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OUR CENTENNIAL STORY.

THE BASTONNAIS:

A TALE OF THE AMERICAN INVASION OF CANADA IN 1775-76.

By JOHN LESPERANCE.

BOOK III.

THE BURSTING OF THE TEMPEST.

XII.

WAS IT DESIGN OR ACCIDENT?

Batoche delivered Pauline's letter to Zulma earlier than he had expected. He had intended to go out to the Sarpy mansion on purpose to do so, but to his surprise and pleasure, he encountered her that very day in the environs of Quebec. She was on horseback, accompanied by a servant. As soon as she spied the old soldier, she rode up to him and greeted him in the warmest language. A few words of conversation sufficed to reveal the intention of her journey. She had taken advantage of the splendid weather for a jaunt across the country and had chosen the direction of Quebec in order to learn what was going on between the contending armies. Batoche confined himself to a few words about her friends within the town and excused himself from saying more by producing the letter of Pauline. Zulma seized it eagerly, broke the seal and ran her eye over the numerous sheets. She said nothing, but the expression of her countenance was that of intense amusement, except towards the end of the reading when it changed to a look of curious gravity.

"I shall read it more leisurely when I get home," she said to Batoche, folding the missive and secreting it in her bosom, "and Pauline will be sure to receive a long answer. For the present, please give her my thanks and tell her that the things which she writes me are full of interest. It is very kind of her thus to think of me. Tell her that she is ever present to my mind. I am in no danger, but she is. I can roam about at my pleasure, while she is restrained within the walls. Tell her that I am prepared to do anything I can for her. Whatever she needs she will have from me, and you will be our messenger, will you not, Batoche?"

The old man signified his ready assent. "If there is a necessity for it, I will go to Pauline even through the barricades and barriers. Wherever you lead, Batoche, I will follow. Tell her this, and now, adieu."

"Adieu?" said Batoche inquiringly. "Yes, I will return home. I have had an agreeable ride. I might perhaps have advanced a little further, but now that I have met you, and received this precious letter, I am satisfied."

"It is not yet late in the forenoon," replied Batoche. "Mademoiselle might tarry somewhat longer. I think she might render her journey still more agreeable."

Through these simple words, Zulma was not slow to discern the meaning of her old friend. Her cheek reddened and her eye got animated, spite of the exertions she made to hide her emotions.

"Some of your old tricks of divination again," she said laughing. "Pray, why should I tarry longer?"

Batoche met her ardent glance with a flash of intelligence. Pointing to a little clump of wood, about a quarter of mile to the right, he said: "I gave him your note, mademoiselle. He was deeply moved. He declared he would treasure it all his life. Perhaps he has answered you already."

Zulma shook her head slowly, but made no interruption.

"He is there, mademoiselle, with his command. Perhaps, in a few days, he may be ordered further forward. If he knew that you were so near him and did not see you, I am certain that he would be deeply distressed. If he knew that you were here, he would ride out at once to meet you."

Zulma still maintained silence, but she could not conceal the agitation which these words produced within her.

"Mademoiselle," continued Batoche, "will you advance with me a little, or shall I go on and tell him that you are here?"

"I put myself in your hands," said Zulma in a low voice, bending over to the old soldier.

Batoche darted a last glance at her which appeared to decide him. He set forth at once in the direction of the camp, and before ten minutes had elapsed, Carry Singleton was riding in hot haste to meet Zulma. He persuaded her to remain a few hours in the camp in the company of his fellow officers and it was in her honor that he performed the tournament which we have described in the preceding chapter. And it was thus that they both unexpectedly were seen by Pauline and Hardinge.

XIII.

THE INTENDANT'S PALACE.

