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OUR CENTENNIAL STORY.

THE BASTONNAIS :

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

By JOHN LESPERANCE.

BOOK IV.

AFTER THE STORM.

X.

ON THE BRINK.

Another month had passed. With the middle of April the balmy spring-time was at hand. The snow had disappeared from mountain and plain; the rivers flowed clear and abundant in their channels; the trees were faintly burgeoning, and the heavens palpitated with an atmosphere of genial warmth. The cattle, confined for so many months in the darkness of stalls, lay basking in the sunshine, or trooped to the southern slopes where the young grass was springing. The sheep skipped on the hill sides. The doors and windows of the farm-houses were thrown wide open for a vital freshening. The children played on the stoop. White steam rose from the cracks and fissures of the heated granaries. The barn-yard was vocal with awakening sounds. The dove-cots buzzed with wooings; the eaves grew populous with swallows, and the thatched roofs of the pens and stables were covered with poultry grubbing for the earliest worm.

It was the resurrection of nature, nowhere felt with such keen exhilarance as in arctic latitudes. From the far off mountains, the clouds of murky vapor that lifted and rolled away, leaving the purple summits towering up to receive the first kiss of the rosy dawn and the last embrace of the golden sunset, were emblems of the winter's gloom replaced by that spring-tide brightness which aroused new hopes and a revived interest in the souls of men. The crocus of the glen, the anemone of the prairie, the cress of the sheltered waters, the hum of the first insect, the twitter from the mossy nest, the murmur of forest streams, were all so many types of human rejuvenescence and animation.

There was besides a moral feature to the splendor of the season. The dreary Lenten time was over, with its vigils and fasts, its self-abasement and penitence. The dread Holy Week had gone, with its plaints and laments, its confession of sins and cries for mercy, its darkened windows and stripped altars, its quenched tapers and hushed bells, its fourteen stations of that *Via Crucis* which rehearses the ineffable history of the Man of Sorrows and the Lady of Pain. The glorious Easter morning was there. Bright vestments gleamed, a thousand lights flamed from the sanctuary, perfumed incense circled heavenward bearing the thanksgiving of opening hearts. From hillside to valley echoed the music of bells in very turret and steeple, even the bells of the churches and convents in the old beleaguered town, that had so often sounded the alarm of battle during the night, taking on a new voice to celebrate the "great day which the Lord hath made." And even as the heavy stone was suddenly flung aside from the sepulchre under the shadow of Golgotha, giving freedom to the Master of the world, so the pall of winter was torn from the face of nature, and from the hearts of men was removed the burden which, during four long months, had made their torpor somewhat akin to that of the great beasts of the wilderness.

It was Easter Monday, a calmer day, but perhaps more enjoyable from the palpable assurance it afforded that the promises of its predecessor were really being fulfilled. The weather was magnificent, and the whole country resounded with the voices of men and women preparing for their work. Zulma Sarpy and Cary Singleton walked alone on the bank of the St. Lawrence, directly in front of the mansion. They moved along slowly, frequently stopping to admire the scenery spread out before them, or to engage in earnest conversation. Cary had entirely recovered from his illness, appearing stouter and stronger than ever before. He was clothed in his uniform, a proof that he had resumed active military duty. Zulma was seemingly in her usual health, and as she stood with her grey felt Montepan hat and azure plume, and brilliant cashmere shawl tightly drawn across her shoulders, her beauty shone in its queenliest aspects. No fitter companion for a soldier could well be pictured. Cary evidently felt this, as his frequent glances of admiration testified, and there were moments when to the observer he would have appeared as making the most ardent declarations of love.

Such, however, was not the fact. The young people had not reached that limit. Well as they knew each other, often as they had met, exceptional as were the circumstances which had surrounded their intercourse, they had never gone beyond a certain point of mutual confidence. They had often hovered on the edge, but sudden or unforeseen incidents had intervened, and thrown them back instead of advancing their suits. Zulma was sure that Cary loved her, but she had never ascertained

that fact by any word of his. Cary could not doubt of Zulma's love for him, as her deeds and writings had eloquently shown, but she had never given him the opportunity, or he fancied he had never had the opportunity, of obtaining a decisive answer from her lips. On this day, their conversation was earnest and active, but inconsequent. It is often thus in that game of love which is conducted not in concentric circles, but in eccentric orbits.

