The money was forgotten; he moved his chair impatiently nearer his companion's, and laid his hand upon her arm, where it showed fairest upon the dark wood of the table.

'I don't care about the money,' he said. 'I shouldn't care even if you yourself had taken it. There's more where that came from.'

'I guess I wouldn't make so sure of that,' said Kitty; 'and I'd rather you'd take your hand away. Mr. Jonas and Mr. Reichenburg are both looking over here, and Rylands will hear.'

'Will hear what?' said Magloire, respecting her wish, but twirling his moustache and bending his brilliant eyes at her. 'Say, Mis' Rylands, you must learn to speak French. Then we have a good time together. But you won't try.'

'No,' said Kitty, laughing again—and she was irresistible when she laughed—'it seems as if my French would have to wait. It might be useful, though. When it's cooler some day, I'll try again. Rylands is going to hire me a new piano next week, and you can teach me some of your songs—those funny ones you used to sing in Canada. Speaking of Rylands, there he is!'

Magloire started and asked where.

'I saw him passing a moment ago in the street. He didn't look in, and if he did, he couldn't see me. Why, no, indeed. He could see you, though, but that wouldn't matter. He's awful busy these days; and kind of cut up, too. I guess, Mr. Carson, you and him has had some words?'

'No,' said Carson. 'For why? About you?'

'Goodness, no!' said Kitty; 'Rylands isn't such a fool. But about money: he says—and I brought you here to-night to tell you what he says—he says, says he, that he's going to have it out with you; that you promised to bring some money into the business, and so far from that you have been using up his capital and even ready cash, and that he can do without you, and that he'll expose you; and I

tell you, Murray Carson, Rylands can be awful desperate.'

'Do without me?' said Carson. 'In the bizness? Impossible! The bizness cannot be kept going without the office, and there must be someone in that office while your husband is to the other places. He is mad, that Rylands. See—my money—what I had—it was very leetle—I have to send it away to my mother, to my sisters. I spend a lot on the theatre, on clothes, on—you. Besides, I have much money coming to me. Wait a leetle longer. Wait—I will not keep him long.'

Kitty laughed in secret about the mother and sisters. She didn't believe in them a bit.

'Well, you're real eloquent, I do say, Mr. Carson. But you've got a woman to deal with this time, not Rylands; and though he is head of the Order, he is not as sharp as I am in some things. Say, Mr. Carson, hain't you been gambling?'

Carson started, almost to his feet, but Kitty's voice stopped a passing waiter, and at the approach of that individual he sank down again and managed to preserve his presence of mind.

'Ain't this lager-beer too cunning for all the world to-night? Take some more, Mr. Carson. Come, now, hain't you?'

Carson meditated no escape. Mrs. Rylands was more than his match, and he admired her for it. If he disclaimed the fact of his gambling, he robbed

her of her cleverness and insight, and thereby lost an opportunity of complimenting and accordingly pleasing her. At twenty-three, Carson's age, one is apt to be influenced by thirty-five. Where a young and innocent girl could not have driven him, this middle-aged and precarious woman led him easily. He gave a kind of uneasy, hollow laugh, and then clutched her hand under the table.

'How you know that? Well, I play—jes' a leetle. Sometime—my friends come and ask me—I go with them to Foy's—yes, I play a leetle. Mis' Rylands——'

'Well,' said Kitty, who kept a close watch on the side-walk and the saloon.

'Does Rylands know?'

'Why, no. I would never tell him, you see, and he is so awful busy. But I guess he'd find out some day, for though he never goes himself to Foy's, he knows the men who do. And you're his partner, you see. And he wouldn't like you to be seen there, I'm sure, on account of the Order.'

'That's why I go—half de time!' said Carson. 'There are men I follow. They go in there. I go too. Well—say—there is no harm in that—I go in, I see those cards. When they play, I play too. Sometimes I win—it is at faro we play.'

'Yes, and sometimes you lose, and lose to those men. And if you continue going there you will hear, not from Rylands, but from the Order. I



want you should understand this, Mr. Carson—promise me you’ll stop going there, going to Foy’s.’

Carson hesitated to promise. A law unto himself, he disliked tyranny even on the part of pretty Mrs. Rylands.

‘If I promise,’ he said slowly, ‘I cannot take you to the theatre—well, no more the Vaudeville; but there are others. You will not like that.’

‘You must promise,’ said Kitty, ‘and you must find the money in some other way. Make it, if you can. If you can’t, I guess you’ll be able to find it, but not—at Foy’s.’

Carson drained his lager-beer to the last drop, and swore under his breath a mixture of oaths, French, English, American, that would have done credit to a Colorado miner. His passion for Kitty was momentarily growing, and it remained to be seen whether it would last, or whether it would prove a gourd of no growth, of not even a night’s standing. As they left the garden and walked back through the flaring, noisy, panting midnight streets to the Hallam House, there came for the first time into his head the idea of revisiting Bourg-Marie and testing for himself the assertions of Louis and Jack Péron with respect to his grandfather. Mrs. Rylands hung on his arm, with her perfumes and laces and jewels, and when they arrived at the hotel made him finish the night in her own parlour, where, with cigars, sherry cobblers, and the Sunday papers,

they made merry till two o'clock in the morning, when Rylands entered. He was tired out, he said; moody, cross. Carson departed, and as soon as he went the pretty Mrs. Rylands drew something gray and crumpled from her pocket and gave it to her husband.

'Ten dollars!' he said angrily. 'What good will this do? Ten hundred is more the figure. You must drop him, Kitty.'

'I wonder at your saying that,' said Kitty. 'Why, you'll never get such a man again. With his looks and his way of speaking, and his lack of relations, he's the very man you want. Let the Order pay him a bigger salary.'

'I don't see as how the Order can,' grumbled Rylands, who, with his feet on a plush and onyx table, was puffing away at a monstrous cigar. 'Bigger salary! Why, Lordy, what are you talking about, old girl? Ain't he a poor Canuck that's jes' drifted up here, and glad at first to get anything? Salary! Why, the Order's in difficulties itself—hain't got too much to spare. And branches yet to start and keep running in two or three States and all over Canada.'

Pretty Mrs. Rylands said no more on the subject of Murray Carson, though she pondered in her heart over the prospect of establishing the Order in Canada, and getting Carson to help in it. Carson, or Magloire, who became preternaturally careful of

his pockets after that night at the Vaudeville, was finally sent on a secret mission to the land of his birth, charged with several grave offices and services that were only partially paid for in advance by the magnates of the Order—Headquarters: London and Chicago. While he was away Rylands had to control the entire 'bizness,' consisting of the secret workings of the Order, transactions in horseflesh, real estate, counterfeit paper, the bowling-alley, the shooting-gallery, and his wife's appearances in public. Magloire, or Carson, set himself in the first place to startle and impress his native village and to conciliate his grandfather, and, in the second, to make known to the countryside some of those pleasant and ennobling ideas which he had picked up in the society of people like Rylands and Mrs. R., through the medium of a lecture delivered at Delorme's.

From the tainted, gas-lit, poisoned atmosphere of the great Western town to the pure solitudes of Bourg-Marie, set under the cold and sparkling stars of a true though frigid north, is a long step. But it was short compared to the distance between the unsullied soul and the childlike heart of a man like Nicolas Laurière, and the utter selfishness, the intriguing iniquities of the hybrid product of three civilizations—Magloire le Caron or Mr. Murray Carson.

## CHAPTER VII.

### SEDITION.

‘They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression : they speak loftily.’

It was not easily possible to procure posters or bill-stickers in Bourg-Marie, else Magloire had ordered a hundred or so of the former, and commissioned one or two of the latter to paste new bills over the circus-bills which flared on all the fences and barns available.

The ‘show’ had passed through in June, the advance agent, as customary, having placarded every village on the route, though the canvas itself was not set up nearer than Three Rivers, and nothing had occurred to supersede the placards. There they were still, along with St. Jacob’s Oil and Mrs. Winslow, profaning with their gaudy colours and vulgar suggestion the primitive aspect of the peaceful village. On the way down Magloire had thought out his lecture pretty carefully, having a bundle of

notes, newspaper extracts and secret communications from the Order, out of which it was fairly easy to construct a sort of running commentary on the Irish question, the Jesuit Bill, the narrowness of existing British Institutions, the supremacy of his adopted country, and general socialistic assertions.

Such a secluded place as his native village might not seem the best place to begin operations in at first sight, but he had his instructions, and whereas such ideas as he proposed to disseminate would be openly dangerous to himself and his cause in a large centre of life, where thought could rapidly turn to action, they would not necessarily, while sinking deeply into the minds of the habitants, cause any immediate upheaval of either class—priest or peasant. The end to which he addressed himself was to stir up a dissatisfaction among the farming and rustic classes first, then gradually to attack the larger towns, and so on, till anarchy and lawlessness, undermining the entire dominion, should finally flash out in open rebellion against organized systems of government. Viewed in this light, then, Bourg-Marie was not so insignificant and obscure, after all.

Finally, the evening arrived. Delorme's was brilliant for the occasion with coal-oil, tallow candles, and a small bonfire outside the door, built by the boys of the neighbourhood, and surrounded by ten or twelve of them all madly excited, running to and fro, gesticulating, entreating, exhorting. What was

it, then, to be done *chez Delorme* that night? Why, did you not hear? There will be a grand performance of a private actor, tableaux finer than the Christmas Babe in the Manger, with the straw all around Him, and the black men from the East on their knees in the straw, a cow and her calf at their elbow; or it will be a grand concert, the performers all the way from Quebec, with harp and violin, and a flute; or *bah*, it will be only old Ladislasky and his yellow bear. He passed through yesterday. Who cares to see them? Or there is some who say it is a preacher, not a priest, but the man in scarlet flannel, who sings hymns in English, and persists in waylaying this village, full of good Catholics, to throw his fire and brimstone at our heads. Well, here is old Prévost; he will tell us.

‘Say, Bonhomme Prévost, what is all this affair? What is to be done to-night? We have made the bonfire—oh yes, it is a fine one; but we don’t know for why.’

‘It is only that there is a star fallen in Bourg-Marie.’

‘A star! Who has seen the star? But it is not time yet for Noël. What star, Bonhomme Prévost?’

‘It is rather, I should say, only a fish, very bright and shining, swimming on the top of the river.’

‘A fish! All those candles for a fish, Bonhomme Prévost—a fish and a star?’

‘It is—let me think——’ and Prévost tantalizingly

laid his finger to his nose. 'It is for to please, and at the same time keep off—whom do you think?—Loup Garou!'

The voices ceased instantly; every boy crept close to Bonhomme Prévost and felt of his clothes.

'Take us to the father—take us to the good father! Let the bonfire stay! We will be quiet, Bonhomme Prévost!'

The cobbler enjoyed his joke. Then he said:

'But we must not frighten the good father. No, my children. M'sieur L'Étoile, M'sieur Le Poisson—that will be the same person. He is a young man, one of yourselves, such as you may all be yet, with care and diligence. He left here nine years ago, when he is fourteen, small, shy with other boys, but bold enough with his elders. He returns, tall, straight, a young pine, smooth, silky-haired, keen-eyed, intelligent. He returns rich, gracious, benevolent, with a gold watch of his own. Wait till you see him. I speak the truth. You shall see.'

The room was rapidly filling. Jim Platte brought two American friends, the notary turned up, so did Palissier and Docteur Pligny. The entire family of Lagardère-Lemaitre, from Fournier, came in a cart capable of holding about six comfortably. There were nineteen, however, in the cart. Curiosity ran high, and at eight o'clock, when Magloire and the twins, Louis and Jack, walked into the room, the rustling and sensation and general commotion were

intensified by the presence of Paul Ladislasky, and Satellite the bear, and three village musicians, who were giving an impromptu entertainment in a corner, Paul singing in guttural Gregorians the following incoherent doggerel:

‘ Je sais un pay-y-y-san,  
Oop-oop-oop-tra-la-la-la !  
Oop-oop-oop-tra-la-la-la-la !’

To which seductive strain the bear stood on its hind-legs, waved its paws about and described a rolling, drunken circle, being a very old and impotent animal, and incapable of harming anyone. Genest, Lavallée, and Giraud, the three musicians, fiddled and piped away in high glee, and clouds of tobacco-smoke obscured the already murky air. Dame Delorme ran here and there, counting and naming over the guests. There were nine ladies present, and any number of children; and Nicolas Laurière sat by himself down by the door. He had not seen Magloire for two days, having stuck resolutely to work and resisted all temptations to walk over and waste his time at Widow Péron's.

As Laurière sat, with his cap off, his well-shaped head, his broad, high, moody, but noble brows, his deep-set, thoughtful eyes, his stern mouth—a line of sadness untouched by a softer curve—his strong arms folded on his chest, and his steady, penetrating gaze, suggested more the ideal speaker or lecturer



than the flashy nimbleness and adroit mediocrity that distinguished Magloire. Pacifique Péron was nowhere to be seen. Since the encounter with Laurière, he had, so to speak, lain low, fearing to make known his inmost wishes to one who did not share in them. Upon Magloire's entrance, the fiddling stopped, and Ladislasky withdrew his bear. He had made a few cents, and was content.

Finally the address commenced. Magloire, satisfying himself that his grandfather was absent, and the parish clergy likewise, ascended the improvised rostrum, consisting of a couple of wooden benches, a chair and a ewer of cold water, and, bowing to his assembled fellow-countrymen, opened fire on his audience :

'Fellow-countrymen,' said he, the Marc-Antonian manner of speaking coming naturally to his help, as, indeed, it has done to many an unfledged orator—'fellow-countrymen, Canadians, you grand million, I salute you. I am myself one of you. Yes. Here and there I see a face I know; I recognise an old friend. Do not treat me as a stranger; that I beg of you. Make me as one of yourselves. It is true, my comrades, my good friends—it is true that I am much changed. Scarcely had you known me, eh, had you met me on the road, or seen me here at Delorme's. Well, that is natural, to be expected, that. And I am glad to see so many of these old friends here to-night. I speak to all the valley. I

‘speak to the farmer, the cultivator, the labourer, as well as to the lawyer, the merchant, the doctor, the priest.’

A sensation pervaded the assembly. Heads were chucked forward and wagged, shoulders were elevated, pipes lowered, dull eyes flashed, slouched figures straightened, tongues clattered, hands waved.

‘Ah-ha, the brave one! He speaks to the priest. What does he say?’

The cry was caught up.

‘What can he say to the priest, this Magloire?’

Carson was not slow to hear the question. He advanced a step forward, and lifted his right hand.

‘Yes, I speak to the priest. I begin there, I end there. All I say is not about him. No, but he may hear it all, he may listen. I do not fear him. Friends, I have here some figures, some statistics’—and he consulted his bundle of papers with a telling air—‘which describe you to me, you and your beautiful country. Yes, beautiful, as it might be, not as it is. See, you million of Frenchmen. But, stay; perhaps you do not know that you are a million. A million? You number over a million. In this province you are 1,082,787 souls; in Ontario you are 100,000; in Manitoba 10,000; in the North-West 3,000. Come, that is a fair number. You are all united, too; you are all brothers. You have one language, one faith. That is pleasant, charming, all right. You should be happy, then, fortunate, rich, prosperous. But are you?’

‘What is “content”?’ said Magloire, with a magnificent note of interrogation. ‘Who in this assembly can tell me what “content” is? Is it possible that you, farmers, toiling three months of a long and inclement year; you, labourers, burning in the torrid sun, and freezing next moment in the Arctic blasts; you, shanty-men, diggers, miners, trappers, living the life of savages—well, yes, a little better, perhaps, when the fiddle is scraped, and the *viskey blanc* goes round, but still barbarous, more like animals than men, with coarse food and poor lodging and rough clothing; you, gentlemen, the merchants, with little dark windows scantily filled with pipes, tobacco, apples, eight-cent print, straw hats, and spades? Ah-ha! you laugh. You find that amusing. Oh, I can amuse you; I can speak. You shall see. I am only beginning. Well, gentlemen, the merchants, are *you* satisfied with this little *commerce*? Is this enough for you? You, M. le médecin, you, M. le notaire, goes it well also with you? You keep each a little horse, it is true, and a little chariot, and you have each a little house with a little garden at the back, and you have a little—a very little this time, mark—money to your credit in the bank. Ah, yes, you are frugal. You do not spend much; you are wise there. But if you had it, would you not spend it, being Frenchmen? Yes, yes, you would. You would build larger villages, finer towns, handsomer houses, big theatres, palace hotels, steamboats, rail-

ways, bridges. You would be better educated; read the papers. See, now, here is a copy of the *Detroit Free Press*.'

Those in the front row clamoured further to the front to examine the novel thing.

'See, now, the amount of reading in that! See the poetry, the stories, the little sketches about dress and *politique* and the police-court! Where I live there are dozens of papers like this. I read them. I learn a great deal by them. Here is another.'

This one was the *Burlington Hawkeye*.

'Now, all this comes by living in a fine town, by being a citizen of a free country. That is what I am. Here nobody is free, not even the priest. Well, now, you look as if you did not believe that. Well, it is true. You, the farmers, labourers, and trappers—you are the worst off in existence. You live in a species of slavery. Lower Canada and Russia, they are the same. Both hold serfs—serfs and slaves, wretched dependents of a tyrannical Government and a despotic Church.'

The audience no longer clamoured. It was growing serious. The more educated thought Magloire was speaking satirically, the ignorant simply did not follow him at all.

Bah! this lecture was a failure, it was dull. Many present, though constrained to behave politely and pay enforced attention to these enigmatical assertions, had much rather have seen Ladislasky

put his bear through his paces on the platform. Laurière sat and listened attentively. The ideas were not positively new to him.

‘But,’ said Carson, continuing, ‘do you know that you are slaves? Are you aware of it? The outside world, the world of these States, of the great towns of Chicago, New York, Minneapolis, Milwaukee, looks at you and wonders. It wonders how you, Frenchmen, you, grand million of clever, hardy, resolute people, can live in this restraint, under this bondage, legislated for, robbed right and left, hemmed in by emissaries of the Pope, creatures of his slightest wish or lightest whim! Bah! I perceive you do not know your condition! I have come here, then, my friends, to enlighten you.’

It was marvellous that such a speech as this had been so long heard in silence. Carson had counted on some slight disturbance in the beginning, but as he proceeded without being interrupted, he grew bolder, and spoke his mind even more freely than he had intended to do. The habitant is patient. His avocation and his climate make him so. He is also polite. His descent shows in this. The French Catholic can hear his Church abused in silence. His revenge will show later—in deeds, not words. The Irish Catholic lashes himself into a frenzy at once; with him there can be no freedom of speech. But as Carson now paused for a moment to refer to some of his notes, a slight stir was perceptible

among the devout who had graced Delorme's with their presence. He perceived that he might have gone too far. With a flashing smile he dexterously retrieved his position.

'Who talks of bondage,' he cried, 'to us *Canadiens*, owners of our own soil, healthy, hardy, vigorous, a little poor, but contented to be thus devout, virtuous, respectable? That is how your hearts speak. Ah! Yes, I follow well your thought, your reasoning. You do not like that I speak against your Church, your parish priest, the Pope himself, and all the rites so dear to you. You do not wish your children, your wives, should be told of these things. Ah, yes, I follow you there too. See, the Church is not everything. There is the Government as well. Both can be reformed, both can be altered to suit you. I, in your place, speaking as your voice, complain of both. Now, tell me, do any of you know what kind of things taxes are? Of course you do. Your faces fall. I repeat, your faces fall, your eyes lower themselves. How many kinds of taxes do you know? More than you can count, for their number is far over ten; and some of you can only count that far by your fingers. Well, then, taxes—taxes, tithes, first-fruits, what of all those? The cereal-tax, the land-tax, the *fabrique*-tax—ah! ha! we hit everybody alike now, there is no one that escapes. Now, some of these are Government taxes, some are Church taxes. You pay them blindly, just because

you are obliged to. Do you know that there are countries where such a system would not be allowed for a moment, tolerated for a minute's space? It is true. Those countries are free. Your country is not free. My arguments are strict, logical, can be proved. Why should one-half your honest wealth, decently acquired, go to the Church? why should the other half go to the Government? Now, there are my two points. I leave those with you. I ask, Is not the Church already rich enough, the Government rich enough, without robbing the habitant and plundering the farmer ?'

A dramatic pause here followed, the audience being still quiet.

' Now, you think I am here as the enemy of the Roman Catholic Church. I am not. That is, I do not oppose it more than any other Church in other countries, only here, among you, where its power is so omnipotent, I speak out perhaps a little louder, that is all. No. I divide the world into two great sections. One section includes all the countries ruined by the Church, mostly Roman Catholic countries; the other includes all those ruined by Government, mostly Protestant countries. Under these heads one groups all lands. Is it Spain? The Church, the Jesuit, the monk, the Inquisition, the cell, the nun, the convent, have ruined her. Is it Russia? Frederick the Great instituted an infamous system of serfdom and feudalism from which

she has never recovered. But his descendants shall yet suffer on their throne—the Czar of all the Russias, and his wife, Princess of England.\* Is it England? Look at the monopoly of wealth, the vicious aristocracy, the bloated merchant, the languishing rustic population—ignorant, debased, half-starved! Her day of reckoning is not far off. Already plans have been matured to carry off that surplus wealth, to exile that merchant, to elevate that languishing population. In America alone, at the present time, is there any hope for us, proud leaders of our land to victory. To crush all churches, and to subvert all governments, in the interests of the common good—is not that a glorious purpose? My brothers, I invite you all to question these things, to aid in overthrowing all systems of tyranny, to establish, each man for himself, his own law, his own morals, his own rule of conduct.'

The sensation had subsided. Carson was certainly a fluent speaker, though his French accent had suffered from long disuse, and he held his ignorant audience spellbound. His pauses were made purposely, that he might learn by the remarks and gestures of those before him what result had followed these startling opinions. Bonhomme Prévost was cautious in his admiration, and looked warily at the patrons of the entertainment, Docteur Pligny, Palissier, the notary, and the family of

\* Magloire's historical information is limited.



Lagardère-Lemaitre, who all sat near one another about five rows from the front. The doctor thought Carson's utterances highly treasonable, and yet some of them touched him on his frugal side keenly.

'Come, now,' said Magloire, resuming, 'this tithe question. Many of you are getting tired of it, discontented; you are not lending cheerfully any more than one—what is it?—twenty-sixth of your produce. Some of you pay out yearly half of what you make for masses, lotteries, fees of all kinds. I have here a paper which is authentic. It tells me that these tithes annually paid by you in this province of Quebec alone amount to over three million dollars. Three million dollars! Well, then, I call that a big sum, a lot of money.'

A voice from the back: 'How much is that a head?'

'Twenty dollars, eighteen, fifteen, twelve,' answered Carson, 'according to your pockets. Listen now: The entire income of the Church in the province of Quebec eleven million dollars and over—yes, well over, too.'

The audience began to grow excited. Murmurings and mutterings were heard on every side. Jim Platte and his American friends clapped furiously and struck up 'For He's a Jolly Good Fellow!' This ditty being sung in the States, and, indeed, all over the world, to the same tune as the Franco-Canadian and Frenchman have long put to 'Mal-

brouck,' came in as a marked diversion, for the good-humoured shanty-men, fiddlers, miners, and labourers caught it up in a moment, and away they went in the wildest hubbub imaginable. Genest and Lavallée tuned their fiddles, and scraped and sang at the same time. Dame Delorme, seeing her chance, sent two of her sons around with drinks, and the noise and confusion became almost unbearable. To add to the uproar, a small party of habitants—raftsmen mostly from the Richelieu—who knew a different tune to the same words, struck promptly in with their own version, and Ladislasky, certain that the lecture was finished, walked in with his bear and commenced *his* refrain :

‘ Je sais un pay-y-san-n-n,  
Oop-oop-oop-tra-la-la-la !  
Oop-oop-oop-tra-la-la-la !’

In this scene of uncontrollable tumult there were yet some quiet auditors. The young doctor and the notary both looked and felt very uneasy. The sentiments they had listened to were blasphemous in the extreme, and it would clearly be their duty to report on the morrow to Father Dominique Labelle touching the entire performance. Bonhomme Prévost looked across to Joncas, Magloire's uncle, and vigorously shook his head in protest. No one knew exactly what to do, when Carson, making his strident voice ring out over the disorder, attempted to finish.

‘I have not much more to say,’ he said. ‘Will you be quiet, now, and let me say it? Emancipation—freedom—light for darkness—that is what I am trying to tell you about.’

‘Then tell about it. Leave the Church alone!’ shouted one man. Another caught him by the arm.

‘He is old Mikel’s grandson. His father—he that was killed by a falling tree—was like this, always speaking against the priest and religion. It is not the lad’s fault.’

‘Look! there is his uncle. Well, let him speak—here, more whisky, *B’ptiste!*’

Respect for old Mikel kept the Lagardère-Lemaitre family and the notary and doctor in their seats, and it must be owned that they were much impressed by the appearance of their fellow-villager in his new costume. Besides, a sister of Dame Lagardère-Lemaitre, at present living in Three Rivers and well-to-do, had married a Protestant of the Methodist persuasion, which apparently singularly ill-advised alliance had lent a little breadth to the religious views of the family.

Carson, beginning with a few more statistics, references to Jesuit aggression and Ultramontanism—topics which about three in his audience knew the sense of—finally grew to a point. He lauded the Franco-Canadian, he lauded the resources of the country, he handled the Church again, this time with gloves, with regard to its encroachments on the

personal liberty of the subject, and he ended by a grand peroration in favour of 'Equality for all Men on Earth.'

'In that day,' said he, 'there will be no poor man. Every man will be rich. There will be no organized Church, no organized Government. The family will rule the State. The State, Napoleon Buonaparte said, was himself.\* Well, in that day, that will be true for each of you. This wealth—locked up for years in the coffers of the churches—shall be shared among you. Your lives will be made gay, pleasant, charming. No more the forge, the raft, the field, the forest, but the theatre, the concert, the drive, the music. Ah, ah! how you, my countrymen, descendants of merry Frenchmen, will enjoy that! That is how I live when I am at home among my friends. I have many friends. I lead a pleasant life; gay, brilliant—I am in demand. Well, all that I just tell you about myself. I see my friends here of the village, and that makes me talk. I hope many more will follow where I and Louis and Jack Péron, my distinguished comrades, go. Emigrate, push, move on, up. Bourg-Marie, Nicolet, Yamachiche, all these places—well, they are good for a little while. Not long. One tires always of trees and water and pork and beans. What is your destiny? I proclaim to you your only sensible one. Language, creed, existing institutions, prejudice, pride, sentiment—all must

\* Magloire is again a little mixed.

be rooted out. I do not ask you to be American. I do not ask you to be English. I ask you to *spea*k English, but to *be*—Citizens of the World, Free-born, Free-living, Independent Creators of yourselves !'

\* \* \* \* \*

On the whole, this vague conclusion was not unfavourably received. The notary and the doctor left at once without speaking to Magloire, but the Lagardère-Lemaitre contingent stiffly expressed their appreciation of the evening's entertainment to the lecturer. As for the rest of the audience, it dispersed in various stages of disorder—singing, shouting, fiddling, dancing, smoking, chattering, and laughing.

Nicolas Laurière alone took his silent way through the vast arches of the forest to his meagre home. Many of his companions lived in fear of its dark shades and its savage denizens, and avoided it for those reasons as much as for a more practical one—the numerous traps and snares which were set towards its centre. But for Laurière nothing of this awe existed. Magloire's utterances left him with a curious sense of their impropriety. He suddenly found and felt a beauty in the solemn wood, in the starlit night, in the roar of the distant fall, that he thought he should sadly miss in the glaring streets of the towns Magloire had attempted to depict so vividly. His soul spoke very clearly to him as he halted beneath one of the tallest trees. It was an

old beech, with a gigantic hollow in its scarred brown trunk, and Laurière, leaning sadly yet contentedly against it, did not dream of the time when it should preserve, hidden in that leaf-piled hollow, a relic of the confusion and tumult which Magloire was yet to cause in the Valley of the Yamachiche.

CHAPTER VIII.

‘WITHOUT A TEAR.’

‘For this our heart is faint,  
For these things our eyes are dim.’

