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POOR DOCUMENT

LATOUR'S BEQUEST.

A Tale of Buried Treasure in the St. John.

CHAPTER I.

The time was midsummer ten years ago and the place was a steamer on the St. John river, on which I was enjoying the beginning of a holiday which had been peremptorily ordered by my physician with an intimation that if his advice was neglected the consequences would be very serious indeed. This was why I was idling away my time viewing the scenery of the noble steamer on which I was sailing instead of attending to my usual duties in a distant city. It was a pleasant change and recalled the memories of an earlier day when every point on the whole river was as well-known to me as the streets of my native town. The old landmarks were still there and looked so familiar that I seemed to be a boy again cruising in my light pleasure boat along these shores.

As standing near the bow of the steamer, on the upper deck, I took in each charming prospect I became aware that two other persons were sharing the delight which I experienced. One was a gentleman of my own age—I was then under thirty—; the other was a lady considerably younger who resembled him so much that it was evident they were brother and sister. The gentleman was tall, dark and handsome and had a foreign air which may have been due to the style of his beard or of his dress or to an indefinable something in his manner; but when I caught the tone of his voice I was aware that he was speaking English. The lady was tall also and dark like her brother, but the features which were simply handsome in him were beautiful in her and with her glorious black eyes, fine color and splendid figure it would have been difficult to find anywhere a finer looking woman.

It was easy to see that this interesting pair were strangers to the scenes they were viewing and yet so anxious to know them that they were striving to make them out by means of a guide book, a task which is frequently impossible from the fact that the writers of such books are not generally familiar with the places they attempt to describe. It was after wrestling for some time with the problem of how to reconcile the scenery with the descriptions [illegible] a very polite bow, accosted me:—

"Will you be so kind," said he, "as to tell us the name of this great water that we are entering upon?"

"This" I replied, "is the Long Reach, a sort of lake in the river. for in some places it is three miles wide."

"I have heard of it before" said he, "it is one of the old French names which still survives in English."

I was somewhat surprised to hear a stranger, evidently from across the sea, speak so confidently of the old French names in what was once a part of Acadia, but I said nothing except to signify my assent.

When people are interested in the same objects they soon cease to be strangers. In a few minutes I was conversing on familiar terms with the gentleman, his sister being all the time an attentive listener. I found his knowledge of the first explorers of the St. John to be very complete, so much so indeed that I could only supplement it by identifying the places which these explorers had described.

"That" said I pointing to a long point which was just coming in sight, "is Oak Point."

"Ah," said he with renewed attention, "that must be the place which Champdore visited in 1608 and which Champlain describes, and these are the three islands where Champdore found beeches, butternuts and vines of the wild grape."

We were by this time approaching the three islands referred to which now bear the names of Caton's, Rocky and Jones's Island. I saw at once that my new companion was greatly interested in them, but not more so than his sister. "Pray tell us all you know about them, she said" in her own charming manner, "we have heard of these islands in France, our native land."

I was right then in my conjectures; English was not their mother tongue although they spoke it as well as I did. As it chanced I knew a good deal of two of the islands in question. Caton's island I had never visited because there was nothing on it but forest; with the other two I was very familiar. They are connected by a strip of low intervale land which is covered with water when the river is high, a famous place for snipe and ducks as my gun could attest.

"The island that bears the romantic name of Jones is the one nearest Oak Point," I said; "it would be a splendid place for a hermit who wished to keep within the sound of civilization. Here he might be near the busy world and not of it. He would see the steamers and the traffic of the river pass him day by day, and hear the whistle of the locomotive as it rushed up the Nerepis Valley, and yet live in a little solitary realm of his own. He could subsist on the products of his own island fields, drink of the purest springs and in their season repose beneath the branches of his own vines and eat of their grapes."

"How pleasant," replied the lady, "then there are grapes there still?"

"Plenty of them," I continued, "there is one huge vine on which I have seen more than a cartload of splendid grapes, it may be one of those that Champdore saw more than two centuries and a half ago."