On the 5th December the whole American army marched up to Quebec. Montgomery, who had come down from Montreal with his victorious army, joined Arnold at Pointe-aux-Trembles and took command of the expedition. Flushed with the success which had laid all Canada at his feet, in a campaign of barely three months, the youthful hero advanced against the last rampart of

British power with the determination to carry it or die. His troops shared his enthusiasm. The despondency of the preceding fortnight had melted away and was replaced by an ardor that was proof against the rigors of the season and the undisguised difficulties of the gigantic task which confronted them. They knew that the eyes of all their countrymen were upon them. The Congress at Philadelphia paused in its work of legislation to listen to the news from Canada. Washington was almost forgotten in the anxiety about Montgomery. New England stood expectant of wonders from the gallantry of Arnold. In far-off Maryland and Virginia, the mothers, wives and daughters on the plantations had no thoughts but of the postboy who galloped down the lane with letters from the North where their loved ones were serving under the chivalrous Morgan. It was generally felt then, as it is now well understood in the light of history, that on the fate of Quebec depended, in great measure, the fate of the continental revolution. If that stronghold were captured, the Americans would be rid of every enemy from the North, the French-Canadians and the Indians friendly to France would be encouraged to join the cause of independence, while the moral effect in Europe, where Wolfe's immortal achievement was still fresh in all minds, would doubtless hasten the boon of intervention.

Montgomery, who was altogether a superior man, was keenly alive to all these considerations, and hence when he moved up from Pointe-aux-Trembles he carried with him the full weight of this enormous responsibility. How far he was equal to it these humble pages will briefly tell for the hundredth time, and the writer is proud that he is allowed the opportunity to tell it.

Montgomery took up his headquarters at Holland House and Arnold occupied Langlois House near Scott's Bridge. Around these two points revolved the fortunes of the Continental army during this momentous month of December prior to the attack on Quebec.

It was in the latter building, on the morning after the arrival of the army, that Morgan, who, as we have stated, had preceded the main body by five days, and occupied the principal roads leading to the beleaguered town, received from Arnold the command to occupy the suburb of St. Roch, and establish his headquarters in a large edifice known as the Intendant's Palace. This historical pile was perhaps the most magnificent monument in the Province. It was built as early as 1684, by orders of the French King, under the administration of Intendant De Meulles. In 1712, it was consumed by fire, when occupied by Intendant Bezon, but was reconstructed by orders from Versailles. During the last eleven years of French domination, from 1748 to 1750, it became famous through the orgies and bacchanalian scandals of Intendant Bigot, the Sardanapalus of New France, whose exploits of gallantry and conviviality would have formed a fitting theme for a romance from the pen of the elder Dumas. After the Conquest, the British had almost entirely neglected it, as they held their official offices entirely within the town. At the time of the siege, therefore, the edifice was in a deserted and somewhat dilapidated condition, but its large dimensions afforded shelter to a considerable number of Americans, and its advantageous locality suggested to Montgomery the idea of making it the headquarters of his sharpshooters. Morgan was in consequence ordered to place there a picked detachment of riflemen. This he put under the command of Singleton who moved thither a couple of days after his interview with Zulma. From the high cupola of the Intendant's Palace, he kept up a regular fire on the exposed points of the garrison. The sentries along the walls were picked off, one after another; whenever a reconnoitering party appeared above the stockades, they were at once driven under cover, and even the workers of the barbette guns were often frightened away from their pieces. Whenever, as frequently happened, a few mortars were pointed on the town from the environs of the Palace, the sharp fusillade which accompanied them from the embrasures of the cupola, produced the liveliest commotion within the walls, causing the alarm bells to sound and sending battalion upon battalion of militia to the rescue. The Americans were very much encouraged by this sign of success, imagining that they had discovered a strong strategic point. The British were proportionately vexed, and Carleton determined on getting rid of the annoyance. For that purpose, he brought a battery of nine pounders to bear upon the building. When Cary Singleton saw it mounted, he smelt mischief.

"We will be knocked off our pins, boys," he said, "but before we drop let every man of you bring down his man." The contest was keen and animated. The riflemen of Virginia poured volley after volley against the artillerymen, while the latter hurled their solid balls against the massive masonry. At first they fired low battering in doors, splin-

tering wood-work, unhinging shutters and ploughing the floors. The old walls of the town were shrouded in clouds of white smoke. The Palace appeared like a ring of fire from the red barrels of the rifle-men. At length, one of the British militia officers stepped forward and pointed a nine-pounder direct on the cupola.

Cary spied the movement and exclaimed: "This is our last chance. Fire!"

