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THE PEACE-KILLER; OR, THE MASSACRE OF LACHINE.

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[Written for the Canadian Illustrated News.]

CHAPTER I.

THE COUNCIL OF WAR.

IN the summer of 1687, in the Fort of Catarqui, which then stood on the site of the present city of Kingston, a council of war was convened to deliberate on the campaign about to be opened against the Iroquois, the inveterate enemies and incessant disturbers of the colony of New France.

The President of the Council was the Marquis de Denonville, Governor-General of the Province. He was a man somewhat beyond middle age; and his countenance, although it wore an anxious and a care-worn look, was characterised by an expression of mildness rather than of severity. As a soldier, he had shown himself on the battle-fields of Europe a man of approved bravery; and the polish and suavity of his manners had won for him a reputation which was envied even by the accomplished noblemen who contributed to the lustre of the Court of "Le Grand Monarque." But, like some other colonial governors, both before and since his time, he knew little of the internal affairs of the nation over which he had come to rule; and that little imperfectly. In the art of government, he was a man of speculation rather than action. He could form excellent precepts concerning the duties of a colonial ruler, and the reciprocal obligations of the people; but was slow in putting his theories into operation. He knew neither the time to make concessions, nor the time to act with vigour. He lacked the moral nerve and steadiness to hold, in equal poise, the scales of justice between the hostile Iroquois and his royal master. From this cause his Indian policy resulted in the most terrible catastrophe to be found recorded in the eventful annals of "La Nouvelle France."

M. de Callières, a veteran who, for nearly a quarter of a century, had upheld the military renown of France on the battle-fields of Europe, occupied a seat beside the Marquis de Denonville. In the colony, at the time of which we write, there was no officer who possessed the military experience or the military ability of M. de Callières. But recently, he had been stationed on St. Helen's Island, opposite Montreal, forming a corps to operate against the Iroquois. And now he was awaiting, with impatience, the opening of a campaign, in which, had he been the leader, the colonists might have broken into fragments the entire Iroquois confederation. There also took part in the deliberations of the council the Chevalier de Vaudreuil, who had seen some hard fighting in Flanders, and had lately brought from France to Canada a reinforcement of eight hundred men. The other members of the council were Lavaltrie, Berthier, Grandville, and Longueuil, the chiefs of four battalions of Canadian militia, who, after having been organized on St. Helen's Island, had made their way in four hundred canoes to the Fort of Catarqui.

The plan of the campaign was simple;—to cross Lake Ontario and, after disembarking on its south shore, to attack and destroy in detail each of the cantons of the Five Nations of the Iroquois confederation.

The council were about to rise, when a loud tumult outside, and the sound of Indian voices, vociferating at their highest and angriest pitch, made every member spring to his feet, and place his hand upon his sword-hilt. In a few moments the cause of the uproar was made apparent. A number of Abenakis Indians, in the service of the Marquis de Denonville, dragged into the council-room another Indian, whom they had overpowered and made prisoner. By order of the Governor, they released the captive, who rose to his feet, and paying no attention to the blood which trickled down his left arm from a wound on his shoulder, cast upon the officers a look of indifference, and upon the chief of the Abenakis Indians, a glance of hatred and contempt. The prisoner, who was attired in the costume of the Hurons, was a young man, and almost six feet in stature. He might have stood for a sculptor as the type of an athlete of the forest. His chest was of more than ordinary amplitude; the muscles of his shoulders and arms stood out like whip-cords; while his flanks and limbs, lithe, rather than full, betokened a swift and enduring runner. But it was his face that attracted, most of all, the attention of the Governor and his officers. The forehead, contrary to the general rule amongst the native races, was high and square rather than low and wide. It protruded over a pair of small dark eyes, never at rest, but perpetually glancing from face to face, and from object to object. The nose and mouth bore slight resemblance to those features amongst his own or any other Indian tribe; the former being well defined and prominent, the latter small,

and its thin lips almost always compressed. Altogether, it was a face that denoted mental power, rare cunning, the faculty of rapid observation, and an obstinacy and tenacity of purpose not to be baffled or set aside.