WHEN the elder Caron awoke from the stupor—for it could hardly be designated as slumber—into which he had voluntarily fallen on the day of his meeting with his grandson, his first impression was naturally that of intense shivering and discomfort. Hurriedly replacing the peerless diamond in its inside secret resting-place—a tiny wallet secured to an obscurely situated pocket—he groped for his lantern, and with difficulty relighting it, appeared to pull himself together at the same time that he took a melancholy survey of the apartment. In the latter there was no change, for, where night was the same as day, and day even as night, few changes could come. But a change had come over Mikel. He rose and traversed the room with less of his usual long-striding activity and more of old age’s disability distinctly noticeable

in his gait and countenance. Sweeping aside a second time the sombre hangings of shaggy fur, he turned a key—one of those on his colossal bunch—in a door completely hidden by its thick canopy, and entered a third apartment. In this, at least, was no display made of the costly furs that formed Mikel's chief personal property, but in the place of fur there gleamed shield and sabre, rapier and sword, cuirass and headpiece, all affixed in symmetrical forms upon wall and door, and alternating with banners or small flags on which the emblem of the house of Colombière Caron was imprinted in various degrees of skill and shades of fidelity—a wolf rampant, black on yellow, and a motto, 'Quy crains?' Here hung also two or three of those finely reticulated shirts of mail that in all probability had been brought from the East by that Crusading ancestor, and many ordinary weapons of later years, arquebuses, bows and arrows, both Continental and North American, and two immense tomahawks. The room was in fact nothing more nor less than an armoury, the floor bare, the two windows undraped, though pasted over with thick paper, and its whole appearance terribly martial and unæsthetic.

Mikel stopped not to look at banner or sword, rapier or helmet, but unlocking still another door, opening directly on a sort of balustrade in carven, mouldering wood that ran along the side of the Manoir, passed out into the open air, or inner



precinct of the chief courtyard. In its stone-paved centre, grass-grown, sinking and stained, its large extent flanked on all sides by dull, cold, windowless buildings of gray stone, and its diagonal rows of evergreens—unsightly, distorted and monstrous now, though once cut and carved by that clever Père Chaletot into shapes of tower and turret, lyre, bird and beast—this courtyard, as part of the *ferme ornée*, must have impressed the dullest beholder with a melancholy sense of the efforts put forth by that same worthy father and his illustrious patron, the Sieur Jules-Gaspard-Noël-Ovide Delaunay-Colombière Caron, to import the customs and implant the sentiments of feudal France in foreign, and, it must be owned, difficult soil. On yonder pavement had the entire strength of the household often mustered—serving-man and son, chevalier, father and kinsmen, in time of frightful uncertainty, when Iroquois were reported in the neighbourhood, or wolves or black bears, and madame and her young niece, and the stout Norman nurse and the children watched them parade and drill from the terrace. On yonder pavement were always unpacked the precious things that slowly, very slowly, reached the exiled family from France; the imported fruit and shade trees, the hangings and pictures for the little chapel, the arms and clothing, the breviaries and relics, and all the thousand and one priceless articles that at long intervals, and sometimes in only very small quan-

tities, arrived at their singular destination. On that pavement, too, had Père Chaletot, in fine weather, done most of his hewing, shaping, cutting, and carving of tree, rock, stone, and wood, always surrounded with a merry but respectful group, admiring the skilful touch, the vivid imagination, and more than all, the excellent memory. Whether he carved, or painted, or drew, or shaped, the general wish of the delighted assembly was that he should ever bring to their remembrance the land they had left. Urn, basket, chair, stool, plate, statue, grotto, cave—whatever it was, it must be made to resemble—never anything which lay immediately around them, but something that belonged to their former life.

All this, then, was part of old Mikel's wasted heritage; and looking at it in the bright October sunlight, he felt, dimly, indeed, but bitterly, how totally uninteresting, nay, how despicable, might all this decayed splendour appear to his grandson, while sacred as church and altar to himself. Surveying in this disappointed mood the Manoir proper, the courtyard and the offices that flanked the latter, he next withdrew through a gap in the stonework to an outer court or yard, overgrown with rank grass and weeds and myriad small maples and other shrubs, and which merged almost imperceptibly into the vast, towering recesses of Bourg-Marie—that side or edge of the forest which no man ever dreamed of penetrating. It might be that an occasional surveyor

or pertinacious *coureur de bois* had penetrated as far due north of the vast forest as to emerge unexpectedly upon the outer court or enclosure of the old Manoir ; others might even have gained the inner paved yard, and viewed with interest and amazement the detailed work of balustrade and rounded turret, slab and curious tree ; but it is safe to say that since Mikel's thirtieth year, when he had first begun his course of preparation for an enchanted château, fixed in the everlasting darkness of a primeval forest, no one, either a resident of the valley or a stranger, had ever divined the rare treasure of honour and wealth that lay hidden there. His thirtieth year had been the year of the icy wave, that winter, memorable all over the country, when snow and ice lay spread over the face of the land as did once the mythic waters. They came so early, they deepened and hardened so fast, they remained so late, who was to know when they would go ? Who dared to hope for one scarlet sunrise more or one purple sunset again ? Who ever pictured feeling anew the intoxication of spring in the veins, and the ecstasy of finding the first tall trillium in the wood ? Men's hearts failed them, and, at least to the superstitious minds of the valley, the course of Nature had failed. Mikel's eldest son, a lad of ten—who believed in his father, after God, and the priest, only as a young Catholic can believe, and in such a wilderness as Bourg-Marie—watched him, intensely, wistfully, unceasingly.

'When will the snow melt, my father?'

'Alas! I cannot tell you, my child. But you are right to ask. If any, surely I, Mikel le Caron, ought to know. I watch all day; I listen half the night. The other half I dream strange dreams of altar roses, bed on bed, and lakes of violets, blue as those you pulled last April for your dead bird's grave, and glowing noons with you and me, Octave, out upon the dazzling river. Well, that for fire and flower and fruit—oh yes, I should have said bunches of crimson fruit—in dreams, should come but more snow and ice is strange, Octave.'

And Octave would nod his head knowingly, smack his lips, and dream of the scarlet fruits and sheets of violets. Octave's brother, Magloire, a little fellow of five, loved the snow, however. It seemed never too cold for him.

Living, as Mikel at this period of his life did live, in two or three small rooms in the minor part of the Manoir, across the courtyard from those three rare chambers, not yet so richly decked out, madame the mother, and the two little boys waited long and wearily for that winter to pass. Mikel brought them their only comfort. Strong and young, and by nature a trapper, reliant, vigorous, loving the keen, silent air and the drifted arches of dazzling snow, he would tramp many a mile through forest and by riverside, but always return warm, happy, buoyant, gay. There was one time, though, that he did not return as soon

as his wife had expected, and Octave in particular was in despair. The third night coming on, and the father not back! Yet he was often known to stop out all night, even in cold weather like this, making a hole for himself in the snow, caching himself—indeed, yes. Wait, Octave; the father will come as he said. By eight o'clock you shall see him and hear him too, singing, while the pendant icicles of his moustache make a strange canopy for the voice,

‘ Dans les prisons de Nantes—pris-on-n-n—Tra-la !  
Les belles filles ont garouch sh-sh-a—Tra-la !’

If you are not patient, *mon* Octave, this is the weather that the great wolf stalks in the forest; so look out. But when nine o'clock came, madame herself was anxious. Shut up in their sequestered dwelling, they could see little. Wrapping a stout shawl about her head and neck, she ventured into the yard, to find a beautiful moon rising, although it was bitterly, quietly cold. At ten her agitation was terrible. Her husband had now been away two days and a half. Both children were awake: Magloire sitting in an antique cot of dark wood, Octave, silent, dreamy, frightened, brooding over the fire.


Mikel's supper had been ready, warmed over and warmed over twice since, and everything had that air of perturbed preoccupation which betokens a belated arrival. At eleven the wife hesitated no

longer. She put whisky and bread into her pocket, made up the fire, kissed the children, gave Magloire, who could not sleep, a picture she always wore at her neck of a kneeling child intent upon the Sacred Heart, suspended above him in ether, bade Octave look after the Manoir and his brother and await her return, then departed.

‘It may be that I meet with him directly; or it may be that I go far before I see him. He is safe; do not fear, Octave, but it will cheer him to have me part of the way, so keep awake and watch. It does not seem so very cold.’


Alas! that degree of cold that does not seem so intense yet is so all the same. Octave clung to his mother, but let her go without a tear. Yet his nature was supposed to be weak, unreliant, the reverse of vigorous. Their friends in the village always said Octave would never weather the storms of Bourg-Marie and grow into manhood. But his courage was moral if not physical, and he let his mother go without a tear. Magloire—little scamp! clever and strong—grinned at the Sacred Heart, and blew his mother a kiss.

Outside, the dame wrapped herself up well, and marched ahead. In those days the little clearing at the back through which lay the bridle-path to Mikel’s modern dwelling was not in existence, and the shortest way to the road was through the dense forest for a quarter of a mile—pretty enough in



summer and in spring, but melancholy in autumn, and terrible in winter—and then out along a sudden high hill that sloped down to the river for six or seven hundred yards, and finally through a sheltered plantation down by gentle degrees to the level of everyday life—carts, vans, dogs, and peasants, Bonhomme Peter, Ladislasky and the bear, and all the rest of the jolly, simple, innocent life. Dame Caron flew like the wind through the forest, for it held a world of fearful spirits for her mind, and its cold dark recesses held what might be death for her body. The trees around her, bitten to their cores, cracked with deafening reports which her superstitious fancy deemed the shots of infernal artillery, and as she ran she kept shouting her husband's name, fearing she might pass him at any moment, though within the forest there was little fear of his being covered in the snow. It was not until she left Bourg-Marie behind her and emerged upon the drift-piled plateau that she experienced any sense of the cold; but when it caught her, it held her fast. And now she realized her foolish pride, her want of patience, her lack of confidence, her unreasoning and inconsequent action. She began to see that Mikel, in his calm and superior wisdom, had probably foreseen the bitter cold of the hours when the sun had gone down, and, making or finding a bed for himself somewhere, had decided not to attempt to return home till morning. What, then, might have

proved fatal to a strong man was reserved for her, and Dame Caron was no longer young. She had been a widow of thirty-five when Mikel married her eleven years ago, and one's blood is a little poor as one nears fifty. She stopped a few moments, irresolutely considering where Mikel could be, what she had better do or what she could do, and in those few minutes one cold dart crept like a snake stealthily into her feet, up through her limbs, and then another entered her wrist and her poor red fingers, and a third wound itself around her brow, and then she began to stumble and to cry out, sometimes for Octave, sometimes for Mikel, and thus was her whole body bound in living bands and fetters of frost, and she powerless now to retrieve herself. How quickly it beset her, attacked, assaulted, and won her for its own! how in her clouded mind she fought with all her might against it, tried to collect her senses, tried to think of Octave and Magloire and Mikel—Mikel who must be found, Mikel whom she had come out to save, and yet knew quite well what a foolish woman she had been, and how she must be gradually freezing to death! All this time there was not a breath of wind, and a bright fair moon was high in the violet sky, and galaxies of stars were rising in myriad points of silver. There could not be a more beautiful picture than the shining river lying down at the foot of the soft white hills, flowing away to the south in a curve





of polished silver, and the trees all draped and fringed with icicles and snow, a midnight bright as noon, gleaming, brilliant, but cruel, because so cold. Dame Caron saw no beauty in river and road, however. It was close upon twelve now, and her heart grew weak. Her feet stumbled—once, twice. She laughed giddily, her pulses flagged, the last cold devil, or snake, wriggled close to both pulses and heart, and, sinking down a helpless frozen lump on the plateau, exposed to the relentless temper of that keen living axe of frost which had sent its emissaries before, Dame Madeleine-Joséphine-Virginie Amable Colombière Caron saw, in place of Bourg-Marie and river and tree, the most beautiful and wonderful and magnificent rose, larger than any rose that had ever grown in the curé's garden, and larger than the paper ones on the altar ; and as she looked, it grew larger and larger and redder and redder, till it seemed to take the entire universe into its broad sweet petals, and her along with it, and then, cradled there, the atmosphere grew warm, because above her swung a great heart of living fire, from which swept to feed her frozen form the most blessed and warming of rays, pure yet ardent, and it was then that the poor woman knew for certain she was dead. And although she was not so very sorry for herself or Mikel or Magloire, she was sorry for Octave—Octave, who had let his mother go without a tear.

## CHAPTER IX.

### A SUNDAY AT HOME.

‘ There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink.’

WHEN little Octave saw that dead mother the principle of life died within him too. It only took three weeks to slay it, for on his way to her funeral he contracted some desperate throat disease, and nothing kills at the last so quickly as the throat. Thus was Mikel left with the child Magloire, to whom he devoted all the time he could spare, and who grew up in the feudal surroundings of the old Manoir. And looking back upon the result of that education, old Mikel realized afresh on this bright October day that such as the son was, such had the father been. Octave, perhaps, gentle, high-bred, dreamy, religious—Octave might have helped him to consummate his ideal, the restoration of the honourable house and estates of Caron, or in like manner Octave's son ; but Magloire the first, shrewd,

grinning, implacable and narrow, or Magloire the second, *alias* Mr. Murray Carson—Mikel laughed aloud at the fancy.

It was at this moment that Pacifique Péron, who had leapt into the wood when his conversation with Laurière came to an end, suddenly appeared in a small cleared space that Mikel had now gained, and the two men, taken by surprise, stopped short, and exchanged no very pleasant looks. Pacifique, still ruffled, forgot his politeness.

‘Good-day, Caron,’ he said, not removing a small sumach twig he carried between his teeth as he spoke. He also put his arms on his hips, and stared straight before him when he had made the salutation. Mikel was incensed. ‘This, then,’ thought he, ‘is some more of that rascal my grandson’s doing.’

‘You there, you hunchback! speak properly to me. I am not Caron to anyone, least of all to you. You must remember better. What are you looking for here? I rarely meet anyone so far into the middle of the wood.’

Pacifique grew politic, and answered truthfully :

‘It will be Magloire that I was seeking, sir. I thought he might be with you.’

‘But this is not the way to my house,’ said Mikel gravely. ‘You have often been there; you know how to find it. It is simple and straight enough, a mile and a quarter from your mother’s *cabane*, mostly on the wide highroad, and no need to walk

across the forest, frightening the game, upsetting traps. Well, look that I do not set another trap for another kind of game.'

'And that, sir?' inquired Pacifique, spreading out his hands and bowing very low, so that one saw the crown of his queer hat, a large flat felt, with only the rim remaining, and a handkerchief of orange and white plaited in instead. 'I ask what kind of game?'

'It will be found,' said Caron, 'make sure of that. The kind does not matter. But what will you require of Magloire—by whom I understand you mean my grandson—when you meet with him? I had not thought that he was likely to be a comrade of yours.'

'And why not?' asked Pacifique, trying to read the secrets that lay enshrined in those scorching, searching eyes, in the stern and sinister mouth, and in the perturbed and frowning forehead of the venerable trapper.

'Because he, Magloire, is a gentleman, well dressed, well-shod, well-bonneted. He is, though self-made, still a young fellow of some wit, education, manner. He has not lived in Bourg-Marie all his life. No. It is easy to see that. He smokes a big cigar, has a watch, is a great man—does not, perhaps, any longer care to speak French. English, look you, is so much more convenient. Is not that how he is spoken of in the village?'

'Truly,' replied Pacifique.

'Well, then,' said old Mikel, enjoying in a bitter kind of way his own dismal pleasantries, 'they can never say that about you. You will live in Bourgmarié till the end of your days; you will never see as far as the end of the Lac Calvaire; you will never wear a watch, nor give lectures, nor drink anything more delicate than old Delorme's whisky; you will live and die a habitant, and what is a habitant but a simple fool, and a fool is no companion for my grandson, Magloire. You, Pacifique Péron, keep out of his way and stay at home. There is safety at the forge, at the fire, in the fields. Work, and plenty of it, saves every man. Leave them alone at Delorme's. Why should *you* go there? You cannot dance. You do not play the fiddle. You are made to stay at home, do quiet work—women's work, if you will. There are three widowers, and myself four, in the parish, and the curé often wants help with his wine and his hens. Choose the quiet path, and clear it from the fallen logs, then others will bless you. But, by the good St. Hubert, leave this forest alone in your roamings. I like not to think that there is anyone, besides Nicolas Laurière, Joncas, and myself, who dares to walk abroad in this wood, where at present are thirty baited bear-traps alone, besides countless other snares for smaller pests. Remember this, hunchback, and so—turn about and walk on in front of me, and quickly.'

The cripple was madly stung, enraged.

'Women's work!' he yelled. 'It will be that you will be thinking of for me! Women's work! To cook, did you say, and sweep and mend fires? Ay, the fires of purgatory—purgatory; that place you all believe in, and I, too, for your sake! Because I am crooked—*tête-bleu*—damn—Caron, I *will* pass—I *will* go, whence you have come. I will see what it is you keep there in the forest, hidden away like a miser. I will watch; I will steal around, gently, quietly; I will lay my eye to every chink, my ear to every stone; I will run off with it when I find it, be it gold, or wine, or woman——'

Mikel, exasperated at the meeting, and fearing the cripple's frenzy might be heard outside the little circle in which they found themselves, had recourse to violence. He laid two heavy hands on Pacifique's bent shoulders and pressed, it seemed, with his entire weight upon them, till slowly, painfully, but surely, the cripple was forced to bend lower and lower until a crack in his poor deformed back apprised the old seigneur that he was punished sufficiently. He whimpered, and his teeth ground on each other with a terrible sound.

'Do you go my way out of the wood?' asked Mikel, with his hands still on the other's shoulders.

'I go, surely. Messire Caron, you hurt. You are not fair, not kind. Have mercy, messire. I go.'

'Do you go quietly, or do you make a noise that

is like the cry of the animals I snare in those traps here in Bourg-Marie ?'

'I go quietly, messire. Have pity. My back—my poor back! Oh that you had been crooked for one minute of your life, and you would know what I suffer!'

'You suffer no more being crooked. Not so much, since you are already more than bent double. Now go.'

And Pacifique swung himself free, sulkily turning about in an opposite direction to that in which he had been going when he met Mikel. He attempted to lead.

'No, follow!' said Mikel in a voice of thunder that one had not expected to issue from so shrivelled and weather-wrinkled a man. 'I have an eye at the back of my head. I watch you just as I watch the old 'coon, the snake, the squirrel.' And Pacifique, despite his tendencies to unbelief in matters clerical, allowed himself to place unbounded confidence in the secular fact of Mikel's extra eye. He slunk along behind him, cowed, but cunning, and in this way the old fox, russet, wrinkled, reliant, leading, the younger man reluctantly following, afraid even to shake his fist or make a face, they reached the outskirts of the wood, and Mikel, bestowing a look upon his companion that bespoke contempt unmixed with any generous tincture of pity for one formed so unkindly by Nature, took his silent way to his shabby dwelling,

thus describing an almost perfect circle of five or six miles.

This encounter, which produced a great and peculiar impression upon the mind of the cripple, had taken place two days before the memorable Friday on which Magloire had put forth so much rubbish, cant, and fustian under the name of 'Eman-cipation.' Pacifique, lying low and apparently quiet and stupid as ever, stayed with his mother or lounged at Delorme's, hearing all and saying nothing. The lecture had not produced any dangerous result. The curé had heard about it, laughed, shrugged his shoulders, said he feared Magloire was no longer as good a Catholic as he might be, but he was young, he must make a little noise—well, the village was quiet again, we will forgive him this time. The young doctor was greatly puzzled. Knowing Magloire's style and appearance to be slightly loud and inclined to fastness, he hesitated about believing anything he said or in any way regarding him as an authority; yet, on some points, the statements were exactly those he might have made himself. But Pacifique, not troubling to comprehend Magloire's real sentiments, and only cultivating him in order to advance his own interests, bent his admiring gaze upon him continually, till the pseudo-American or the pseudo-Frenchman became the god of an un-complaining and easily-satisfied idolatry.

On the Sunday which followed the lecture the



widow Péron wished to go to church. Dressed in her best black gown, red woollen shawl and hood, she appeared in the kitchen and insisted that her three sons should accompany her. Louis and Jack, who were playing euchre with Magloire on the kitchen-table, looked uneasy. They muttered something about Magloire, how they could not leave him. Magloire laughed. He had a good mind to go to church himself. He used often to take Kitty Rylands to church in Milwaukee. She went regularly in the evening, but never very long to the same church; behaved beautifully throughout the service, and always carried away the text with her, and sometimes the books, if any handsome ones happened to be left in the seat. Magloire considered for a moment. It would be a splendid chance to be seen, and to show off his clothes. Perhaps his grandfather would be there, and it might be useful to pretend to be once more a good Catholic. Then he saw the Chicago Sunday paper (last week's) lying on the floor, where he had tossed it after breakfast, with an account of a divorce suit in it, and the details of a dog-fight, and his cigar was only just begun, and it was too far to walk. And Pacifique said:

'I will sit in the house with Magloire, and then you, Louis and Jack may go to church. I have the dinner to watch. Magloire will perhaps be so kind as to teach me to play the game. I can learn.'

And Magloire looked at him almost for the first time.

'Come, Louis and Jack, to church—quick! It is too far away to hear the bell, but it may be ringing all the same. The good curé expects you, and all the village waits to see you. We have not too much time, but we have enough.'

The twins stood irresolute for a moment. Magloire made it suddenly easy for them. He got up, tired of euchre—they didn't play well enough for him—and took his paper to the fire, looked all over Pacifique, and established himself in the only comfortable chair, a primitive rocker of light wood, black with age and grease. At this Louis and Jack gave in, and accompanied their mother to the parish church, four miles away, wearing their claret check suits, 'nobby' light overcoats, and plug hats.

As for Pacifique, he struggled hard to hide his delight, stealing to and fro, putting more wood on the fire, rubbing the potatoes till they were smooth like bark or brown satin, and humming snatches of tunes underneath his breath. Magloire—or Mr. Murray Carson—surveyed his companion from time to time with a keen sense of his ugliness, his uselessness, and his stupidity. Mr. Carson was very fond of beauty, either in human beings, horses, clothes, or furniture. His bedroom and little sitting-room at the Hotel Hallam were fitted up very handsomely—Grand Rapids furniture, chromos, a pot or

two of flowers, a musical-box—indeed, it was a great trial for a person of Mr. Murray Carson's attainments to have to endure the close cabin and the greasy chair of the widow Péron and the company of her deformed son.

When Pacifique had completed his domestic duties he stood by Magloire's side as if waiting for a command. The latter was amused and not displeased, for he saw how he was regarded.

'You do not go to church, eh?' he said, lighting a fresh cigar. 'Are you not as good as the rest of your family? or are you afraid of being seen?'

He spoke English, and Pacifique only dimly divined his meaning. He lifted his hands and then let them fall, a favourite action of his.

'I don't know,' he said. 'De church so far away—four miles de church.'

'Ain't you a good walker, then?'

Pacifique began to chatter.

'*Ouai*, I walk, just like all—like de rest. No, I do not walk; I creep, I steal along, I fly; I show you, but I do not walk. Walk, dat is slow some-time for me. Straight man he walk; crooked man he fly.'

His action was hurried, feverish, uncertain. Magloire looked at him with a faint interest. Then of a sudden he bethought him of Nicolas Laurière. Jim Platte had not been near him since the first night at Delorme's, and his absence, combined with

that of Nicolas, struck him as sufficiently peculiar to warrant inquiring into. The admiration of the Péron family did not suffice; he wanted more, and always more.

'Laurière!' said Pacifique, with a start. 'Oh, dat Laurière, he is no good; he is slow. He is not like you, Magloire. He is just fit for Bourg-Marie, and nowhere else.'

'I ain't so sure of that,' replied Magloire. 'Laurière, a handsome one him. I guess he'll go back when I go to the States. He'll be a rich fellow yet, Nicolas Laurière.'

'I don't think Laurière will go,' said the cripple.

'You don't, eh? And why not? It's a chance, I tell you. Why, see what I can do for him! I've got friends all over the States, and right in Milwaukee; I can just set him up in any way he likes. Make him a barber in three weeks, a hackman in two. So why shouldn't Laurière go back with me? Now, tell me, if you know. Are you a friend of his?'

'Well, I know Laurière—yes, pretty well. He is a kind fella, Nicolas Laurière, good fella; fond of de church, quiet—yes, friend of mine, I guess that.'

'He is a trapper, too, like my grandfather. He must have money, then.'

'Ah no, not much money, Laurière.'

'Furs, then?'

'Well, yes, a little furs.'

'He lives—where, this Nicolas, who is fond of church? I suppose he is saying his prayers now this moment;' and Mr. Murray Carson laughed.

'He live one mile from here, alone. His mother die last year. Yes, he will be saying his prayer now.'

Magloire looked full at Pacifique as the latter spoke.

'You don't seem to be saying yours. I guess if you prayed a little oftener that back of yours would grow straighter. Don't you forget it.'

Pacifique stole very close to his elbow.

'You don't believe dat yourself. I say all dat to Nicolas Laurière—all dat you say de oder night to Louis and Jack when *ma mère* was asleep—about de church.'

'And what does Laurière say? Here, leave me room to breathe, you, Péron—Pacifique Péron, if that is your name.'

'He think you very bad, very wicked. Well, for sure, in Bourg-Marie everyone must obey the curé; no one must think for himself.'

'Exactly,' said Mr. Murray Carson, who began to have a respect for the cripple, and offered him his half-smoked cigar, which was eagerly snapped at, lighted, and partaken of, Pacifique crouching down beside Magloire on the hearth, his dark-gray eyes fixed upon the latter's fresh and smiling countenance. 'It is a d——d pity you're crooked!' said Magloire presently. 'I wouldn't mind taking you back with

me in place of Laurière, if you was straight ; but you ain't.'

Pacifique, in his eagerness, forgot his cigar-stump, and suffered it to lie upon the hearth, where it went out.

'But I would not be a trouble,' he said. 'Every man—well, everyone has something they can do.'

'What can you do?' said Magloire contemptuously.

The fellow might prove of use, being a gossip, but as for encouraging him to go to Milwaukee, it was absurd.

'I can sing,' said the cripple ; and to Caron's astonishment, placing his hands on the latter's knee as if to insist upon permission and attention, he actually began to sing, in that beautiful, clear, and rare tenor, which had won for him the admiration of the valley, a portion of a 'Salutaris Hostia' he had learnt by ear in the choir of the parish church he had only left a month before, and that because they did not pay him. 'I will only sing for money,' he remarked doggedly to the others, who reported it to the priests ; and he kept his word, for they could not pay him.

Caron, half fascinated, half alarmed, allowed this strange being to consummate his wild chant, during which his rough countenance softened, and his ugly form seemed to dissolve and melt out of sight. Ignorant of art as Magloire was, he yet knew that

there must be something vastly different in this soaring, untried, unspoiled, penetrating, exquisite voice from the voices he had so often heard in theatres, music-halls, concert-rooms, and choirs in Milwaukee. He waited till the strain was done, calculating how it would be possible for him to retain a hold on the cripple should he consent to endeavour to launch him on the turbulent ocean of modern Western American life. Suddenly Pacifique stopped, all the music fading out of his sullen face. He was again the common, distorted cripple, sneak, scavenger of other men's thoughts and words, deceitful, rebellious, superstitious, and vindictive.

'You sing well enough,' remarked Magloire carelessly. 'You are an angel while you sing, and a devil before and after. But I am not so fond of it as you. I guess you needn't to sing me any more You're real smart, hain't you?'

Pacifique nodded. He did not quite understand the phrase, but gathered he was being praised, and praise to him was as dear as the Wine of God to such a one as Laurière—Laurière, who even then was kneeling in deep abasement in the parish church, four miles away, waiting for the service to begin.

Magloire rose and put his paper down. He took several turns around the small kitchen, and, picking his teeth still with the omnipresent penknife, appeared to be thinking more deeply than was his

wont. In reality, Magloire was finding himself in difficulties, caused by his lack of ready cash. He expected daily a messenger from Yamachiche with a message which would probably demand an instant reply. Beyond the lecture at Delorme's and miscellaneous flighty statements, he had so far done very little in the interests of the Order, and he might have to move on up the river at once, or as soon as instructions came, without having gauged his grandfather again, or made any advance in his regard. The more he saw of Pacifique, the more it seemed to him as if in him he might find a colleague, and not in Nicolas Laurière.