Loud and clear boomed the roar of that fatal cannon shot amid the rattle of musketry. There was a crash, a shivering of timbers, and then a heavy fall. When the smoke cleared away, the Intendant's Palace was a heap of ruins. The cupola had entirely disappeared. Wounded men crept out of the debris, as well as they could, some limping, some holding up a broken arm, others bandaging their damaged scalps, but all trailing their muskets. Cary Singleton was borne away by two of his men badly hurt in both legs. The British officer who had aimed the victorious shot stood towering on the walls surveying his achievement. It was Roderick Hardinge.

"Well done, Captain," said Caldwell, commander of the militia regiment to which Roderick belonged, and who had entrusted his young friend with the destruction of the Palace. "That is a good work. I have watched it from the bastion yonder and come to congratulate you. I shall recommend you for immediate promotion."

And so he did. Before that day had ended Roderick Hardinge was breveted a Major. He was overjoyed and after receiving the congratulations of his friends, he hurried off to tell Pauline of his good fortune. Her father was out of the house and she was quite alone. When she opened the door to Hardinge, her eyes were red with weeping, and she held a bit of written paper in her hand. There is no need to describe the meeting. Suffice it to say that the note had informed her of Cary Singleton's fall.

XIV.

LITTLE BLANCHE.

Zulma had not forgotten her promise to Batoche concerning little Blanche. The last time she had met the old man, the subject was mooted and the answer she received was that possibly within a few days he would have occasion to demand her good services in favor of his granddaughter. An unforeseen circumstance hastened their meeting. Sieur Sarpy having learned that an intimate friend of his, living at the village of Charlesbourg, was very ill and particularly desired to see him, proposed to Zulma that she should accompany him on the visit. There was no risk attending the journey, as although Charlesbourg lay not very far from Quebec, to the north-east and in the environs of Montmorenci, it was out of the beat of the besieging forces, and could be reached by a circuitous route free from all interruptions. The promise of immunity had no effect upon Zulma who knew that she had nothing whatever to fear, but she accepted the offer eagerly through the motive of being near her aged father, and because the excitement of travel was a positive relief in her then state of mind. The journey was accomplished successfully and without incident. The weather was favorable and the winter roads excellent. Sieur Sarpy finding his friend very ill indeed, decided upon remaining two or three days at his bedside. The first day Zulma kept him company, but the second, having learned upon inquiry that Batoche's cabin was not a great distance away, she felt an irresistible desire to drive over and visit little Blanche. Her father did not think it worth his while to interpose any objections, although he really did not fancy the project. Strange to say, his sick friend favored it. Smiling languidly, he said in a whisper:—

"Let your daughter go. She may be able to do some good. Batoche is a wonderful man. We all like him, however little we can make him out. I am told that his granddaughter is a very singular child. Let Zulma go."

She went accompanied only by her own servant. She would accept no other escort. When she debouched from the Charlesbourg road into the broad highway leading from Quebec through Beauport to Montmorenci and onwards, she heard the sullen roar of cannon and the muffled roll of musketry in front of the town. She stopped a moment to listen, remarking to her companion that the firing was brisker than usual. But she was not further impressed and soon drove on. The directions she had received were so precise that no difficulty was experienced in finding the route to the cabin. The little path leading to it from the main road was unbeaten either by trace of cariole or web of snow-shoe, but her horse broke through it easily enough, and pulled up in front of the hut almost before it was seen. It was nearly indistinguishable, being white as the element by which it was surrounded, and silent as the solitude amid which it stood. The faintest thread of white smoke rose from the chimney. Not a sound in the environs could be heard save the dull moan of the water-fall. Zulma stepped lightly out of the sleigh, tripped up to the door and rapped gently. No answer. She rapped a little louder. Still no answer. She applied her ear to the small aperture of the latch. Not a breath was audible. Getting just a little excited, not through fear, but through the mystery of adventure, she drew off her glove and knocked vigorously. The door opened wide and noiselessly on its hinges, and across it stood a mite of a girl, dressed in white woollen. For a moment Zulma did not stir. She could not. The strangeness of that child's face, its weird

beauty, the singular light in the wide-open eyes arrested her footsteps and almost the beating of her heart. And near the child was a huge black cat, with stiff tail, bristling fur and glaring green eye, not hostile exactly, but sharply observant and expectant.