"But that second little island," said the gentleman, "what of it?"

"That," I answered," is Rocky Island, a most appropriate name because it is surrounded by a belt of rocks and is very small, not being more than an acre in extent. It is, or rather has been, a great resort for treasure seekers."

"What!" he hastily exclaimed, with a visible start, "treasure seekers! Why do they look for money there? Is there any tradition on the subject?"

"The truth of the matter is," said I, "there is no tradition that I have been able to trace. Soon after the first settlement of the country some one conceived the idea that Captain Kidd had buried some of his ill-gotten money there, and fools have been digging for it at intervals ever since."

"But they have not found any?" said he.

"Never a devier, and it is my opinion that if they dig there until doomsday they never will. But their want of success will not deter others from digging, for the crop that never fails is the crop of fools."

"Still," said the sister, "it must be very exciting this digging for money. It is a kind of gambling where the amount lost cannot be altogether ruinous and then there is the hope of winning so much with so little trouble."

"If any one wished to bury money about here, I should think that island would be just the place," said the gentleman. "Who knows but that there may be treasure buried there?" As he said this he looked at the little isle which we were then passing with a face which showed more than common interest.

Our conversation then drifted away to tales of buried treasure the world over and we all agreed that it was highly improbable that the pirates who frequented the coast of Acadia two hundred years ago had any great amount of treasure to bury. Never did a forenoon pass more pleasantly than that I spent with these strangers identifying for them each noteable landmark on the river and enjoying their agreeable conversation. Unfortunately I was not going as far as Fredericton, but had to leave at an intermediate point. Before we parted we exchanged cards, the gentleman saying as he handed me his. "I must meet you again."

I expressed the greatest pleasure at the prospect of doing so, but when I read the name on the card I was more than astonished, and must have given a visible start, for it was that of the greatest man known to Acadian history, "Charles Latour."

CHAPTER II.

It was just a week later that I received a letter from Latour containing a very urgent request that I should meet him in Fredericton on business of the greatest importance. It hardly needed so strong a summons to induce me to renew my acquaintance with such agreeable companions and next day I was with them again in their sitting room at the Barker House. Their greeting to me was so cordial that I felt as if I had met old and tried friends. "We will talk of our business this evening," said Latour, in the mean time let us enjoy this beautiful afternoon and take a drive. This excellent idea was unanimously adopted and when we returned to the hotel we were in a proper frame of mind to appreciate a good dinner, while I was consumed with curiosity to learn what business Latour could possibly have with a stranger like me. I had not long to wait for as soon as dinner was over the young man led me back to his apartments where, in the presence of his sister, he told me the following singular story.

LATOUR'S STORY.

"I saw you start," said Latour, as he settled himself in an easy chair, "when you saw the name on my card, but you will be still more surprised when I tell you that I am a lineal descendent of the great Latour and of his first wife the heroine of Acadia. The name of this noble woman was Frances Marie Jacquelin and her family still exists in Rochelle where in 1625, at the age of sixteen she was united to Latour. Strange as it may seem to you it was a matter in connection with this very union that brought me to America."

"The business which has drawn me here is of such a nature," he continued, "that I require the assistance of a discreet and well informed adviser and confident and I cannot but rejoice at the good fortune which threw us together at the very outset of my visit. I intend to entrust to you a secret of the greatest consequence to my family not only in a pecuniary point of view but also in respect to clearing up a mystery which successive heirs of the house of Latour have been unable to solve.