'Laurière,' he said, half aloud—'Laurière, bigot, Catholic, fool, sentimental, yielding, contented with this vile forest—no, Laurière is not fit!'

Pacifique heard him, and bounded to his feet. When erect, his head, a little too large for his neck and shoulders, came to about the other's waist, so different was their height and formation. Like a serf or willing slave, Pacifique bowed his hot forehead till it touched Magloire's belt, that confined a loose dressing-gown he affected on Sunday mornings, and whispered:

'Take me; not Laurière. You have said so yourself. I will—oh, I will do all you ask. See, I will go lie in de trees, in de snow, kill, steal, lie—all you want! Me, not Nicolas Laurière. Then, I go away when you go?'



Magloire instinctively drew back. The theatrical air that heightened the commonest phrase his fellow-countrymen used amused yet half startled him. He was no longer accustomed to it, and Pacifique's manner was dangerous. He called him off like a dog, shook himself free, and smoothed his dressing-gown.

'I never make a promise,' he said. 'But if you will help me—there is a thing I have to try and manage while I am here—I guess I can help you out West, if you care to come. What do you want money for, eh? You are not like me, at the mercy of the Order, bound to collect so much and send it over the way, or else be put in a private prison.'

Pacifique controlled his delight with evident difficulty, and awaited Magloire's explanation. The latter seated himself, and, taking those papers from his pocket which appeared to cause him so much grave reflection, began sorting and reading them over and over.

'You wouldn't see me in Quebec or Montreal with these papers loose like this. No, indeed. There's no police in this place. Why, even in Three Rivers, I tell you, I wouldn't be safe for ten minutes if they saw the end of these papers sticking up in my pocket. No, sir. Nor would you be safe if you was seen talking to Mr. Murray Carson. Yes, that is my real name now. The boys, they don't know

out in Milwaukee who Magloire Caron is; it is all Mr. Murray Carson. I have an office, and a real splendid lady lives in the hotel just over it, and I take her out every day. I guess she's just wild now while I'm away. I was always to her room every evening, with music—she plays the piano—or else we went to the theatre. There is some living in all that. Better than Bourg-Marie.'

'Ah, *ouai*,' said Pacifique, who devoured his volatile companion with his hot evil eyes. He did not understand any but the last sentence.

'Now you, Péron, can you follow this, what I am going to ask you?'

'Well, I will thry.'

Magloire motioned to a seat at the opposite side of the table, and kept his eyes upon Pacifique, who took the seat without another word.

'This lady,' said Magloire, revelling in the lies he was about telling, '*cette dame*, you understand, she is to send me always the money—that is, whenever I want it. But look, there are times when she is away or ill, or the money, coming through the Post Office, gets stolen, and then I do not get it. I am left without, except what I have in my pocket—see!' And Magloire made as loud a jingle as he could out of a very little silver and less copper, and tossed over a nickel to Pacifique.

'Well, all this is bad for me. I have to live well—like a gentleman, you will say—treat my friends in

the village, make my grandfather fine presents—come, is that not difficult for me, when this lady, who manages for me my office, does not send me my money, my own money, in time? Ah! *bien*, you see it is so, you understand this at least. Well, what am I to do, so far from my friends, from my business from the bank? Why, if there was a bank in the village I would go to it and draw all I want. I can do that, yes, all over the world, wherever I am, it makes no difference. And why? Because I am no longer Magloire Caron, but Mr. Murray Carson. Yes, that is my new name, and you must learn it. Well, where am I to go for this money? You can see I must not ask it of anyone in the village, for they would say it was strange, for sure, so big a man come away without enough money. No; I cannot ask it of those in the village, nor anywhere in the valley; not of Nicolas Laurière, not of your mother, nor of Dame Delorme, nor of old Palissier; all these would talk, would say bad things. Ah! you see—Well, there is only one of whom I can ask, and that is my grandfather. Why do you smile, you fool? For Pacifique grinned with a horrible delight. He foresaw that he might find ample opportunity of revenge.

‘I smile—why? I don’ know why. I think perhaps of old Caron, den I smile. He shoke me—so; take me by de troat—push—push! Ah! damn! but I do hate that one, that old Caron!’

Magloire was delighted.

'So do I,' he said, not fearing to be frank. 'Come, what did he do to you? When do you see him?' And Pacifique told him the story of the encounter in the wood.

'For sure, he hides something in his house. But it is so very small.'

'No, no,' cried Pacifique; 'it is so very big. You don't know. I know. Many time I lay out in de snow, watch, listen, look. Many time old Mikel he go in arms full; come out empty. It is large house. Why, yes, de old Manoir very big; many room—top—roof—all. Everyone know *le vieux Manoir*.'

Magloire gazed upon him as if he were mad.

'The old Manoir! What old Manoir? It must be that I have forgotten that place. I was young when I go away. Mikel was already old, and always sullen, quiet. Then he has two houses—has another besides that little hut I found him in?'

The cripple nodded.

'And you know where it is?'

'Everyone know dat. Well, I can take you there—yes, when the old man is away. You can go two ways.'

'One way will do,' said Magloire excitedly. 'Why, what else do you know—you, Péron—Pacifique Péron? You're the very fellow I want. See, I'll make you rich man—gentleman, like me—if you do

as I want you should. How do you get to the Manoir—the shortest way, remember? Well, it is not that I wish to rob my grandfather—no; but if I see what he has got I shall know better what to ask for. He will do great things for me yet. But then—well, I may as well see the place.'

'Yes, yes—see de place,' said Pacifique. 'Old place—fall soon; no one live in it.'

'Is that so?' said Magloire. 'I guess that's some of the property the old man spoke to me about the other day. Property! Well, I'll take it before the time comes. Anyhow, I'll see the place. Why, Péron, I'm cleared out—I'm desperate. If you go to Milwaukee, mind you don't gamble, or if you do, don't come to me to help you out. But I guess you don't understand me half the time. When I'm here in Bourg-Marie, I want to talk English—I *must* talk it all the time—yet when I was in Milwaukee I kind of liked to speak French to Mis' Rylands. Say, Pacifique, what kind of things did Mikel used to carry into this old house when you seen him? Say, how often did you seen him?'

'There was,' said Pacifique readily, and gazing beyond Magloire, as if he now saw the same things again, 'much tings, like bags, and a big box, a thrunk, and many fur. Well, I don' know all de tings I seen.'

Magloire, making a careful but hurried note of these remarks, quickly came to a decision in his

mind. Satisfy his curiosity he must, and as soon as possible, with regard to Mikel's wealth.

'Now, Péron,' he said, with an authority which faintly reminded the cripple of the violence offered him by the old but hardy trapper, 'whenever you are ready, I am. My grandfather and I—well, we are not very good friends yet; so, as I cannot walk up to his front-door and enter as a guest, I shall go round to the back and get in as I may. But if you tell your brothers or that fool Laurière, by God, I'll break your crooked back for you in two pieces, and send them to the d——l for a present! And there's another thing. You hear me speak of the Order, eh?'

Pacifique understood, and nodded.

'Keep to yourself what I say. It's something you can't make out, or else I'd tell you. Come, now, when will you take me to the old Manoir? I tell you I've no time to lose. You're not afraid, I suppose, thinking of what the old priest will say?'

The cripple sneered, and came close to Magloire, who recoiled from his evil eyes and garlic-tainted breath.

'Afraid! Magloire, it was me—me who stole de wine from de holy altar; me who broke all de banes in de glass house, made dem soft, and dhrank them off in whisky—ah, bah! Afraid! Not me—not Pacifique Péron! I go any time—to-day, to-night.'

'To-night!' said Carson thoughtfully, knocking

the ash of his cigar upon the table, and reflecting upon the promises made to Kitty Rylands of numberless solitaires and silk dresses. 'What if we went to-night—Sunday? All will be at church—eh? Not bad.'

Pacifique reflected.

'Too soon,' he said. 'Next Sunday, thry. I do dis week see over de place, make ready, watch old Mikel. That better.'

'As you like,' returned Magloire. 'Old Mikel—old fool, say you—do you know what he calls himself? Seigneur of the valley, seigneur, lord and master of that infernal forest full of wild beasts, and that road lying out there in front of your door. Seigneur! Then you are a slave, Pacifique; you belong to old Mikel. You should obey him, crawl to him, kneel down to him, pray to him, as they do in Russia.'

Pacifique stepped back.

'Seigneur?' he said. 'Well, dat is for de rest if dey like dat—Seigneur. For me, I have no master over me. I do as I like; go where I will. Magloire, it is true what you say—there is no God.'

Magloire, tired of the interview, went back again to his comfortable chair, and closed his eyes for a morning nap before he answered:

'Yes, it is all settled about that. You come with me; you shall learn—there is no God.'

'But the curé——'

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'D——n the curé! He knows all the time. He's just fooling you. Don't listen, that's all.'

'Mais, Magloire——'

The cripple's face assumed an awful expression.

'What now?'

'Is there, then, no Devil neither?'

'No, I tell you, neither God nor Devil. Leave me alone; I wish to sleep.'

A fearful joy shone in Pacifique's sunken eyes.



## CHAPTER X.

NICOLAS LAURIÈRE.

‘ His word was in mine heart, as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.’

NICOLAS LAURIÈRE, on his knees in the old parish church that bright October Sunday, could not forget Pacifique Péron and his disjointed blasphemies. Since the arrival of Magloire, he had not been the same man. His ambitions remained the same, but a powerful check had been administered in the shape of the defiant and rebellious speeches of the unfortunate cripple. He was assailed by a thousand doubts, and tortured in a thousand ways. That Magloire was wrong, grievously, horribly, fatally wrong, he felt, and the contamination suffered by Pacifique in being so much in his company caused a profound sensation of pity for the unhappy boy. Laurière emerged from the service weary, and not refreshed. For the first time it appeared long and

perfunctory. The flowers were tawdry, and covered with dust; the priests snuffled, and looked too closely at the congregation to be in earnest in their prayers. The music frightened, disgusted him, for it recalled the air that Pacifique had sung in the forest on that awful day. He shuddered, and crossed himself.

‘Mother of God, have pity! I, too—I, unworthy sinner that I am, to feel so, to doubt—I, Nicolas Laurière!’

He would have quickly strode along the street, and walked home alone; but no, there were the *veuve* Péron, and Louis and Jack.

‘Here is Nicolas, here is Laurière. Well, my child, how goes it? Are you here alone? Walk along with us, and taste a little whisky at home. There will be fine potatoes, too, and beans and eggs. Come along; you will see Magloire. Ah, that is a lazy one, that Magloire. See him sit by the fire, smoke, be so kind as to talk with Pacifique, teach him many things——’

How Laurière winced! Then there appeared Anna - Catharine - Adelaïde, youngest daughter of old Prévost: he had seven. The women of Bourg-Marie are talkative, forward, self-possessed, jocular.

‘Here, Nicolas! Here, Nicolas Becjaune (yellow beak), baby, young bird, stripling, whence comest thou, and with such a long face? *Ma foi!* but it is long like the day your mother died. That is over a year ago. Good soul! she is out of purgatory by this

time, I should think. Nicolas, listen thou, and walk along with me. I have had a letter from Blanche Durocher, who is at Three Rivers until Noël, and I am to follow her there in a week. There will be a wedding. It is that young man Platte—Jim Platte's brother. Jim, you will know him, for he is a friend of our Magloire. Say, is not Magloire handsome? Reply thou, Nicolas of the long face. Oh, there, patience, Laurière! You do not yet know of what wood to make an arrow, or in what hollow tree to look for the honey. Adieu, Laurière, that is if you will not walk with me. My companions wait. But Rosalie and Emma, come, we wait no longer. Say your prayers, *becjaune, brav' enfant!*

And here was another old friend, Joncas; Émile-Sylvestre Joncas, the uncle of Magloire, whose sister, Demoiselle Cordélie-Marie-Louise, had married his father, that Magloire the first who was a cunning little lad in his cradle, and an idle scamp in his youth. Joncas was also full of Magloire.

'*Mais, Laurière, mon garçon,* where art thou all these days? Do you complain? or do you carry yourself well? See, I haste to join the *veuve Péron* and her sons. We go to see Magloire, my nephew, your old playmate; you recollect, he was of all that was *drôle*, funny, and clever in those days; and now he returns, laden with honours. Yes, it is true. Hast thou seen his watch, felt of his clothes? Is he not handsome, clean, shining, fair? But a word,

Nicolas Laurière,' and the uncle laid his finger to his nose, and looked behind him cautiously; 'is it also true that he is no longer a good Catholic? Why was he not here this morning?'

'I cannot tell you,' said Laurière, with some confusion. 'I do not see Magloire every day. I am busy building a shed at the back of my house, and looking after the field before the frosts come. I have enough to do. I suppose you will be going to work soon?'

Joncas was, in some sense, ranger for the neighbouring forests of Fournier and Lafontaine, as Mikel was of Bourg-Marie. He was a burly man of forty-five or fifty, with a comical face, reddish hair, and extremely bowed legs, so that the sobriquet of 'Jambe-Archet' was given him all over the countryside.

'Ah! Yes, when the frost comes, as you say. The shed: is it a barn? For the animals, or for the wood? You have heard the news? It is that René Laframboise has been arrested. He had smuggled four kegs of whisky across the river; indeed yes. The curé is to preach about it this evening. Shall you be here, and with you my nephew? What! No? Yes, yes, go you along now with me. I go there to dinner. It is all right that you should come too.'

'I think not,' replied Laurière, who pushed his tuque back on his head, feeling warm. 'Magloire—'

well, I am his friend, if he care for that, but I don't think he does. Magloire, he is fine *garçon*, but he says strange things—things that are not going to do good to Bourg-Marie and Yamachiche. I am old Mikel's friend : I cannot be Magloire's.'

Joncas's laugh startled even the garrulous crowd around them.

'You make me laugh, Nicolas Laurière. Do you, then, share with old Mikel his dream of restoring the ancient house and line of Caron ? Are you anxious to play the serf, the slave, harness his horses, run at the sound of a bell, wear a uniform, wave a whip ? Do you see the valley fertile, blooming, peopled ? The notary, the docteur, the curé all attached to the *maison* ; he, old Mikel, their head, *chef, souverain* ? You believe in all that—you, Laurière ? Where is your cool brain, your square head ? That will never be. It is, look you, a beautiful dream, a grand idea. I myself should like to see it accomplished ; but no, never will it happen thus. *Malavisé !* you and Mikel, you are dreamers both. Your life is made up of *chansons*, bagatelles ; you are not men at all : you are children. Come, what is this about my nephew ? Is he, in truth, no longer a good Catholic—son of the Church ?'

'Why do you ask me ?' muttered Laurière. 'I have little business with him. He was—yes, certainly—my friend in childhood ; but now all is different. I have seen him but three times since his

return. I only know that what he says, both in his address the other night and in the widow's *cabane*, is contrary to our religion, and against the express commands of the priest. I have thought, I myself, somewhat about these matters, too.'

'What things? What affairs? You have thought? What comes of all the thinking? That is for the curé. Working is for you and me, Laurière. *Allons!* here is Anna-Catharine-Adélaïde back again! She will not go without you.'

'Then I will show her that I go without her. Come, Joncas, walk along with me, and I will speak, if you wish it, of Magloire. *Bon jour*, Anna-Catharine! *Bon jour*, Rosalie-Suzanne!'

'We offer you a seat, "Mister" Laurière. Be so good as to ride with us.'

The three girls had jumped into a cart driven by one of their brothers, and had dashed up to Nicolas, the handsomest young fellow in the parish. He held his tuque in his hands, and his dark hair lay black and dank on his brown forehead. His shirt, slightly open at the neck, showed his vast and splendid throat, a column of ruddy bronze. His teeth were exquisite, regular and white, and his firm chin, broad brow, and melancholy dark eyes, all denoted a purity and strength of character rare, not alone among the habitants, but among wiser and more ably-trained communities of men. The colours of his costume were all quiet and neutral, with the

exception of the dash of red morocco at the base of his trousers, and the tuque and scarlet woollen sash. Type of the unconscious picturesque, he afforded a more striking contrast than ever to the cheap vulgarities of Louis and Jack, Rosalie-Suzanne and Anna-Catharine, for the women of Bourg-Marie have less natural taste than the men in the matter of apparel, and mix their colours and spoil their materials whenever they get the chance. Thus, Anna-Catharine had a black gown trimmed with jet embroidery—a wonderful novelty for the valley—a brown cloth jacket extending to the knees, a hat of navy-blue straw trimmed with red ribbon, and a feather of vivid green ; while Rosalie-Suzanne wore a skirt of purple merino, made with panels of cotton velvet of a lighter shade, and ulster of cinnamon-brown with a lemon-coloured silk hood, a knitted hood of garnet wool, and a ‘ cloud ’ of palest blue. They were undersized girls, merry, with sparkling black eyes, much-frizzed black hair, good-natured expressions, coarse complexion, and Rosalie already had the beginning of a tiny moustache. Laurière admired Anna-Catharine the most, for she was the better-looking, but Rosalie, despite the moustache, bore the best character, and in Bourg-Marie virtue is the chief ornament. The young girls work hard in the house, out in the fields, attend church punctiliously, are in bed by eight and nine o’clock, and up by four and five. Work, virtue, religious

devotion, all this is the rule, and the exceptions are few and far between.

So Laurière, intimate with both these girls, found it hard to decide upon which one he preferred. For example, now, after church, Rosalie was quiet, inclined to be serious, thoughtful, self-contained. Nicolas would have liked to have the cart to himself, put Rosalie into it, drive away from all the chattering throng out to Mad Dog Creek, tie the horse, wander up and down with Rosalie, tell her about his troubles, watch for her sympathetic, '*Mais ouai*, I understand. Go on, tell me more, Nicolas; thou wilt not tire me; so continue, Laurière.' But Anna-Catharine, though she talked too much *bavardage*, gossip, nonsense, scandal, yet how pretty she was with her arching, blowing, bright green feather, her small feet, the little brown mole near her pretty mouth, and her coaxing ways. Then she was only nineteen, and Rosalie was the same age as Nicolas, unaccountable in Bourg-Marie, as the girls mostly marry off from fourteen to twenty. But these two were both in love with Laurière, and were for being loyal to him, and sneering at every other young man.

So Laurière refused point-blank to drive along the road with the girls. He would rather talk to Joncas to-day, he said, about the coming frost, and the bear season, and the dimensions of his shed, and the truth about René Laframboise. And Anna-



Catharine gave a bitter laugh and tossed her head—everyone was looking, for sure, at the green feather—and Rosalie bit her lip and wondered what could be the matter with Nicolas, and in a moment the cart was off and away, and Joncas and Laurière were left almost solitary in front of the gray church door. With a gesture of relief, the younger man turned eagerly to his companion :

‘ You go, then, now to Magloire ?’

‘ I am bound to appear,’ replied Joncas. ‘ The widow has walked ahead, but you and I will speedily overtake her. Come, as we go along relate to me what this is, this difficulty with Magloire. Were you anyone else in the village, or in the valley, I should say, “ ’Tis jealousy ; leave it alone.” But you, Laurière, are, I believe, the worthiest, most virtuous, most respectable young man in the parish. *Sacré !* I ought to know—I, who see you all the time in the forest, on the river, in the camp, at the dance, at the threshing, at funerals, at weddings. You know what you are talking about usually, although, as regards old Mikel and his dream, you are too credulous, too simple. Otherwise, I know no better fellow, no truer man.’

Laurière flushed and walked very rapidly, almost beyond Joncas for a moment. ‘ All that is kind, but we know well one thing, that we are all sinners. There is not one of us who does all he might—even you, Joncas, and I. And it is because of this that I

dislike to speak so of Magloire, knowing not what his life is. But this much is true, that he ridicules the Church and our religion ; he is teaching Pacifique, the cripple, who but for him might yet go to the shrine of the holy St. Anne and be made straight—teaching Pacifique to rebel against the curé and the holy Church, saying it is not true—the person of Christ, the Mother of God, the Sacrament and the Mass.'

Both men crossed themselves, and Joncas became suddenly serious.

'I put it into few words,' continued Laurière, 'what I have heard about from Pacifique ; but doubtless he is for ever talking it into the ears of those he meets.'

'But it is idle talk—idle talk!' said Joncas hurriedly. 'It is a boy's vision. The curé has sometimes preached to us of the dangers of unbelief. There are other religions besides ours. Magloire will be a Protestant, perhaps.'

'I tell you he is nothing at all,' persisted Laurière. 'Pacifique has told me, as if in pride, how that Magloire has learnt for certain that there is no God, that there are no miracles any more, that the bread is but bread, and the wine but wine.'

Joncas stole a look sideways at the perplexed and melancholy countenance beside him, and winked at the landscape on his other side.

'My son,' he said soberly, 'you must take your

trouble to Father Labelle. You have fallen into evil hands, you and Pacifique. Magloire is tempting you, certainly, but he believes more than he says. You will find he is a good Protestant. Oh yes, there are many such—Father Labelle will tell you that. We have the better faith ; but still, they have a faith too, such as it is. These English that stroll through the village sometimes in summer, they walk in at the open door of the *église*, they look at the dish of holy water, they bend down, they smell it, dip their fingers in, laugh to one another, and say, Perhaps it will do us good, bring us a blessing. Ah ! I have seen them at that often. And why do they do that ? Because something speaks to them and says, Our faith is better than theirs, our priests are more devout, our churches more suitable for worship. Still, some of them are very virtuous, respectable people, and it will be that Magloire has met some of these English and so been corrupted, changed from the sonship of the holy Church to a citizenship in another. Yes, these others, you have not met them so often as I have. That is what has happened to Magloire.'

'I do not think so,' protested Laurière. ' Besides, he is no longer Canadien—*vrai* Canadien.'

' Ah-ha-a-a ! there I agree with you !' said Joncas eagerly. '*Ça fait mal*. That is what is going to make matters worse, make the soup stronger. There is much in that. Yet he is not like these others—

the English, either. But, *sacré-é-é*, he will do no harm. The curé has said so. "Leave him alone," he has said; "it is but talk—idle talk. For a day and a night he will make a little noise. After that, he will go to another place, and our people will forget what he has told them." Besides, all this is partly old Caron's fault. When my nephew, that is, Magloire, was small, the old man was always praising him, teaching him, talking to him. Magloire was to be this, and Magloire was to be the other. Magloire would go to the Séminaire, study, take a degree, become a great man, live in Quebec or Montreal, be in the Government, perhaps travel and see the world. Bah! the old fool, the old dreamer! Better to have taught the lad his own woodcraft, or how to follow a plough or manage a farm, or conduct a shop in the village. For Magloire, growing up very much alone, as you remember, Laurière, with only yourself for a companion, and that very seldom, since old Mikel was so particular, grew up at last into that youth of fourteen whom we all remember, that ran away and has now returned, as they say, a gentleman. That is to say, Nicolas Laurière, he is no longer *l'petit* Magloire, your equal and my nephew, but a distinguished person, travelled, clever, rich, fortunate, handsome. *Eh bien*, it is not I, his uncle, who will say anything to him about his religion; I leave that to the grandfather and the curé, and as for his *politique*, look you, it is best to leave that alone, too. Though

I consider his principles dangerous, I do not mind confessing all the same.'

The two men walked along in silence for a while after this. It was clear they were slowly gaining upon Dame Angélique Péron and the twins.

'Will you do anything about it?' inquired Laurière hurriedly. He would be compelled to pass the *cabane*, perhaps enter, see Magloire, talk, loiter, drink a glass of *viskey blanc*.

'Nothing at all,' rejoined Joncas coolly. 'What could be done? Father Labelle will tell you the same as I, if you go to him: that is, there are some who cannot be kept in the Church—some minds, some spirits, who must for ever be hesitating, doubting, questioning. With these men one must be patient. They are like children who, one knows, one must be continually fooling, deceiving kindly with caresses and sweetmeats. One cannot force such minds. One must bear with them. Yet, I suppose, one might yet speak a little to Magloire of this, if one wished. Perhaps, then, it will be you, Nicolas Laurière, that will thus speak.'

'No, no,' said Laurière, 'it is not for me; I am too ignorant. Perhaps I am simple, as you say, easily made to believe, myself a doubting, yielding spirit. It may be so. I have no wish to speak to Magloire on this subject. Old Mikel—'

'Ah, *ouai!* old Mikel should be the one. A good Catholic, although he rarely goes to church. A

pious man, old Mikel, steady, no drunkard, no gossip. And he is the lad's grandfather. Then, who shall tell him? You, Nicolas Laurière?'

'Well, I do not mind that much. I can, I think, see him, talk to him at any time. Already he is displeased with Magloire. He thinks it shameful that his grandson should have been nothing better than another man's coachman all this time; and other things. A barber at one time, and a pedlar of pictures at another. At first I, too, like the rest of the village, thought much of all that, but now it seems to me that I would rather stay in Bourg-Marie all my life, if but to be my own master, cut and carry and pile my own faggots, and lay my own fires.'

'Then you are a fool, Nicolas Laurière. Look you, Magloire has made money. I do not know how much, but see how he dresses, how neat and shining he is; see the ring on the little finger, the watch, the bright shoes! I tell you, Laurière, that is all good and nice and pleasant—pleasanter than homespun and coarse wool, and sabots, and clumsy tuques. The money—ah-ha-a-a!—the money, that is everything in this world. Come, tell me, is it not money that we all strive for—you, Laurière, and I, Joncas, in our bargains with fur and skin; the curé, in masses for the dead and tithes for the living; the docteur and the notary, who cunningly create disease and law for their own pockets; old

Delorme in his whisky, and René Laframboise in his? Bah! there is nothing to be compared to money! Make all you can and put it away, and when you marry, marry neither Anna-Catharine-Adélaïde, nor her cousin Rosalie-Suzanne, who have no money; but cast your eyes upon my sister, the widow of Noël Duquette, who has the finest farm on the other side of the river, and is handsome still, though over forty. Dame Adèle Duquette—you have seen her? She was behind you in church this morning, and is looking for a husband. It must be a young man, too, that she will be wanting—someone to help her in maintaining the farm. There is an orchard of the most magnificent, and the house was a manor-house belonging to the seigniory of De Lotbinière, till her husband bought it upon their marriage. The house alone is a dowry; 'tis as fine as the old Manoir itself, which Mikel keeps in such order, and doubtless has intended as a marriage-gift to Magloire. But we may talk of all this no longer. See, here are the friends! Dame Péron, I salute you. Louis—Jack! Good fellows! but I demand pardon; you are doubtless so improved, so fine, so neat, old Joncas may not address you as formerly. Still, welcome to Bourg-Marie once again, and I entreat of you to persuade this lad Laurière that he may remain and take dinner with us. I make bold to ask him.'

'And I too insist that he does,' said Dame Péron.

'Remain with us, Nicolas. Thou wilt see Magloire, and that is a fine thing. He will not long be here. And Louis and Jack, they will all soon be for going. We have potatoes to-day, and hot beans, with a piece of pork in the middle, and stewed crab-apples the colour of the leaves yonder.'

'And whisky, my friend, and a good song and story,' continued Joncas. 'And Dame Péron will, no doubt, ask a pretty girl, too, if you wish it. This Rosalie-Suzanne, or her cousin——'

'Whom I must not marry,' said Laurière grimly. 'You are merry, Father Joncas; but I cannot go along with you.'

'Ah! the great pity! You are sick, Nicolas Laurière?'

It was Louis who spoke, with something like a sneer. They despised the country clothes, the habitant air, the simplicity of his manner, the primitive French he used.

'No, I am not sick,' replied Laurière doggedly.

The others were all looking at him more or less stiffly. He was an impertinent this Sunday, for sure, to refuse a good dinner—a man who lived by himself, too, *scrupuleux, rigoriste, faquin*.

'*Diantre* take thee, Nicolas Laurière! Come, we go, then, without thee!' said Joncas. '*Bon jour, bébé! Bon jour*, "Mister" Laurière! Go thou and spend thy evening with old Mikel *chez le vieux Manoïr!*'

'I will,' said the young man quickly. 'And, Joncas,



one word alone: see, I shall tell him—old Mikel, as you have said.'

