IN THE HEART OF THE WOODS.

Wm. J. Fisher, M. D., in Rosary Magazine.

I.

Sheltered by a number of large pine trees, in the very heart of Notre Dame de Larette — the thickly populated home of the Hurons—stood the lodge of the humble missionary. On all sides, as far as eye could reach, were rows and rows of wigwams, the homes of these thrifty children of the wilderness and, through the light and dark green tints of the maple, spruce and pine, one caught glimpses of crimson on the blue sky, that told too soon that another day was nearing its end.

Good Pere Menard, the gentle Blackrobe, who had labored for twenty years among the Huron tribe, had reasons to congratulate himself, for had he not founded this very village and had he not also carried the faith to these deserving creatures? It was a desperate struggle at first. Tsohahissen, the brawny, old, copper-faced chief, would not listen to the gentle tales of a Redeemer Who had suffered the agonies of Calvary's redemption, but Father Menard was determined and, in his mind, he treasured visions of a distant, glorious day that was to bring him the laurel wreath of victory. And that day did come, and, when Tsohahissen bowed his head and was baptized, it was not long and the whole tribe came with him. The great mountain had crumbled to atoms, the big chief was a follower of Christ and now the way was clear and, far beyond, basking in the sunshine of God's smile, lay the wide, open fields that the Blackrobe was to explore. The soil was good, the reaper was experienced and in time there was to be a golden harvest of souls. Every day, in the twilight hours—those delicious moments so silent and sacred—one could see, there in the open air, a picture that the skilled, artistic fingers of mortal man could never do justice to. There, on the grass, silently listening, were the upturned faces of hundreds of red children, their hearts swaying under the clear, ringing words of the cassocked priest, as in soft, musical voice, with crucifix in hand, he pictured the drama of the Crucifixion. And as he stood there, in his pulpit, upon the bared stump of an old oak tree that had fallen a prey to Canadian winds and storms, tears would steal out of his eyes, while a few stray sunbeams from the west, brightened his beautiful face —a face that had the freshness of spring in it though it was crowned by the white of a premature winter.

"I am so glad," he would often say, "that God pointed my way out so clearly. Even when I was but a child, mastering the Latin elements, I dreamed dreams which have since come true. Later, I saw the hand of God directing my footsteps to this western hemisphere —this land where one sees Nature, in all her glory, unshorn of her many beauties, unmolested, glorious, real, a veritable garden of Eden, wherein millions of birds pour forth daily their souls in music, doing glory to their Creator." Often his thoughts unlocked the heart of nature and he stole into that holy of holies to hold sweet converse with her. He loved the glorious forest, the sun and moon and stars, the rivers and lakes that shone in the starlight, the flowers that turned their faces to the sun and the birds that madrigaled unceasingly. His was a Wordsworthian love almost. To him the earth itself was a grand poem. He studied it carefully and it brought him nearer to that other land above, where golden fields lay basking in eternal sunshines. Often he would say:

"When I shall go sleep and wake again
At dawning in another world than this—
What will atone to me for all I miss!
The light, melodious footsteps of the rain,
The press of leaves against the window pane,
The sunset wistfulness and morning bliss,
The moon's enchantment and the twilight kiss
Of winds, that wander with me through the lane,
Will not my soul remember evermore
The earthly winter's hunger for the spring,
The wet, sweet cheek of April, and the rush
Of roses through the summer's open door,
The feeling that the scented woodlands bring
At evening, with the singing of the thrush."

Father Menard was a descendant of a noble family closely connected with French royalty. Paris, by the Seine, had often sung the praises of his ancestors. The death of his parents left himself and an only brother, Gabrielle, orphans at a period in life when children realize too fully what it means to be without father or mother. But the two found a good friend and mother in the Countess Boulanger. "Be good to these two boys, for my sake, Fanchon, and God will reward you!" were the dying mother's last words, as she pressed the noble, French lady's hand. The two women had been friends through life and Fanchon Boulanger, Countess and possessor of millions in this world's goods, took the orphans into her heart and from that day on was a mother to them in every sense.