"Latour's first marriage was one of pure love and affection and up to the time of his wife's death in 1645, the Acadian heroine and her husband were devoted to each other. His second marriage was forced on him by events and may be described as a political union. It took place in 1653 and its real object was aptly described in the marriage contract as being the peace and tranquility of the country and concord and union between the family of Latour and that of Charnisay the second wife's former husband. Latour was then nearly sixty years of age, but he still had thirteen years of life before him and lived to see two sons and three daughters born to him by his second wife. Yet if we may trust familv tradition the children of his first love were always nearest his heart. These children were three in number Jeanne who married Martin D'Aprendistigue and resided at Jemseg on the St. John River and two younger sons Claude and Richard who went to France after the capture of Fort Latour in 1645. It is from Claude, the oldest son that I trace my descent. The children of Richard dropped the name of Latour,—to which they had indeed no claim it being simply the title of the family estate which went to the oldest son—and retained the proper family name of St. Etienne under which name their descendants are now numerous in France. The Latour's are also numerous but owing to the fact of my grandfather having but one son, my father, and he no other children but my sister and myself, I have no relatives on that side of the house nearer than second cousins. With this preface you will be the better able to understand the story which I am about to relate."

"In the autumn of 1652, a few months before my great ancestor's marriage to Madam Charnisay, he very unexpectedly made his appearance at the house of his daughter, Madam D'Aprendistigue. The family tradition, which was committed to writing by my grandfather, states that his arrival did not occasion so much surprise as the manner of it. Usually he travelled with twelve or fifteen armed men in his train, who rowed a large boat, but on this occasion he came in a small shallop, and had but one companion, an aged and faithful servant named Robin, who had been with him for forty years. Both looked greatly fatigued, and Latour especially seemed in low spirits, a condition most unusual to him. He had with hin a small tin box, of which he appeared to take a great deal of care."

"It was not until the day after his arrival that his daughter learned the cause of his visit. Calling her and her husband to him, he said suddenly, 'I am about to marry again.'"

"'To marry,' exclaimed his daughter in much astonishment, 'but who is the lady?'"

"'Madam Charnisay,' said Latour quietly, 'I marry again for the sake of my family and to settle the deplorable [illegible] into which this country has fallen. With the Duke De Vendome enlisted on the side of the Charnisay family, I see nothing but a renewal of the conflict of ten years ago, and I am too old to face another civil war in Acadia. To avoid this, I will unite the families which indeed are both threatened alike by the claims of Le Borgne and the hostility of the English of Boston. But in doing this, I do not forget the claims of you my daughter and of your two brothers, now in France. They will be provided for by the appropriation in the marriage contract to their sole use, and also by my will of my estates in France, and I have brought with me a grant to you snd your husband of ten thousand acres of land on the River St. John.'"

"'The destruction of Fort Latour,' continued he, 'greatly impoverished me and deprived me of almost all these heirlooms, which I should have wished to hand down to my children. But my great success in my Hudson Bay ventures in the fur trade has in part restored me to affluence, and will enable me to present my future wife with the sum of thirty thousand livres tournois as a marriage gift, as well as to set aside a sum for you and your brothers on my decease. Considering the great uncertainty of the times, and the danger of an attack in my fort by Le Borgne or an English invasion, I have concluded to bury the money and jewelry destined for your brothers and yourself. In the place where I have concealed it, if it draws no interest, it will be exposed to no risk. But it must not be touched until my death, for fortune may be unkind to me again and I may have need of it. In this box you will find the deed of your land and also a sealed paper containing my directions as to the disposal of the treasure and a description of the place where it is concealed. This paper is not to be opened until my death, and I charge you with the duty of seeing that my bequest is properly divided.'"

"When Latour had concluded he handed the tin box to his daughter and almost immediately afterwards took his departure for Fort Latour, his residence at the mouth of the River St. John. Although Jeaune D'Aprendistigue met her father many times after that he never alluded in the remotest degree to the subject of his bequest and she was too much in awe of him to refer to the matter."

"Latour died in 1666 and his daughter Jean who was in France at the time persuaded her brother Claude to come with her to Acadia in order that the sealed papers might be opened in his presence and the treasure unearthed. The sealed paper proved to be a very short letter with a parchment enclosure and read as follows:—

"My Children,

'This letter when you read it will come to you like a voice from the tomb; accept then a father's blessing. It is my wish that you divide the treasure I have concealed equally between you. You will find its place of deposit described in the accompanying parchment, which you will heat at the fire in order to bring the writing upon it to view. Here are some jewels of your dear mother's which I commend to your particular care:—

"CHARLES DE ST ETIENNE".

