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THE PEACE-KILLER; OR, THE MASSACRE OF LACHINE.

BY S. I. WATSON.

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CHAPTER III.

RENNING THE GAUNTLET.

The morning after the events described in our last two chapters, was set apart by the Chief of the Abenakis for the preliminary torture of his captive. The Huron chieftain was to be compelled to run the gauntlet, the terrible ordeal through which every Indian prisoner, destined to suffer death, was constrained to pass before ending his miseries at the stake. The custom was common to all the Indian nations; and in proportion to the standing of the captive, and to his reputation as a warrior, was the importance attached to this first step in the ascending scale of savage vengeance. There was a tradition among the colonists that, in the early days of the immigration, a white man, condemned to run the gauntlet, had effected his escape through the avenue of armed enemies, carrying with him, however, to his grave, the deep scars of knife and tomahawk. But it was a rule, almost beyond the possibility of exception, that he who was forced to undergo this barbarous ordeal was hacked, wounded, and battered to such a degree, that before he reached the middle of the two opposite rows of his enemies, he would fall down exhausted and insensible; and in this condition was carried away to await the final torments of the pile and faggot.

The Huron chieftain, from the time he had been conveyed out of the council-room of the Fort by the Serpent and his band, had been watched incessantly by eyes, to whose natural keenness the anticipation of vengeance lent an additional sharpness. When he arrived at his place of destination, which was the wigwam of his enemy, the Serpent, his arms were bound behind his back by strong thongs of the untanned hide of the deer. His legs were fastened with similar ligatures. A guard of a dozen savages, each armed with a knife and tomahawk, kept watch over the Huron; and were relieved every three hours. A French guard was also stationed inside the wigwam, not to watch the prisoner, but to prevent his Indian custodians from inflicting upon him needless insult.

About a couple of hours after sunrise, the whole of the Indian village was in motion towards a plot of cleared ground, some five acres in length, and running from the front of the Fort down towards Lake Ontario. This was the spot where it was designed that the captive should be made to run the gauntlet; and thither hurried old men bent with age; squaws, grey-haired, hideous and toothless; younger squaws, chattering over the anticipated feat of vengeance; warriors, silent with the dumbness of resolute cruelty; young children of both sexes, and a multitude of wolfish-looking and half-starved dogs, making the forest resound with their yelpings.

The garrison of the Fort were also stirring. A number of them had sauntered outside the walls; they took the precaution, however, to carry their arms with them. The officer of the day was Lieut. de Belmont, who knew well the character of the Indians; and was fully aware that on occasions of this nature, when their fierce instincts were roused to the highest pitch, like the tiger's by the taste of blood, no unarmed white man in their vicinity, was secure from impulsive acts of violence.

The Serpent, with a dexterity which gave evidence of long practice, arranged the Abenakis in two lines, parallel with each other. These lines, commencing within about thirty yards of the gate of the Fort, and running straight towards the Lake, terminated near the centre of a clearing, a couple of acres square, and studded with stumps of last year's timber-felling. The Serpent had a deep design in causing his line to terminate in this obstructed ground. He knew that the Huron was the best runner in Canada; and feared that, perchance, he might get to the end of the lines comparatively safe; and, in that event, if he emerged upon open ground, he could not be overtaken. But, with the present arrangement, supposing the Huron, owing to his extraordinary agility, were able to make a lucky dash through the hostile avenue, he would find himself in the midst of stumps and fallen timber, and in such a position could be surrounded without difficulty, or, at all events, reached by a bullet or an arrow.

Every individual in the two lines was provided with some description of weapon; the men, with clubs or tomahawks; the squaws, with knives tied upon poles; the children, with stakes sharpened at the ends. It seemed almost impossible that any living thing could pass two yards along that avenue of alert enemies, without being hacked to pieces.

The Serpent having made all his arrangements, cast his eye down the lines, and having convinced himself that there was no out-

let for escape, from head to foot, ordered some of his band to bring forward the Huron chieftain.

In a few minutes the captive appeared on the scene; and was received with loud yells from both lines of the Abenakis. His answer was a contemptuous smile, followed by the words, uttered with deep guttural emphasis, "Dogs and cowards."