'As I have said!' repeated Joncas furiously. 'I have said nothing, and what I did say I take back. I am going now to eat with my nephew, with Magloire; and I will not join a *cabale*, a faction, against him. Do you hear?'

'I hear,' said Laurière quietly, 'but I shall go all the same. So good-day, Father Joncas, and good-day, Dame Péron, with many thanks for your kindness.'

And when they reached the *cabane*, it was Nicolas who was left to walk to his lonely dwelling by himself with his mind full of solemn fancies, in none of which did Dame Adèle Duquette play any part. No; they were for the most part fancies of great and solemn things, such as the crowded church he had just left, the mysterious nature of the services, the miracle by which his sister Aspasia had been cured, and the beauty of the glowing forest draped in the colours of stained glass, each fallen, drifted leaf itself a window of flashing hues, through which one could look at the sun in all its glory.

'I shall never marry,' said Nicolas aloud, opening his mouth, and expanding his rugged chest, thus inhaling the intoxicating air latent in the keen yet warm October breeze, 'for I love all this too much. I should love it, this wood and road and the river and the trees and the leaves like gems, more than

my wife, and I suppose that next to our religion we should love our wives. Therefore I will not marry—neither Rosalie - Suzanne, nor Anna - Catharine-Adélaïde, and certainly not Dame Adèle Duquette, who is handsome still, though over forty.'

At eight o'clock that evening he put on his tuque and walked over to see old Mikel, who sat smoking in his narrow kitchen, morose, defiant, taciturn, and self-contained.

## CHAPTER XI.

### A BEAR-HUNT.

‘ He that earneth wages, earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.’

SINCE parting with his estimable grandson, and surveying in his own morbid peculiar manner the old Manoir of Colombière Caron, Mikel had endeavoured to pursue his accustomed avocations, but with little success. He had made no effort to see Magloire a second time, or to discover what were the plans of this favoured individual. He had felled and pruned, and trapped and baited, and slept and walked, as all in a dream. For above and through all else came that one thought—‘ Magloire is come back, and come back so changed, that you yourself did not know him till he spoke. Then that intense quality of the voice betrayed him ’—a high voice, clear and shrill, yet not effeminate, and with the slightest quaver in it—that vibration which belongs

to all Franco-Canadian singing voices, and sometimes is noticeable, as in the case of Magloire, in the speaking voice as well.

There is, after all, no estrangement more bitter than that which arises between kith and kin. While we may be more prone to make excuses and create contingencies for those of our own blood who have disappointed or injured us, there is always the conviction that, since these were of our own blood, they might have been, they should have been, more loyal. Mikel, aristocrat to his finger-tips, scorned anything like a scene, confession of weakness, humiliation or failure. For nine years he had mourned for his grandson, thought of him sometimes as dead and sometimes as living, dreamed of him famous, and dreamed of him poor, dug his grave for him, dandled his children for him, bent low over the hand of his wife, watched him die, come to life again, stand before him firm, healthy, reckless, fortunate. And stray papers had been eagerly scanned, and travellers accosted, and brain-splitting letters concocted to officials in Quebec, Three Rivers, and Montreal, and all to no purpose. But he had come back at last, and for what?

‘Of a truth,’ said old Mikel aloud to himself, in the solitude of his murky kitchen, ‘I do not know. Many a time have I dreamed of his coming back, but never in the strangest dream did I see him as he is—cold, harsh, affected, insincere, a stranger to the

beautiful sights of his native Bourg-Marie, a stranger to my hearth and to myself.'

Laurière knocked and was admitted. The younger man, awkwardly returning Mikel's quiet salutation, took a seat by the long stove. Only six days since he had occupied it last, and he fancied a change already had crept over the elder Caron—a more decided stoop in the shoulders, a deeper furrow between the eyes, and a more cynical line around the mouth.

'Well,' said Mikel, 'you are here again, Nicolas Laurière, and with much the same story as you brought last week. Sit down, be comfortable—smoke. It is cold enough for a drink of whisky before you go. But what fine weather! It is a magnificent October.'

'I have never known such a month,' rejoined Laurière. 'Have you seen the trees in the valley from the top of the hill, *brûlé*, where it is clear, to the edge, and one can look for miles up and down the angry river? For yesterday the strong wind ruffled it into spray, and had it frozen later when the stars were out and the sunshine gone, it would have seemed full of little stiff arches, round and crested, and silver like the backs of fish. Fish! ah, I wonder that they do live so long in that cold water, those fish.'

'What is that you say? Fish—ah!—no fear that you, Nicolas Laurière, or I will dive as far down into

that cold water as the fish. *Mais!* but it was cold this morning at four o'clock. And yet I have known a man—but he was no Canadian—who would bathe as late in the year as the fifteenth day of November.'

'Break the ice?' suggested Laurière.

'Ah! *ouai*, without doubt, break the ice, plunge far down in that black water! Well, that was a crazy thing, it seems to me. One is clean enough.'

'Clean enough!' said Nicolas. 'Why, yes—it is not everything to be clean. It is far more to be warm.'

'In a few weeks,' said Mikel impressively, 'it will be everything to be warm. It is setting in already for a long and a cold winter.'

Laurière inclined his head. His melancholy was not unobserved by Mikel.

'Say, then, what you have come to say, Nicolas Laurière. You look sad. Ah, you make yourself straight, you shake your head, you open your eyes—but you do not deceive me, nor are you changed for all that. What should make you sad—you, healthy, strong, living for yourself, and in yourself, and with yourself, and young—young. *Sacré!* but all is said in that word "young." Laurière'—and Mikel laid a heavy brown hand on the younger man's knee, and looked wistfully in his eyes—'to think that I shall never be young again!'

'But youth, it may have its troubles. Think,

Mikel—when you were young, were you always happy?’

‘I was,’ said Mikel solemnly, ‘only I did not know it. And therefore you, although you think yourself sad, I tell you you are happy. And chiefly because you are young. When one is young anything may happen. When one is old everything has happened. That is all the difference. Come, tell me, how is my grandson, Magloire, or, as he calls himself, Mr. Murray Carson? You see him daily.’

‘Not at all,’ said Laurière. ‘I see him but seldom. Look, I am busy. He is busy too—has lots of friends, and letters to write, and——’

‘And you are but a habitant, Nicolas Laurière, son of the old *coureur de bois*, and grandson of Laurière the pedlar. It was your sister Aspasia that was cured at La Bonne Ste. Anne, it was your mother who died last year, poor, very poor, in your *cabane*; it is your elder brother, Max-Simon Laurière, who keeps the public-house at Point Laclaire; it is yourself who wears coarse wooden shoes or clumsy *raquettes* and earrings on Sundays. Bah! Laurière, you are no companion for Mr. Murray Carson, exper-r-r-t in horseflesh, Milwaukee. You are *engourdi*, stupid, blind, you do not see, you do not understand.’

Nicolas flushed with sudden anger, that paled and died away as rapidly as it had come.

‘That is not so about Magloire,’ he said. ‘I think

Magloire would have been pleased to have seen me oftener, but I have not cared to go. There were enough there in that *cabane* without me. When I did see him he was kind. He has spoken to me about leaving Bourg-Marie, about my going back with him. There is a great deal of opportunity there, in those States, for a young man, for one like me. I am steady, I can work. And it has long been my dream.'

'Your dream! What! To leave Bourg-Marie? I have never guessed that. You kept it quiet.'

'What else was I to do? I have few friends. I am not a talker. I mention this to-day, and I may never mention it again.'

'Because, then, you are going back with him, with Magloire?'

'No; because I shall stay here—I feel it—all my life. I shall be just what I am—Nicolas Laurière—till I die.'

'And what else should you be? *Sacré dame*, but these young men are amazing. Why, they must all leave home, run away, be impolite, unreasoning, piggish. You are all cabbages, and nothing more; and cabbages that grow up all sprout and no heart. It is a madness, this dream of every boy to leave his native village and his friends, and carry his right arm and his strong shoulder and his straight leg into a foreign country. And that it should allure you, Nicolas Laurière, of all men!'



'Be still!' and Laurière smiled. 'I am not going away. Believe me myself until I myself shall tell you the contrary. I see the folly of it.'

'Ah-ha! You see the folly! You are right—you are sensible—you are no cabbage. How, then, do you cheat Magloire? Do you tell him you will go, and then look aside at that ugly *putois* of a Pacifique, that *caribou*—ah, *peste!* you are a smart one, Laurière, to do that.'

'But I do not,' said Laurière. 'I have no mind for going. And yet I have always thought that, when the time came, I should go. Now my mother is dead, I could easier go, and I could still send the money for the Mass—it is not much—to you from these other places, and you would give it to the priest for me; but there is her grave to leave behind, and that is worse.'

Mikel started. He thought of his own dreary deathbed—there would be no children, no grandchildren, hardly any relatives or friends around it, and he felt strongly drawn towards his companion after hearing him assert his intention of remaining in his native village. He had often regarded him with a stealthy jealousy, mostly on account of his youth, but now a softer feeling seemed to leaven the interest he naturally felt in one who was really his pupil, and over whose career he had involuntarily watched for some years. Several times he began to speak, then broke off suddenly, as if unable to com-

mand his emotions. Nicolas, absorbed in his own sombre reflections, did not heed these moments of wild abstraction, in which the coolness and intrepidity of the old trapper seemed merged in a spasm or convulsion of feeling, which at length mastered him entirely. Nicolas, turning to reach his pipe from the table, encountered suddenly the sad and questioning gaze of his friend.

‘What is it ails thee, Mikel le Caron?’ he exclaimed, in great perplexity. ‘There is a great trouble in the eyes, a terrible line upon the forehead. Speak—I am not one that tattles again. If it is any secret, you can trust it with me. Come, I will wear a new name: Nicolas-*qui-ne-parle-pas*, like the *rapide* that empties into Lac Calvaire.’

‘Thou dost forget that the *Parle pas rapide* does speak in some seasons.’

‘Nay, then,’ said Nicolas, bending forward earnestly and looking at Mikel with all his honest soul in his melancholy brown eyes, ‘in all seasons you may depend upon me. When the winds ruffle the pools roughest, when the snows flood the babbling streams, when the crows fill the air with calling, and when the forest drips with warm May rains, I at least will keep silence. Mikel, I mean it. I will swear, if you wish it.’

‘Laurière,’ said Mikel, much moved, and a radiant softness illumining his hard old face—‘Laurière, thou art a good child. But you need not swear, neither

is my secret worth the name. I have already told you, or you have already guessed. I have been foolish, and now I am old. There are two bad things: to be old, and to have been foolish. That is what I meant when I said a moment since it was sad to be old. Nothing can be done any more. Life does itself. One learns to suffer.'

'To suffer!' and Laurière repeated the words softly under his breath.

'Once, no man was afraid to suffer. Now we try to smooth out every wrinkle, roll away every stone, cut down every tree, lay snares for every passion, every appetite. Well, are we any the better for it? For the latter, a little. My ancestors were gentlemen, but they were not ashamed of being seen drunk. I am a labouring man—forest-ranger for the county of Yamachiche, an office destitute of uniform, of honour, respect, and importance—yet I never drink to excess. Well, if not for sin, one must suffer for something. And, after all, one suffers for what one has set in motion one's self.'

'Well, that is sad,' said Nicolas.

An intense sympathy seemed to be manifesting itself in his heart with all that Mikel spoke of, and he longed to find suitable words that might convey that sympathy to a bleeding heart. Yet he felt inexpressibly stupid, slow, and wandering, as he followed, from under drooping lids, the motions that Caron made from time to time.

'It would have been better if he had never come back,' said the trapper moodily, beating one brown hand upon the other. And Nicolas knew that he meant Magloire.

'Ah, not that,' said he gently. 'Magloire is kind in his heart. He is too clever to be lost to the world, living here in Bourg-Marie. You yourself would be proud of him if you saw him in his new home, with his new friends and all his proper surroundings. One cannot tell here what he is really: it is all so different.'

'Let it be as different as you will,' growled the trapper, 'there are a few things that are the same all the world over. And these things my grandson, Magloire, has forgotten, if he ever knew. But I will not allow him to disturb my last years. I have disowned him, Laurière.'

Laurière's melancholy dark eyes looked their pity.

'That is bad; it will make him so very angry, so bitter.'

'Not so angry nor so bitter as his conduct has made me. The law of love for you and such as you—you are just like your father: he was only half a trapper, afraid of seeing the animals caught, or hearing their cry of pain—but another law for me, Mikel le Caron. I tell you I have disowned him. For the present I choose to ignore him. Let him stay as long as he may, I will not seek him, and should he seek me, I will receive him as a stranger,

*en vérité* as Mr. Murr-r-r-ay Carson. *Voilà un bel nom ! C'est un nom infâme ! Oui-dà*, and when he goes, I make no comment, no inquiry. I write no letters, I receive his politely if signed Mr. Murr-r-r-ay Carson ; if not, I burn them unread. When I die, it will be seen that what I own is not for him. *Cadédís*, no, I should think not. I shall give it to the Church—the proper receptacle for wealth.'

Mikel caught his breath and looked hard at Laurière, a look that gave the latter pain. He turned away his head and rose from his chair.

'It will be better that I say good-evening, Mikel, and leave you. Another time. It is true I had something to say, but it will do another time. You are disturbed, unquiet, distrait ; you say things perhaps you do not want me to hear——'

'What things have I said that you might not hear, *quel diantre ?* Laurière, *mon enfant*—Laurière, Nicolas, *toi*—listen ! Let me only speak—let me only speak, tell these things to some ear beside that of the curé ; let me be assured of someone's friendship, someone's love. My God ! I have said it.'

'Said what ?' queried Laurière, his heart bursting with every beat, and a hunger rising in that heart that now could only be appeased one way.

Mikel, rising, looked from his superior height upon Nicolas as upon some favourite child with the counterpart of Nicolas's hunger in his straining eyes and his faltering voice. He locked Laurière's hands

between his own as tears—rare, rare tears—gathered in his sunken eyes.

‘Said that I needed friendship, solace, love—said that my heart was dry for the lack of it, caking like the old brown earth which looks so hard and cold although there is plenty of soft living green underneath that cracking crust. Say, Nicolas, thou too—thou didst have this feeling? Thou wert not satisfied to live alone—thou too, *enfant, mon fils*?’

The force of his passion had swept over Laurière’s already awakened and easily stimulated nature, and he stood trembling before the revelation that came to him in those words.

‘I may have been,’ he stammered—‘yes, I was. And, Mikel, I will do anything for you—to help you, Mikel, or to please you. You have done so much for me.’

‘Ah,’ exclaimed Le Caron, with swimming eyes and softened mouth, ‘it is thou, Laurière, a stranger, who sayest thus, and not my own flesh and blood, not my grandson, Magloire! And thou, too—thou wert dull and lonely and cold, and I never guessed it. Thou hast had thy dreams, too, though thou art young enough, Laurière, still to dream again. Yet thou art old enough to understand another’s grief. And thou art a good Catholic, a true son of the Church, and all that thou doest is to the glory of God and the Mother of the Holy Saviour. I have watched you, Laurière. I knew your worth,

yet because of your youth I refused to court you. Ah, yes! I was jealous of that young arm, of that fleet foot, of that undimmed eye, of that most excellent ear and unfailing memory. Well, without doubt what I said you will keep to yourself.'

He released Laurière as he spoke, and pointed gently to the chair the latter had quitted a moment before.

'You cannot doubt me,' answered Nicolas earnestly. 'I came to-night that I might speak to you about your grandson, but if you would rather not hear I will pledge myself to talk of him to no one else.'

'He is not wise, eh? Mixing himself with *politique*—he, Magloire! Foolish boy—young wood, unfeathered bird! But that will soon pass.'

'Not so soon perhaps as you think. He is to be listened to, Magloire. He also says strange things about the Church.'

Nicolas spoke in a lower tone, almost a whisper, and as he spoke Mikel's face also took on a horrified and perturbed expression.

'It is Pacifique, the cripple, who has told me. I—I have not spoken myself about it to him—to Magloire, but he has told Pacifique that none of this, our religion, is true; that men can live without it; that they can even die without it. And Pacifique believes him.'

'Unhappy boy!' cried Mikel bitterly. 'Un-natural son of a forgiving Church! That he should

have come to this! Laurière, you must not listen, else you also come to grief. Through what has this come to pass, that my grandson should dare to renounce his Church? It is infamous, dishonest, altogether terrible!

'Lest I also disbelieve?' said Nicolas, in a gentle surprise. 'Alas, Mikel! that you should know me so little. I desire only that all men shall believe with me in the holiness and sanctity of our precious Church, and lead as pious a life as their occupations permit them. For you and me, that should be easy, for though we assist at many a funeral of our own making, it is for the general good, and according to the orders of those above us in authority and station. In truth, Mikel, it is well for our peace that beasts have no souls.'

'Else were we condemned for ever to purgatory, my son, with—in my own case—no one to say a Mass for me, unless you, Laurière, or Émile Joncas. Well, so thou dost fear for the future of my grandson, Magloire. Thou doest him too great a kindness. He is already bound for the domains of the enemy of mankind. Does he, then, refuse the blessed Sacrament?'

'I think that he must,' said Laurière, 'since he has told Pacifique it is all make-belief. *Idées extravagantes* of the priests, he calls them, these things, these rites of the Church. Ah, but that is horrible! I do wonder how he can say such things! Once



there were upon a small image of St. Catharine and her wheel, upon my mother's shelf, some spots that I did try to wash off with a cloth and water. I took it to the window to see better ; it was a hot day, very hot, and the clouds were rolling swiftly overhead, and although my mother had told me never to disturb the image, I disobeyed her. And, Mikel, out of those purple clouds the lightning came and darted in at the window, and I fell to the floor.'

'Ah! *ouai*,' said Mikel, smoking placidly again. 'And there was thy sister, Aspasia. Think how her prayers were answered! As straight and healthy a young woman now as can be found in the valley.'

'And there was Alexis Ducharme——'

'Ah, *ouai*, Alexis Ducharme! *Mais*, but that was a horrible story. You mean, how that he spit out the holy——' Mikel crossed himself.

'Yes, yes, and fell dead on his way home the same morning. And so it is, everyone who is a good Catholic can tell some such tale of the vengeance of the true God. Was it not last year at St. Barthélémi that the week of prayer and the pilgrimage on bare feet brought the rain, after we had waited ten weeks for it? *Ma foi*, these things are true, and no man can explain them.'

'Explain them, Nicolas Laurière? They need no explanation. They are the will of God.'

'You are right, Mikel le Caron; and therefore is it blasphemy to question these things. Let them

alone. As for us, there is work and duty—plenty of that, at all times.' And Laurière sighed wearily.

At the sigh the elder man turned upon his companion a look full of tenderness. 'My son,' he said, it is right that I should finish what I have begun. No one can say I ever left a tree half felled, standing where it might easily fall and crush a traveller under it, or disdained the cry of a wounded animal snared in the cruel trap that God ordains to complete His ends. You, Nicolas Laurière, shall be my son, inherit all I have, all I will leave to you. For, Nicolas, it is worth leaving, worth inheriting. Nicolas, I am rich.'

Laurière turned a startled gaze upon the trapper. Riches were things he had never thought of. When he had dreamed of leaving Bourg-Marie he had thought of comfort, a little ease, friends, amusements, but hardly of riches.

'Rich!' he gasped.

'Ah! *ouai*. I expect I am richer, were it all told off by the notary and sworn to by myself and Father Labelle, than Prévost himself, or even M. Thibideau. You are surprised? Well, why should I speak of my affairs? Of what good were my riches to me, a childless old man wrapped up in the past, and thinking always of the years that are for ever gone? Say, Nicolas, my son, but what ails thee? Thou hearest something, seest someone?'

For Laurière had risen, and with a stride reached

the one window of the small kitchen. A common blind of green paper extended almost to the window-ledge, but not quite, leaving a hiatus of an inch or two through which it was perfectly possible to see either into or outside the room. Laurière had distinctly caught the eye of someone on the other side of that dangerous gap, but when he reached the spot, as usual in such cases, nothing was to be seen. Quickly turning to reassure Mikel, he gave a gasp of horror, for shining in the trapper's grasp was the diamond of former days, fatally conspicuous in the sombre dwelling by reason of its brilliancy, making flashing points of radiance and tremulous shimmering colour in the midst of dull neutral tints and shabby surroundings. Nicolas, excited, suspicious, troubled, saw all the danger.

'Put it down!' he cried. 'Put your hand away, and that ring on it. Mikel—for your own sake, Mikel, I saw someone—an eye—that ring—put it away!'

Le Caron leisurely replaced the stone, which, in its antique and elaborate setting, he had been about displaying as a sample of his belongings to Nicolas, in the inner pocket where he usually kept it, but no fear crossed his intrepid spirit.

'Thou, Nicolas, thou are frightened at a bat! It was no more. They wheel and beat at my window many a night just like that. They are ugly things, but harmless. Come, draw the blind as far down as

it will go, and I will show thee this bauble once more. But 'tis much more than a bauble, *mon enfant.*' And Mikel, despite the protest of Laurière, drew the diamond forth again.

Nicolas, with many a backward glance, came near and stared at the brilliant thing, unconscious of its value. He knew nothing of precious stones, although he knew something in a general way of minerals and the various surface rocks of his native valley.

'What is it now, Laurière, think you?' said Mikel smilingly. 'What do you see in it?'

'Colour—plenty of that. The sunrise as it flared this morning; the sunset as it glowed last night; the trees in the wood as I passed them on my way from church this morning; the drops of the Parle-pas Rapide——'

'The Parle-pas Rapide? No such vision! You are a child still, Laurière. I tell you what I see: The old Manoir of Colombière Caron remodelled, rebuilt; a donjon added, for the terror of Bonhomme Peter and Paul Ladislasky; the ancient fountain playing, drip, drip, all the summer days; great fires lighted in the hall every day in winter; an army of servants—a neat, orderly, obedient brigade; portraits and hangings on the walls; dogs in the kennels; horses in the stables. One might even establish hawking again among us.' And Mikel dreamily let his thoughts wander far from Laurière and the old black stove in front of which he was seated. 'There

would be a new chapel with carven seats, over which a new Père Chaletot should preside. One might find such a one, I think, at home in France again if one could cross the ocean, travel, see men and women. That, as you know, has been my dream, Laurière : to restore the once distinguished and honourable line of Colombière Caron to its original dignity ; make of the ancient fief something of which my great grandsires might be proud, and something which should show to the valley the true principles of self-government. Laurière,' said the old man, growing interested in his favourite theme, and occasionally tapping the other's shoulder with an impatient yet gentle left hand, 'there is much trouble out in the great world, of which you, and such as you, know little. There is lawlessness, revolt, the spirit of rebellion manifesting itself ; not in great wars like those that convulsed the France of my forefathers, noble in their way, grand, impassioned, heroic movements, episodes of the most tragic, full of death, and solemnity, and force, but in the family, between man and wife, brother and sister, father and child, master and servant, the employer and the employed. Evil is no longer beautiful, distant, lurid ; it is small, ugly, near, personal. Men have forgotten how to suffer ; they have also forgotten how to serve. They cannot wait, they cannot hope, these men of to-day. They have no reasonableness, no patience ; they must have everything just when they want it. There is a loss

of character, while there is an increase of education. See thou, even in our parish this trouble creeps in! It will be for this that our priests are so careful to instruct us safely as to our souls, and leave our minds alone. What is a man better that has read a few books, for example, than you or me? Yet out in that world he is accounted better and wiser. *Trédame!* but I am as wise as any among them. I wish to say that there is a great folly in this confidence in books, in education. Father Labelle will tell you the same as me: how that it is of little use, this reading of many books, in making the character, in forming the will. Well, there is Magloire. He is impious, you tell me, blasphemous, vile, believing in nothing. Whence comes it? Had he lived here with me, this would not have happened. It has come of too much haste, too much folly, the wish to be better than he was accounted—better, when he is nobly descended, gently sprung! He is, I tell you, ashamed of his origin, of his country, of me, of himself. *Mon Dieu!* but it is cruel.' And Mikel drew a long shuddering breath.

Laurière did not speak. Presently his friend resumed:

'That is where lies this grand mistake. Father Labelle has often told me. One may cultivate, work, make much of the soul and of the body; but, except in very few cases, the mind must be left alone. The Church includes everything necessary for the body

and for the soul; therefore can we learn to be Christians and pious well-living men without the exercise of our minds at all. The mind is separate from the soul, Nicolas Laurière. This is a great truth. But there are some who will not let it be so, who teach the mind along with the soul, or try to, and the result is pain, discomfiture, annoyance, the impiety you describe, the horrors you shrink from, in my grandson Magloire.'

'But if one were to be a priest——' said Nicolas hurriedly.

'Ah, *ouai*! then it would be necessary. Were you a priest, you would train your mind to see and confront everything. You would read everything you could find; you would probe and cut aside, and fell and dig, and turn up all the boulders in the way, with how many ugly, squirming, but necessary worms underneath! Then, having confronted all these spectres—shapes of sin, and doubt, and ignorance, and temptation—you would be fit to be a priest; not before, and not otherwise. And the first thing you would preach to your flock would be: an absolute reliance on simplicity of mind; the importance of the great truths of sin and death and judgment. Those are enough—*ma foi*, I should think so!—enough for any man to carry about with him in his brain. Let him keep his body pure and his soul pious, and his mind will take care of itself. Now, that is the greatest truth any priest can tell you.

Ah, ha! Look! let me read to you. This Père Chaletot—you have heard me speak of him? He was, two hundred years ago, Nicolas Laurière, the Chapelain, Aumônier, priest, on duty in the old Manoir. Wait here a moment, and I will procure for you the greatest curiosity of the valley—nay, for all I know, of the whole country. You do not mind that you wait, eh, alone? It will but be for a few moments. In the next room, at the back, I have this rare thing—a piece of writing in Père Chaletot's own hand. Agree you, then, my son, to wait but a moment?'

Laurière, not knowing what else to say, hastily agreed. It was absurd of Mikel to make the suggestion in the form of a request at all, and his manhood revolted at the notion of his appearing a coward in the eyes of this man, so many as four decades older than himself. With a laugh and characteristic shrug, and at the same time a passing look fraught with much tenderness for Laurière, Mikel rose and passed across a narrow hall into another room.

Nicolas, fascinated by that gaping hiatus of window, slowly turned around in his chair until he could see it. He watched during five minutes, listening to old Mikel moving drawers and chairs in the other room, and nothing being visible at the window, he got up and quietly strolled to the front-door. Opening it, he looked on the star-sown beauty



of an October night, clear and keen and quiet. There was no moonlight, but a soft glow from the stars over all the majesty of Bourg-Marie. In front stretched the highroad bordered by immense firs, hemlocks and pines. Nicolas opened his mouth and drew in long breaths of that delicious night air. After the confinement of Mikel's kitchen, this other atmosphere seemed singularly pure, and with his eyes directed up to the gleaming stars, burning with silver, martial red and blue of steel and sapphire, he listened all the while intently both for Mikel's voice from behind him and for any suspicious noises in front.

As for Le Caron, he was busily employed in making search for the seventeenth-century document that formed one of his chief treasures. Inability to place his hand at once upon it rendered him irritable, flurried. He fancied he was rapidly, momentarily dwindling, growing old and helpless. He swore a good deal; tumbled the contents of drawers—seeds, stones, feathers, odd bundles of paper, Government documents and receipts—about, till the confusion grew almost hopeless.

All of a sudden Laurière heard, no such noise as he half expected to hear, such as hurrying footsteps or crashing branches, but a strange, husky, portentous breathing, more like a snuffle, and accompanied by an uncertain, heavy tread that suggested only one living thing to his mind. The sound appeared to

come from the trees at one side of the road, and Laurière, before moving, bent his keen eyes upon those dark arches in front of him. The creature, whatever it was, stopped instantly, as if it could see Laurière, and knew that his gaze was directed toward it. Laurière, noticing this, drew cautiously inside the door and pretended to close it upon the visitor and the cold, keen air. But from behind the partially-closed door he held his breath and listened, and in a few moments he heard the sound recommence. Then his mind was made up.

‘Mikel,’ he said politely, going into the room where the old trapper had strewn the floor with stuffed birds, papers, dried herbs and grasses, tools, pencils and string, ‘I will come back and finish the evening with you, if you will allow me; but for the present I am going for a little stroll in the fresh night air. There is something alive in the wood yonder, Mikel, and I must find out what it is. Mikel, it sounds like a bear.’