"When this affectionate epistle was read neither Clande Latour nor his sister Jeaune could refrain from weeping for it recalled not only tender memories of their dead father but also thoughts of a mnch loved mother. But when they came to examine the parchment enclosed not only did they find it entirely blank but the most vigorous application of heat failed to develop any characters upon it that could be distinguished. The parchment utterly refused to disclose its secret and Claude had to return to France disappointed in his expected legacy. He took the parchment with him, however, in the hope that some French chemist might be able to succeed in solving the mystery it concealed. All was in vain; the best skill of France was baffled and the parchment still remained blank".

"Years passed on, Jeaune D'Aprendistigue returned to France and died; Claude and Richard also passed away; their children and their children's children lived and died and were forgotten. But the now faded parchment still remained in the family and passed regularly to the eldest son of the line of Latour until in due time it came to me, the tenth in descent from my great ancestor. Many were the efforts that were made to solve the puzzle of the parchment and various were the opinions expressed by the family in regard to it. Some thought that Latour in his haste had forgotten to write upon it, while others of a more cynical nature thought it was his design to perpetrate a huge joke upon his decendants. But such views found no acceptance with the majority of the family and most of them firmly believed the day would come when the mystery would be cleared up and Latour's treasure found".

"My great grandfather who perished in the first French Revolution was one of the most staunch believers in the parchment. In a letter written the night before his execution to my grandfather then a child he instructed him ever to preserve it in the family. My father who died only two years ago was an equally strong believer and bequeathed the parchment and the same injunction to me. I thought the best method I could adopt to carry out his wishes would be to undertake the solution of the mystery myself. I felt that I had many advantages ever my predecessors for such a task. My circumstances were easy and my fortune considerable. I, like my sister had enjoyed the benefit of an English education at the best schools and colleges so perfect that, as you may perceive I speak English like a native and in ordinary conversation with my sister prefer to use it to my mother tongue. My long residence abroad brought me into contact with the bts scientific minds of the age, especially with men who had made chemistry a life-long study. I felt that in modern chemical discoveries must lie the key to the secret of the parchment."

"I will not trouble you," continued Latour, "with an account of my failures which were many. The art of writing with sympathetic ink is one that has wholly gone out of fashion except among school-girls and I found very few who could give me any light on the subject. It was not until last year that I chanced upon the proper party to help me in my difficulty. This person was a young Scotchman named Leslie whom I had first met while a student at the University of Edinburgh. He while there attended with me the chemical lectures of Professor Crum Brown and was looked upon by the rest of us as a person whose enthusiasm for chemical knowledge was so great as almost to disturb his reason. That I suppose was why I did not become more closely acquainted with him at Edinburgh, where, however he did not remain long.

"It was quite by chance that I met him again while on a walking tour in Scotland. He had established himself in a small town in the north where he was making a precarious living by keeping a drug store and spending his spare time which was abundant in chemical experiments. It struck me the moment I renewed my acquaintance with him that if any one could help me to decipher the parchment Leslie was the man. Lo, as he was showing me his laboratory, I told him of my difficulty and asked his assistance."

"Leslie laughed much more than I thought was necessary over the matter, but he restored my good humor by assuring me that it a single line had ever been written on the parchment he would disclose it. "Give me forty-eight hours to think over it," said he, "and trust me to solve the secret. You may imagine how gladly I heard these words and how intense my anxiety was during that forty-eight hours."

"Again I was with Leslie in his laboratory where he had made every preparation for the experiment. I was very nervous but he was as cool as ice. 'I have got at the secret,' said he; 'the parchment needed moisture as well as heat to bring out the writing; let me see it.'"