They brought him to the head of the lines, and there unloosed the thongs that fastened his arms behind. When he felt himself free, he opened the neck of his hunting frock, and drew in a deep inspiration of the fresh morning air. Then stretching himself to his full height, he cast a searching glance down the ranks as if to see where they terminated. As soon as he perceived that they ended among the stumps of the clearing to which we have already alluded, a shade of disappointment passed over his brows, but almost as instantly disappeared.

Suddenly he turned toward the Serpent and said, "Dog of an Abenakis, I am ready."

The Serpent gave a loud and prolonged whoop, which was answered by a yell from his tribe, and an instant uprising of weapons.

With head thrown back, chest advanced, and left knee bent outward, the Huron seemed about to bound forward, when he shouted all at once down both lines, "Look!" "Look!" pointing, with his left hand, in the direction of the forest. All eyes were turned to the point indicated. In an instant the Huron chieftain, quick as thought, had wrenched a war-club from the hand of an Abenakis who stood near him, and then dashed forward through the hostile rows with the speed of the wind. The savages, who were discomposed by his stratagem, struck at him, most of them in vain. Straight onward he flew, dealing tremendous blows from right to left. He had almost reached the clearing, when a fearful yell struck upon his ears. In a moment a number of Abenakis, who had been concealed behind the stumps, rose from their ambush, and confronted him with levelled muskets. He saw at once that it was death to advance; it was also death to remain stationary, for the lines of enemies through which he had passed were closing in on him from behind in a semicircle from which there could be no escape. He resolved to make for the fort, and turned back in that direction.

A shower of bullets from the Abenakis in the clearing, followed, but passed over his head. He now saw that a party of his enemies had determined to intercept him if he attempted to reach the gate of the Fort in a straight line. His only chance, then, was to make a rapid circuit, and, by passing well to the right of his assailants, and putting forth all his speed, endeavour to reach the gate before them. Situated as he was, there was no opening by which he could find his way into the forest; for a palisading, twelve feet in height, ran round the Fort on its four sides. Darting to his right, with the speed of a deer, he passed round the line of savages, and directed his flight towards the gate. But on glancing behind, he saw that he was closely pursued by the picked runner of the Abenakis. This man had the advantage of being fresh, while the Huron had gone over a mile of ground, and had received several hard knocks while running the gauntlet. The Abenakis was followed, at a distance of some twenty yards, by the Serpent and his brother, both of whom were good runners. But the Huron kept his distance from his first pursuer; and amid the yells of the Indians, and the encouraging cheers of the French soldiers, who were spectators of the exciting chase, had arrived within about ten yards of the gate of the Fort, when his foot caught upon a portion of a stump that projected three or four inches from the ground, and was completely hidden by the long grass. He fell to the earth with great violence; and lay still for a couple of seconds. The main body of the Abenakis, who, seeing the Huron pursued by the best runner of their tribe, as well as by their chief and his brother,—and feeling certain that the prisoner, even if he escaped into the Fort, would be given up to them again, had refrained from the chase, raised a loud cry of triumph when they witnessed the fall of their enemy. But their exultation was brief. The Huron was on his feet before the Abenakis runner came up to him. To the amazement of every one, instead of continuing his flight, he turned round to meet his pursuer. His conduct seemed to be inspired by madness; for he had only a club, while the Abenakis had both knife and tomahawk. Throwing himself back, and resting the weight of his body on his right foot, the Huron awaited the attack. The soldiers of the Fort, although they considered the result of the contest would be the death of the Huron chieftain, could not resist giving him a loud cheer. The Abenakis came up. Leaping up from the ground, so as to add impetus to the blow, he brought his tomahawk down in a direct line with the head of his adversary. But the latter sprang aside, and, before the Abenakis could recover himself for another blow, the club of the agile Huron had fractured his skull and laid him prostrate. Bending over his enemy, the victor snatched the knife from his belt, and picked up the tomahawk. This done, he scalped the lifeless Abenakis, in the twinkling of an eye, amid the infuriated ex-

crations of the tribe, who now rushed in a body towards the gate of the Fort. After waving the scalp in the air, in order to enrage his enemies still more, he was preparing to encounter both the Serpent and his brother, when a dozen of French soldiers seized him from behind and carried him into the Fort. But before the threshold was passed, he managed to get his right arm free, and sent his tomahawk, with unerring aim, right against the breast of the Serpent, who was pressing in after the soldiers. The chieftain of the Abenakis dropped like lead. "Ha, ha," shouted the Huron, "that is the second mark I have branded on the Serpent; the next time Death and I will make the mark together."