As soon as the council had recovered from their surprise, the President inquired of the leader of the Abenakis the circumstances under which the prisoner had been captured, and the nation to which he belonged. The personage addressed, who was the chief of the tribe of the Abenakis, advanced close to the captive. He was beyond middle age, about the medium height, with the thews and sinews of a giant. He was evidently the equal of the prisoner in strength, but not in agility. His low forehead, over which the hair grew almost to the eye-brows, a deep scar on his left cheek, and an enormously wide mouth, at once savage and sensual in its expression, combined to give to his countenance a stamp of ferocity in perfect keeping with the character of the man himself. He was known as the "Serpent," and a rude representation of that reptile, tattooed on the upper part of his chest, added to the repulsiveness of his aspect. He and the prisoner kept glaring at each other with looks of intense hatred, and it did not escape the observation of such of the council as were acquainted with Indian manners, that the memory of some by-gone feud was still nourished in the bosoms of these two children of the forest.

In a voice husky from excitement and passion, the Serpent proceeded to inform the President and Council, that the prisoner had been discovered lurking in a clump of brushwood on the edge of the lake; that he must have reached his hiding-place by water; that he had made a desperate resistance, and had killed one of the Abenakis, and wounded two others, before he was overpowered. Finally, that he was an Iroquois spy, attired in the costume of the friendly nation of the Hurons.

At this last assertion the self-command of the captive gave way, and he exclaimed in a voice quivering with rage:

"Dog of an Abenakis, you lie! The coward sees his enemy a hundred miles away. It is thus you see an Iroquois in a Huron."

The Serpent ground his teeth, but made no reply.

The Marquis, surprised at this outburst, and at the captive's acquaintance with the French tongue, asked him why he had repaired to the fort in such a covert manner, and if it were true that he belonged to the Iroquois confederation.

"What answer does the White Chief expect from me?" replied the captive. "The White Chief knows the Serpent, but not me; and he will not believe a stranger when his friend has spoken."

"The prisoner speaks truth," shouted out the Serpent. "The White Chief is mad if he believes an Iroquois."

The prisoner's features relaxed into a grim smile:

"Ask the Serpent," said he, addressing the Marquis, "if it were an Iroquois or a Huron hatchet that left that mark upon his cheek, as he turned his head to look behind him while he fled. But that was ten years ago; and the Serpent may have forgotten the time, the place and the man who wounded him. I shall tell him all three. The time was when, in the absence of our braves, he made war upon our women and our children. The place was our village, at Michilimackinac. The man who wounded him as he fled, was none other than myself. Look at his scar; it is a brave man's brand upon the face of a coward." As he finished, the captive warrior raised himself to his full height; a triumphant smile passed over his features, and he shook his clenched hand at the Serpent, in a manner at once menacing and defiant.

The Serpent could bear the taunts of his adversary no longer. Snatching his tomahawk from his belt, he was in the act of springing upon his unarmed enemy, when a young officer who had sauntered into the Council-room, along with the crowd, and who had been watching attentively the motions of the Serpent, flung himself in front of the savage, and, quick as lightning, wrenched the uplifted weapon from his hand. The baffled Indian looked, for a moment, as if he would have rushed upon the officer; but there was something in the young man's air and attitude which warned him to desist. The captive, for a few moments, kept his keen black eyes riveted on the face of his preserver; and then, folding his arms across his chest, muttered a few words in the Huron dialect, which it was well for the young officer's chances of military promotion, the Marquis of Denonville did not understand.

The Marquis addressed the officer who had so opportunely prevented the commission of a deed of bloodshed in presence of the representative of the King of France—"M. Henri de Belmont, the Governor of New France thanks you for your bravery and presence of mind. It shall not be forgotten."

The veteran, M. de Callières, who never lost an opportunity of encouraging a younger officer, or saying a word for the colonists, added—"Yes, M. le Marquis, it was certainly a brave action. But I am sure Lieutenant de Belmont will show himself, before the campaign is

over, to be capable of performing even braver acts. You require men born in the colony to cope with the Indians. These men possess the natural bravery of the French race, combined with a thorough knowledge of the ways of the savage races; and thus their services are invaluable."

