

Conny Morgan

THE CHIEFTAINS OF CHAMPLAIN.

A TALE OF ADVENTURE IN THE NEW WORLD

CHAPTER I

AN ADVENTURE WITH WOLVES

'Twas on the 26th of December, in the year of grace one thousand six hundred and ninety-six, about six o'clock in the evening, that I met with the happy accident which was destined to change the course of my life

I was snugly ensconced in my arm-chair close by the fireside, enjoying the cheerful warmth of the bright winter fire, when a ringing voice smote my ear from the foot of the staircase, and growing in distinctness as it came nearer, admonished me that Marion and Beaupoil were about to enter my room

Marion was housekeeper, maid of all work and cook Beaupoil was her lieutenant, husband and yoke-fellow It was he who tended the garden, took charge of the horse, spread the manure, peeled the carrots and onions, wrung the necks of the fowl, drove the cows to pasture, clipped the vine, swept the kitchen and the stairs, ran of errands, went on market day to Tulle, sowed, mowed, reaped and gathered the corn into the granary, but the most purgatorial of his multifarious tasks and duties was the necessity of submitting without reply all day long to the commands, the lamentations, the reproaches, and gossip of Marion. "Monsieur le Cure," he would often say to me, "I am going through my purgatory here on earth"

Beaupoil was an individual of medium height, well built, his hair light in color, his eyes gray, and his step slow and lazy, like that of a cow returning at evening from the pasture His amiable temper, never ruffled, would have done credit to a philosopher

Beaupoil was not talkative, as a rule he preferred silence, having observed, with the Arabs, that if speech is silver, silence is gold Still, when pushed almost over the border of patience, he would at times shrug his shoulders, careful withal that his wife did not see the gesture, for he was not a whit less prudent than phlegmatic However, he was a good

sort of fellow He had married my housekeeper, who was thirteen years older than he, chiefly because she made good soup

And so it was that, having Marion already in my service, I was obliged to take at first Beaupoil and afterward his mother, the aged Jeannette Beaupoil, without counting an ancient hunting dog she had adopted nine years before, whose spats with Marion's cat kept the whole presbytery in one continued uproar

Despite all this, I was as happy as one can be in this valley of misery, having attained without sickness or infirmity the age of thirty-five years, pastor of the parish of Gimel, near Tulle, in the department of Limousin, beloved by my parishioners, in amity with my brethren of the clergy and my bishop, and besides a cure's income of at least five hundred crowns, having for seven years past, through the demise of an uncle, a lawyer at Pergueux, been left sole heir to the nice legacy of one hundred and seventy thousand French livres

Now, friendly reader, you are acquainted with my presbytery and its inmates I accordingly, return to the loud exclamations of Marion, which, had I known the good woman less, might have occasioned me some disquietude

"Oh, miserable man!" she cried, as she opened the door of my room, "there was nothing more wanting but that 'Tis the last drop in the cup!"

Then, drawing aside a little on the corridor and looking at the luckless Beaupoil, who durst not show himself

"You could not leave them where they were, you great, big simpleton! But M. Beaupoil must play the role of the generous man Beaupoil tenders his services—he conducts people into Monsieur le Cure's house, as if it were his own And what will you give them to eat, I ask you? Where will they sleep? This costs you nothing, 'tis no trouble or expense to you It is Monsieur le