When fairly over the threshold, the gate was instantly closed; and the Huron for the present was safe from his enemies.

CHAPTER IV.

JULIE AND ISANTA.

Is a chamber, adjoining the quarters of M. de Callières, sat two maidens, discussing, in low and tremulous tones, the cause of the uproar outside the fort. Both were aware that an expedition was in course of preparation against the Iroquois; but they felt assured that it was not yet ready to start, for if so they would have been informed of the fact by M. de Callières the previous evening. They asked one another if the tumult could have been an attack by the Iroquois; but the presence of the greater part of the soldiers inside the fort convinced them that it was not occasioned by the appearance of these dreaded enemies. So, after exhausting their stock of conjectures, the maidens came to the conclusion to await the explanation of the disturbance from M. de Callières, their guardian and informant on all matters inside the fort, and on most matters in the little colonial world beyond it.

Julie de Châtelet, whose name has already appeared in the course of this narrative, was about entering on her eighteenth year; and was passing from the dream-land of girlhood into the world and ways of womanhood. She was tall; but a rounded and perfect development harmonized her height with all the requirements of beauty of contour and faultlessness of proportion. Her face was of the oval type; blending loveliness of feature with a perpetual sunniness of expression. The eyes were large, black and luminous, shaded, but not concealed by the long silken lashes which fringed them. Her hair, dark, luxuriant and glossy, swept in waves over a neck whose ivory whiteness lent a rare and exquisite distinctness to the contrast. But it was not only in gifts of physical and external beauty that Julie de Châtelet challenged admiration, and captivated all who came within the circle of her acquaintance. Her mind, from an early age, had been stored with that species of knowledge which tends to higher purposes than merely to enable its possessor to float at ease on the shallow conversational currents of *salons*, or fritter away listless and unoccupied hours in the execution of useless and fantastic embroideries. M. de Callières, who, in the active duties of a soldier's life, never ceased to remember his school-day authors with delight, had provided himself with a collection of books, which followed him everywhere, and which he regarded as the most precious portion of his baggage. To these volumes, his ward, Julie, had access whenever she chose; the veteran being her instructor, and, in his absence, one of the missionary fathers, who accompanied the troops everywhere. The result of the care and exertions of M. de Callières was, that in intellectual accomplishments his ward was one of the first women in the colony; and could have compared favourably with many of the ladies who graced the court of King Louis of France.

The companion of Julie de Châtelet was an Indian maiden about her own age, named in the Huron dialect "Isanta," or the "Lily of the Forest." The girl, along with other captives, had been brought to Montreal some ten years previously by the Serpent, and was a Huron by nation. The child was possessed of rare intelligence and beauty; and attracted the attention of M. de Callières, who formed the design of making her a companion for his ward. For this purpose he ransomed her, took her under his own care, had her instructed by the missionary fathers, and finally baptised into the faith of the Church which they represented. Julie de Châtelet took to her little Indian play-mate with all the affectionate ardour of childhood. They learnt their tasks together, grieved together, and rejoiced together; sisters in everything save in the accident of birth.

