



It is easy to be noble among the noble. The difficult thing is to keep the nobility of one's nature unperturbed among the petty and the ignoble.

God's Country and the Woman

(Continued from last week.)

WITH each minute that passed Philip wondered how much longer Josephine could keep up the pace. They had run a mile and his own breath was growing shorter when the toe of his moccasined foot caught under a bit of brushwood and he plunged head foremost into the snow. When he had brushed the snow out of his eyes and ears Josephine was standing over him, laughing. The dogs were squatted on their haunches, looking back.

"My poor Philip!" she laughed, offering him an assisting hand. "We almost lost you, didn't we? It was Captain who missed you first, and he almost toppled me over the sleds."

Her face was radiant. Lips, eyes, and cheeks were glowing. Her breast rose and fell quickly.

"It was your fault!" he accused her. "I couldn't keep my eyes off you, and never thought of my feet. I shall have my revenge here!"

He drew her into his arms, protesting. Not until he had kissed her parted, half-smiling lips did he release her.

"I'm going to ride now," she declared. "I'm not going to run the danger of being accused again."

He wrapped her again in the furs on the toboggan. It was eight miles to Joe Breuil's, and they reached his cabin in two hours. Breuil was not much more than a boy, scarcely older than the dark-eyed little French girl who was his wife, and their eyes were big with terror. With a thrill of wonder and pleasure Philip observed the swift change in them as Josephine sprang from the toboggan. Breuil was almost sobbing as he whispered to Philip:

"Oh, go sweet Ange, M'sieur! She came just in time."

Josephine was bending over little Marie's cot when they followed her and the girl mother into the cabin. In a moment she looked up with a glad smile.

"It is the same sickness Marie," she said to the mother. "I have medicine here that will cure it. The fever isn't as bad as I thought it would be."

Noon saw a big change in the cabin. Little Marie's temperature was falling rapidly. Breuil and his wife were happy. After dinner Josephine explained again how they were to give the medicine she was leaving, and at two o'clock they left on their return journey to Adare House. The sun had disappeared hours before. Gray banks of cloud filled the sky, and it had grown much colder.

"We will reach home only a little before dark," said Philip. "You had better ride, Josephine."

He was eager to reach Adare House. By that time he felt that Jean should have returned, and he was confident that there were others of the forest people besides Pierre, Renault, and the Indian in the forest

near the pit. For an hour he kept up a swift pace. Later they came to a dense cover of black spruce two miles from Adare House. They had traversed a part of this when the dogs stopped. Directly ahead of them had fallen a dead cedar, barring the trail. Philip went to the toboggan for the trail axe.

"I haven't noticed any wind, have you?" he asked. "Not enough to topple over a cedar."

He went to the tree and began cutting. Scarcely had his axe fallen half a dozen times when a scream of terror turned him about like a flash. He had only time to see that Josephine had left the sleds, and was struggling in the arms of a man. In that same instant two others had struck, to him his axe. He went down, a pair of hands gripping at his throat. He saw a face over him, and he knew now that it was the face of the man he had seen in the freighter's face of Lang, the Free Trader. Every atom of strength in him rose in a superhuman effort to throw off his assailants. Then came the blow. He saw the club over him, a short, thick club, in the hand of Thoreau himself. After

that followed darkness and oblivion, punctuated by the crack, crack, crack of a revolver and the howling of dogs—sounds that grew fainter and fainter until they died away altogether, and he sank into the stillness of night.

It was almost dark when consciousness stirred Philip again. With an effort he pulled himself to his knees, and stared about him. Josephine was gone, the dogs were gone. He staggered to his feet, a moaning cry on his lips. He saw the sleds. Still in the traces lay the bodies of two of the dogs, and he knew what the pistol shots had meant. The others had been cut loose; straight out into the forest led the trails of several men; and the meaning of it all, the reality of what had happened, surged upon him in all its horror. Lang and his cutthroats had carried off Josephine. He knew by the thickening darkness that they had time to get a good start on their way to Thoreau's.