Lieut. de Belmont, who was so much confused that he could scarcely muster the few words necessary for the purpose of thanking the Marquis, and M. de Callières, managed to find an opportunity of speedily withdrawing himself from the Council.

"It is near time," said the Marquis, "that this affair should be brought to a termination. Let us again ask the prisoner why he was found in the vicinity of the Fort of Catarqui; and why, if his intent were friendly, he chose to make his appearance in this suspicious and stealthy fashion. What say you, M. de Callières? You know these people better than most of us?"

"M. le Marquis," replied the veteran, "this prisoner I take to be a Huron, and not an Iroquois. The Hurons, moreover, are our friends, and I suspect that the errand of the prisoner was to avenge some private grudge entertained against some one in or about the Fort. I think his object was to be revenged upon the Serpent. But no matter what cause brought him here, he is a brave fellow, and if he were civilized and drilled, would turn out an excellent soldier."

"But," queried the Marquis, "I fail to understand why, if he cherished a just cause of complaint against the Serpent, or any one else, he should not come openly to me and solicit justice. The King, my master, has enjoined on me the duty of protecting equally the friendly Indians with our own colonists."

"No doubt, M. le Marquis," replied M. de Callières. "But I feel constrained to inform the Marquis that an Indian—not this one alone, but all of them—will never suffer another to avenge his quarrel, if there is one chance in a hundred that he can do so himself. He believes there is infinitely more glory in obtaining his object by force, or by cunning, than in asking it openly, and having his request granted. But, if M. le Marquis wish it, I shall put one or two questions to the prisoner."

The Marquis gave consent, and the prisoner, who showed by his countenance that he understood the conversation, turned round and bent his eyes on M. de Callières. The veteran, fully aware of the advantages of speaking in the figurative style of the children of the forest, addressed the prisoner:

"Has the game grown scarce in the forests of the Great Lake, that the Huron descends a twelve days' journey to beg the fragments left at the feasts of the Abenakis? Have his young men been slain, and his women carried away in bondage, that the Huron has no more flesh nor corn in his villages? Or does he love the Serpent so much that he crawls when amongst his friends, and fears to come to them walking like a warrior, upright and on his feet?"

The prisoner, at the finish of the last sentence, gave a start. Then, looking keenly at every member of the Council in succession, and having satisfied himself that the Serpent was within hearing, he addressed himself to the Marquis:

"You are the great white chief; you are the man of peace. He who is spoken, is a great warrior, but he has less power than you. Among my white brothers, the man of peace is greatest; among us the man of war. I would rather speak to the war chief; but the man of peace might be offended. Tell me to whom I ought to speak, for I am a stranger to your customs."

The Marquis de Denonville, who evidently disliked being addressed in no other capacity than as the "Man of Peace," and who was puzzled to know whether the Huron had sinned through ignorance, or had verged upon wilful satire, bade his interrogator, in a peevish tone, to address himself to M. de Callières. The veteran, between whom and M. de Vaudreuil there had passed something like a smile during the Huron's remarks, instantly compressed his features into model military seriousness, and directed the plain-speaking prisoner to proceed.

The Huron obeyed. "The war chief," he said, "has asked me if we have no game in the forests of the Lake which takes its name from the name of our people; and if we have come to beg the leavings of the Abenakis. Let the war-chief enquire of his hunters, who smoked with us, in our wigwams, the pipe of peace, when the moon that is now wasting away, was then but three days old. Who gave to the hunters of the white chief four hundred of the skins of the beaver; and two hundred of the skins of the deer? Who was it refused these skins to the hunters of the great English chief, who offered a hundred guns in exchange, and gave them to the hunters of the French war-chief for thirty? Who filled the canoes of your young men with corn and dried flesh, that they might feast night and day on their journey? My people did these things. But the memory of the chiefs of the pale-faces is full of holes. The good acts of the red-man pass through; his bad ones remain for the age of a grandfather. Our young men have not been slain,

nor our women made captives. We have warriors enough to sweep the Abenakis into the waters, with as much ease as our boys, in the time of autumn, sweep the flies with pine branches from our wigwams. The Abenakis are flies. They cannot slay; they can only feed on what has been slain by others."