‘Then distrust it,’ said Le Caron, with a grim but interested smile. ‘You are a youngster, after all. There is no bear that will come so near my house as that. There is no bear out at all so far down as this. They know me too well. Why should you go after a *feu follet* on a Sunday night at ten o’clock? Bah! Nicolas, you are a coward to-night.’

‘It is no *feu follet*, I can assure you. There is something in that wood, and I must see what it is,

but I think it will be a bear. It has a heavy walk ; it is a *nasillard*.'

'No bear, I tell you,' said Mikel angrily. 'Well, then, go, and come back soon, for I will not wait long for you. I can tell you, Nicolas Laurière, you are a fool! But, there—no, I mean you are too easily taken in. A bear! *Caddis!* but you will find something else behind the tree.'

'I am not afraid,' said Nicolas, lightly closing the door and striding out into the night.

He scanned the road up and down, but there was no vehicle or person visible in either direction. Crossing it—the hard, rutted road that ran straight before Mikel's house and clearing—he entered the pine-fringed edge of mighty Bourg-Marie, and exercising all his trapper's tact, gentleness and wit, began cautiously threading the dark intricacies of the forest. The sound still existed, but it was quite distant now. Laurière stole on, from tree to tree, from log to log; sometimes crawling, sometimes gliding, but always managing to carry his body and stout, lithe limbs noiselessly over brushwood and stump and boulder, for towards the middle of the forest the rocky stratum that covered the entire valley often protruded, and being clad with many kinds of moss and lichen, formed a specially safe footing for one anxious to make little sound, as he undoubtedly was. In this manner he followed the sound that surely belonged to some living, breathing

beast or animal, till it ceased with one tremendous crash of wood and shattered timber, and Laurière thought the bear must have fallen into one of Mikel's many traps. After the crash came a profound silence, however; there was no noise as of wounded bear or surprised human being, and he was all the surer. Moving, still cautiously, towards the direction of the crash, Laurière, hot, tremulous, and excited, began to wish that he had had his knife with him, or, at least, some tool or weapon which might be of use in case he came face to face with another foe. For now, away to the left, and in an opposite direction from that of the crash or tumult of split and scattered boughs, he heard the mysterious noise again.

'Another,' said Laurière to himself, and he promptly set his teeth. 'There will be, then, two of a kind.' And he turned to the left in stealthy pursuit of that heavy breathing and that clumsy tread.

He was enabled, by reason of the very thickness and number of the trees in this spot, so different from the half-cleared spaces obstructed by fallen logs and rotting stumps that intervened nearer the edge of the wood, to walk still more softly than before, and, by dint of extraordinary precaution and agility, he found himself gaining upon the suspicious visitant, whom he still strongly asserted to himself must be a bear. Nicolas had no glimmer of light. All was dark, only that the trunks and branches of the trees

were blacker than all else. The sound grew nearer, clearer, and with some difficulty he made out a shape that was dark enough to be that of a bear, and that crawled along the ground apparently in an aimless and puzzled manner. The noise the creature made was now easily distinguishable, and was something between a pant and a snore. Nicolas, perplexed and nervous, yet with all the instinct of the hunter keenly alive within inciting him to his prey, bore down softly upon the mysterious animal.

'Tis a bear,' said he to himself at one moment; 'Mikel is wrong.' The next: 'It is some strange new animal, perhaps new even to Mikel. Ah! see where he goes. He is puzzled; he has lost his way; he stops, smells, looks about him, returns, goes the other way. I go too.'

Thus did the singular nocturnal traveller lead Laurière in and out, backward and forward, sometimes panting, growling, or breathing heavily, and sometimes remaining perfectly quiet. The creature acted as if it had lost its way, as Nicolas had thought to himself, and this idea rendered him peculiarly watchful. There was more system in its movements than animals ordinarily display, and coming to a place where a quantity of broken branches and faggots made an obstacle in his path, Nicolas conceived the bold plan of walking, or, rather, crashing, through it, in order to alarm the bear or whatever it might be. He did so, making the forest ring again, and the

dark shape he had been following so long stopped short as if to think, but emitted no sound, nor essayed to go forward or back. Nicolas, ready for any encounter, sprang upon it, and clutched at a furry skin or covering of some kind of hide, which came off in his grasp, leaving behind the real object of his pursuit. For a moment he fought with something that stood, upright now, though short, half inside and half without the coat of rough fur, tore, pinched, strove with all his might, till his nails were broken and bleeding, and he caught his feet in a network of branches, and so lost his hold of the creature while he clung to the covering, and went sprawling down upon his face in the thick darkness, humiliated, enraged, defeated.

Later on, a small distorted shape stood panting and laughing and grimacing on the edge of the shadowy wood. It was the cripple, Pacifique Péron, who cursed the eyes of the stars above him as he looked up at their soft and luminous splendour, because they gave too much light.

## CHAPTER XII.

### A FELLED TREE.

‘As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him ; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him.’

MIKEL, intent in his dwelling a mile away from the spot where Nicolas lay tangled in the mesh-like branches and forks of felled and scattered coniferæ, with a sharp pain cleaving his left ankle, and a sharper, bitterer pain surging in his bosom, heard and divined nothing of the chase and its results. He searched long and earnestly for the document which he intended for Laurière’s guidance, but it did not appear. More than once he called across to Nicolas, supposing him to be still in the room where he had left him, and wondered perhaps that he received no answer ; yet he was not disturbed.

‘It grows a cold night,’ said he half aloud. ‘The youngster, he sits by the fire, he hugs his arms, he dreams of the nights to come when one must dig a

hole in the drifts of snow, nose about like a bear—ah! that is Nicolas. He said he was going after a bear.'

At the remembrance Mikel jumped hastily up, crossed the passage, and, having satisfied himself that Laurière was no longer in the kitchen, went to the door and looked out. The beauty—luminous, cold, quiet, perfect—of the October night tempted him sorely to follow. Not a sound reached his ear. The blue and crimson and silver of the midnight sky revealed only an eternal silence, a bland but Divine plan, an inch or so of the true and distant Infinite. Mikel listened as only a veteran hunter and trapper can listen, the body bent forward, the eye, ear, nose all alert, the breath kept back, the whole living throbbing organism in abeyance, the nervous centres held in control, rendered torpid, passive, pliant. Once a sound of revelry from the direction of the village was blown faintly along the road, and Le Caron, who had learnt from Indians many secrets of their forest magic, laid his ear to the ground, and knew what the sound was. It was unlikely that Laurière had wandered in that direction, and Mikel, locking his house, entered Bourg-Marie with a conviction that Nicolas was within the wood, and that he must be found. The grinning shape of Pacifique did not arrest him on his route, else some partial conception of the truth might have helped him to discover his friend sooner than he did, which was not



until two hours had passed in calling, whistling, retracing weary steps to and fro through the interstices of the forest, and listening for bear or other prey in the blackness of the night. A small lantern cautiously carried in the left hand, the right one being constantly occupied in putting back branches and protruding twigs, finally revealed the prostrate figure of Laurière, pale as so brown a man could grow under pressure of faintness, pain, and the sense of degrading defeat. Mikel's newly-awakened sentiments of friendliness and attachment were freshly alive at the sight.

'I have found my son only to lose him!' he cried. 'Holy Mother of Jesus, have mercy and save! Nicolas, canst thou hear? Well is it that I never went so far as openly to grudge thee that keen eye, that strong arm, those supple limbs. No; I stopped in time. Nicolas, I may have been impatient, perhaps, of my own weakness; despairing as to the next ten years; not anxious to see you and Joncas—old Jambarchet—taking my place among you and casting lots for Mikel le Caron's property, but I was ever just to your prowess, Laurière. I spared no blame, perhaps, but likewise I spared no praise. Canst thou hear me, Laurière, *mon fils*? But no, of a truth, he is in the arms of death. And pale—the colour of the leaves that stay all winter on many a sapless branch—a yellow white—*sacré-é!*—that matches not with any pretty hues of spring, nor yet

with the brave ones of autumn. The wood-brown all is gone from his cheeks, the oak-red from his lips. *Mais!* he hears—he tries to sit up—he looks at me!—his eyes open; they regard me, and their look is as the look of many a beast I have caught in the trap. *Mon Dieu, Nicolas!* 'tis only I—Mikel. Look not so strange, my child, upon one thou knowest so long and so well.'

Laurière, dazed with the sickly glare of the lantern and the unexpected appearance of Mikel, came out of his swoon with a low groan.

'It is, then, nothing, Mikel—nothing at all, that is, but a sprain. One could, though, more easily bear with a limb sawn off at once than this living, throbbing pain, like a worm in the ankle that turns when I turn, and eats and bites, and grinds its teeth if I but breathe a little deep. Its teeth grind so that you can hear them.'

'What was it brought you here? I told you it would prove but a *feu follet*. You were wise, Nicolas, to have taken an old man's advice and stayed with him.'

'I could never have done that. But that it was no bear, though a shape that looked most like one, I grant you now, Mikel.'

The older man set down his lantern, and proceeded to examine the injury sustained by Laurière, who lay now with closed eyes, and now with eyes tenderly regarding his friend, or else gazing up into the black

arches overhead. Midnight in the glooms of Bourg-Marie brought no terrors to his contented mind, for he had nothing on his conscience, and the legendary shapes that haunt those three forests of Lafontaine, Fournier, and Bourg-Marie, for coarser and more faulty spirits, recurred to him only as phantasms of a nurse's tale. He lay still, silent, but inwardly embittered while Mikel took his hurried survey and prepared to assist him to rise. The stoicism of their calling prevented any doubts as to Laurière's ability to reach the highroad. Reach it he must, and with no more aid than Mikel's still strong arm and cautious tread might give him, since he was Nicolas Laurière, son of Polikarp-Jacques Lauzon Laurière, a trapper by choice, education, and destiny. Mikel raised him by painful degrees, indulging the while in incoherent exclamations and rapid transitions of emotion. Step by step, his brown lips bleeding where the white teeth cut through, and old Mikel's blackened dried lips firmly set in an effort to maintain presence of mind allied to physical strength, they proceeded through the avenues of vast trees that, one so like another, might easily cause that curious possession known as *folie du bois*. Mikel, warier than Nicolas from longer experience, guided their footsteps without seeing where he went, his instinct being so unfailing, his wood-magic so accurate; and when the road and clearing were finally reached, he prevailed upon his friend to enter the

house, at least for a time, till the true nature of the sprain should be ascertained. Laurière, still blanched to the lips, staggered into Mikel's kitchen, from whence he had gone forth a couple of hours before, strong, supple, and vigorous.

'But I am only fit to die!' he exclaimed. 'Mikel, all the time I have been with you in and out of the wood, and nothing has harmed me—bear, wild-cat, lynx, holes, traps, smugglers—well, I am at last to be beaten by a thing dressed up in fur—a bear! A pretty bear! Mikel, you must watch, you must take care. I tell you, Mikel, there was someone to-night at that window and in the wood, and it was the same person, of that I am assured.'

'But when for fifty years I have lived in safety, in seclusion, and no one has guessed——'

'Perhaps there was no one to guess.'

'Ah! that was, you are thinking, before the return of Magloire.'

'I must say the truth, Mikel. I am afraid for you. That jewel, this secret wealth you speak of, your circumstances, Mikel—it is no longer safe to live so. And I—I, who would do so much for you—I am useless, helpless, a tree felled before it counts twenty-six rings——'

'Say, then, rather, a sapling that, frightened as it is by the first blast of November or of March, will never live to be an oak for very fear. What! is it thou, Nicolas, that will give up on the strength of a

mere twist of the ankle-bone? I would be ashamed for you did I not know something myself of that same sensation. 'Tis worse, as you say, than a leg or arm blown off, because the pain is ever there, and eats and grinds, and will not away. Laurière, I follow mostly my own will, and I wait only till morning, when I can the better see if any lurk behind trees or lie in the leaf-strewn ravines, to carry thee to the old Manoir. There I can tend thee in quiet, and there too shalt thou see these things of which I have spoken.'

Laurière, forced to comply, swallowed some whisky and watched the preparations made for his comfort. When the dawn arrived, Mikel went forth to meet it, making a thorough search among the trees at the back of the house, and when he was completely satisfied that the most absolute silence and safety prevailed, he assisted Laurière out into the plantation behind and up the gentle, wooded slope that led to the quaint triangular close of green that faced the long, low pile of the old and weather-beaten Manoir. Mikel, supporting the other on his left arm, pointed to the fires of dawn that surged in orange and rosy flames over the cool, gray sky, and together the two men looked at that vast blush of colour that called into sad contrast the bald, shattered walls and glassless windows of Mikel's ancestral home.

'Seest thou, Laurière,' he said falteringly, 'how

the old towers flame, and the dark red tiles show black against the brilliant sky? There it is—the Manoir of Colombière le Caron. Many a gentleman in France might glow with pride and call it his. See, the crucifix with its image, the post with the iron bell at the top, the grotto of curious stones, the Cupid, the carven seats, the long, low terrace, half sun, half shade, the rows upon rows of windows, the turrets from which the flags should fly—all this, Laurière, is mine, and nightly in my dreams, and daily in my walks, I see it peopled, the windows hung with cloths, the terrace gay with dogs and children, the fountain playing, the bell ringing, the sound of an organ, the music of a horn—anything, everything, that betokens life, health, prosperity. Laurière, had Magloire stayed at home, all this might have come to pass. A seat in Parliament——’

‘A seat in Parliament! Ah!’ exclaimed Nicolas, for the moment oblivious of his pain; ‘but how could he get that?’

‘Mon Dieu! But you are stupid. And I forget—you are sick—faint. But look: it would have been easy. I give my grandson a good education; I am myself respectable. Eh! I do not keep a public-house, or peddle images and clocks; so I send him to the Séminaire. He is clever, black-eyed, shrill-voiced, a quick speaker. The Fathers all say the lad is a genius; there is no one like him. They are always on the watch for such; he will be a glory to

our race. Well, then, it happens I have property, money, plate—plate, Nicolas—silver plate, *argenterie*—look you—and with such I am powerful; I can do what I like for my grandson Magloire. I keep myself back; no one need know me—old Caron, old man of the woods, old hawk—and so I help him to become a great man. *Enfin*, he will be offered a seat in the Parliament, and at last becomes the great leader of his party. Ah! Bah! it was but a dream. For look: we stand, you and I, on the threshold of a noble home, feeling that all is not right with Magloire, that he is not as one of us, that what he has learnt and heard and seen in these nine years is not going to make him the proper man to represent that line—distinguished, honourable, virtuous—and perhaps rebuild that home, straightening its crooked walls, draping its blind, black windows, and legislating for all the happy valley. Why, Laurière,' said Mikel, still talking as they passed along the gravel walk and finally gained the terraces and central door, 'half the trouble the present world complains of is that, under God and the priests, men are not willing to own any masters except themselves. And very few men, Nicolas Laurière, are born and reared fit to become their own masters. The priests and God in the first place, and in the next a wise owner or seigneur, or a discriminating parent, or a faithful friend, and thus would be saved much loss of character. This restlessness in your young

men, this unreasonableness, this hatred of a yoke—*cordédis*! it might be better for them to work the fever out in six months' hard labour under a severe taskmaster, and so be grateful hereafter for frozen potatoes and smuggled whisky. Now, my son, we enter the once hospitable *manoir* of Colombière le Caron. You are my guest. I bid you welcome, then, and here I promise you quiet and repose undisturbed.'

Laurière, despite his suffering, threw a startled glance at the rich apartment in which he found himself. Mikel, rolling one soft skin into a pillow for his head, laid him comfortably upon another, and as the last rose of dawn faded from the sky the old trapper watched his charge sink into a sound, though troubled, slumber. There was no daylight visible, but by the familiar light of his lantern he marked the drawn mouth and the clutching hands of his companion, and great and grave thoughts soared within him. Accustomed to such deeds of healing learnt in the course of his long and lonely life, he had already done all he could to allay the pain, and now sat looking with infinite tenderness upon the muscular frame and splendid proportions that lay so helpless before him.

'Would he were my son in truth,' thought he—  
'my grandson! Ah! there is much in blood, but there is more in spontaneous affection. I feel for *this* lad as I never yet felt for anyone.'



Mikel knelt by Laurière's side, and locked his hand between his own.

'My grandson—Magloire!' he said, and a bitter smile accompanied the reiteration of the once beloved name. 'There is no more that one. In his place I take this one.'

And moved by a curious sentiment of exaggerated kindness that belonged to his racial characteristics, though foreign to long self-imposed habits of repression, Mikel placed the antique jewel which he had carried with him so many years upon Laurière's finger. It was a pledge of his new attachment, and a proof of his confidence in the fidelity of the man whose increasing prowess and strength had once occasioned him pangs of jealousy and spasms of a feeling akin to that of a morbid hate and distrust.

When Nicolas awoke, he again gazed in mild astonishment at the strange fur-draped walls and ceiling, the absence of doors and windows, and the gleaming lantern on the fur-strewn floor; and when he felt the heavy ring upon his finger, and noted with wonder and awe its gleams of colour and its setting of massive gold, he literally relapsed once more into unconsciousness at the thought of this buried treasure of Mikel's, the existence of which he had never contemplated even in fancy.

Meantime Pacifique, triumphing in his successful ruse, had crept, half stealthily, half gleefully, along the highroad home, and made a barn and pile of hay

serve as a sleeping-place for the remainder of the night. The following morning he caught Magloire alone, who in his character of Mr. Murray Carson was adorning himself with a view to going into the village and inquiring at Delorme's for letters. Finding that his company would be tolerated at least during this expedition, Pacifique told Magloire in a few words the affair of the night before.

'But you are a noisy fellow,' said Murray Carson, with a shrug, 'and a clumsy fellow. Supposing Laurière is dead—what then? You say he fell; you heard him fall crash among the branches; you ran away without learning what happened. What if he is dead? You will have to go in the box—swear—sure, you do him no harm.'

Pacifique did not share in these apprehensions.

'He not dead; he fall twice as far, and not die. He and old Mikel and Joncas all like: take much to kill them.'

'And for why do you quarrel with Laurière at all?' continued Magloire. 'This bizness, it is between you and me and my grandfather. There need be no one else in it. Laurière, if he gets well, he will find you out, going about in a bearskin. Ah well, you are a queer fellow, for sure. And this ring you saw—come, what was it like? A gold ring?' He fixed his eyes upon the cripple's evil face. 'By G—d! if you tell me lies, I'll take you to the curé, and have you sent to prison! This ring—it was gold?'

Pacifique nodded.

'And the stone—what colour was the stone?'

'No colour at all—that is, all colours at once.'

'A diamond!' exclaimed Magloire incredulously.

'My grandfather living in this forest and carrying a diamond! How big was it? As big as this?' and Mr. Murray Carson carelessly indicated a seal ring of a vulgar red that he bore on his left little finger.

Pacifique nodded, then said:

'A little larger, and it shine much, much more.'

'Larger than this?' And Magloire caught the cripple by the arm. 'Shine! I should bet your sweet life it was bound to shine if it was larger than this. D—n it! I'm in luck, I guess, if it is a diamond, and I can only get hold of it. And what else did you see?'

'Nothing else,' said Pacifique truthfully.

'What! no furs, no skins, nothing of that kind?'

'All those,' said Pacifique cunningly, 'are in de old Manoir; de oder I see in Mikel's leetle house-cabane.'

'See here,' said Magloire impressively, 'I can wait no longer. I am clever with my tongue. Leave me to arrange with Louis and Jack and with your mother. To-night we will visit this old Manoir—to-night or never. Ah, ha! I snap my finger at you. Grandfather, Old Man of the Woods, as we used to call you, I laugh at your fears, your haughtiness, your precautions. I shall change my plan: I shall go,

Pacifique, alone, although you may wait outside, and call upon my grandfather as a gentleman. He will not dare to refuse me, and thus shall I make him show me over the place, and anything I take a fancy to I think he will not refuse me ; I have a persuader here.'

And Mr. Murray Carson drew from his pocket a neat little revolver, mounted with silver, and altogether an article quite in keeping with the dress and appearance of its owner. His white teeth were whiter than ever this morning, his plastered black hair blacker, his long sinewy frame undulating and rapid in its motion, his smile more caressing than usual, his air—*le bel air, air du gentilhomme*—more pronounced. Pacifique shivered with joy at the near prospect of revenge, and glanced from time to time at his friend, superior in tweeds, blacked boots, a cigar and ring, watch, and cuff-studs.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE CURÉ'S GARDEN.

‘For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins; they afflict the just, they take a bribe.’

THEY soon entered the village. The hour was early, and Magloire regretted that his desire to know if any mail awaited him necessitated his walking abroad at a season when nearly everyone was at work or so employed that his arrival could not be telegraphed from one end of the straggling street to the other. However, one person, walking in his front garden with his hands crossed at his back—Curé Labelle—saw Magloire as he slowly came down the village street with Pacifique following at his shining heels, wished him good-morning, and went suddenly to the gate and accosted him.

Curé Labelle was one of the short, rotund order of priests. The other class is tall, thin, ascetic. He was pink-faced, comfortable, prosperous; seemingly very sweet, amiable, gentle, with a pleasant eye and

a secular manner that put everyone at ease. But beneath this honeyed exterior, graced with actual virtue and no suspicion of cant, lay a fund of mental keenness, penetration, subtlety, and a remarkable gift of logic. He did not wear his cassock nor shave his head for nothing. Gay and simple, adroit and evenly tempered, he was the idol of the parish, and a clever man of business as well as a good speaker and charming companion. He leant over his gate and offered one hand to Magloire; in the other was a glowing bunch of yellow and white hollyhocks.

Mr. Carson returned the salutation with a more awkward air than was usual with him, and gave a half-sneer at the flowers. The priest's skilled eye read him correctly.

'You admire my garden,' he said smilingly, and opening the gate. 'Be so good as to walk inside, and you will see it better—you and your friend. How do you do, Pacifique? You will also wish to walk through my little park; see the hollyhocks, smell the vines, taste a grape or two.'

The men were irresolute for a moment, Magloire's predilections naturally unfitting him for such an encounter; but the priest was so civil, who could resist?

'I am on my way to Delorme's,' he said, 'and I wish to get there at a certain time. But since you are so good, I will walk in. I am not sure, however, if you remember me—if you know who I am.'

The priest simulated lively interest.

'Not at first, my son—not at first. But, come, walk in, walk in. This is the yellow hollyhock bush, yonder is the white, and at the back there is a red one I wish to show you. But though I knew you not at first—the air was so different, the person so changed—I asked of some in the village, and they told me, "Old Carson's grandson, the boy who ran away, has come home, and that will be the young man you mean." It is easy to know you; faith! there is no other youth like you in the valley—so tall, so straight, so much a gentleman. But walk along; proceed. Here is a summer-house I have built myself. In it you shall taste of my home-made wine. I make it myself. Well, it will be nothing for you, Magloire; still, you will perhaps do me the honour.'

The curé, still talking as he led the way and indicated various points of interest, did not fail to notice the gradual change in Mr. Carson's countenance. With an easy manner the priest went to and fro, bringing a carafe and three tumblers, and presently sat down with a guest on either hand, happy, smiling, a model host, and surely a model pastor. But he divined that Pacifique would be in the way.

'You are anxious to get to Delorme's by a certain hour,' he said frankly to his chief guest. 'Doubtless you will be expecting letters.' Carson flushed. 'Why

not, then, send our friend Pacifique for them? Then you can sit here until he returns. Come, that is a good idea. I pour you a glass of wine, my son. You drink it—good—it is not too warming, too enlivening this October morning? It goes down well? Ha ha! Now then, you, Pacifique, may go on to Delorme's, and inquire for this gentleman's letters. They will be directed to Mr. Magloire le Caron——'

'No,' interposed Carson, and gave his English patronymic.

The curé, as if gently but agreeably surprised, repeated the name carefully over to the cripple, and Pacifique had nothing to do but accept the situation thus adroitly thrust upon him and leave the summer-house.

The little garden was a mass of autumnal colouring. Flowers, crimson Virginia creeper, the purple and red of grapes, the bronze flush of ash and sumach, preparing the way for more brilliant hues, all contrasted strikingly with the graystone house and offices and the black-robed figure of Curé Labelle. Magloire contemplated the scene with pride at finding himself the honoured guest of the parish priest, and reflected how his appearance and manners must have commended him to so distinguished a person.

'There is little change, you will find, in Bourg-Marie,' began the curé, with a pleasant shrug. '*You* are now fortunate, favoured indeed to have seen



something better than the monotony of our little village. How long is it that you have been away? It is, I believe, nine years. You are rejoiced to see your grandfather and uncle, I make no doubt. Old Mikel, he is tough, he wears well. You resemble him. You are the same height, you have the same complexion, the same carriage; but, mon Dieu! how improved, how well-dressed, how much a gentleman! Ah, but it is wonderful, this travel, this education!

Magloire grew complacently satisfied that he was making the best of impressions.

'It is wonderful, as you say, but it is not everyone who shows so much change, so great an improvement. Some—they do not change at all.'

'I suppose not,' said the curé ruefully, as if he also deplored the ignorance of such as were blind to the gentle influences of Milwaukee society, summed up in bars, oyster-rooms, hotel rotundas, and the races. 'Louis and Jack, now, your companions——'

'Louis and Jack! Well, they are my companions here, but not in Milwaukee. They are good fellows, Louis and Jack; but then they are slow; they do not improve, learn new things, ideas like me.'

'I understand;' and the priest sagely nodded his head. 'Now you, Magloire, you are different; you are clever.'

Carson languidly admitted the truth of this statement.

'You are, I doubt not, a rich young fellow, pros-

perous, contented, popular. Yes, yes, it was wise of you to run away from such a place as this. Trees, stumps, frost and ice, work in the fields, or sleep in the woods—what had you to do with that? Tut, tut! it was not to be endured. And the grandfather, he did his best, perhaps; but he was so old, he did not understand a young fellow—clever, a natural speaker, witty, handsome; well, I do not blame you, my son.’ And he gravely patted Magloire’s bare head.

As for Magloire, he was delighted to find the priest a man of so much sense, sympathy and penetration. He drank off his first glass of wine, and the curé, quite deftly and hospitably, filled him a second.

‘I drink to your success, my child. What is your line of business, by the way? You would have made a fine soldier, and not a bad priest. And though soldiers are seldom needed in our modern communities, priests always are. There is always room for a clever priest, look you, one capable of interesting his people, assisting them, comforting them——’

The curé appeared to hesitate, and Magloire took the sentence up and finished it.

‘Leading them his own way, robbing them, persuading them? Well, you are right, M. le Curé; you priests have all the power in this part of the country. ’Tis as you say, of a truth.’

'Pardon me,' said the curé quickly, with a pleasant but, nevertheless, amused smile; 'I said nothing of the kind, but if you think so—well, there is some truth in what you say. And you—you do not approve, perhaps?'

'Oh, I,' said Magloire, with a return of his sneer and superior manner—'of course I cannot approve. You may have heard that I spoke in the village, at Delorme's, last Friday.'

'You spoke! You mean, you gave there an address—an oration. Yes, yes, I heard something of it. They say in the village great things of you—that you will yet be in Parliament, that you have returned to Bourg-Marie for that purpose. Then we shall be very proud of you—indeed, yes. In Parliament—that goes well; that will be an honour for old Mikel's illustrious house.'

Magloire, incapable of seeing the true sentiments of the priest, grew more communicative, and while he lost his reverence for the gown, manifested more interest in the mental attitude of one whom he had deemed a mortal enemy. Conceit so blinded him, and he was so given up to visions of success, and so haunted by spectres of failure, that he forgot the true position of this smiling, ruddy, comfortable, sensible servant of the Church.