One thought filled his dizzy brain now. He must reach Jean and the camp near the pit. He staggered as he turned his face homeward. At times the trail seemed to reach him and strike him in the face. There was a blinding pain back of his eyes. A dozen times in the first mile he fell, and each time it was harder for him to regain his feet. The darkness of night grew heavier about him, and now and then he found himself crawling on his hands and knees. It was two hours before his dazed senses caught the glow of a fire ahead of him. Even then it seemed an age before he reached it. And when at last he staggered into the circle of light he saw half a dozen startled faces, and he heard the strange cry of Jean Jacques Croiset as he sprang up and caught him in his arms. Philip's strength was gone, but he still had time to tell Jean what had happened before he crumpled down into the snow.

And then he heard a voice, Jean's voice, crying fierce commands to the men about the fire; he heard excited replies, the hurry of feet, the barking of dogs. Something warm and comforting touched his lips. He struggled to bring himself back into life. He seemed to have been fighting hours be-

fore he opened his eyes. He pulled himself up, stared into the dark, livid face of Jean, the half-breed.

"The hour—has come—" he murmured.

"Yes, the hour has come, M'sieur!" cried Jean. "The swiftest teams and the swiftest runners in this part of the Northland are on the trail, and by morning the forest people will be roused from here to the Waterfound, from the Cree camp on Lobstick to the Gray Loon waterway! Drink this, M'sieur. There is no time to lose. For it is Jean Jacques Croiset who tells you that not a wolf will howl this night that does not call forth the signal to those who love our Josephine! Drink!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Jean's thrilling words, burned into Philip's consciousness like fire. He roused him from his stupor, and he began to take in deep breaths of the chill night air, and to see more clearly. The camp was empty now. The men were gone. Only Jean was with him, his face darkly flushed and his eyes burning. Philip rose slowly to his feet. There was no longer the sickening dizziness in his head. He inhaled still deeper breaths, while Jean stood a step back and watched. Far off in the forest he heard the faint barking of dogs.

"They are running like the wind!" breath Jean. "Those are Renault's dogs. They are two miles away!"

He took Philip by the arm.

"I have made a comfortable bed for you in Pierre's tepee, M'sieur. You must lie down, and I will get your supper. You will need all of your strength soon."

"But I must know what is happening," protested Philip. "My God! I cannot lie down like a tired dog—with Josephine out there with Lang! I am ready now, Jean. I am not hungry. And the pain is gone. See—I am as steady as your hand. See—I am as steady as your hand. 'God in Heaven, who knows what may be happening out there!'"

"Josephine is safe for a time, M'sieur," assured Jean. "Listen to me, Netootum! I feared this. That is why I warned you. Lang is taking her to Thoreau's. He believes that we will not dare to pursue, and that Josephine will send back word she is there of her own pleasure. Why? Because he has sworn to give Le M'sieur the confession if we make him trouble. Mon Dieu, he thinks we will not dare, and even now, Netootum, six of the fastest teams and swiftest runners within a hundred miles are gone to spread the word among the forest people that L'Ange, our Josephine, has been carried off by Thoreau and his beasts! Before dawn they will be on the path where the forks meet, twelve miles off there toward the Devil's Nest, and to-morrow—"

Jean crossed himself.

"Our Lady forgive us, if it is a sin to take the lives of twenty such men," he said softly. "Not one will live to tell the story. And not a log of Thoreau House will stand to hold a secret which will die forever with tomorrow's end."

Philip came near to Jean now. He placed his two hands on the half-breed's shoulders, and for a moment looked at him without speaking. His face was strangely white.

"I understand—everything, Jean," he whispered huskily, and his lips seemed parched. "To-morrow we will destroy all evidence, and kill. That is the one way. And that secret which you dread, which Josephine has told me I could not guess in a thousand years, will be buried forever. But Jean—I have guessed it. I know! It has come to me at last, and—my God!—I understand!"

(Continued next week.)



A Peep into the Future.