To Cary the situation was becoming pressing, and he told Zulma as much in words which deeply impressed her. He foresaw that the end was approaching, that, with the return of the open weather, military operations must take a decided turn, one way or the other. He was sagacious enough to foresee that there could hardly be other than one fatal result—the retreat of the Americans. Arnold had been superseded. Wooster, an aged officer, who had commanded during the winter at Montreal, doing a great deal of harm to the American cause by his inefficiency, and his religious intolerance towards the French-Canadians, had assumed the control. From him little or nothing was expected with the present army. Reinforcements, although often promised and ostentatiously announced to the garrison through deserters and prisoners, were altogether out of the question, while it was known that, now the St. Lawrence was clear of ice, a fleet of British vessels might soon be expected for the relief of Quebec. In a fortnight at furthest, Cary foresaw that a crisis must come. All this he confided to Zulma, knowing well that he was violating no duty in entrusting her with the information. The girl was astounded at the intelligence. It broke all her dreams. Her confidence in the success of the Continental arms had been unlimited. Notwithstanding their terrible reverses she never allowed herself for one moment to doubt that the champions of liberty would capture the last stronghold of British tyranny, and restore the old reign of French domination in America. She even tried to argue her companion into a reversal of his judgment, but failing in this, her instinct brought her face to face with the further personal result to which Cary had altogether eluded.

The retreat of the Americans then took a more serious aspect. It implied mutual separation. It came to this—that, after six months of the closest intercourse, hallowed and purified by a series of the most cruel vicissitudes, Cary should be sent flying back to whence he came, while she would be driven again to the solitude of Pointe-aux-Trembles. Could this be? Should Cary be thus left to his fate? Would she be able to endure this sudden and enforced loneliness?

Singleton was outspoken and diffuse in his expressions of regret. He repeated over and over again that his failure as a soldier wounded his pride and disappointed his hopes, but that his separation from Zulma would break his heart. Had he foreseen this, he should have sought death at the Intendant's Palace or at Sault-au-Matlot. Death in the house of M. Belmont would have been a relief and a benediction.

It was in vain that Zulma attempted to comfort him. Her heart was not in it, and she could, therefore, not go beyond the range of commonplaces. Finally a deep silence fell upon both. They doubtless felt that they ought to go one step further and face a dread corollary. But they did not. Perhaps they durst not. Why not? Time will tell.

The conference ended in these words: "I must return to camp, mademoiselle. Let us postpone this subject. I have more to say, but require to collect myself."

"I too have more to say, Captain."

Cary almost started on hearing these words, the tone of which struck him as singular. He looked at her, and found that her face was ashy pale. Her eyes were gazing far away across the St. Lawrence. He fancied—was it only a fancy?—that she was a little piqued.

"Shall we walk back to the mansion?" he asked almost timidly.

"If you please," was the quiet reply.

They advanced slowly across the open field, and up the avenue of trees, speaking little, and that little only on such objects as caught their eye on the way. Unconsciously they were fighting shy of each other. When they reached the green-sward in front of the mansion, they paused and suddenly Zulma broke out into a hearty laugh.

"We are both children, sir," said she. "I thought you a great soldier and I find you a child. I thought myself a strong-minded woman and I too am a child."

And she burst out laughing again. Cary was puzzled, but could not repress a smile. He did not ask her meaning and smiled only because he saw that her old serenity had returned.

Just then the setting sun poured through the intervening trees, flooding the green with glory, and lifting the tawin as it were in a kind of transfiguration. They were idealized—he ap-

pearing like a knight of legendary days, and she a queen of the fairy land. Both were beautiful and both were happy once more.

Zulma knocked at the door, and the maid who answered the summons handed her a letter. She opened it hurriedly, glanced over the page, and throwing out her arms, uttered a moan of terror, while her eyes were fixed wildly on the young officer.

