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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.

VI.

THE SAVING STROKE.

When Roderick took his departure, Pauline accompanied him to the outer door, but she was not long away, being desirous to assist at the interview between Cary and Batoche. The old man stood by the bedside of his friend keenly observant of the symptoms which presented themselves to his practised eye. He that had so often been exposed to the severities of the Canadian winter and the hardships of the hunter's life was well acquainted with a malady which had more than once threatened his own days.

"Both his lungs are terribly attacked and he is very, very feeble," said he to M. Belmont and Pauline, "but the clearness of his complexion shows that his constitution is sound, and the repose of his limbs is proof that he is endowed with remarkable strength. His illness comes from his wound. He was struck by a ball under the right shoulder and the upper lobe of the lung was probably grazed. He held up against the shock thus wasting much of the vital force which absolute repose from the beginning would have spared him. He is a very sick man, but I believe with the doctor that he will pull through. Indeed," added Batoche in that quaint oracular way which was no longer new to those who heard him, "Cary Singleton cannot, must not die. Not only is his own young life precious, but there are dear lives depending upon him. What would Zulma Sarpy do without him, she that is fretting at the very thought of his illness? And, Pauline, you, I am sure, would not have him die?"

The answer was two large tears that quivered in the eyes of the poor girl.

Presently, the head of the sick man turned slightly on its pillow, the body contracted a little and Cary opened his eyes. There was no bewilderment in the look. He awoke knowing where he was—not in a strange place, but among those whom he loved and who lovingly cared for him. Pauline was the first to approach him. She asked him a question, and he answered in her own language, as naturally as if the French had been his mother tongue. Batoche was delighted to observe this, regarding it as a satisfactory normal symptom. Cary accepted a draught from the hands of his beautiful nurse, then lay back on his pillow as if quite refreshed. At that propitious moment, his eyes encountered those of Batoche who stood up a little towards the foot of the bed. A calm smile played upon his lips, intelligence beamed softly in his look, and, withdrawing his long-emaciated hand from under the sheet, he extended it to his old friend.

"Batoche," he whispered.

The latter took the proffered hand reverently and pressed it to his lips.

"You know me, Captain?"

"Perfectly."

"I have longed to see you."

"And I to see you."

"But it was impossible to come sooner."

"I know it and you had to use that uniform."

As Cary saw this he pointed to Batoche's disguise with a subdued laugh. He immediately added:

"And my friends, how are they? Mademoiselle Zulma and Sieur Sarpy?"

"They grieve at your misfortune and pray for your recovery. Mademoiselle's chief regret is that she cannot be at your side."

A radiance passed over the sufferer's face, and he said:

"Does she know in whose kind hands I am?"

"She does and that is her only consolation."

It was Pauline's turn to betray her emotion, by averting her head and wiping the tears from her eyes.

"Here are a few lines from her pen," continued Batoche, "written not many hours ago."

Cary held out his hand for the paper, partially raising himself on the pillow in his eagerness as he did it. He would have asked that it be read to him, when Batoche interposed with that quiet authority so familiar to him.

"Not to-night, Captain. Keep it for your first joy on awakening to-morrow morning."

The sick man smilingly acquiesced, and handed it to Pauline, saying:

"We will read it together at breakfast."

After a pause, during which Cary appeared to be collecting his thoughts, calmly, however, and without effort, he said to Batoche:

"You return to-night?"

"Yes, at once. It is growing late."

"You will see Mademoiselle Sarpy and her father. You will thank them for their solicitude. Tell them that my thoughts are with them. If I live and secure my liberty, my first visit will be to them. If I die—"

"Die, Captain, die?" exclaimed Batoche in a ringing voice that startled Pauline and her fa-

ther. "A soldier does not die thus. All is not lost. We shall fight side by side again. A young man does not die thus. Death is for old men like me. A glorious future is before you. Die? You will not die, Captain Singleton. You must live for the sake of your parents and relatives in the old home at the South, and you must not break the heart of these two Canadian girls whose happiness hangs upon yours."