The Abenakis, who filled the room, began to utter loud threats.

M. de Callières, in order to prevent a storm, which he saw was gathering, endeavoured to drive the Huron from his irritating topic, and asked:

"Is he a chief of the nation of the Hurons who speaks? Or do we hear the voice of a fox inside the skin of the bear?"

"Ask the Serpent," replied the Huron; "he hides; I cannot even hear his hiss."

"Catspaw of the Iroquois," exclaimed the Serpent, suddenly coming forward from an angle of the room, whither he had slunk after being disarmed by Lieut. de Belmont. "Catspaw of the Iroquois," he repeated, "before another sun goes down, the Serpent will sting thee to death."

The Huron answered by a contemptuous smile.

The Marquis, perplexed and annoyed by his reticence, asked him to answer in a straightforward manner why, if a friend of the French, he did not come openly to the Fort, instead of lurking in its vicinity, and incurring the suspicion of being a spy.

The Huron made reply:

"The hunter kills the snake without warning. So with me and the Serpent of the Abenakis."

The Marquis de Denonville, annoyed and perplexed at the equivocation of the prisoner, inquired of the council how the matter should be settled.

The veteran, de Callières, proposed that he should at once be liberated, and sent on his way home, escorted for three or four leagues, by some of the soldiers, in order to protect him from the Serpent, from whom, it was evident, the Huron would receive no mercy. The old soldier gave it as his opinion that the captive was a man of influence amongst the Hurons, as any one who was acquainted with the Indians, might perceive. The man's taciturnity was nothing remarkable. His scheme, whatever it was, had miscarried; and hence his silence respecting both himself and his visit.

The Serpent suddenly advanced. "The spy," he vociferated, "must not go free. He belongs to me, the Chief of the Abenakis. He killed one of my people; we must kill him in return. This has been the custom of our tribe long before our friends, the French, came here to visit us. I have three hundred and fifty warriors; they bring you food; they bring you furs; they paddle your canoes; they show you the hiding-places of your enemies; they fight for you. Set this spy free, and by sunrise to-morrow, I and my people leave you for ever. We are your right hand. If we leave you, the Iroquois will eat you up. If we go hence, they will roof their wigwams with the scalps of your people. Give me my prisoner, or bend your necks to the hatchets of the Iroquois."

The Marquis and every member of the council were equally exasperated and disgusted with the insolent threats of the Chief of the Abenakis. The only person in the room who seemed to be indifferent, was the Huron himself.

"Prisoner," said the Marquis, speaking in a high and somewhat excited tone, "tell us who you are; explain to us what brought you hither, and this boaster, who dares to hold out threats to the representative of France and the gentlemen who command the French army in Canada, shall see you set at liberty this instant."

The council signified in an emphatic manner their hearty concurrence in the sentiments of the Marquis.

"Speak out," exclaimed M. de Callières. "Tell us what you have been asked, and by to-morrow I will have you dressed in a Christian uniform, and enrolled in my own regiment as a grenadier."

The Huron's features were lit up by a passing smile; but lapsing next moment into their ordinary grave expression, he quietly said:

"The Huron is grateful to the Chiefs of the white warriors. But the eagle never craves mercy from the carrion-crow. The Huron will not move the little finger of his left hand to preserve his life from the Serpent."

The council were deeply disappointed. The prisoner had refused to save himself. The blame rested on him alone, and on his obstinate refusal of all explanation.

He was hurried out of the council-room by the Serpent and his warriors; but not before the Marquis, at the suggestion of M. de Callières, had ordered a guard of soldiers to accompany him, in order to protect him from the fury of the relatives of the Abenakis warrior he had slain while fighting against capture.

But there was no man in Fort Catarqui, save the Serpent, who knew that the captive was the great Huron chieftain, Rondiarak, better known in the annals of the colony as "The Rat," and styled by one of the native historians, "The Machiavel of the Wilderness."

To be continued.