

joy of his loved ones on his reaching home, when, all of a sudden, the little mare stops. "Hallo, there, what's the matter, what do you want." He springs up,—a man is brandishing a stick over his head, saying in a strangely trembling voice: "*La bourse ou la vie*" (your money or your life). Baptiste is strong and active; leaping from the sleigh, with a sudden twist he knocks the stick out of the man's hands and soon has him powerless in his strong grip.

The man offers no resistance, and, as Baptiste looks at his assailant, he recognizes the sullen stranger of the hotel.

"Well, well, my friend, you do not seem used to this kind of a job. You do not look like a robber."

"I was cold and starving," the poor fellow whimpers, "this is my first attempt, you can see that I am weak and almost exhausted. I could hardly lift the stick with which I wanted to strike you. Do not, I beg you, give me up to the police. I have not eaten anything for nearly two days. I have no money, and could not bring myself to beg."

"Poor fellow, you shall come home with me; this is *la veille de Noël*. I will trust you. My wife and little ones will cheer you up. Come on, we will soon be home. *Hop, la Grise*.

They soon sight the house. Carlo, who has heard the bells, meets them with a bark of welcome, and Louise and Jean greet them joyously.

"Jean, good boy, go and prepare good warm straw litter for *la Grise*, and give her some water so soon as she cools off a little."

Baptiste and the stranger enter the house. Louise, I have met a friend on the road; he is tired and hungry, give him a cup of hot tea and something to eat, while I fix up things."

She is soon busy attending to the stranger, and while Jean is away Baptiste hurriedly sneaks in the parcels for the children and hides them in a corner of their bedroom, but leaves those for Louise in the shed. "I bought a few things for the little ones," he says innocently, "we will give them when we come back from *la messe de minuit* (midnight mass).

While the stranger is eating, Baptiste tells

Louise all that has happened on the road. She says: "You have a kind heart; this will bring us luck."

"You will come with us to *la messe de minuit*, my friend, it will do you good to hear *Nouvelle agréable* and other *cantiques de Noël* (Christmas hymns). Jean, big man, and Carlo will take care of the house. Jean will also see that the fire keeps bright in the fireplace, and will watch little Josette."

They start for the church, which is not far away. But Baptiste suddenly stops, saying: "You go on, I forgot something in the house, I will join you in a minute." He runs back and brings in the parcels for Louise, places them with the others, and in a moment is with them again.

The night is beautiful. They can see, in the distance, the humble village church, its colored windows ablaze with light. The bell is ringing merrily; sleighs pass them swiftly and they exchange jolly greetings with the occupants. The moon is just rising above the hills and throws mystic lights and shadows on the white snow.

They enter the church to the sound of the organ peeling forth merry Christmas music, and, after a short prayer, they have a few minutes to look around, as it is not yet quite midnight.

The *messe de minuit* is quite a religious event among French-Canadians, especially in the villages of the Province of Quebec. For weeks past preparations have been going on, everybody has lent a helping hand in the decoration of the interior of the church, which is brilliantly illuminated by a profusion of candles and colored lanterns. Evergreens tastily entwined with red, white and blue bunting, decorate the sanctuary, and the altar is resplendent with flowers and tapers. The priest is clothed in glittering robes, and the attendants wear spotless white surplices. The singing, though plain, is very impressive, and when the priest ascends the pulpit there is a solemn silence.

Good Father Lorrain has been in the parish for over a quarter of a century. He knows and loves everybody and everybody worships him. He draws a vivid picture of the Saviour child born this very night, and speaks with emotion of his mission of peace, pardon and love.