This last sentence especially Batoche blurted out in a kind of reckless enthusiasm. But he knew well what he said.

Pauline was amazed at the audacity of his speech. M. Belmont looked on in silent wonder. As to Cary he gazed with great open eyes, as if he was listening to a summons, delivered in a trumpet blast, from an unseen power that was omnipotent to save him. A glow of sudden health mantled his cheeks, his brow was illuminated with an air of intelligence quite distinct from the torpor of mortal disease which had lain upon it, and, as he stretched himself out more fully on his couch, he appeared endowed with a vigor that could only be born of confidence. It was evident, too, that, at the moment, he was perfectly happy.

"It is well," murmured M. Belmont, laying his hand upon his daughter's shoulder. "This is the blessed revulsion of which the doctor spoke."

Batoche seemed quite satisfied with what he had done, and a moment after he bade his friend farewell. Down in the hall, when alone with M. Belmont, he delivered his other messages, a letter from Zulma to Pauline, and one from Sieur Sarpy to his son Eugene, which his friend was to send to its destination in whatever way might seem best so as not to compromise himself. He observed also with satisfaction that Cary had not breathed a word about military matters. This he regarded as a sign that the young man's mind was quite at ease.

VII.

DONALD'S FATE.

Before he took his departure M. Belmont solemnly warned Batoche of all the dangers which he had incurred, reminding him that it is often more difficult to return from such an expedition as he had undertaken that night, than to get through its initial stages. Batoche was by no means insensible to his perils and, thanking his host, promised to exercise the utmost prudence. M. Belmont particularly called his attention to a patrol headed by Roderick's old servant, Donald, who was a desperate man, animated by the most deadly feelings against every one whom he even suspected of disloyalty towards the King.

"I know that he owes you a special grudge, Batoche, for your frequent midnight incursions, and if he catches you, he will treat you without mercy."

The night was as dark as death, without a single star in the sky, or a solitary lamp in the streets. On leaving the house, Batoche shot boldly into a narrow lane that led towards the ramparts facing the St. Charles, and then slackened his step, creeping along the walls of the houses. This lane opened on a little garden which the old hunter was obliged to skirt along its whole length. He heard nothing, saw nothing, except that he fancied the leafless trees looked down upon him with shadows of warning. Batoche often said that he understood the language of trees, and certainly to-night the sight of them impressed his usually imperturbable soul so that he accelerated his pace. When he reached about one-third the length of the garden, he distinctly felt that he was followed. He turned around and saw a dark figure at a distance behind him. He knew instinctively that there was mischief brewing. He stopped; the figure stopped. He advanced; it advanced. He crossed the road diagonally; it crossed. He returned; it returned. He might have rushed upon his pursuer, but that would probably have occasioned outcries and other noises, which were naturally to be avoided. He had recourse to flight. Swift as a deer he darted along the garden palisade, turned, and hid himself behind a large tree that formed the corner of the street. His pursuer was equally fleet and came up to him immediately.

"Give me your musket," he growled in broken French.

"No."

"Follow me to the guard-room."

"No."

"Who are you?"

"Your enemy."

The strange man advanced a step and looked full into Batoche's face.

"Ah! it is you, at last, and disguised in his Majesty's uniform. I knew I would catch you yet. Take this."

He raised an enormous horse pistol which he pointed at the old man's forehead. With the left hand Batoche struck up the levelled arm, while with his right he whipped out a long hun-

ter's knife from his belt. The struggle was brief. The pistol went off grazing the edge of Batoche's fox-skin cap, and the hunter's blade plunged deep into the patrolman's heart. The latter rolled into the snow without a groan, and Batoche fled with the sound of footsteps, attracted by the pistol's report, sounding in his ears. He encountered no further obstacle, crossing the wall at the same spot which he had chosen in the earlier part of the evening, and almost in sight of a sentinel who was half-asleep on his carbine.

"That fellow will never trouble me or M. Belmont again," thought Batoche. "And what is better they will not know that I did it. I am only sorry for Monsieur Hardinge who will have to provide himself with another servant."