"I took the precious heirloom from my pocket and handed it to him. In a moment he had it stretched in a cylinder of steel and fastened it firmly. Then he directed a small jet of steam against it until it was thoroughly moist and afterwards covered it with a colorless fluid which resembled alcohol. The cylinder was then heated by means of a steam coil until the parchment was too hot for the touch and as it gradually dried I was then aware of a startling change in its appearance. Even while I looked, slowly and gradually the lines of writing appeared one by one, very faint at first, but every moment becoming more distinct until at length they shone out clear and plain so that the dimmest eyes could read them. My own eyes indeed were very dim at that moment for they were filled with tears of joy as I saw the good faith of my great ancestor vindicated and the secret of two centuries solved."

"Leslie, who was a man of action and not of sentiment, promptly removed the parchment to a table and, while the writing was still fresh, traced it over with real ink so that it could never elude us more. Almost before I had recovered my composure the work was done and I could read in good old French where Latour's bequest was concealed. I gave Leslie two hundred pounds on the spot and would have given him more had it not been that I had almost to quarrel with him to get him to take anything. But I felt that the service he had done me could not be overpaid."

"Now," concluded my new friend "you have my story; will you help me to find the treasure of Latour."

"I will," I replied, "you may count on me. And so we parted for the night."

CHAPTER III.

The narrative of Latour made so singular an impression on me that my sleep that night was much broken and filled with strange dreams. I had never had any faith in searches for buried treasure in Acadia, yet here I was about to engage in such a quest at the instance of one whom I had never seen until a week before. I was also aware that there was another cause for my metal disturbance. I had without knowing become a devoted admirer of Latour's beautiful sister Marie and experienced for the first time that uncomfortable sensation which men call "falling in love." Yet although the manners of Marie Latour were charming and her conversation most agreeable, I had no reason to believe that she looked upon me in any other light than as a useful assistant in the work they were about to engage in.

Latour was in excellent spirits when I saw him the next morning, and after breakfast took me apart to show me the old parchment of his ancestor with its quaint inscription. The writing which amounted to but a few lines was supplemented by a plan of an island, which by its outline I at once recognized as Rocky Island, showing the spot where the money was hidden. Without troubling the reader with this plan, or with the old French of the writing, it will be sufficient to give the following translation:

"Below the point of oaks in the great reach of the river are these islands, the middle one small and with rocky sides, containing an arpent of land. It lies north and south. At its south end are two large rocks twenty toises apart. From the centre of the northerly side of each extend a line twenty toises in length, north-west and north-east, and at the point where they meet you will find the treasure buried five feet below the surface in an oaken chest."

This was the whole of the writing on the parchment. It was brief, plain and business-like, and hardly needed the plan to make the finding of the treasure a matter of certainty.

"Then," said I, as I finished reading the parchment, "it seems that your ancestor's treasure is buried on Rocky Island."

"It certainly is," replied he, "unless the parchment lies, for I have been to the Crown Land Office already, and the plan of the island there precisely corresponds with this outline. Is it not strange," he continued, "that some old tradition should have set so many money seekers to work on that very island? Perhaps Babin in his old age, when his mind was weak, dropped somo hint of the matter; who knows."

That forenoon Latour, Marie and myself held what might be termed a council of war and settled upon a plan for the discovery of the treasure. Secrecy was necessary, but I thought it would only be right to inform the owner of the island, Mr. Zebulon Jones, and to get permission to dig at a cheap rate. In this, the Latours fully agreed with me. As for the actual labor of digging we would have to do that ourselves.

That same afternoon I succeeded in having a good sized sloop yacht with a comfortable cabin for a month or for the summer at a reasonable rate. Charles Latour and I were to form the crew. Marie undertook to be housekeeper and cook, for this was to be our home for some weeks. That afternoon we laid in a supply of provisions, the requisite tools for our undertaking, not forgetting some patent blocks and some line, and early next morning we began our voyage down the St. John to Oak Point. On the second day we were at anchor close to Rocky Island.

Rocky Island was no doubt covered with trees in Latour's time, but when I knew it first it was completely cleared and had only a fringe of small bushes around its margin. Now, however, it was again going back to a wilderness state, being covered with high raspberry vines and small birches, forming a thicket so dense that it was difficult to penetrate it. This fact we discovered where we landed upon it—the very afternoon of our arrival, but we were able to find and identify the two rocks twenty toises apart on the southern end of the island which were mentioned in the parchment. Not far from these rocks we could see the half filled excavations where former treasure seekers had bee nat work.

