

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE CLEARING OF MYSTERY

THE point of his sword was at De Artigny's breast, but the younger man stood motionless, his lips smiling, his eyes on the other's face.

"Perchance, Monsieur," he said quietly, "it might be best for you first to speak with this friend of mine."

"What friend? *Sacre!* What is the fellow to me? Who is he? another one of La Salle's spawn?"

La Forest, still bareheaded, his forehead bleeding, pressed down the swordblade.

"My company is a good one," he said bluntly enough, "and just now well worth belonging to. I am Francois de la Forest, Monsieur, one time commandant at Detroit; at present messenger from the King of France."

"King's messenger — you! *Mon Dieu!* you look it. Come, man, what mummery is this?"

"No mummery, Monsieur. I left France two months since, bearing the King's own word to M. la Barre. 'Tis with his endorsement I journeyed hither to restore Henri de Tonty to his rightful command of Fort St. Louis."