The death of Donald created a great excitement in the town. Besides that he was well known and much esteemed as a faithful, active soldier, the mystery that attended his fate aroused the most painful feelings. Was it due simply to a moonlight brawl, were any of the disaffected men of the garrison concerned in it, or had some of the American prisoners, in attempting to effect their escape, committed the deed? A thorough investigation took place, but no clue to the tragedy could be found. Roderick Hardinge was particularly distressed. After exhausting all the means of inquiry, a suspicion of the truth flashed upon him, and roused the sternest indignation in his mind. His vexation was the greater, that, if his conjecture were correct, it would place him in a difficult position towards the Belmonts. Once already, as he only too well remembered, his military duties had led him to a bitter misunderstanding with Pauline's father, and, several times since, the operation of the same cause had rendered their mutual relations very precarious. Both of them had made concessions, and the young officer was generous enough to admit to himself that M. Belmont had borne a very trying part in the most noble spirit. But, in the present instance, the element of publicity in Donald's death was a particularly disturbing circumstance, and it preyed so much on Roderick's mind that for two or three days he avoided calling at the house of M. Belmont. Pauline and her father noticed the absence without being able to account for it. They had indeed heard of Donald's death, but it never entered into their remotest suspicions that Batoche had anything to do with it. At length, when his mind was calmer, Hardinge went to inquire after the health of Cary Singleton. He made that appear the main object of his visit. In spite of himself he was constrained in manner while addressing a few words to M. Belmont, and even towards Pauline he appeared cold and formal.

On conducting him to the door, the girl ventured to ask him whether he was ailing.

"I am ailing in mind, Pauline. I have tried my best to make things pleasant with my friends," and he looked sharply at her—"but this outrageous murder of my old servant has upset nearly all my calculations. I don't know what may come of it yet."

Pauline understood nothing of this speech, but when she repeated it to her father, he grew very excited and angry.

"It is the hardest thing in life to serve two masters, my dear. Roderick is a fine fellow, but perhaps if you or I had known less of him, our course would have been simpler, and we should not have to live in perpetual fear and trembling. I think I know what is on his mind which would explain the coldness of his manner towards both of us. I will say this, however. While I will stand strictly to the promise made to Monseigneur, I will not allow myself to be made the butt of any man's humor, and if Roderick holds the same conduct towards me to-morrow evening, I will attack him about it."

M. Belmont's aspect was very decided as he spoke these words. Pauline, still comprehending nothing, retreated to the sick room with a load of apprehension at her heart.

VIII.

THE BUDENED HEART.

Nor was this her only sorrow. The morning after Batoche's visit, Cary's first thought, upon awakening, was about Zulma's letter. He asked Pauline to read it to him, which she did without delay. The note was short and simple. It expressed the writer's amazement and regret at the awful misfortune which had befallen Cary and his companions, and contained such sentiments of comfort as might have been expected from her warm heart and generous nature. The only remarkable sentence was the last one which read as follows: "Do you know that all these adversities are making me selfish? It seems to me that I am harshly treated. I know that you are in good hands, but it is my place to be beside you, and I am jealous of the chance which Pauline has of nursing you. Tell Pauline this. Tell her that I am dreadfully jealous, and that unless she brings you to health within a very few days, I shall myself lead a storming party which will succeed in wreaking its vengeance. Pardon this banter. It is meant to enliven you. Give my love to Pauline. I write to her more on this subject."

These phrases were innocent and commonplace enough, and they caused Cary to smile. Not so with Pauline. She read them with a serious face, and faltering accents, and when she closed, her eyes fell on those of the sick officer in a queer spirit of interrogation.

"A very kind letter, such as I knew she would write. I hope to be able to thank her soon," he said. "And she has also written to you, mademoiselle?"

This was spoken in such a way as to show plainly that Cary would have desired this second letter to be read to him. Pauline thus understood it, but although the paper was secreted in her bosom, she instinctively raised her hand to produce it, she checked the movement and contented herself with saying that, among other things, Zulma had recommended her to take the utmost care of her patient.