'Why,' he said, crossing his long legs easily, and tapping with one hand on the small rustic table that held their glasses upon it, its rude carving the work

of the industrious curé, 'you are as bad as my grandfather, old Mikel of the woods, old hawk, weasel, fox. He will be always for making of me this, or that, and the other. See, now, I have no notion of going to Parliament, or staying in this accursed country any longer than I can help. Do you suppose I love it—land of forests, and frozen rivers and desolate lakes; and then the other extreme—burning summers that scorch your feet up, and coarse food—at least, in this place—barring your wine, Father Labelle, and the widow's whisky—do you suppose that I am come back to stay? I am here on business only—see the old man, of course; see all my friends, make them fine presents, see the country, tell them all about myself lest they mourn too much for me and make themselves ill, give them some of my ideas, so amuse them, interest them, and improve their condition. All that fills up my time. I go back soon. Thank you—no Parliament for me. I am no fool; I do better in Milwaukee. I intend to stay there—have a good time.'

'Still, is it not a pity?' asked the priest, as if disappointed, and gravely weighing the situation, while he kept Magloire's glass filled to the brim and occasionally sipped from his own; 'is it not a mistake not to embrace such an opportunity, my son, of together making a name for yourself and for your native land? I quite agree with you that here the field is very small. The habitant is

slow. Generations of tedious winters, of enervating summers, of forced idleness, of natural limitations, have made him slow. Give us credit—we in the Church—for doing all we can. We teach, we scold, we impart, we work, we blame, we praise, we chastise, we implore from morning till night, from week to week, from year to year, but slow he is, this habitant, and slow he must remain. You, now, might be of so much use to our country, to your Church.'

The priest calmly regarded Magloire as he spoke, taking it as a matter of course that his visitor was in harmony with his opinions, and a devoted and faithful follower of the Roman Church. Mr. Murray Carson, on the other hand, somewhat lost his accustomed self-command. He still retained enough original fear for the personal authority invested in the parish priest to wish to be cautious, while old habit impelled him to confess all and demand forgiveness.

'Well,' he stammered, but slowly recovering his wonted air of *sang froid*, 'I don't think that would suit me. Money is a very great thing—no one is fonder of money than I would be if I had much. You are wrong there to think me rich; I am not, indeed, but I do not care for a name. No; I would rather live in Milwaukee, and trade in horses and go to the theatre, than have a seat in your Parliament—be the Premier, even. And about the Church,

what would you say if I told you I did not even care very much about that? I don't know how it is, out there one goes to church'—and Magloire's pallid face flushed a deep crimson, and he evaded the priest's eye—'one goes to church, listens to the music, but that is about all there is of it—at least, with me. Yes,' suddenly defiant, 'and with many others as well.'

To his surprise and relief, the priest simply lifted his glass to his lips and drank its contents off.

'Certainly, my son, certainly; I understand all that. That is a phase, a feature, an episode with which I am well acquainted. Yours is a mind worthy of being considered, of being waited on; it must not be driven, forced, battered in with the ram of dogma. Terrorism, despotism, tyranny, are not for you. You can walk alone, you can guide yourself, you need no priest over you. I was nearly going to say you needed no God either; for see, you are different from these ignorant sons of the forge, the shanty, the raft, the fields, the forests. These—what would they be without the Church and without the priest?'

'What indeed!' stammered Magloire, bewildered by the easy manner and disposal of the question.

'Remember that, if you please, my child,' continued Father Labelle. 'For such as you, a pleasant condition of doubt very likely suffices. There have been great minds, rare intelligences,

powerful thinkers whom the Church has, with all her charm and breadth, been unable to retain inside her fold. You are no doubt one of these. No one seeks to inconvenience you. We only ask that you refrain from associating your valuable thought and conclusions too openly and vulgarly with these ignorant ones around you. They would not, in the first place, comprehend you; and in the second, they could never appreciate you. You must see that yourself.'

Carson grew easy again under this generous patronage, and quaffed his wine leisurely, like a man of the world.

'We think much alike. There are not many priests, sure, like you, Father Labelle.'

'Why not? You left Bourg-Marie too soon, too young, to be able to tell. You cannot have met many priests. If you had, you would understand them better, and measure their influence more at its proper worth. Be not hasty in forming conclusions. Weigh your thoughts carefully, and spread them only before the appreciative and the wise. I should grieve to hear of your excellent gifts wasted. The subject of your address the other night, for example—I have not heard it.'

Magloire grew perhaps a shade less confident.

'Well, there was no special subject,' he said hastily. 'I am interested in my countrymen; I wish to help to make them wiser, more comfortable,

better off. I hear a great many new things out in those States. I bring them back with me, I tell them to the village and to the valley. I do not do this for money, you understand.'

'Certainly not,' said the priest, 'nor yet for fame. I wonder, then, why you do do it. But have some more wine. Yes, yes, my son, it will not harm, will not mount to the brain. 'Tis mere vinegar, made from some of this year's grapes. It hath not had time to grow dangerous. What, then, are some of these ideas? Equality will be one, doubtless. It is a grand word, equality, and means in these days much it never meant before. To be actual equals men have long endeavoured. In rank, in possessions, in health and wealth, in religion—— Ah, let me give you a little more wine, or vinegar, call it which you will. I was saying——'

'That we had long endeavoured to prove all men naturally equal,' said Magloire. 'And that would be a fine thing. See now. You're a priest, but a sensible one. Think of the money you have, my grandfather has, the Church has, locked away in coffers! Think what might be done with that towards helping the poor, the wretched, the ignorant, building schools, educating the children! Well, it is a funny thing that these people do not see for themselves how unjust it is, this locking up of their hard-earned money in the coffers of Mother Church! Bah! the habitant is more than slow. He is a fool.'



'Doucement, mon fils, mais doucement,' returned the priest, with his pleasant smile not a whit relaxed. 'But you will prove an enemy to the Church if you sow these truths among the people. You see, I hint that they are truths—partial, approximate, half-truths only. *Ma foi!* but you are a clever lad. You have not lived in the great world nine years for nothing. Go on. Talk to me of this again.'

And Carson, continually sipping the curé's home-made wine, drank in the simulated praise with greedy inordinate vanity.

'Why, the whole thing,' said he, leaning over confidentially to the priest, just drunk enough not to be careful of what he said, 'the whole thing is a sham, a hoax, a fabrication.'

He paused dramatically. The priest, as if bewildered, repeated his phrase.

'The whole thing?' said he.

'Yes, the Church. Its fêtes, processions, triumphs, and jubilees; its pilgrimages, shrines, cures, and miraculous interventions; its tithes, masses, prayers, and alms; its altars, crucifixes, pictures, and statues; its saints and saints' days, purgatory, and paradise; its rosaries, bells, cassocks, and incense. The whole thing, I tell you, is sham, fabrication, rubbish. I don't believe any longer in it. D—n! Father Labelle, how can anyone believe in it? What's the good of it?—that's what I want to know! Tell me the good of it.'

The priest sadly shook his head. It cost him an effort not to rise and arrest the progress of the blasphemer, but he was a finished actor, and maintained a sad composure.

'You can't tell me,' rejoined Carson, 'I knew you couldn't. And yet you call yourself a priest. And the Confessional and the Sacrament, what can you make of these? They are the worst of all. Well, some day the people will wake up. They will not sleep always. There will be a great war, a revolution. The people will come forth from a land of darkness and follow a new light.'

This was a quotation from the lecture, being an application of a well-known Bible verse. The priest affected despair.

'It will come,' said Carson. 'Not very long, either, before it comes.'

'And you will help, doubtless, to bring it quickly. You would fain be the herald of a fair dawn. Worthy usher of a worthy régime. My son, you are an ornament wasted, an instrument neglected, unless, indeed, it fall out as you say, and our religion be dethroned. But within the Church itself, what a head, what a power, what gifts! Ah! had you stayed in Bourg-Marie you should have been a priest. I might have had the honour of fitting you for your post. Alas! it is my misfortune and the Church's loss. You do not tell one, however, my child, what it is you do all the days in this city where you live. You have, I

expect, taken up some profession, perhaps a learned one. Good Heaven ! I cannot bear to think of such as you in trade.'

Magloire was positively electrified with joy, gratitude and wine. Wine, after all, is the drink for Frenchmen, for Italians, Corsicans, Spaniards. He took little of it in Milwaukee, for it was scarce and high, and lager was infectious, cheap, a good quencher.

'This wine,' cried he, 'is no vinegar. Father Labelle, you ought to know your own wares better. Speaking of wares, you have guessed aright. I am not in trade. I am—many things. One does not content me.'

'Ah, the clever lad ! He is a potential Richelieu—a possible Machiavelli ! A credit to his village.'

'Yes, I should be tired of a pen beside my ear always, or a whip in my hand, or a tray carried—so—in my left hand aloft. I deal largely in horses. I have an office. I am much in demand ; have many friends, all Americans. Well, I suppose I may say I am a well-known young fellow, have plenty friends, go to the theatre three or four times a week, dress as you see.'

With a gesture sublime in its fatuous self-conceit Magloire opened his coat, uncrossed his legs, and indicated his matchless suit of tweed and other appendages. The curé made every demonstration of awe and delight.

'That I have only this wine to offer you, Magloire! 'Tis a shame. But if you will do me the honour a second time to enter my garden, you shall taste of something better, stronger; a sip of liqueur, home-made, too—everything is home-made in my modest house—but clear and amber and honeyed fire. The celebrated *elixir doré*, *eau dorée*, gilded water, made with goldbeaters' leaf in it and oils of cinnamon and roses. Ah ha! that is something to taste—to take the bad humours away: the frost in winter, the languor in summer. And this business of yours, it pays well; you are prospering, without doubt, and, like all your frugal countrymen, endeavouring to put something by? Be sure you do that.'

'My grandfather, he will have done that for me,' replied Magloire. 'Say, Father Labelle, how much money has he hid away in the old Manoir?'

The curé laughed.

'You are not so clever, after all. Mikel has very little money. It is possible he has a few skins—bearskins, sealskins—but nothing remarkable. You should go to see him.'

'I have been—once, but I shall go again. I wish to tell him that I do not care for his ideas, his opinions. I am no longer Magloire le Caron, but an American citizen, a gentleman, man of business. I am no dreamer.'

'And Mikel is?' said the priest. 'I see, you do not sympathize. Now, with me you are perfectly

at ease, eh? Not afraid to tell me anything? Well, now, here is an important question: Are you married? Who will these letters be from?'

'Letters?' repeated Magloire, in a confused way.

'These letters you sent Pacifique for. Ah ha! you had forgotten. Say, then, perhaps you had better take no more wine. Do you generally drink so much?'

There was a fine show of reluctant surprise in the curé's voice as he removed the empty bottle that completely shook Magloire's confidence in himself. He buttoned his coat with a shaking hand, and endeavoured to be as sober as possible.

'That's the second time since I've been here,' he said, in English, 'that I have taken one glass too long—too much. D——n! Father Labelle, but I am sorry. Wait a moment. My head will be quite clear immediately.'

'As long as you like, my son,' replied the curé. 'I see Pacifique approach, however. Pull yourself up; that is the way. Never let your inferior see your weakness. There is, then, no Madame Carson?'

Magloire's dark face suddenly grew serious but darker, darker, till it was condensed into one black frown of fear.

'No,' he whispered; 'but there is a lady of whom I am very fond, and she—she will go nowhere without me. I have said to myself often, "Is there any reason why I should not love her?" and every time I tell myself no. But yet I do not speak to her

nor tell her. I am not afraid. I do not, like you, believe in punishment, or in a God, or in purgatory. Therefore, why should I fear ?

‘Why, indeed ?’ The curé was profoundly interested. ‘She is perhaps too young. Take courage, *mon fils*. Woman was made for man. She is beautiful, I doubt not. Frenchmen were ever great judges of women.’

‘After all,’ said Magloire, suddenly calm and confident, ‘there is no great difficulty. There is one place, I am told, where one can get a divorce in a very little while—in an hour, they tell me. I have thought that will be what we must do. And again I have thought—well, it is not necessary.’

How the curé enjoyed the joke ! Ah, the clever, funny, delightful, surprising, charming joke !

‘A divorce !’ he cried, actually digging his fat fingers into his visitor’s distinguished side. ‘And I said, Take courage, *mon fils* ! Take courage ! Ha, ha ! The good joke ! The clever lad ! A divorce already, and he not twenty-four ! Bravo, *mon enfant* ! Tiens, c’est pour la divorce !’

And the good man drew a second bottle of home-made wine from a vine-trellised recess in the summer-house (pavilion), and insisted on a final glass being quaffed in honour of the occasion, while another was poured for Pacifique, who presently arrived, looking stealthily from under furry and lowering brows at *the priest*.

Carson rose up steadily enough and took his mail : one letter from Rylands, another from the headquarters of the Order, bearing a Chicago postmark. He dared not break the seal of either before the curé. The latter had divined enough.

' Well, we part, my son. I invite you whenever you are passing. Make a good long visit. I will myself attend your second meeting. I may not sympathize with all you say, that is impossible. But I will not attempt to refute one so gifted, so learned. Farewell, thou, and farewell, Pacifique. Thou dost not come to Mass often enough, thou idle one. I must speak to your mother about it.'

Pacifique trembled. He was still, in spite of his newly-acquired opinions, very much in awe of the priest. The latter looked gaily but yet searchingly from the cripple to Magloire. There was a moment's silence. Finally it was the priest who broke it.

' *Tiens !* but you two are in a hurry. My children, go ! You behold in me a man as well as a priest. Confide in me. Am I not professionally your confidante, the ear, the eye, the mind for all the village—indeed, all the valley ? I bid you go, but see that you return.'

He shook hands warmly with Magloire. He slapped Pacifique on the shoulder. He forced a glass of wine upon the latter. Together they all three walked to the garden gate. Arrived there, the priest presented each with a rich handful of flowers.

Magloire had hollyhocks and zinnias, Pacifique petunias. His manner was soothing, contented, cheerful. Carson, bewildered, but half sober, confused and constrained to politeness, walked off as in a dream. Pacifique, crushing and flattening the stems of his flowers to green pulp in his hand, stole moodily along. In the presence of the priest he could not be natural, comfortable, blasphemous, revolting, base. Yet, when the check upon his nature was removed, he refrained from speaking to Magloire, who began reading his letters as soon as the road was reached.



## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE CURÉ HAS A DREAM.

‘ We see not our signs ; there is no more any prophet.’

THE priest went back to his summer-house and apostrophized his visitor. His house, though on the highroad to the village and only a few yards away from that main artery of life for the valley of the Yamachiche, gave at the back upon the more beautiful and sweeping crescents of green tinged with October bronze that formed the valley itself. The pavilion, draped in grape-vines, faced this delightful prospect. With all the fervour of his race and all the yearning of a strong and noble nature, he threw his arms widely upon the air and almost wept as he regarded the peaceful landscape.

‘ Mother of God !’ he cried, ‘ what an iniquity, what a shame, what eternal pity, that all the work of years, the prayers of a constant and much-enduring manhood, should be useless, ineffectual, in face of this blasphemous conceit, this maudlin machination,

this phrasemongering—it is no more! This coward—for he is a coward as well as other things—this coward has no real education, no real polish, no real impulses, beyond those of his own advancement and comfort and safety. It is infamous that he must return here to the innocent fields in which my people work uncomplainingly, to the majestic forests clothed in matchless hues, to the bright, broad river of his youth, bearing upon its bosom the mighty rafts that my people have made for workshop, hearth, and fane, to all the simple, virtuous plan of our primitive village life! It is monstrous that our nationality, so unaccountably precious to us, should be as nothing to him, that our very language is partly foreign and partly hateful, that the Church itself, even, is not sacred, but perhaps misunderstood and maltreated worse than all!

He stopped, and looked even more wistfully than before upon all the beauty of the scene. The river ran in sparkling lacy froth of beaten silver to the left, where a series of small rapids kept up a perpetual seething and bubbling and foaming over, and in smooth oily circles of purest gold to the right, where it disappeared in the strips of pine forest, that showed straight and serried ranks of blackness against the pervading amber of the maples beyond. From the pine strips floated pearly spirals of smoke, and the sound of a minor chanson drew gradually nearer. The curé watched a long raft with two huts upon it

slowly emerge from the dark edges of the pine-fringed banks and gleam yellow in the sunshine. A dozen men in blue and brown shirts were lying about, talking, fiddling, working, singing. How they enjoyed the air, thinking how soon the long winter would be upon them! The curé did not recognise them, but he could almost tell without looking who they were. He knew to whom the raft belonged, where it was going, what would become of it.

Across the river, just where the fleecy silver flashed into ardent gold, reposed the snug Norman farm of Blaise Aubert—man, wife, sixteen children, grandmother, aunt, a man, and a maid. The old grandmother was now at work among the vegetables in the front garden, pipe in mouth, old straw hat over a tightly-drawn cap. With her were six small children and a dog. The curé knew all their names, ages, faults, and habits; had baptized them all, including the dog, for when one day he had encountered a toddler of five leading the great black beast to the river to swim, he had, to please the child, to take the good-natured animal by the paws and throw him in, and gaily pronounce him Dominique after himself, Père Dominique Labelle, guide, counsellor, and friend for all the valley of the Yamachiche.

These sights, so domestic, so gentle, so familiar, so dear, were too much for the offended priest. His mood changed.

‘I am angry. A righteous anger inflames me.

Mais c'est un enfant terrible—that one, that Magloire, with his detestable English name, and his vulgar scents, oils, and his declaration of independence! He would like to doom us, to call us a doomed race; he would wish to see our language supplanted, our emotions suppressed, our traditions ridiculed, our true sentiments ignored! It is hardly possible to credit that he is indeed the grandson of so true an aristocrat, so fine a gentleman at heart, as old Le Caron! And his lack of moral character—how despicable a position, to believe neither in God nor in hell, and yet for ever to be afraid of some Being akin to the first and some state similar to the second! Ah, Magloire!' exclaimed the good man, his angry mood again leaving him, melted almost to tears, 'how much sorrow, humility, and mischief you may already have created, and how much more of the peace, innocence, and comfort of Bourg-Marie is endangered in the future, by your unlucky sojourn here!'

Later in the day, the curé, having finished his simple dinner, cooked by himself, and accompanied by a small glass of that excellent wine, established himself in the green pavilion to take all the sunshine he could, and folding his arms on the little carved table, gradually dropped asleep. And while he slept he had a curious dream or vision. Down from the hazy golden heaven floated a celestial shape that stopped not, stayed not in the amber airs until it

rested over the grim gray towers of the parish church. The priest, gifted with the power in his sleeping hours of piercing the thickest walls, scaling the giddiest heights, and opening the most impregnable doors, glided down on a shaft of streaming light to the door of the sacristy, and passed through to the altar. There he found the vision pendant in mid-air directly over the images, pictures, and scarlet roses. Mystic sounds, pungent and aromatic odours, trailing films of cloud, all surrounded him. He passed swiftly along by the railing, entered the holy enclosure, and fell upon his knees.

## CHAPTER XV.

## THE SLAVES OF THE RING.

‘ With the point of a diamond—it is graven upon the table of their heart.’

LAURIÈRE, an irritable prisoner, confined against his will in that strange room, draped and carpeted with fur, had abundant leisure to think of many things. Chief of these was perhaps his instinctive distrust of the cripple, Pacifique Péron, and his companion Magloire. Thrust it away as he would, it came continually back, that lingering, loitering, abiding fear of men so impious, so unregenerate, blind, and unreasoning. And recalling so much of Magloire’s easy impertinence—at first actually precious and admirable in itself—and Pacifique’s brazen defiance of laws both natural and enforced, his contempt for ritual, and his reckless audacity of purpose, he recalled also that singular encounter in the shades of Bourg-Marie till it became perfectly clear to him that the thing of fur and

gliding yet misshapen presence had been Pacifique himself and none other. But what he could not fathom was the motive which had induced the cripple to pry upon the well-known seclusion in which Mikel lived; and whatever this impelling motive had been, it was clear that now another and stronger one existed. Avarice looked forth from the sunken eyes of the cripple if it ever looked forth at all, thought Laurière. The vision of the ring would doubtless recur again and again, and should he not rob, he must at least burn with curiosity and wonder, sure to be imparted to Magloire. Thus Laurière reasoned, lying prone on those luxurious skins, with no knowledge of time or the mutation of the brilliant October day. From morn to noon he lay, from noon to amber eve, Mikel thrice entering with food and many solicitous offers for his comfort. Laurière showed his bewilderment in his melancholy and questioning gaze, and Le Caron told him as much of his story as he had ever told to his only confidant, the parish priest.

And Nicolas heard with increasing wonder. He viewed with astonishment the treasures of fur that lay under, over, around him. He watched the spectral light of the lantern illuminating the red eyes of the stuffed fox in the corner, the soft richness of the many hued skins, the prismatic beauties of the antique ring on his finger. A heat that was electrical, potent, all-encircling, wound him from head

to foot. He lay at times almost without breathing, so marvellous was the spell cast over him in this lonely chamber of the north. His was a noble body, though ignorant of all the arts that luxury devises for the improvement and sweet maintenance of the ignoble flesh. And as he lay there in the body, his soul took higher flights than it had ever taken before, and his mind expanded from a crumpled immature bud of starved promise to a perfect flower of consciousness. He felt his soul within him. He could close his eyes, abstracting himself from the curious chamber, from the forest which surrounded it, from everyday thought and from everyday routine, and behold the body was no more, and upon the wings of the soul the mind floated away.

In this rare hour his faith was much to him, but it came a great deal changed. It was hardly the same faith, for all ritual being absent and the atmosphere empty of impelling prejudices, the Church, with its mystic yet actual odours, bells, roses, and images, the calm face of Mary, the terrors of the damned, the mental picture of the Pope, the horror of a personal devil, all faded away and left but one enthralling vision: the crucifix and wasted figure, the sunken head, the thorn-bound brow, the Great, Living, Eternal Sacrifice! And as he fastened the eyes of his soul upon that figure, he wished that he too might emulate, repeat, some such sacrifice. The dignity of the deed, the tenderness of it,




the pathos of it, smote all at once upon his heart with new force and passion, and a dim yet not uncertain pulsation of gratitude and hope filled his heaving breast.

But while the things spiritual were thus progressing in the heart and brain, Laurière did not cease to be the calm, practical, frugal trapper, who could not be expected to lie comfortably and at rest so far from his own dwelling, which he had not seen for over twenty-four hours. When Mikel—who waited upon his wants as upon those of a dear and precious child—appeared about seven o'clock in the evening, he readily agreed to Laurière's wish that some measures should be taken towards securing the latter's house, left the night before presumably for half an hour's visit, unlocked, unbolted, and with a couple of windows open. Le Caron acceded to a request that he should walk over and do all in his power to make the dwelling fast, and accordingly left the Manoir when he had seen Laurière fed and made as comfortable as possible. The sprain was in no way abating, but the dogged intrepidity of the sufferer resulted in a stoicism which old Mikel himself envied and admired. To speak was a source of exquisite pain, but he gave Mikel his directions in an even voice that betrayed no suffering.

Thus, when Mikel carefully locked the door behind him, Nicolas Laurière was left alone in the first fur-draped chamber, lighted only by the sickly yellow

glare of the lantern, while on every side the gathering glooms that hung over Bourg-Marie grew denser and denser as night approached. He slept — not at first, but after a long hour of dreamy reflection, in which was uppermost a great tenderness and solicitude for Mikel, who had hung over him, pressed his lips to his brow, called him his son, confided in him, hoped in him, trusted in him. He slept now at eight o'clock, by which time it was quite dark outside. At nine he was still sleeping. At ten Mikel returned, having found Laurière's little house all in order, and threading his accustomed way from the back of his own clearing up to the triangular close and the venerable Manoir, looked in, and finding his guest quietly sleeping, returned to his dwelling, and being fatigued, went to bed, and was instantly asleep himself. Meanwhile the darkness lifted a little, and showed two figures that stealthily awaited their time in the wood opposite Mikel's house.

The night wore on. A late moon, pearly and pale, soared high in the midnight sky. Laurière, who had slept for four hours, dreamed as it neared twelve o'clock that all the skins that lay on the floor and hid the walls grew suddenly endowed with life, form, bulk, and breath. They left the walls, they rose from off the floor, they mustered thick and close, panting, clawing, howling, growling; their bristling hides, their rolling eyes, their protruding tongues, their gleaming teeth, all proclaiming a miraculous



return to life. Nicolas awoke with a spasmodic gasp and jerk of his entire body that wrenched his heart with pitiful pain. He sat up, relieved, at least, to find that the creatures of his dream had indeed vanished with the celerity of midnight spectres. Exhausted, he was about to carefully lie down again, when he heard sounds which probably would have escaped the ear of anyone whose senses were less acute—sounds in the dark forest to the north of the Manoir. Preternaturally on the alert, both for Mikel's sake and his own, he listened for full half an hour, during which the sounds stopped, began again, stopped, ever drawing a little nearer, and, therefore, becoming a little clearer. Laurière saw in a flash the possibilities that awaited him. Mikel would return no more till morning. He could only make a guess at the time, but what did the time matter to him either way? If it were near morning, Mikel might be awake, stirring, on his way to the Manoir in danger. If it were midnight, the core of the twenty-four, it was the worse for himself. Help? There was no help; he would have to submit, to suffer indignity, assault, perhaps. Draped and curtained as those thick walls were, the sound took long to penetrate, and still he sat, unable to move more than his head and arms, but listening, watching intently, unerringly. Then it was that strange thoughts entered into his brain of the Manoir itself—its crumbling walls, its carven terraces, its

rude images, its papered windows, its gloomy passages, haunted very likely by the restless, chivalric, and martial spirits of the past century, of whom Mikel had been telling him that afternoon. If the sound came as a tap, it was, he fancied, a lady's dainty shoe. If it came as a click, it was, he deemed, the lid of some curious box opened and shut by more delicate fingers than his own or old Mikel's. If it resembled a clank, it was the sword or spur of some gallant officer. And it came like all three of these, accompanied by strange scratchings and gratings.

Laurière, bound to the floor, almost cursed aloud at the thick hangings that shut out the true character and location of these unusual and conflicting sounds, while, between the remembrance of all old Mikel had told him, in hushed and thrilling tones, of the grandeur of his house and the distinction of the line, and his own conviction of the rascality of Pacifique, he was in a state of mental confusion and doubt torturing enough at any time, but now, when added to bodily pain, almost unbearable. The sounds had now stopped getting nearer, and Laurière, though he exerted himself to the utmost, could not decide whether they came from inside or outside. With a sudden resolution, he dragged himself along about a couple of feet till he reached the lantern and extinguished it. Then he listened again, being now somewhat nearer where he fancied the door of the

chamber must be behind its covering of fur. He listened and caught the complication of sounds distinctly. They were on the outside, and Laurière gave a gasp of relief. Of the living or the dead, he, like most men, much preferred encountering the former. He lay, enduring sickening pain, but with every trained sense on the alert. Presently the sounds stopped. Voices, muffled, unrecognizable, but still voices, made themselves faintly heard through the walls and fur. Then the sounds recommenced with more energy than before. There was a slight crash, a shiver seemed to run along the floor, and Laurière knew that an attempt had been made on the entrance door. Another few minutes and he would be discovered. There was evidently sudden and increased caution on the part of those who had entered, for they spoke no more and trod carefully, so that a full minute might have elapsed between the reluctant footfalls. Another moment, and they were trying a door opposite to the one by which Mikel had brought Laurière into the fur-draped chamber. It yielded, and for a little while all was silent. They were doubtless searching for what was not there, this apartment being a mere empty shell, without any nut of riches for the unregenerate hand and the selfish heart to rifle and carry away. Then they returned, those careful footsteps, and began at Laurière's door. He thought now, for one instant of madness, that he must scream,

shriek aloud in the darkness for Mikel, someone, anyone, to help him fight this intruder, assert his courage, maintain his prowess; but the very name of Mikel rising to his lips brought sense and craft with it. He looked at those curtains of fur. Ten minutes ago he had cursed them, now he gladly welcomed them, seeing one of their uses, which was to drag himself still further along the floor—further, further still, till he reached the edge of the wall, and here to creep behind that hanging screen of fur, a gigantic bear-skin, black and glossy as jet, and so ensconce himself, half lying, half crouching, between the skins that covered the floor and those which depended from the side of the wall. Inch by inch, painfully, breathlessly, he gained this hiding-place and found, to his joy, that he had chosen a corner where a window-recess afforded him room to lie at length. With a groan he cast himself into this dark niche just as the door was opened and a bright light flashed into the room. A smothered ejaculation of wonder and delight, uttered in English, did not escape his ears, although he was almost fainting.

