

A DAUGHTER OF NEW FRANCE.

BY MARY CATHERINE CROWLEY.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AGAIN THE GALLANT BOSTONNAIS.

At Ville Marie I put before Governor Vaudreuil the affairs entrusted to me by our Sire, and these proceeded, with as little delay as might be, to Quebec, there to carry out his instructions still further and to await his mails from France. I will not attempt to describe my emotions down the St. Lawrence, I beheld looming up before me the rugged crag whereon the intrepid Champlain erected the royal stronghold of New France; when I saw the peaked roofs and gilded bellfries of the upper town gleaming in the light of the setting sun; when I gazed upon the grim old Castle of St. Louis and saw above it the proud banner of the fleur-de-lis floating in the breeze, even as it does to-day in this good year 1735, I was a joy, indeed, to find that my long absence had not turned the hearts of friends from me; to have pressed upon me offers of hospitality and entertainment from high quarters. In the letter I brought from his Excellency it was ordered that I was to be given rooms in the Chateau, and the best that the old mansion afforded; the Intendant, Monsieur de Beaubien, in turn most cordially made me free of his table at the Palace.

The Recollets, seeing that I was not disposed to house myself with the great, would fain have me stay with them in their new monastery beside the church on the Place d'Armes, and I had a score of other invitations. Nevertheless I chose to go quietly with my brother Jacques to the old residence above the Guyon warehouse, which, with its many associations and its memories of my dear parents, was still home to me, albeit I now found there another generation of Guyons, over whom my brother's wife ruled as "la bonne mere,"—she who was pretty Louise Neil.

Still comely she was, and most good-natured, albeit now, I hear, there is a deal too much of her in the mat or of avoirdupois. For my reception there was a banquet, to which our nearest friends were bidden, and during all my visit Louise strove to her utmost to tempt my palate with the delectable delicacies known to the housewives of New France, since she would have it I was not grown fully strong after my lassitude. It was not her fault, good soul! that her petites croques au beurre and her croqueignoles, though truly delicious, were not quite equal to those I had eaten in my boyhood days; since—even my wife (for I have a wife now)—even my wife scarce makes such perfect croqueignoles as those which my dear mother used to have for me of old when I came home from my studies in the book-room of the Recollets.

This I confide to the manuscript before me with the utmost accuracy, however; and if the reader chances to find at this point two of the pages adhering together, or, if I must needs explain, well, then, I will set down that my wife has a spirit of her own, and moreover she is proud of her cookery. Also, like my brother Jacques, I am somewhat lacking in the imperious manner of the elder Guyon, and my wife holds me not in awe as my good mother held my father; indeed, I will acknowledge, my lightest say has weight with her. Yet this, she says, is a matter of love; and with her answer I am more than content. For if to some it may appear strange that, although I have been her husband many a year, she loves me still, and I am still her lover, yet so it is. And so it will be, even were her skill at making croqueignoles not half so notable as I have found it.

But I have lapsed into the present, whereas I should be writing of some twenty years ago. On the morning after my arrival at Quebec, having made one or two visits to officials in the interests of La Mothe, I set out, upon Jacques' bay horse Lambrun, for Beauport and the home of my uncle, Francois Guyon of the Meadows, as he was often called.

The season was of an autumnal hue, and I took the old road out by St. John's Gate. I looked not back at the gray churches and monasteries, the grim Castle and Palace, or the picturesque houses of the town, nor yet upon the yellowing trees of the gardens by the river, but kept my face toward the open country, and urged my horse to greater speed. Still I knew that the valley of the St. Charles, winding away to the northwest, was in the river where Jacques Cartier laid up his ships whose like silver in the sunlight.

So early is our Canadian autumn that already the hillsides began to take on a tinge of russet, and across toward the cleft of Montmorenci the maple groves and thickets were aflame with crimson and gold, as if Nature had lighted a mighty camp fire and bidden all her children to a harvest feast. But I am getting into the present again; at the time it was not of feastings I thought, and the forests, so gorgeous in their foliage, seemed to me then as so many altars whereon were lighted sacrificial fires to the Most High.

Their splendor too was half veiled in a soft haze, and the sky glowed with the wealth of color contrasted with the clear blue of the sky, and the violet mists that hung over Cap Tourmente and the distant mountains. The road had been well travelled all summer, and the hoofs of Lambrun rang a cheery music out of the hard ground. After an hour's riding I caught sight of the red chimneys and white walls of my uncle's house and the walls of my uncle's house and the walls of my uncle's house.

Presently I should be again face to face with Francois Guyon; I should hear his hearty greeting, and feel the warm clasp of his hand. Here, too, I should find the Lady of Chateauguay, the sweet Babette of the olden time. Yes, she had come back to her childhood's home to help to soothe the last days of my aunt—for the good Dame Guyon was no more. Barbe, however, had stayed on, I had been told, to comfort a grief of my uncle with a daughter's love. Anon I should see her; should note the sheen of her fair hair, the flush of her cheek, the light of her eyes; should hear her blithe voice speak my name in happy-hearted welcome. But—my spirits sank as I thought myself back from my reverie and reined in Lambrun from the mad gallop to which I had spurred him. The truth confronted me once more. I should see Barbe at Beauport; I might take her hand in mine for a moment, and even press a kiss upon those white fingers in cavalier fashion; I might spend the afternoon in talking to her; nevertheless, we should be still as far from each other as when separated by the leagues of wilderness that lie between Fort Pontchartrain and Quebec, more apart even than when I came from France and found she had married the noble Le Moyné and was already his widow.

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