"What is it, mademoiselle? What is it?"

"Pauline is dying!"

XI.

IN THE VALE OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

Cary's presentiment had come true. After his departure, Pauline struggled against her fate for eight or ten days, but had finally to succumb. One evening as she sat alone in her chamber, the forces of nature suddenly gave away, she fell heavily to the floor in a swoon, and was carried to her bed in the arms of her father. The physician treated her at first as for a case of mere physical debility, resultant on her long watches during the eight weeks of Singleton's illness, and the extreme anxiety she had experienced for the safety of her friend. But when the malady remained obstinate to his prescriptions, and other insidious symptoms set in, pointing to a gradual decay of the vital energies, he divined that the ill was a mental one which would baffle his art unless he could ascertain its cause from the patient herself. Her confession of it would be half the cure. But he did not succeed in extracting this confession. Pauline did not know what ailed her. Beyond a great prostration she did not know that she was sick. She was unconscious of any cause for her present condition. This was her language, but of course the experienced old doctor did not believe a word of it. At the same time, however, he was aware that it was quite useless to press his interrogatory further, his knowledge of women being that there is no measuring the length, breadth and depth of woman's secretiveness. He therefore consulted M. Belmont. From him he learned that an observable change for the worse in Pauline's manner was coincident with the young American officer's departure from his house, and even dated back from the latter days of his convalescence when his departure was understood to be only a question of time. But beyond this M. Belmont's perspicacity did not go. He averred that he had not noticed any particular attachment between his daughter and her patient. She was nearly always at his bedside, but this was no more than could be expected from a tender-hearted nurse towards a poor fellow who had fallen among enemies, and whose life depended upon unremitting care. The young man had throughout acted like a perfect gentleman, was cautious, delicate, reserved, and quite above taking advantage of his position to toy with the feelings of Pauline. Furthermore, the girl had long been devoted to Major Hardinge, and the Major was devoted to her. Indeed, their relations might be said to be of the tenderest character. Finally, this American officer, unless he was much mistaken, had contracted a strong affection for the daughter of Sieur Sarpy, an affection which was reciprocated, and he had every reason to believe that Pauline was well acquainted with that circumstance.

"Stop there," said the old doctor, taking a pinch of snuff and smiling slyly. "There is perhaps a clue. Your daughter may have fallen in love with this young rebel—girls cannot help such things, you know—and the knowledge that his heart is turned to another may be precisely the thing that has preyed upon her mind, bringing her to her present pass."

"But she and Zulma Sarpy are intimate friends."

"So much the worse. Her feelings would be the more acute and the struggle against herself all the keener on that account."

"But Major Hardinge?"

"La, la, la! your Major. She may have loved him till she saw the other man, and then, *va fait*. From a Major to a Captain, from a loyalist to a rebel is rather a descent, *eh, mon ami*? But what will you have? These things cannot be controlled. They happen every day. Do you know that she is plighted in any way to this Major?"

"She is not."

"How do you know?"

"She told me so."

"Under what circumstances? Excuse this freedom, my friend, but with the confessions of women everything depends upon circumstances. If it is under persuasion, a woman may tell you the truth, for their hearts are good after all. But if it is under compulsion, or threat, or by strategy, they are a match in fencing with the best of us."

"It was under a sense of duty, and only a few weeks ago. I was annoyed at Hardinge's manner to me and even to her after the death of that servant of his who was killed, you remember. I told Pauline I would resent that conduct if it were repeated, and on the same occasion I asked her whether she had engaged herself to him in any shape or form. Her answer was a simple, straight-forward negative, and the child is incapable of an untruth."

"This is very well. It removes one difficulty. Her mind does not suffer from any broken pledge towards the Major."

"But her love for him must remain."

"Not heaven or earth can dominate a woman's love. It is strong as death, immense as the sea, deep as the abyss, yet a glance of the eye, a wave

of the hand, a smile, a toss of the head may change it for ever. Listen, Belmont. Your daughter loves the American officer. She grieves for Hardinge, she grieves for Zulma Sarpy. The diagnosis is complete. She is wasting away in a silent, hidden combat between herself and her friends. And I fear the worse."