The Huron maiden, indeed, was a favourite everywhere. She was one whom it was impossible to avoid loving. Her artlessness, her natural buoyancy of spirit, her trustfulness won for her a welcome among all classes of the colonists. She possessed, moreover, the advantages of physical beauty rare among her race. Her features had none of the marked characteristics of her people; but were delicate and finely formed; and her complexion partook more of the deep olive hue of a maiden of southern Europe than of the tint of one born in the Canadian wilderness. It was her eyes, however, which left the deepest impres-

sion on those who gazed for the first time upon her countenance. They were large, dreamy eyes, that seemed to be looking forward at some object present only to her own imagination; and, at times, they would be lit up with a lustre half mysterious and half unearthly. But on these occasions she would be silent and reserved, as if under the spell of a melancholy from which it was impossible to break free, even though assisted by the countercharms of the sweet voice and sisterly comfortness of Julie de Châtelet. The Huron maiden was attired in the same costume as her companion; and the garments of civilization displayed to the highest advantage the exquisite proportions of a figure which united the plastic gracefulness of the Indian with the stately poise and carriage of the European. The only indication of Isanta's origin was a neck-lace of white beads, which she wore continually, from the day she first became acquainted with the French; and these beads no amount of persuasion, even on the part of Julie de Châtelet, could induce her to discard.

"I wonder," said Julie to her companion, breaking a silence that had lasted a considerable time, "what caused the uproar we heard outside the Fort, this morning?"

"The Abenakis have been drinking," replied Isanta.

"But we heard shots fired, and we also heard voices loud in anger," objected Julie.

"The Abenakis, then, have been drinking fire-water," retorted Isanta; "and, in that condition, mistaking their own men in the forest for the Iroquois, have shot at them. Did I not say to you, when the guns were fired, that the sound came from the direction of the clearing? and you know that the forest, at each side of the clearing, runs down to the Lake, and it is by that way the Iroquois would approach if they were coming to attack us?"

"Yes, you said that, Isanta, but I do not think the Abenakis were drinking; for the Marquis de Denonville has issued strict orders that no liquor shall be sold to the Indians."

"And what care the Abenakis for the orders of the Marquis? If they are not allowed to buy fire-water they will steal it."

"Ah, Isanta, you still dislike the Abenakis. I am afraid that all the lessons Father Martin has given you on the duty of forgiving your enemies, have been forgotten."

"The Abenakis killed my mother and sister. How can I forget that?"

"But, surely, if you had it in your power, you would not revenge it upon these people. In spite of all our missionaries can do, the most of them are heathens. But you, Isanta, are a Christian."

"If I would not care to punish with my own hand, the murder of my friends, I would not cry if I saw the Iroquois do it."

"Alas! Isanta, I am beginning to fear for your Christianity."

"Are not you a Christian, Julie?"

"I hope I may be allowed to call myself so."

"Well, then, if you saw the Serpent kill Lieut. de Belmont, as I saw him kill my family; and if, the next moment, you saw Monsieur de Callières come up and kill the Serpent, would you cry for the act of M. de Callières?"

Julie turned red, and, with a confused air, replied: "I think, Isanta, that you are turning foolish, and will soon make me as foolish as you are yourself."

The Huron maiden relapsed into silence for a few moments, and then suddenly asked:

"How old is Lieut. de Belmont?"

Julie's face was again suffused with crimson as she answered:

"How should I know, Isanta? But why do you ask the question?"

"Because I was just now thinking of my brother—the one the Serpent could not kill, when he murdered my family—and that brother would be twenty-five years of age had he lived until the next falling of the leaves."

"Well, Isanta, I cannot say what may be the age of Lieut. de Belmont, but I have heard M. de Callières say he is twenty-four or twenty-five. But how came you to hear that your brother was dead? And why did you not tell me so before to-day?"

"I only heard it yesterday. The Serpent sent one of the Abenakis to tell me that he had taken an Iroquois prisoner; and that this man had told him the Iroquois had captured my brother, and put him to death. I cannot believe it. My brother was too great a chief to be captured by the Iroquois. I would have seen the prisoner yesterday, and inquired of him the truth, only for the order of M. de Callières, that you and I should keep our rooms till the expedition leaves. But I will see him this evening come what may."

"It is better to remain where you are until M. de Callières arrives. From him we can learn everything."

"I would rather inquire of Lieut. de Belmont than M. de Callières."

"And why, Isanta?" queried Julie, looking at the Huron maiden with a somewhat puzzled expression of countenance.

"Because," replied Isanta, "Lieut. de Belmont is a much younger man than M. de Callières; and I do not feel so much ashamed asking a question of a young person as I would on asking it of an elder one."