"Blanche," said Zulma at length in a voice whose musical softness was as that of a mother's appeal. "Bon jour, Blanche. You do not know me. My name is Zulma Sarpy."

There was no fear in the child's face from the first. Now all doubt and hesitation disappeared from it. She did not smile, but a beautiful serenity spread over it. She joined her two little thin hands together, open palm to palm, and instead of approaching, retreated a step or two as if to make way for her visitor. Zulma entered and closed the door.

"I have come to see you, Blanche. Your grandfather has spoken to me of you and I want to do something for you."

The child answered brightly that her grandfather had indeed mentioned mademoiselle Sarpy's name and told her how good she had been to him and how she had promised to be her friend. Both Zulma and Blanche being now perfectly at ease, our old acquaintance Velours testified his satisfaction at this issue of affairs by curving his long back and rubbing himself against the hem of Zulma's cloak. Blanche gave her visitor a seat, helped her to take off her furs and soon the two were engaged in earnest discourse. Zulma looked around the room and moved about to examine the many articles of its quaint furniture. This afforded her the opportunity of asking many questions to all of which Blanche returned the most intelligent answers. Indeed, the child gave proofs of very remarkable intelligence. There was patent in her a wisdom far beyond her years. It was something different from the usual precocity, because the range of her information was limited enough, and there was sufficient simplicity in her discourse to eliminate that feeling of anxiety and pain which we always experience in the presence of abnormally developed children. Zulma made her tell all about her grandfather, and thus learned curious details concerning a character which she intensely admired notwithstanding the mystery which was set like a seal upon it—a mystery which Blanche's unconscious revelations rendered only deeper and more provokingly interesting. She spoke to the child, too, of her god-mother, Pauline, and it was a delight to learn from those truthful lips how much more lovable her dear friend was than she had ever suspected. Zulma felt that her visit was more than repaid by the insight she thus gained into the characters of Pauline and Batoche.

Then she broached higher things. She spoke of God and religion. The untutored child of the forest rose with the occasion. There was nothing conventional in her mind or words on these topics—as how could there be under the wayward teaching of Batoche? But her intuitions were crystal clear. There were no breaks, no obscurities in her spiritual vision. It was evident that she had studied and communed direct with nature and that her soul had grown in literal contact with the winds and the flowers, the trees and the water courses, and the pure untrammelled elements of God.

She knelt before the lap of Zulma and recited all the prayers she knew—the formulas which the priest and Pauline had taught her, and the ejaculations which she had taught herself to say, in the bright morning, in the dark evening, in the silent days of peace, in the crash of the tempest, or when her little heart ached from whatever cause as she passed from infancy to adolescence. The contrast between the styles of these prayers impressed Zulma very strongly. The former were such as she herself knew, complete, appropriate and pathetic in their very phraseology. The latter were fragmentary, rude and sometimes incongruous in syntax, but they spoke the poetry of the heart, and their yearning fervor and indubity made Zulma understand, as she listened to them through her tears, how it is that wayside statues of stone, and wooden figures of the Madonna in lofty niches, are said to hear and answer by visible tokens the prayers of the illiterate, the unfortunate and the poor.

(To be continued.)

GENERAL CUSTER.

General George A. Custer, was a native of Ohio. He graduated at West Point in 1861, with the grade of Second Lieutenant of Cavalry. He was attached to the Army of the Potomac, and distinguished himself at Williamsburg in the Peninsula campaign, for which he was made a First Lieutenant. Promotion now came to him rapidly, as a reward for gallant services. He was soon made Captain, and displayed so much ability while acting as a brigade commander of mounted cavalry that in 1863 he was appointed a Brigadier-General of Volunteers. General Custer participated in many important engagements, and won great honor for dash and gallantry during the terrible campaign in the Wilderness and in Sheridan's brilliant operations in the Shenandoah Valley, for which he received the commission of Major-General of Volunteers. He participated with distinguished ability in the grand movements which decided the fate of Lee's army and of the rebellion in 1865, and was breveted Colonel and Brigadier-General in the regular army for his eminent services. Since the close of the war General Custer has been chiefly engaged in the Indian country. At the time of his death he was acting simply as commander of his regiment, the Seventh Cavalry.