That evening I went to the mainland to see Mr. Jones the owner of the island and obtain his permission to dig, but that worthy man was away from home and would be absent a fortnight, so his neighbors told me. As he had left no one behind capable of representing him in so delicate a matter, I returned to the yacht somewhat disappointed.

"A fortnight is a long time to wait," said Latour, "but I suppose we must submit to it."

"Suppose we dig first and get Mr. Jones's permission afterwards," suggested Marie.

This spirited proposal found favor at once, and we proceeded to make every arrangement, to carry it out next day.

At daybreak next morning Latour and I were on Rocky Island with our measuring lines. We found the two rocks to be just one hundred and twenty-five feet apart, or as near to twenty French toises as may be. Then we determined the point of the equilateral triangle where the lines would intersect—and there drove in a stake, where we proposed to dig. Then we repaired to the yacht for breakfast.

Every one was naturally a good deal excited over the business we were about to engage in, and Marie insisted on forming one of the party of searchers. She was in high spirits and if at any time we felt discouraged at the severe toil we had to undergo, she soon talked us into good spirits again. We worked hard, and by the time it was high noon had got down nearly six feet, yet there was no sign of any money chest. This had a bad look, for the parchment said the chest was buried five feet deep, and we had already passed that depth without finding it.

"I vote," said Latour as he clambered out of the hole, "that we go and get something to eat. Can it be possible that we have made a mistake in the place?"

"I hardly think so," replied I, "but let us have dinner first and we will discuss the matter later."

Our dinner that day was rather gloomy, no one seemed to have much heart for conversation; Latour and I were both very tired, and our hopes of success were not as high as they had been in the morning. Suddenly Marie broke the silence, which had become oppressive, by the question:—

"Does the parchment say yon must dig five feet?"

"It does" replied her brother.

"Then it must mean," returned she "French feet and you have been using English feet which are shorter."

"Happy thought," said I, "then we shall find the treasure yet."

After dinner we returned to our work full of hope nor was it without reason for the very first stroke of my pick it came in contact with something that felt like wood.

"Hurrah!" I exclaimed, "I have struck the chest."

Latour turned so pale that I thought he would have fainted but he was speedly by my side in the excavation. The pick and shovel were industriously plied and in five minutes the whole top of the chest was exposed to view. No one said much but every one felt a good deal more than could be uttered in words.

It took us a good hour to get the earth removed from about the chest, and another hour to hoist it out of the hole by means of our blocks and tackle, for it was prodigiously heavy. Finally after a great deal of labor we got it on board the yacht and proceeded to open it.

The chest was a small one about two feet and a half long, eighteen inches wide and about a foot deep. It was very thick and strong and the cover had been fastened down with large nails. It was as sound apparently as the day it had been buried and looked as if it might have kept its contents safe for another two hundred years.

The removal of the cover was my task for Latour had became almost helpless from excitement. He had undertaken the discovery of his ancestor's treasure as a sort of life work and now that work was done, and he had in his possession the glittering prize which so many of his family had failed to win. It is no wonder that the nervous strain was too much for him.

When I at length got the cover of the chest removed we gathered around it with silent curiosity. Its contents consisted of a number of small leathern bags evidently filled with coin, and two boxes. One of these had marked upon its cover in fine enamel F. M. J., the other was similiarly marked with the letters C. de St. E. Charles. Latour and his sister both wept when these old family relics were brought to light.

The bags of coin were four in number. The largest one was full of English sovereigns and half sovereigns of the coinage of Henry VIII., Elizabeth and James 1. The second contained French gold pieces of the reign of Louis XIII. In the third were Spanish and Portuguese gold coins and in the fourth silver coins of various nations. The intrinsic value of the whole as bullion was about fifty thousand dollars but its actual value considering the age and variety of most of the coins was fully three times that.

In the box marked C. de St. E., was