The day Father Menard left Paris, Gabrielle was exactly eighteen years old and was pursuing the study of the sciences and the languages at the University. The former, having graduated in medicine a number of years before, and finding a practice of his profession distasteful, entered the Jesuit noviate and was ordained when he was about thirty, leaving the next day with a band of missionaries to do God's work in the western hemisphere. And now twenty years had passed since that day, and how he longed to clasp his brother to his heart!

"Not yet! not yet!" he murmured, one evening, as he rose from a bench and closed the rude, wooden door of his lodge and made for open space, where the Indians were wont to gather at sundown. "Not yet—not yet! When my work is done and the shadows are creeping about me, 'tis then I will return to thee, my beloved France—to rest and to die in peace in thy outstretched arms."

The air was sultry and heavy with the perfume of honeysuckle, as the good priest walked along the well-beaten pathway. The ground was parched and dry. It had not rained for weeks and the fields of corn, for miles around, that waved their heads so pitfully, were burning up in the heat. Not a breeze stirred the leaves overhead. The grass was turning red, the trees and flowers were wilting—the very tongue of Nature was parched and hot and longed for the cooling showers, that God alone could give. As the earnest Blackrobe drew nearer he at once noticed that the Indians, gathered in groups, were discussing some vital issue. Their voices smote the air with their hissing sounds. The whole village was in an uproar. Loud, shrill cries rang out everywhere; men, agitated, threw their arms into the air; women, distracted with excitement, sang minor strains, clear-cut and vigorous, and the monotony of many drums, clappers and rattles filled in the strange melody, that was intensely weird and gruesome.

Father Menard halted a few minutes, his gaze intently fixed on the swaying multitude in front of him. Then he took out his handkerchief and wiped his hot forehead. Suddenly his eyes fell upon Tsohahissen. The old chief was carrying a large pole, richly painted, on his swarthy shoulders and his band were following in the rear with dance and song. The missionary knew what was coming and in his heart he felt something that was akin to pain. He sighed deeply and whispered thoughtfully: "My poor children! God pity them! They are preparing for their rain-dance and there will be great excitement in the village shortly. Poor Tsohahissen! he is not himself at all this evening." Then, with a quick turn, he was off, and in his heart he wondered if he could prevent them from carrying out this foolish dance. Since his coming among them they had abandoned many former customs, and the last time Tsohahissen stood ready for the dance, about two years ago, Father Menard's words worked almost magically; the Indians at once left their respective places and rallied around him and the dance did not go on.

Tsohahissen saw the Blackrobe coming down the pathway and ran out to meet him. When they met, the old chief was breathless and cowered at the priest's feet and kissed the hem of his cassock. Then he rose and, laying his strong hand on the priest's arm, motioned to the scene in front of him and exclaimed in a voice, hoarse from yelling: "Ah! my Father! See, thy children wait thy coming with joy. The rivers, the fields, the trees—everything around cries for rain. The flowers in the forests are sad and hang their heads and when the grass turns red in the sun, everything dies. So big chief will start rain-dance to-night, before the moon comes out, and braves will follow his example and the Blackrobe will give his blessing."

The Indian chief seemed nervous, as he ran his brown, wrinkled fingers through a chain of buffalo teeth that hung around his neck, and, when his old, dark face was full upon the sweet-faced priest, his eyes fairly shone like two balls of fire.

Father Menard was silent for a moment. Then he put his hand on the old man's stooped shoulders and said lovingly: "Much better would it be, my son, if you and your children were to get down on your knees with me this evening and ask God your Father in heaven to give you rain."

Tsohahissen raised himself proudly; the eagle-feathers on his head shook slightly and there was a dissatisfied look in his wild eyes. The priest noticed it and he knew the virulence of Tsohahissen's anger, for, good as the latter was, it almost tore his heart in two to see the old traditions and customs of his Huron forefathers thrown aside so carelessly. Father Menard knew all this and as he looked up at the man before him—a towering oak among the beeches and saplings—he noticed that the old chief's eyes were full of tears.