'Tis he—Magloire! 'Tis thus he requites, he would thank his grandfather. And with him who? If I might see! I think it must be Pacifique. I hear the heavy, uneven tread—the tread I mistook for a bear!

The men advanced into the room almost dumb with astonishment. Carson knew he had no time to lose.

‘Hold the light here, you fool!’ he said under his breath to the cripple. ‘Are you afraid? There’s riches here to give a dead man courage. Look aloft, and below, and all around!’

Pacifique seemed much impressed, for he uttered no sound. His mind was full of the ring. Furs did not appeal to him commercially.

‘But how to carry them away,’ said Carson, ‘I do not know, I cannot tell. And the old fox—old wolf—but he thought he had put me on the wrong track. And I—I—with my friends in the Government!’

‘You laugh,’ said Pacifique, with a shudder. ‘I don’t laugh. This black room—I don’t like it. I tink perhaps Mikel behind that curtain.’

Magloire half started at the idea. They were certainly not impenetrable, those rich hangings, and might easily conceal a whole band of trappers. But his courage, what it was worth, did not easily forsake him. He had one answer ever ready for the unfortunate Pacifique.

‘You’re a fool!’ he said briefly. ‘Get on with that lantern. Where’s this ring you talked about? If it’s in Mikel’s pocket still—well, it’s got to come out and go into mine. Do you see any boxes, bags—any signs of a window or a door?’

Laurière slid Mikel’s ring inside his pocket, and awaited the result of an examination of the hangings. Fortunately, as it proved for him, his retreat was

sufficiently near the door by which Carson had entered to prevent the latter from discovering him. Magloire went around the room, feeling, poking, lifting where he could, and sometimes tearing with a feverish hand at the skins where they were nailed to the wall ; but when he was within an inch of Laurière he let the hangings fall, under the supposition that the door occupied more space than it actually did. This oversight occurred through his nervous anxiety to clutch something portable and valuable, and from inability to make a thorough search while devoured with curiosity and excitement. Laurière crossed himself fervently, and told himself that his God was with him.

From the walls Mr. Murray Carson proceeded to examine the coverings of the floor, and here he was equally unsuccessful. A second oversight ensued when he stumbled against the lantern, for, only having been extinguished a few moments, it was still warm to the touch, and a moment's inspection might have resulted in the speedy discovery of Nicolas Laurière. But a lantern was only a lantern to the excited intelligence of Magloire, intent upon unearthing bags and chests of money, trinkets, and plate, so that he knocked it aside as an article of no importance or value, supposing it to have been left behind by Mikel at his last visit.

Laurière, unable to see, followed the search with unflagging interest, bewailing his impotence and



fearing that at any moment old Le Caron would enter, aroused by the noise. To give an alarm he dared not, nor was he able to move again, so exhaustive had been his efforts to hide himself. After rigorous and rapid searching, he knew by the exclamations that reached him that Carson had found the other door leading to the second richly-draped and furnished chamber. Of this still more unique and costly salon Laurière had no knowledge. How, then, could he pretend to understand the covetous delight with which Carson viewed the superb table-equipage of silver, the delicate china, and the spotless damask!

Pacifique had entered first, and spying the goodly sight, stood with the lantern low, his coarse countenance transfigured with joy.

'Money!' he cried, 'money for you, Magloire, and for me. I will go back with you. I will sing, make a fortune. What will you give me for my own out of this, when we get it safely away from here, for showing you the way, eh, Magloire?'

Carson let his eyes wander for an instant only from the silver. They rested upon the evil face of the cripple, distorted and yellow in the light of the lantern he held.

'I will give you that ring,' said he, 'when I find it. Say, you, do you see these curtained windows? Who is to tell from the outside when Mikel is here? No light can be seen through such thick skins, with

the windows—see here—all plastered over with paper as well.'

He lowered his voice to a whisper, and Laurière heard no more.

'Are you sure you saw him enter his house, put out his light, and then hear him carefully lock up? He did not go out again?'

'I was at the back-door,' answered the cripple. They had now reverted to French, and still spoke in subdued tones. 'I must have seen him leave, and there was no one, Magloire, go out after I watched.'

'And I was at the front,' muttered Carson. 'He did not leave by that way. If he had, I would have whipped the ring out of his pocket, perhaps, being satisfied with it, ran off, and so missed seeing this sight; so I'm in luck, after all. Do you hear anything?'

The silence was warm, brooding, intense.

'Nothing,' said Pacifique.

Carson drew a long breath.

'He is safe in bed asleep, dreaming of his grandson, of the old Manoir restored, renovated, with me as its master. Come, wait upon me; pass me these dishes. I shall sit down, make myself at home, being the rightful heir to all this tinsel. Tinsel——'

A thought struck him. It might not be genuine, each massive plate, each chased cup, each heavy fork, each elegant spoon, and quickly he scanned

them as Pacifique brought them one after the other to his side. He was no judge, yet the monogram and crest, and the singular weight, richness, and mellow tint, all proclaimed them genuine. He sank into the oaken chair, the tall carved top of which loomed high above his head.

At last Mikel's guest had arrived. For more than thirty years had that table been set, laid for a company of twenty that never appeared.

Carson, intoxicated with success, called for wine. He wished to be intoxicated with drink as well. He stretched his long legs under the table, he revelled in anticipations of the sport which was to follow the seizure of so much wealth. He wished to know all about furs that he might begin to calculate his profits; this was while he thought of carrying away the skins. Then he greedily piled the chased and massive plates in front of him.

'These will do,' he said, 'better than furs. Why, one plate like this—look at it well, Pacifique—is worth all these skins put together! But I shall be a rich man, work no more, snap my finger at Rylands, and dress Kitty like a queen!'

The cripple did not share in these rhapsodies. He was preoccupied, thinking of the ring. He had not forgotten Magloire's excitement on hearing his description of it, nor his later promise to make that his share of the booty.

'You do not attend, Pacifique; you are wandering.

Listen to me. This old rat-hole of a manor-house, farmhouse, barn, or barracks was known to you long, you say yourself—always, all your life, you knew of this Manoir. Now, I—I do not remember it. I understand now why Mikel kept me ignorant of it. Never would he let me go through Bourg-Marie from the back of his house, but always from the front. Laurière—he was my companion—he does not, as I think, know of this place either. See how well, how cleverly the secret has been kept. Well, then, you—you alone perhaps in all the countryside, find out this crumbling ruin, and watch old Mikel go in and out of it. Long before I returned you knew this, you might have found out these treasures, skins, rings, jewels, plate, without my assistance, but you did not. Bah! you were, I tell you, a fool, an ignorant, dull lout of a habitant, smirking to crosses or bowing in the dust to priests. But it does amaze me! However, you told me of the Manoir, and then I put my wits to work and so made this discovery. You see? It was my superior intelligence that did this for myself, for both of us. I am not going to say I shall give you nothing.'

And Mr. Murray Carson, with that ineffable air that distinguished him, turned from the lowering evil brows of his associate in the chase after riches to renewed inspection of the plate, which he began to feel certain was anything but clinquant, mere *modern alloy* or counterfeit.

'You promised me the ring,' said Pacifique sullenly. Carson, whose excitation was fast going down, gave him a pleasant but sneering smile.

'And I will give it you, my friend, when I get it. You cannot expect me to rob my grandfather in person. If he were here, I should do my best to oblige you. Hold there, you, Pacifique, enough of those sullen looks! *Sacré-é!* your frown is deep as the ruts in yonder road. Clear your brow, I tell you, and produce that sack you have to put some of these things in. It is time.'

Pacifique clenched his hands behind him, and did not move an inch.

'I will do nothing more for you,' he said between his teeth, 'unless you get that ring for me to-night, or let me get it for myself. It is worth more than all this room, I know by the look of it it is. And you will wait till I am away with this sack full of rubbish, and then you will take it from Mikel as he sleeps and fool me.'

Carson had to do with animal pertinacity of thought, reason being less powerful than instinct in this brute nature, destitute of high intelligence. He had a veneer of tact when sober, and exerted it now.

'The ring is nothing to me,' he said, with a gentle shrug. 'If you find it, make it yours. I will not say a word even if you—have to send the old man sooner than he expects to that purgatory you all

believe in down here. Oh, I forgot, you're converted. I converted you. But I—I stop at murder usually myself. You may please yourself.'

The directness of this speech virtually disarmed the cripple for a moment. Laurière, straining ears and energies, caught the last sentence, and dragged himself out from behind the suffocating fringe of fur that he might hear more.

'You don't believe in either a God or a devil,' said Pacifique. 'Why, then, are you afraid? He is strong for his age, able, quick, cunning; but, then, once on his back in the dark, all the rest is easy. Why, then, do you fear to—to—kill him?'

'Because it is not convenient. It is an action disapproved of by society. It is awkward always to kill anybody, even in Texas. I prefer not to. About the ring, get it if you can, and keep it, I will not interfere. I have all I want here;' and Carson indicated the rich appointments of the table.

Pacifique appeared to consider, then to give in. He silently approached with the sack. Laurière could only partially gather what was going on, but as he lay there in extreme torture of mind and body, he resolved—making the sign of the cross again, and even more fervently than before—that he must intervene in some way between old Mikel and the assassinating hand of Pacifique. His blood boiled, and then ran cold, to think of the words of Magloire, who could thus endure to hear the subject broached.

Stop at murder—he—Magloire le Caron? Well did Nicolas Laurière know that this was only half true. Disappointed in his researches or plundered of his gains, and the seed of murder, which was as surely in his black heart as it was in the cripple's, would burst forth in hateful and monstrous form—a blighted, blasted growth that would seek midnight spells and sable shadows to force it into life rather than the pale gray of the luminous dawn or the healthy glow of the broad daylight. The knowledge that he held the ring in his pocket caused Laurière to think out a plan of action which, if it failed as regards himself, might at least serve to protect Mikel. He listened again, and could gather that Carson had found another door behind the arras of fur in the inner room. Now the voices were altogether indistinct. He lay quietly awaiting their return. All was silent for four or five minutes. Though Laurière did not know, the pearly moon above him no longer shone pallidly on the vast unfathomable depths of Bourg-Marie, and throughout those bark-strewn, tassel-carpeted aisles a strong wind began to blow. The dust of dead trees began to rise and fume and whirl in eddying clouds through columns of shivering trunks. No animal dared to venture abroad, no bird but lay, when its frightened fluttering was over, safe at the bottom of its nest.

The dawn was three hours distant, and before it

could appear there was to come a storm, fearful out on the plateau overhanging the river, terrible on that river itself, but worse than all in the region of the three great forests. The wind grew and grew. Each instant it increased in chromatic fury, in witch-like yells, in power, in volume. The tops of the tallest trees were splintered like pieces of deal. The storm was one of wind alone, not a single drop of rain falling, no violent wire of lightning, no sheet of sudden flame illuminating the darkness. At last the hurricane reached the old Manoir.

Laurière had once experienced an earthquake, and as he felt the wind rush by and in passing shake and stab the crumbling walls, he himself was seized with a great fear, and, strange as it may seem, he felt more anxiety for old Mikel, lying, perhaps, wide awake in his lonely dwelling, than for himself. Suddenly, in a lull of the surging wind, Laurière, always listening, heard a fearful cry. That it was the voice of Pacifique he could not doubt, but whether raised in fear or pain or rage he dared not say. The wind rose again, and rocked the old Manoir. A second cry was heard, and then Laurière felt all his reason reeling, as, bounding and leaping from room to room, making anywhere for darkness, freedom, and safety in the black forest he had so often abused, came Magloire, in abject terror and mad haste, fleeing from the embruted, infuriated



cripple, who still held the lantern in one hand, within the other a shining dagger, gently, lithely curved as any sickle!

Laurière raised his voice. It would be his turn now.

'Stop!' he cried from behind the heavy hangings that concealed him. 'You are not alone here. If you do murder, there is a witness.'

The two men, the pursuer and pursued, stopped as if met by a Deity on the threshold. Neither was proof against anything that savoured of the extraordinary or supernatural. They confronted each other with blanched lips, their feet being drawn tight to the floor, off which they did not move for several seconds. Pacifique's hand that held the antique dagger slowly fell to his side. Carson, coward though he was, assumed a spasmodic smile.

'Well,' he said in English, 'show yourself, pard, that's all. Where in h—l are you, anyhow? I guess we'll make it all right if you jes' come out of that and let's see who you are.'

'It will be old Mikel himself,' whispered the cripple.

The doors swung to with a deafening crash, and then, in another pause of that unholy, desecrating wind, Laurière spoke again, and pushed the skins to one side.

Carson seized the lantern, and peered down into the remote niche where, with whitened lips and

wind seemed to penetrate the chamber, played around the lantern for a second, making the already fitful light still more uncertain, till, with a weak flicker, like the dying breath of some unhappy thing, it trembled, shuddered, shot up once luridly, then went out. The men were now in total darkness, with that wild wind lashing the walls and turrets outside. But they had seen enough.

The darkness reacted upon them instantly. They became as madmen, and threw themselves upon Laurière, weak, faint, helpless. They fought and wrestled and tore and dug—Carson and Pacifique—for the ring, the cripple plunging his dagger aimlessly right and left, and both regardless of the imploring cries of Nicolas Laurière, who had thrown the ring far from him at the same moment that they fell upon him. The dagger had scratched him twice, but lying as he was, half beneath the thick covering of skins, its sharp edge glanced harmlessly aside. His strength was fast failing, however, through pain and sickness at heart, and he knew he must swoon before many minutes were over if this contest were kept up—swoon or die, and Laurière, as in a dream, recognised that it might as easily be the latter.

Suddenly Pacifique, feeling something hard beneath his feet, stooped down in the darkness and picked up the ring where it lay imbedded in the soft long fur of a handsome skin. Frantic with delight, acquisition, and success, he dropped the dagger in the fur, and,

and curious dagger with which he had pursued Magloire, thinking to make all the treasure his own. He gave a sickly, strained kind of a laugh.

‘For God’s sake, the ring is yours, if you pay the price to get it! Let’s get out of this. This fellow—he will tell the priest, but by that time we shall be beyond reach. Say, Pacifique, I’ll share with you once we get out of this. Run for the sack and then for old Mikel.’

The cripple devoured him with his scorching gaze. He burned to know whether he spoke the truth, and his flushed face and dilated eyes presented a strong contrast to the ashen hue of Carson’s scared countenance.

Laurière now spoke for the third time, and both men turned quickly as he raised himself up to address them.

‘About the ring,’ he said: ‘there is no need to rouse old Mikel. The ring is here.’

‘Here!’ ejaculated the cripple, and his fingers involuntarily closed upon the dagger.

‘Yes,’ replied Laurière carelessly, ‘it is in my pocket. I stole it.’

Carson saw that the cripple was puzzled.

‘I thought as much,’ he said. ‘I guessed one would be as bad as the other round here. Let’s see it.’


Laurière held up the stone against the black background of a glossy bearskin. As he did so, a gust of

## CHAPTER XVI.

### WATERS OF A FULL CUP.

'And this know, that if the good man of the house had known in what hour the thief would come he would have watched.'

MIKEL had slept through the early stages of the storm. When he awoke, he was struck dumb with astonishment, for there had been no indications of anything unusual in the weather when he had gone to rest, and in all his experience he had never known a storm to occur without some premonition of it on his own part. He sat up, and hearkened to the wind as it roared in the forest. Thoughts of Laurière naturally crossed, and troubled in crossing, his active mind, and he prepared to visit him, donning his warm winter garb, and taking a stout staff in his hand, for he knew the difficulty of a climb on a windy night. Despite the rigor of the storm, a feeling of happiness filled his breast. He had cast off his ungrateful grandson, resolving to have nothing more to do with



him, and in his place he had found in Nicolas Laurière a companion, a dear friend who should henceforth be to him as the apple of his eye, the desire of his heart. It might not be for many years, but for as long as his God allowed him to live, and he took proper care of himself, Laurière should be his son, inherit the Manoir and all it contained. He hurried his steps that he might reach Nicolas the sooner, when his ear was all at once caught by a sound all trappers know—that same heavy, stertorous breathing; that same unequal, shambling, shuffling tread that Pacifique in his disguise of fur had counterfeited so well. Mikel, however, was not to be deceived. This was a real bear. He turned aside and watched. The brute was at one side of him, and was rendered uneasy by the force and noise of the wind. It passed within a yard of him, an indistinguishable mass, rolling and snuffing its troubled way along. Mikel thought it the largest beast of its kind he had ever seen, and waited till its black hulk had vanished in the distance before he ventured to go on.

Still not a drop of rain fell, and the peculiarity of the storm attracted his attention. Increasing momentarily in fury, he feared to find much harm done to the farms on the morrow, and thought of the exposed terraces, seats, and images which surrounded the Manoir. His entire strength was spent in dragging painfully up the declivity that led to the triangular close in the face of this buffeting wind.

Whenever a lull occurred, the next visitation would be more violent than the last, and Mikel, leaning breathlessly on his staff, heard many a noble tree die—crack, split to the core, and fall over, and saw many a fertile branch sawn off as by an invisible axe or knife before he reached the open space where the gray and wizened figure of Cupid kept watch over grotto and carven seat. Mikel, alarmed, cast anxious looks at the old mansion itself. Some forecast of its impending fate hung about him. He carried no light with him, and, strange as it may seem, although no moon floated in the heavens, it was not altogether dark to his practised sense, but the Manoir and surrounding trees loomed clear in the shadows of the midnight sky. The distorted, grinning, ape-like shape of Pacifique had just left the Manoir at the moment when Mikel approached it, but they did not meet, since the cripple shot into the wood at the side, and was instantly lost to sight and sound as he ran on, regardless of fallen trunks and depending boughs, wild, defiant, inflamed with avarice, pride, and ambition, lifting up his voice—which had been given him in order that he should praise and adore his God in the sanctuary—in a carnival of disjointed echoing song. This improvisation first attracted the bear that had passed so near to Mikel, and who now turned, listened, smelt, and followed close upon Pacifique's heels.

Le Caron had gained the lower step leading to the

entrance-door without realizing that all was not right within, when a perfect ocean of wind, advancing in waves of aerial force to be likened only to tidal waves of solid wall-like water, came out of the forest, and broke upon the roof and turrets, towers and terraces, of the old Manoir, and its owner, shrinking from so pitiful a sight as the wholesale destruction of his revered birthplace, saw that the structure was in great peril. Tiles and shingles, stones and bricks, whizzed past his head, fell at his feet. The noise of fallen chimneys, mingling with the clap and roar of the wind, resounded in his ears; and out of that womb of wind burst forth in relentless, vicious, but superb play of electric forces, blue, violet, and amber, the twin gods that recreated the storm—the thunder and the lightning. Mikel had forgotten Laurière; he had long since forgotten himself, and the certain danger he was in; he thought only of the gracious, noble past, of the ill-fated Manoir, of the treasure that lay therein. For even were the treasure unharmed, it would never suit any other resting-place so well. It had been gradually growing and augmenting, that of it which consisted of furs, for thirty years, and the rest—the massive plate, the enormous candelabra, the enamelled bowl—had been part and parcel of the original furnishings of the château, placed there in the seventeenth century. As Mikel looked and listened with his head falling on his breast, the great crash came, and one side of the

building fell completely out. And this was neither the beginning nor the end of the destruction; for, half an hour ago, the wind had carried off every chimney and turret and outstanding bit of masonry on the north side facing the forest, and long after the wall fell out various other portions began to weaken, totter, and finally succumb, while the lightning tore at the roof, and bit it away in a lurid flash. Fire was now licking it on two sides, and overhead the storm still raged—thunder and lightning and wind, but no rain. Mikel had frequently crossed himself as he made the ascent, and he now experienced such sensations as made him wonder if indeed this visitation of wind and elemental fury were normal or not. He looked into his life, and saw there some selfishness, some smallness, some coldness of heart, but no great sins, no criminality, which merited the downfall of his house, of his line, of his pride. If it were the work and the will of his God, he bowed himself to it as such, but without recognising it as just, as deserved, as a result, a contingency, an effect which sprang from an apparent and sufficient cause.

The manor house collapsed steadily, every minute bringing some fresh devastation, some new assault, in a weak quarter. The side which had fallen out, disclosing empty floors and plain walls, was not the side which contained his treasure, and it was not until he noticed a tongue of fire creeping up the



opposite side of the house, and not many yards distant from him, that he bethought him of Laurière, perhaps crushed, flattened, mangled to death inside, or awaiting in helpless swoon the slower enemy of fire.

With a start and cry, old Mikel leaped into the falling building. The shattered door escaped his notice; he may have thought it left so by the storm. The hall was still intact, and now for the first time he saw that the door of the fur-draped chamber was shattered, too, the lock cut out, and splinters of wood and rusty screws covering the ground at his feet. The ruling passion, strong even in that moment of great peril, moved him to burst madly in, and commence tearing at his precious skins in the hope that he would preserve some of them from the impending flames and fall of the entire roof. He looked for Laurière, but found no trace of him, though had he not been so absorbed in the preservation of his life-long treasures, he would have seen the torn hanging, the tumbled furs, and the lantern kicked into a corner, where the red-eyed, crafty fox still held his post undisturbed. He had not, however, plucked down with feverish and trembling hands more than a couple of skins from one side of the room, when a step, hardly heard upon that luxurious and costly carpet, made him drop all thought of the furs, and turn sharply around to greet—not Laurière, but his grandson Magloire.

Magloire held a lantern, lighted, and he cast a cunning look upon his grandfather.

'Mister Murray Carson!' said the latter, with no abating of his habitual coldness and self-control.

Carson's lips twitched, and his head and hands shook. It was no wonder. He was not a hardened criminal; and the mighty storm, the ruin impending over his head, and the sudden presence of his grandfather, combined to develop his cowardly instincts.

'Well, I don't wonder you seem anxious to disown me,' he stammered. 'Mikel, I—— Now, see here: I'm going to tell the truth about this affair. It was that brute of a hunchback got me to come here—Pacifique Péron. Ask him. He's run off now—robbed you of your silver. It's true. I had very little to do with it. I came because—— Well, you know what passed between us. I was curious to see this place.'

Mikel stood with a fixed glare in his glittering eyes.

'What is this?' he said, at length.

He strode to the inner room, catching up the lantern from Magloire, and sweeping its yellow light high and low through the air. The table was covered with the snowy cloth of liliated damask as before, but no vestige of antique plate remained on it. Mikel groaned aloud, and, rushing to the hangings at the sides of the room began wildly to pull them about,

groping blindly, as if searching for his lost property there.

‘Well, it seems that you do not believe a word I say,’ said Carson. ‘Ask Laurière, if you will not take my word for it, although I think myself that one is as bad as the other. Ask Nicolas Laurière.’

Carson’s trepidation as he said this was something most remarkable. He steadied himself against the table, having followed the old man there, and now pointed into the other room, but with such a shaking finger, such a frightened eye, such a clammy brow, such actual coward’s fear in his whole attitude, that even Mikel, despite his contempt, felt something like a superstitious thrill of terror as he followed his pointing finger.

‘Laurière is not there,’ he said. ‘Come, look yourself. But you must know as well as I, or even better. You were in that room a moment ago.’

‘I have been in and out of that room for the last ten minutes,’ said Carson impressively, wiping his livid brow. ‘All I know is, we three—Laurière, Pacifique Péron, and myself—were in the dark struggling together—well, if you must know, for that infernal ring of yours. Laurière, he said he had it in his pocket—that he had stolen it. Well, of course I was your grandson, your representative; I could not stand still and hear of this—that you, my grandfather, had been robbed; so, after having a hard time with Pacifique already over that show of

silver and all the rest of your hidden wealth, I had to endeavour to get the ring from Laurière. There was Pacifique, too. I was, as you may say, one against two—your grandson against a couple of low habitants. Well, we did fight and struggle till Pacifique, he did get away, and with him, as I think, the ring; but Laurière——’ And here Carson began to shake once more, and cast fearful glances around. ‘As for Laurière,’ he said in desperation, ‘one minute he was there—prostrate, helpless, unable to move; his leg, I believe, was broken, or something like that, for he would groan with the pain of it—then the next moment he was gone. I did but make a step or two after Pacifique to wrest the ring from him for—you, Mikel; and the next instant, when I go back, feel upon the furs, underneath them, all around for Laurière, he is gone.’

Mikel rushed to the sides of the room, and tore at the furs until he was sure Laurière was nowhere concealed behind them.

‘You have murdered him,’ he cried with a frightful voice to Carson, ‘and hidden his body!’

With that he searched again the two inner rooms, but without success. He could not bring himself to believe a single word his grandson said. As it happened, the only true thing Carson had told him was this disappearance of Nicolas Laurière, which had occurred exactly as he described it. Mikel noted no trace of blood, though he picked up the dagger

and put it in his belt, watching Carson narrowly all the while.

'It must be that you or the hunchback have murdered him,' he said firmly. 'No other end could have overtaken him.'

'I swear to you,' said Carson, 'that I have told you the truth. See here: one may lie about necessary things, but about a poor habitant—that poor devil of a trapper—I won't lie. I say I know nothing of his end. It makes me afraid, though, when I think about it. Perhaps, if one of us was a good Catholic now, and listened to all the priest said, I might believe that he had been spirited away. If you have celestial appearances, you can also, I suppose, arrange for terrestrial disappearances. Well, it looks like that, almost.'

Mikel vouchsafed no answer, though the idea, couched less profanely and glibly, had also entered his head. He stood and regarded the downfall of his home. The storm was more distant now, and only the cracking and creaking of timbers, and the increasing hiss of flames, could be heard. They would not be safe where they were ten minutes hence. Carson, whose superstitious terrors quickly abated in the company of another, played his last card.

'There is another thing about Laurière,' he said: 'he may have been shamming, counterfeiting a broken leg, a sprained ankle, making believe. He

may have got away when Pacifique did. It was so dark, it would be impossible for me to tell if he passed me quickly and quietly. That is what I am beginning to think about that one, Nicolas Laurière—that he has run away. See, now, what has become of the sack?’ And Carson looked eagerly round.

‘What sack?’ said Mikel, hating and fearing him more every moment, yet beginning against his will to listen to what he had to offer in explanation of the whole scene.

‘The sack that Pacifique produced to my horror when he came to this inner room. I did not think he was bad. I knew him curious, fond of money. Well, he makes friends with me, sings songs for me, gets me to promise to take him back with me to the States; then, immediately we are here, he becomes a bad youth, a robber, has a sack into which he puts your beautiful silver. I get up; I fight—well, I have told you all of that. Laurière, who is here by appointment with Pacifique, understands it all, and only waits till all is dark to run away, he with the sack, and Pacifique with the ring. Well, they have deceived me finely, I am beginning to think.’

Mikel dropped helplessly into the carved oaken chair. No revelation of infamy on Magloire’s part could have hurt him so nearly now as a breath raised against the innate honesty and purity of Laurière. *Momentarily* the peril of their situation grew. Carson

lingered, as if loath to have his grandfather brand him as the murderer of his friend ; but as the flames drew nearer, and the crash and fall of the surrounding stones grew louder, he started from his position near the table, against which he had leant for strength while talking to Mikel. He was not any too soon. Mikel himself—sullen, savage, pained, and embittered beyond measure—rose too, and made his way out to the close of autumnal green, guarded by the wan Cupid of the long dry fountain.

Here, if anywhere, must Mikel have realized the failure and misery of his life. He stood with his recreant grandson watching the Manoir burn, and wishing that his own ashes might go to swell the heap of useless cinders that to-morrow would cover the ground. In that sight all other griefs were drowned. The ingratitude, the impertinence, the frowardness of Magloire, the sin of Pacifique, the newly-awakened affection for Laurière, the love of hidden wealth—all gave away before the genuine and noble grief, the sad tumult of soul with which he observed each revered turret, step, and window gradually succumb to the remorseless element. Like other and smaller men in moments of peril, he seemed sunk in a stupor, and incapable of doing the few right and practical things that there was still time enough left for him to do. He let the furs burn. Carson, standing by, itched to spring in and tear them down, but a look at Mikel's face illumined by

the glow of the burning house, arrested him. He did not consider that he had at all failed in his mission. He intended to overtake Pacifique, and claim his share; but these superb skins of bear, marten, and seal, how exasperating to see them lost in such a manner! Mikel held him in check by the dull concentration of his manner. He was afraid to move. There came at last a moment when, with a sickening writhe of the entire structure, the old Manoir of Colombière le Caron oscillated, tottered, trembled, was picked out in fire in front of the dark midnight skies, then collapsed in strange shapeless masses, a creature of parts no longer, or parts that would never again serve to make a beautiful and precious whole.