"Indeed!" said Cary smiling. "That was the excess of generosity, but she might have spared herself the trouble. Let me say it again, mademoiselle. Not my own mother, not my own sisters, not even Zulma Sarpy herself could do more for me than I receive at your hands, and if I recover, as I now believe I shall, I will always hold that I owe my life to Pauline Belmont."

This little speech thrilled the listener. It was spoken in a calm, pathetic tone, and the last sentence was accompanied by such a look as carried a meaning deeper than any words. Words, gesture, look—none of these things had escaped the girl, but what particularly struck her with unusual significance was that, for the first time, her patient had addressed her as "Pauline."

Later in the day, when Pauline was alone for a few moments, she produced Zulma's letter and read it once more attentively. She could not disguise from herself that it was a noble letter, full of generous feelings and instinct with that sympathy which one true friend should testify to another on occasions of such painful trials. Zulma wrote eloquently of the dangers and anxieties which Pauline must have experienced on that dreadful December morning, and renewed her invitation to abandon the ill-fated town and take up her abode in the peaceful mansion of Pointe-aux-Trembles. "You are not made for such terrible scenes, my dear," these were her words. "I could bear them better, for they are in my nature. You should be in my place and I in yours. I would trust in a position to bear the fatigue of nursing him who is the dearest friend of us both."

This was the phrase which had puzzled Pauline at the first reading, and which perplexed her still at the second. It was on account of this sentence that she did not read the letter to Cary. What could Zulma mean by it?

"She is much mistaken," thus Pauline soliloquized, "if she thinks I am unable to bear the burden which Providence has laid upon me. I am no longer what I was. These two months of almost constant agitation have nerved me to a courage which I never thought I could have had. They have completely changed me. When I might have remained out of the town and gone to Pointe-aux-Trembles, it was I who persuaded my father to return to this house, and I do not regret it. I would not leave it now if I could. Much as I should like Zulma's company, and the benefit of her advice and example, I would not consent to exchange places with her."

Pauline glanced at the letter again. "How curiously she words the sentence about my poor invalid! She does not speak of him as her dearest friend, an expression which I would have expected her to use, and which she was entitled to use," here an involuntary tremor passed through Pauline's frame, "but she speaks of him as the dearest friend of us both. What does this mean? Was it written spontaneously, or on deliberation? Is it a trap to draw me into indiscretions? No. Zulma is too true a friend for that. Alas! The dear girl does not know, cannot know, will never know the full bearing of the words."

Pauline herself did not then know the full bearing of the words written with no intention of conveying the meaning which she attached to them. Notwithstanding all the changes that had previously taken place in her character, her sweet simplicity remained intact, and it was this very ingenuousness which had prompted her to admit Cary Singleton into her father's dwelling. When the young officer fell sick in the hospital at the Seminary, it was Roderick Hardinge who acquainted her with the fact, expressing regret that he could not be more properly provided for. She at once suggested that he be transported to her home, offering to be his nurse. Hardinge readily assented and, after considerable difficulties, obtained the necessary permission from the authorities. In all this transaction the conduct of the British officer was manly, noble, and above-board, without afterthought, or the slightest trace of selfishness. It is simple truth to say that, notwithstanding her sincere admiration of Cary Singleton, Pauline acted in the matter through motives of humanity alone and out of her friendship for Zulma. She looked not to future contingencies. Indeed she never stopped to inquire that any contingencies might arise. Had she done so, a sense of duty might have restrained her deed of charity. That duty was the love she bore Roderick Hardinge, a love which had never been confessed in words, the extent of which she had never been able to define to herself, but which existed nevertheless, and which it had but been her happiness to believe was fully reciprocated. But the heart travels fast within nine days, and, at the end of that time, it is no wonder that Batoche's visit, Zulma's letters and Roderick's moodiness should have disturbed the poor girl's soul. Man is not master of his affections, and there is a destiny in love as in the other events of this world.