"You do not mean that Pauline is in danger?"

"It is the duty of friendship to be candid with you. If there is not a complete change, within ten days your daughter will be dead."

"Gracious heaven!" exclaimed the poor father, his wall of horror sounding through the house and frightening Pauline from her trance. She screamed in her turn. M. Belmont leaped to his feet and was about to rush to her room, when the doctor restrained him.

"Do not present yourself in that condition. It might kill her. I will go and pacify her."

He did so. After a few minutes, he informed M. Belmont that he was positive of the correctness of his conjecture, and advised an immediate change of scene for the girl.

"A change of scene? Are you dreaming, doctor? We are penned up like sheep in this unfortunate town. I am under a ban. I can expect no favors. The whole country is deserted or overrun with soldiery. And I must accompany her. Nothing on this earth could separate me from my child. I have lived for her. I will die with her. But oh, doctor, she will not die. Tell me she shall not die."

"Then she must leave Quebec."

"But, doctor!"

"It must be done. It is a case of life and death."

A painful silence ensued. M. Belmont bowed his head in his hands and moaned. "What shall I do? Who will help me? Who will intercede for me?"

At this juncture, who should make his appearance but Captain Bouchette? His presence was a revelation.

As soon as he saw him, M. Belmont became calm, and in a few words unfolded his difficulty to him.

"Rest easy, my friend," said Bouchette in his hearty way. "There can be no possible obstacle. I will go and see the Governor at once, and he will not refuse. It is a matter of mercy. General Carleton is the most soft-hearted of men."

Within an hour, Bouchette returned with the necessary permits duly signed and sealed. M. Belmont and his daughter were allowed to leave the town, the reason of their departure being fully stated, and a recommendation was added to the good offices of both friends and foes.

When Pauline was apprised of this measure, she rallied a little and smiled her contentment, but soon after fell into her habitual lassitude. The doctor, who was there to watch the effect, was not overpleased. He had expected a more marked result, and he almost feared that the relief had come too late. He therefore prescribed that the change should be postponed for a few days, until he had applied some stimulants and restoratives to the debilitated frame. It was during this critical interval that Zulma received a letter from her brother Eugene repeating the current rumor that Pauline was actually dying. He added, however, that a supreme effort would be made to transport her out of the town.

XII.

IN THE FIERY FURNACE.

On the third day after these occurrences, Pauline had rallied to the extent of being able to rise from her bed and sit in an easy chair. She signified to her father and the family physician that she felt sufficient strength to undertake the journey on the following morning. But she set a condition. She must see Roderick Hardinge at once. The young officer had all along been most faithful in his attention, calling morning and evening to visit her, but within the preceding ten or twelve days, neither he nor any other stranger had been admitted to her room. When Pauline stated her request, the doctor shook his head. M. Belmont, however, promptly interfered with his permission.

"You shall see him, my dear. I will send for him immediately."

Hardinge was on duty at the ramparts, but he obtained a respite without delay, and hurried on his errand. Why did his heart throb as he hastened along the streets? Why did his hand tremble as he raised the knocker at the well known door. Roderick's instincts were true as are ever those of single-minded men. A shadow had been on him for weeks, and he knew that it was now thickening into darkness. Spite of himself, a presentiment possessed his soul that whereas his military prospect was brightening, his career advancing, and the success of his cause was being every day more assured, his personal fate was waning and the dearest hopes of his heart were verging to the gulf of disappointment. He could not formulate in words what the matter was. Pauline was exteriorly always the same to him, and yet there was a change. Had her love cooled? Had it diverted? Had he done anything to bring about any alteration? Had his political sentiments in any way affected his conduct towards her? Had he taken sufficiently into account the anomalous position in which she was placed by her father's stand during the war? Or were the causes deeper than all this? And his mind reverted to Cary, to Zulma, to a hundred little incidents of the past eventful weeks which his excitement magnified into possible determining causes of the boding change.