"Hear you not the big river yonder calling for water, O my Father!" the old man exclaimed with emotion. "He is calling for me. The leaves of the trees are also speaking and the lonely cry of the woodchuck haunts me in my sleep. I fear they are dying and I must hurry. The birds of the air are leaving us and the moose and deer are lean and hollow-eyed. And O, my Indians, my family—they are starving now—the river is drying up and I see nothing but dead men's bones. Come, my Father! Come with me! I will take the Blackrobe to his poor children."

And, arm in arm, the priest and chief walked off together and, as Tsohahissen led him forward, cheer followed cheer, and cries, shrieks, war-hoops came in swift succession, until the whole forest trembled and shook with fear.

The great ceremony at last began. The large pole, about eight feet high, with hawk and eagle-feathers on top, was in its place, and Tsohahissen stood admiring the red rings he had painted on it. He, himself, had also made the paint from a red stone, which he found in the shallow river. The women never took part in the dance—the chief always said that their faces would scare the rain away—but they were always present and brought cakes and hominy for the men to eat. The men had now formed large cirles around the pole and Tsohahissen lit the fire that had been already prepared and, when it was blazing away briskly, he threw on tobacco leaves until heavy clouds of smoke filled the air. Then he raised his proud head and, as the smoke rose skyward, extended his bared arms pleadingly to the heavens and cried in a high, strange, hysterical voice: "Rawen Niyoh! I want you to take care of the Indians, your own people! My family is here in the wide, open forest. I want rain! Things won't grow—the earth is too dry. Everything is burning up in the heat. Nothing grows and my children are starving. Hear you not their cries of despair, you big, mighty, Great Spirit? We must have corn, so here is some tobacco for you that you may know we are here and want rain—rain —rain!"

Nearby knelt Father Menard, crucifix in hand, deeply absorbed in prayer.

In a moment, the red chief made for the painted pole and, bowing down low before it, the dance began. The men swayed around wildly and halted and faced the east, then the north, and then the west, as they sang six songs for rain. The songs were all in a minor key and fairly glowed with an intensity of feeling that could not but inspire the heart of every brave. The tempo was quick and delightful and the parting words of the song were lost in loud tones of frenzy and delirium.

The priest was too much absorbed in his prayers to notice the dramatic attitudes of the participants in the dance. Suddenly he felt a light touch on his shoulder. Turning, very much frightened, he saw the form of an Indian lying in the grass behind him, like a panther ready to spring up at the slightest provocation. He rose and faced the strange intruder in the high grass, as the latter raised himself on his hands and knees and whispered: "They must not see me over there. I have Iroquois blood—they have Huron blood. They do not mix well. We hate—we hate each other. I am the servant of Geronimo—big, fine, Iroquois chief, who has camped with his braves, thirty miles from here. He calls me Flying Eagle, because I am quick and strong. Two days ago we were ready to march here and burn down Huron village but Winona, chief's only child—beautiful Iroquois princess —took very sick. Ah! she is so beautiful—her eyes are as blue as the violets in the glen. Big chief, he feel bad—he cry and stay with her in wigwam all day and all night. Geronimo —good man! He send me here for Blackrobe and ask me to bring him back to dying girl. Strong chief heard plenty story from French hunters about Blackrobe healing sick and begs him to come to him now, before the day grows too old."

"An earnest look beamed in the Indian's strange eyes. For a moment he was silent, then his lips trembled and he asked almost pleadingly: "Will you go to Geronimo? His big, red heart is breaking."

A hundred thoughts thrust themselves upon Father Menard's excited nerves. What was he to do? Was he to go into the camp of the enemy and perhaps sacrifice his life for it? But he was prepared to die—what matter then? Just now, there was great excitement among the participants in the dance. A moment later—and Tsohahissen with his large horde of followers bounded over the grass in the direction where Father Menard stood. One of the women, who was on her way to the shallow river for water, happened to spy the stranger in the grass. Noting that he was an Iroquois, she hastened back unnoticed to tell Tsohahissen that an enemy was in the camp.