Mikel felt the oscillation in his own body, turned faint and sick, and fell headlong to the ground.

Carson, not eager to renew any conversation with his grandfather, disappeared in the trees that led down to the latter's house and clearing, in search of Pacifique. The way was an unaccustomed way to him, and he progressed but slowly. The Manoir had long been forgotten—old Mikel and Laurière, too—and all thought concentrated on his meeting with the avaricious cripple, when he heard a succession of muffled shrieks issuing from the middle of Bourg-Marie. They were sufficiently near to cause him terror, and he awaited the result, whatever it might be, in superstitious alarm. The ghost of



Laurière was what he half expected to see, and not what he presently stumbled against—the sack full of Mikel's long-hoarded wealth, the sack for which he was bent on overtaking Pacifique, for which he was ready to commit any crime. He had hardly clutched it once more, shouldering its clinking weight, and uncertain as to what direction he must take, both to escape those shrieks and to get out of the wood, when they came again, and nearer. Carson knew now what they were, and turned and fled as rapidly as he might with that burden upon his back.

Not far from him writhed Pacifique in the hot grip of the huge black bear Mikel had observed in the forest; and the words he had shrieked out in mortal fear and agony over and over again had been: 'I believe in God! I believe also in a devil!'

## CHAPTER XVII.

## A SIGN FROM HEAVEN.

‘Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding.’

PÈRE DOMINIQUE LABELLE, who was in constant, lively, and comprehensive correspondence with his superiors in the Church, wrote to Quebec the week after the burning of the old Manoir of Colombière le Caron, and the departure for the Upper Province of Mr. Murray Carson, of a most curious and interesting episode in the history of the valley. It appeared that one Ladislas Gouin, a habitant living in the parish of Bourg-Marie, on returning to his home a mile outside the village one evening about dusk, was struck with a sense of something unusual in the twilight sky in the direction of the tapering towers of the parish church. The appearance was altogether hazy, indefinite, peculiar, and he could give it no name, rather fancying it to be some *phenomenon* of the Indian summer glories, when all

the valley and the mountain-sides were transfigured in habit of purple and gold. The appearance, however, continuing, he thought it his duty to communicate his knowledge of it to the parish priest—that is, of course, to Père Dominique Labelle himself. The good Father in his letter went on to state his reception of Ladislas Gouin's story, his humouring of him, and his walking forth on the third evening—a Friday—to inspect the aërial phenomenon, accompanied by M. Émile Thibideau, Joncas, and two brothers from the Nicolet Séminaire, who happened to be in Bourg-Marie at the time.

‘I would have you know,’ writes Père Dominique Labelle, ‘that these four persons are well known and to be respected. In view of many recent attempts made upon the veracity of our people, and the honesty of our purpose, I mention this, M. Thibideau and Joncas being men of rare intelligence, high morality, and scrupulously truthful. The brothers are even as ourselves—the two Laframboises from Three Rivers.

‘*En passant*, I regret to chronicle the stay among us of another Laframboise—René, the smuggler. Both by him and by another our village hath been sadly troubled of late, of which more another time. In company, then, with my brothers in the Church and these two well-conducted and pious men, both of whom are exact and considerate in all matters pertaining to the Church's rights and tithes, I went forth last Friday evening just before sunset. We

walked straight through the village, and, emerging upon a small plateau overlooking the river, and affording a fine view of the commanding towers of our blessed church dedicated to the Holy Ste. Catharine, I, at the suggestion of the rest, advanced to the edge that I might better observe the appearance in the sky or clouds of which the habitant, Ladislas Gouin, had told me. I failed not to cause him to stand out with me from the four others, inasmuch as if a vision or celestial apparition were indeed about to be accorded us, its discovery was undoubtedly owing to the piety, the singular and innocent disposition, and the ready obedience to the whole commands of the Church which have ever characterized this simple Christian. It was a beautiful sight in itself—that winding, shining river, those floating golden clouds, the tints that met in tree and grass and meadow; and we stood there, the man Ladislas Gouin and myself, until the colour faded out, and a most peculiar but beautiful shade of blue—although a blue, yet quite different from the everyday blue of the vault of heaven—settled over the river and shining landscape. And out of this blue, yet one with it, lay, shaped in no form that one might dare recognise or name, some shape that was not just a string of feathery cloudlets, or sheaf of film, or wheel of earth-focussed rays. Ladislas Gouin touched me lightly on the arm, though quite respectfully as usual—everything he does is ever reverent and in keeping with

his attitude towards the Church—and I read in his eyes that the moment had arrived.

‘If you demand of me, Most Eminent and Gracious, the exact impression left upon my mind by witnessing that most singular spectacle of cloud or mist or vapour which touched the tops of the towers and melted into the fast dusking sky above them, I must reply that the shape, as observed and retained by me, was that of a form, lofty indeed, far above even our ideas of angelic visitants, but still a form human as to outline, though enveloped in a blue film that precluded all hope of defining its proportions, marking its symmetry or the reverse, or in any way throwing light on what all present were unanimous in considering one of those celestial apparitions which it has pleased our Creator to send among us at rare but ever crucial seasons. For I had already a long letter written to you, Most Eminent, describing the seditious and heretical talk in our midst of a certain habitant, who, since nine years, has lived in precarious fashion in the Western States, and has lately returned to his native village, spreading dissension and the spirit of revolt among our simple-minded and contented people. His talk hath been much of the Church’s enmity towards progress, though progress in what was never too clearly defined or understood. Indeed, he was not only a heretic, but a traitor as well, for he let no religion alone, and hath even discussed the probability

of there arising a time when no religion need prevail and all systems of Government be condemned as unnecessary and superfluous. Dreading the effect of such wild, disjointed, and blasphemous utterances upon my people, I caused such inquiries to be set on foot as have resulted in my discovery of the fact that this young man is a Socialist, and, I think—though of this I am not yet certain—a spy sent into our Lower Province for purposes of which the order to which he belongs hath great reason to be ashamed. You will, then, easily understand how much I have been troubled for the faith and the freedom of the entire district. Up till now we have lived as one family in unbroken harmony and constant union. The evil-doers are few; the pious and considerate and amiable are on the increase.

‘To return, then, to the singular object as observed by Ladislas Gouin and the others, as well as myself, on last Friday evening at sundown. I experienced, as I gazed upon it, a sensation like to that of infinite gratitude for our preservation from the attacks of the unrighteous and disobedient, and it was conveyed to me as I stood there that, by dint of unworldly living and constant prayer, it might be vouchsafed unto me to witness the vision in some more potent and tangible form. Accordingly, that night I kept a vigil, and all day Saturday, turning aside from everything else, I endeavoured to maintain the most contrite spirit, together with ardent prayer for myself

and for all the denizens of the valley. Believe, then, Most Eminent, that my cause hath prospered indeed, so far that, early on the morning of Sunday, while I was at the altar upon my knees, with eyes closed and prayerful heart, I felt a hand, or touch similar to a hand, laid softly but heavily on my eyes, and while I continued kneeling, bound to the spot by awe and love, I heard great rustling and sweeping above me, as of innumerable angels in the church. And presently, the touch of the hand being gone, I took courage, and, raising my unworthy eyes, encountered the Blessed Vision itself, poised above the altar—a saintly figure, blue-draped, gold-girdled, with hair floating behind it of sunny hue, and hands close locked and lifted to heaven. The Vision's eyes did not meet mine, which perhaps is the reason that I ventured to gaze so long upon the angelic loveliness vouchsafed to my poor, earth-bound sight. Believe, again, Most Eminent and Gracious, that at the time I firmly held, and do so still, this apparition to be sent to confirm us in our faith, strengthen us in our weakness, comfort us in our trial, and prove to all men the blessed consolations afforded by a life of piety in accordance with the only true Church.

'I lost no time, be sure, in allowing the gracious news to circulate freely in the valley, and Ladislav Gouin is the hero of the hour. Would that all men believed like us, that the age of miracles is still with us, and that, in face of absolute reliance in the

Church, nothing—in the hands of the Creator—need be impossible. Would that our glorious religion, our unequalled system of morality, our beautiful language and our classic prayers, as well as the minor rites of our precious service, were as dear to the rest of the Dominion as to us, the guardians of the only true and real Ritual! For the present, your wise counsel—how to deal with this spirit of inquiry and progress so fatal to our destinies as a Church and as a people, by deliberately checking both in their first stages—remains for our comfort and better understanding of the matter. These dangerous plans, from time to time artfully concocted and aimed at our civil, national, and religious liberties, need only to be met in one way, and that is, through the reliance of our people on the absolute power of the Church. Such a revelation of the miraculous as this apparition, which, in all humility and ignorance of the Deity's designs, I venture to name our patron, Saint Catharine, should indicate far beyond the limits of the valley the indestructible elements out of which the Holy Church of Rome is made.

'Deign to accept, Most Eminent,' etc.

The reception of this letter, and its subsequent publication in every journal published in the province, succeeded in restoring perfect calm and *unbroken* confidence throughout Bourg-Marie and



those adjacent villages that were soon to acknowledge the brilliant oratory and the dazzling conclusions of Mr. Murray Carson. The latter, while at the same time fulfilling the commands of the order, made his way up to Quebec and Montreal very slowly, lecturing wherever he thought it worth while, and carrying with him, in a brand-new trunk, a choice supply of old family silver and other articles of value and curiosity. His career was cut short in Upper Canada by a circumstance which savoured of great inconvenience to so fastidious a young gentleman—not, perhaps, to be vulgarly termed imprisonment, but, more delicately, incarceration. Insufficient evidence being forthcoming to criminate him, he departed for Milwaukee with his family relics still intact, turned afterwards into fine clothes and furniture, horses and diamond rings, pictures, flowers, and theatre tickets for himself and Mrs. Rylands. Magloire has prospered. He has learned thrift in the middle of extravagance, has become shrewd, careful, while remaining unscrupulous, and has removed to Kansas, where Mrs. Rylands is soon to follow him. Once a member of the order, and always a member. His cruse of wealth—old Mikel's inheritance—never failing him, he is regarded as an important man to conciliate and interest, and he lives in a style that is much at variance with the principles inculcated in the bylaws of the order. His memorable visit to his native land, though it

cost him at the time some trouble and perplexity, is rapidly fading into oblivion, while he has found a worthy successor as an outpost of the order in Jim Platte, the horse-trader, now living at St. John's, Quebec, and occupied in silently spreading his Socialistic nets all over the Dominion.

Carson will live on, destitute of a soul, a conscience, or a heart. He grows stout, his sharpness shows no more in his contour, though it is there still in his eye. He is absolutely content. He has prospered, is rich beyond his dreams. Women have rarely troubled him, and the woman who had the power to trouble him most is to join him at Topeka in a few weeks. He looks back occasionally at the little obscure French-Canadian village of his birth, and when he passes some great Catholic church, and hears the Gregorian interval of the chant, it carries him for an instant, perhaps, to the one stone-paved street, and the silent forest, and the broad river of his youth, but always with the same unspeakable contempt. He has almost forgotten French. He never enters a sacred edifice, of course, being a member of the order, and smokes and drinks and eats more than is good for him. Still, his personal nicety is unimpeached, and he has become a strikingly handsome man, of unusual height, commanding presence, with night-black eyes and hair.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### STONES OF EMPTINESS.

‘ Our holy and our beautiful house where our fathers praised Thee is burned up with fire ; and all our pleasant things are laid waste.

‘ We are the clay, and Thou our potter ; and we are all the work of Thy hand.’

A DAY and a night had flown, and Mikel remained near the ruins of his once stately and revered manor-house. The memory of his grandson was surely for ever blotted out ; yet, if he remembered him at all, in spasms of horror and indignation, it was as the traducer of Nicolas Laurière. He accepted Magloire’s explanation—made in half-scared sarcasm, in simple honesty. Nicolas had, indeed, been removed, caught up ere the hands of wicked men, slayers of the innocent blood, had touched him. He was now a purified spirit, one with the favoured of the Almighty, privileged to adore the face of Mary. The ruin of his house, the loss of Laurière, these were Mikel’s con-

flicting emotions that surged in his simple breast and beat upon his weary brain. He cared no longer to amuse and interest himself with dreams of the restoration of his house and line, seeing himself a venerable and important figure, the seigneur of the district; next to the curé, the father and counsellor of old and young, the friend of rich and poor, ignorant and wise, cultured and simple. He saw no longer the fertile valley, teeming with corn-bright meadows, emerald pastures, tinkling with cattle and sheep-bells, farmed by the willing tenants that acknowledged him as lord and master. This Arcadia of his waking and dreaming hours had passed with the passing of his grandson, with the fall of the Manoir, with the loss of Laurière. For the destiny of his country he had ever thought little. His code was, that every man in authority, or every man of education and gentle birth, should tend, as a shepherd tends his flock, as a pastor watches over his congregation, those who come under his rule and protection. The principle of self-government was his one theme, and yet he, its advocate and high-priest, had lately suffered loss and ruin at the hands of his own flesh and blood. While the spectacle did not appal him, it quieted him, and stilled those dreams which for years had been his chief occupation in leisure.

The burning Manoir had been suffered to collapse *in* shapeless ruins without the valley knowing any-

thing about its destruction. The storm which had so perplexed and alarmed Mikel and the robbers of the treasure had expended its chief fury over that part of Bourg-Marie where stood the giant carven seats, the wan Cupid and the seventeenth-century château, and not even Joncas, Mikel's trusty friend and colleague, had imagined anything seriously the matter with the old trapper and his dwelling. As for Laurière, there was no one to inquire for him, or to wonder at his absence, since he was without relations in the village, while his avocation frequently took him and kept him away from his little house days at a time.

On the morning of the second day, Mikel, faint with hunger, descended for the first time from the elevation graced heretofore by the Manoir to the level below where stood the house he generally occupied. He crossed the triangle of sward, parted the underbush, and began to descend the gently sloping hill. About twenty yards down was an ancient well or cistern, long disused, and grown over with weeds and creeper. Never in Mikel's time had it been used. Never had he heard his father speak of using it. He had found it out by chance several years before, and now, as he passed it, he thought vaguely of the time when it too was useful in its way, when the merry groups of French had gathered around it, when the fountain had been made, and the Cupid shaped, and the crucifix cut

out, and the carven seats filled. And just as he passed it, being about five yards from it, and wondering how and why they came to make a cistern on the side of a hill, he heard a sound which immediately fastened upon his ear, and was not to be shaken away like the cry of an animal, or the whir of a bird's wing, because it was a human sound—the sound of a voice.

'A man's voice,' thought Mikel, standing stock-still. 'And from whence comes it? That is what I must know.'

From the well, the ancient cistern, Mikel, it comes—that strange, weak, far-off voice.

Mikel hesitated but a moment, then, plunging past tree and stump, he tore away the matted vetch and creeper, brier and mullein and weed, till he could see a dark cavity, and knew he was looking into space, with something alive at the bottom. He waited and listened for the sound, but it was a long minute or two minutes before it recurred. When it did, he could make little of it. It was not a cry; it was not a groan: it was rather a long, exhaustive, almost expiring sigh, a sigh of such pathos, of such agony, of such resignation, that Mikel's tears started for the first time since the rapid destruction of so many hopes. This sigh, so tender, so full of exquisite and painful yearning, compounded, it would seem, of human pain with more than human sorrow, touched him deeply. Some unfortunate fellow-

creature, he deemed, had fallen in the empty tank, the waterless cave, during the storm. And yet this could hardly have happened, seeing how matted and thick were the branches and vines that overtopped it. Suddenly Mikel grew straight, keen, alert. He thought of Laurière. The sound was so distant that he could not hope to recognise it for any voice he had ever known, but hope—that most blessed of all gifts to disappointed age—spoke in his wounded heart and said that it *might* be Laurière's, that strange and aching sigh. He listened while a third time it fell upon his ear, then he essayed to answer it, to make himself heard. Twice he called upon Nicolas, but could not tell the result. He now was of the firm belief that Pacifique, or Carson, or both, had thrown him down this fearful hole in the hope that he would die there and not live to tell the tale of robbery and murder. The walls of the cistern being sloping instead of straight, Mikel was enabled to drag himself along a considerable distance downward toward the voice, which he continued to do, never reflecting upon the difficulties in the way of his returning. When the sound came again, it was nearer and louder and more like a groan. Mikel, lying flat upon the damp and rotten planks that formed the wall of the cistern, pushed himself down, steadily down, while he mentally wondered more and more at the construction of the curious tubular well, of which he had had no conception all the

time he had passed and repassed it on the outside. When this had continued for some yards, he began to comprehend that this was no cistern at all. The slope had now stopped and the round wall disappeared. The ground came into view again, and presently Mikel found he could crawl along on the level, in a passage which seemed to be about four feet high and three wide. Now the path took a slightly upward turn, and, stopping for breath and strength—Mikel was over seventy—he heard the sigh, the groan, quite distinctly, and not very far away; but whether it belonged to Laurière he could not tell. He took courage, however, from his proximity to someone in distress—were it friend or foe he hardly cared, so absorbed was he in the contemplation of the remarkable spectacle of a subterranean passage, perhaps two hundred years old, totally unknown to himself, the owner of all the surrounding forest. Gradually the road widened, still gently sloping upwards, into a kind of cave or grotto, as large as a moderate chamber, lighted by a small aperture at one end, to which Mikel crept, the ground over his head arching in the middle to only six feet, and declining at the sides to meet the wall. Arrived at this aperture, Mikel looked with amazement upon a larger cave than the one he was in, strewn with rocks and portions of stony boulder, and containing a curious shaft of plank, which appeared to lead up to the ground above, and at the foot of



which lay a man—say rather a body, so inert, so helpless, so useless it looked, that poor, stunned heap of swooning humanity. Mikel, who knew that from this unfortunate being had been wafted the groan or sigh that had gone to his inmost heart, so full had it been of resigned and mortal agony, with difficulty got through the aperture and bent over the huddled form. The light was so meagre, coming from such a distance, another aperture in the roof or ceiling, through which had slanted for over a hundred years a long inclined plane of rough boards, that only by touch and instinct did he at first divine that it was Laurière. But the clothes told him, then his ear, and he recognised the voice, although only wafted on the air in that weak and despairing sigh. Mikel looked up the giddy shaft of plank down which Laurière had slipped sheer to the ground and marvelled. At the top it was daylight, and, though he had no means of knowing it, Laurière, in lying under the displaced and tumbled skins in that memorable apartment of the old Manoir, where Carson and the cripple had fought against him for the ring, had in his struggles displaced a plank in the flooring. This plank, shooting from under him with an elasticity which brought it back when his weight was removed, so that under the heaped-up furs no sign of anything unusual had been apparent, had been the crowning delight of Père Chaletot's industrious career. He had caused this plank or

sliding panel in the flooring to open directly over the underground chamber in the rock — partly natural and partly hewn out—where he had also set the inclined plane or shaft, continuing for upwards of sixty or seventy feet down into the very bowels of the earth, as it seemed now to Mikel, looking up the ancient shaft.

In the days of Père Chaletot the panel was kept in order, and many were the sacks of provisions and ammunition sent sliding down to that underground storage-room. In the days of Mikel's father, however, the panel got out of order, and its existence was hushed up, Mikel himself never hearing of it. Yet it had been there when he ran about as a boy, learning to love the old Manoir, and drinking in tales of chivalry, war, romance, and conquest. It had been there when his father died, when he brought his wife, Dame Madeleine-Josephite-Virginie-Amable, home, when she died, and when Octave died. It had been there when he built the little common house on the roadway, and began accumulating his store of splendid skins; when Magloire the first died, when Magloire the second climbed on his knee, an orphan of seven or eight, intensely agile, clever, cunning, and spirited; and when he, old Mikel, had clapped him on the back and prophesied great things of him.

He bent low and listened. Laurière was alive, and gave now and then that half-groan which had

reached Mikel's ear at the other end of the subterranean passage. The false cistern was also Père Chaletot's invention, and, in face of the bands of fierce Iroquois who ravaged the country in the time of Mikel's grandfather and great-grandfather, may perhaps have often served as a place of refuge for the retainers of the family, and, in an emergency, for the family itself.

The trapper bent lower still, finally knelt beside his friend. Laurière had shot down the plank at terrific speed, and, broken in spirit and tortured by pain as he had been, had evidently succumbed to the shock, for he lay still the indescribable, inert, huddled-up heap that Mikel had first observed. The latter endeavoured to rouse him, or at least to move him a little. After a few minutes Laurière showed some faint signs of life beyond that sickening groan. He opened his eyes and knew Mikel.

A great cry of love and relief burst from the old man's overwrought heart.

'I thought you were dead,' he said.

And Laurière, hearing, smiled. He could not speak just then; but how he longed—how he longed to die! And yet there was something he must say before he died.

Mikel looked closely at him. There was something wrong. He grew terribly nervous, afraid of asking, afraid of giving pain, fearful even of touching him. Laurière dimly saw and understood. He

might help his friend by a word. If he only could make the sign of the cross even. But that was denied him. He made a great effort and spoke :

‘It is my back,’ he sighed. ‘See, the back—broken!’

Mikel hung over him, with large tears rolling down his wrinkled brown face. He longed so intensely to know how Nicolas had come in this strange cave, but dared not ask. One word, however, escaped him.

‘My grandson?’ he cried; ‘Magloire——’

‘No, no!’ groaned Laurière. ‘Not through him I lie here. All my own fault. Mikel, believe, Magloire knows nothing of where I am. Do you see that shaft, that faint light? That is the old Manoir.’

Mikel started and looked towards that speck of light.

‘Daylight!’ he cried. ‘And we are under what was the old Manoir!’

‘Daylight?’ repeated Laurière, fast passing away, but reinforced by a sad strength in his last moments. ‘I cannot make out that light—why it should be. I was in the darkened room—the room so richly lined with furs. The cripple—he fought with me for your ring, Mikel, and I had to struggle for my life. He had a dagger—I am scratched with that. Indeed, Mikel, I am not yet dead, but I am dying; for I kicked against a board in that room, and

the next moment I hardly know—Mikel, it all swims; hold me, or—no, no, do not touch me, Mikel!

‘My grandson, Magloire,’ cried Mikel, full of pity and awe, ‘surely he knew of this! He pushed you down?’

Laurière seemed to pull his strength back from the grave.

‘Magloire,’ he murmured—‘Magloire had nothing to do with it. He was there, yes, to look for you—to explore and visit the old Manoir. He came with Pacifique. Perhaps—of that I am not sure. Mikel, the light grows very strong.’

Mikel listened and looked on in awe. To him the light seemed growing weaker.

‘You were ever tender of him, the accursed heir to all this forest and stream. For now, Laurière, there is nothing more. You see the daylight there because the top of the shaft is open to the sky. Laurière, the old Manoir is gone—burnt, scattered on the ground, blown afar to the winds. The furs, they are burnt also. And my grandson, he has robbed me of the rest of my wealth. Well, it is the will of God.’

Laurière half turned his dying eyes to Mikel.

‘You are wrong,’ he said, and with those words stranger and beautiful flutterings mustered around his head, and that light seemed to stretch up into the sky and stream out in clouds of splendour. To

lay down his life for his friend, was that his dying dream?

'You cannot make me believe good of him,' cried Mikel. 'He was there to rob, perhaps to kill.'

'No, no!' said Laurière. 'That was Pacifique. Ah yes, that poor Pacifique who would not go barefoot to the shrine of the holy St. Anne and be made straight. I would go now, Mikel, if it were not too late. For, even if I lived, I should never be straight any more. For all time I should be the same as Pacifique—or worse. No, no. Magloire, you do him wrong. He was fond of you, Mikel, but afraid to show his fondness. You had been cold, hasty to him. Well, that chills one. I used to feel that, too, with you, Mikel.'

Le Caron held his breath.

'How very strong the light still grows, Mikel. If it did not shine out, dazzle so hard, I might speak more clearly, think more harshly. No, you must forgive Magloire. You must seek him out and tell him that he has been wrong but so have you. You would forgive *me* if I had done you an injury? If I had been the robber, and not Magloire—not Magloire?'

Mikel instinctively drew back, and his voice grew hoarse and rough.

'But you could not—you, Nicolas Laurière, whom I had taken for my son! Yet that was what he said.'

‘Who said? Magloire?’

‘Yes. I flung, I stamped, I wrung the thought by the neck away. I would not listen.’

‘Would not listen, Mikel! To your own flesh and blood, to your grandson, *le p’tit* Magloire, grown tall and straight and handsome, and still a good deal like you—the gait, the bright eye, the long body!’

Mikel groaned.

‘I love him not,’ he cried, ‘be he just or unjust, true or false! He that told me you were in league with Pacifique to rob me, how could I listen, how could I confide, how could I trust in such an one? Laurière, you are—you must be innocent! And, Laurière, you must not die. You must live, because I love you!’

‘The dead talk not of loving,’ said Nicolas, with difficulty. ‘There are those alive who will gather up your love and bless you for a few daily crumbs of it. I say to you, Mikel, find Magloire, pray for him, watch over him, tend him—it may not be too late. Mikel, this is a strange place to die in.’

The elder man had softened again. Magloire was forgotten.

‘One would think that under the ground it must always be dark; but look, Mikel, and see how bright that far light shines! It shines upon all the valley, where soon the snow will lie. Mikel—if you can—bury me under the snow. When I have watched

the early flowers bursting, splitting their brown hoods while the snow is still massed about their roots, I have thought—I too shall lie warm under the snow and earth some day, and rise like them. You believe that, Mikel ?’

‘God! I do not know,’ burst from old Mikel. ‘How can I tell? I am not in the light as you are, my son. All that—it is dark, confused, mysterious to me. But do not talk; rest, be quiet, sleep.’

‘Who could sleep for that strange light? It is strange because, although it is so powerful, it does not hurt my sight. Mikel, all that is true; Mikel, I have suffered, thinking that perhaps it was not true. I have prayed to Mary and to the blessed saints for aid in those dark hours, and it came—but it came—not through Mary. Mikel, the light shines upon the valley, and upon the river of my youth—upon the cross of the parish church, upon the grim gray towers, and I seem to stand, once more inside, and see—no maze of lights and flowers, no image, no priest, no pictures, but a Face, Mikel—the face of Mary’s Son, thorn-crowned, blood-stained! Mikel, turn to Him. Do you not see? Do you not understand?’

Laurière spoke in great gasps now. He had not five minutes to live.

‘Bury me,’ he said presently, ‘in Bourg-Marie. There can be no sweeter place, no nobler soil, to lie in.’



'But thou art dying without the last rites!' groaned Le Caron. 'Thou canst not even make the sign of the cross, my son, my poor Laurière!'

'I do not think,' said Nicolas, turning his fast-glazing eyes towards his old friend with almost a smile in them, 'that matters. Mikel—I die. Bury me—in Bourg-Marie, where the light still shines on the river—on the Cross—on that Face—Mikel.'

Le Caron broke into a passionate tempest of tears over the body which had cast out the soul. Thus was accomplished the death of Nicolas Laurière, and Mikel remained a moody, reticent, embittered old man, betrayed by his kith and kin, and shorn of his adopted son. Laurière's earnest request that he should find Magloire he utterly neglected; the youth was dead to him.

One day—the first anniversary of Laurière's death—Mikel went up to the desolate Manoir, and calmly set fire to the grotto, the ornamental trees, and the curious carven seats. The Cupid he also took down and buried, and nothing now remains but the crucifix and weather-beaten image of our Lord upon it to testify to the once noble proportions and medieval appointments of the manor-house of Colombière Caron. He did not search for the ring, nor even think of it, and perhaps one day it will be found where it fell when Pacifique struggled with the bear, in the hollow of a huge beech, where year after year the autumn leaves pile themselves in the dark re-

cesses of Bourg-Marie. His strength, his keenness, and his trapper's wit are not yet impaired. Last year, with Joncas, there were many bears caught—the finest season for many years—and out of one hundred and twenty-seven, old Mikel le Caron, Forest Ranger for the County of Yamachiche, caught fifty.

THE END.