In a a moment, they were upon both howling and shrieking like a pack of wolves Flying Eagle sprang to his feet, and faced the whole frenzied populace, that would of cut him down with a sweep of tomahawks had not the gentle Jesuit interfered. With a quick turn of the arm, the priest raised his crucifix into the air. His face was pale and his lips were moving and, by some strange power, hundreds of hands loosened their grip on their deadly tomahawks, while disordered, angry voices suddenly ceased—and strong men—men who but a moment before possessed Hurculean strength—now sank back powerless in the light that shone from the little wooden crucifix.

Then Father Menard briefly told his hearers the object of Flying Eagle's coming. "At daybreak," he added, "I will leave you, my dear children. The voice of God calls me into the camp of the Iroquios. But I will return again. In the meanwhile, be good and place your hearts in your Father's care, Who is in Heaven."

Flying Eagle was the guest of the learned Jesuit that evening and for some time they sat talking in the old lodge down by the pine trees and when later they both fell asleep, Father Menard dreamed a beautiful dream—and he was to be the peace-maker!

II.

At midnight, a heavy rain was falling. Peals of loud thunder shook the earth and now and then there was a crash of falling timber. The heavens flashed continually and, in the west, inky clouds were writhing, demon-like, in a living hell of fire. Father Menard turned slightly on his couch, and, wiping his eyes, slowly raised himself on his hands. Then he moved mechanically to his feet and lit the tallow candle on the table and strode sleepily across the floor. Just then there was a loud peal of thunder and crash followed crash; the poor priest's heart beat more rapidly as he said, thoughtfully: "Ah! 'tis a stormy night—but I am glad that God heard my prayer for rain. I hope that no harm may come to my Indian children!" Then he went to the window and looked out across the dreary landscade. It was a great titanic battle of the elements. The rain was coming in torrents and, when the skies again flashed lightening, he saw long rows of wigwams in the distance and more—he thought he saw the figure of a man, creeping along in the rain.

In a second, the priest was down on his knees and, from his heart, he gave thanksgiving to his God. When he rose, there was a tap at the door. Who could be out at this hour? Perhaps one of his children of the wilderness was dying and longed for his strong word to give courage to the passing soul. He lifted the latch, the door flew open and there, on the threshold, stood the figure of a man, tall and full of majesty. It was Tsohahissen, poor, old man, dripping wet.

The chief strode into the room proudly, and kissed his friend's hand. "O my good, kind father! Tsohahissen is happy. The sound of the rain has made chief glad. He could not sleep so he left wigwam and, seeing a light in Blackrobe's window, knew that he was awake and came here to thank him for his prayers. His God has been good to us and given us rain. Rain dance no good—chief and braves dance full time but no rain. Chief now wise and will dance no more." Tsohahissen's voice trembled and his eyes had a far-away look in them. Then, suddenly, he clutched his battle-axe and sprang to the door.

"Oh, my son," interceded the priest, "you must not go now; wait till the storm is over."

Tsohahissen's face wrinkled into a smile, as he shook his head and said carelessly: "Big chief fears neither thundering, lightning or rain. He loves it—but wife and children are all alone in wigwam and they wait Tsohahissen's return."

Then he raised himself straight as an arrow, his fiery eyes fairly sparkled, there was a sudden sweep of his right arm and almost instantly he sprang out into the darkness and rain.

III.

When the dawn purpeled the eastern hills, Father Menard and Flying Eagle left the lodge, the latter carrying a canoe on his strong shoulders. When they were gone, Nanette, the trusty French maid, who had come to the wilderness twenty years ago with her priest-cousin, gently closed the door and sighed deeply. That morning she thought she had noticed a strange look in the Blackrobe's eyes, such as she had never seen before and, in her heart, she wondered if he would ever come back to Notre Dame de Larrette alive. He had been a father to her and now that he would be gone for some time, the little lodge down by the pine trees would become very lonely.

When the two reached the river shore, they were greeted on all sides by the Indians, who stood waiting to give them a royal send-off. Tsohahissen strode sadly to the gentle priest's side and was engaged in earnest conversation for some minutes.

"Iroquois hate Hurons!" he muttered, nervously. "I fear they will capture and kill our good Father and Blackrobe will return to our homes no more. I am sad, for I love you," and his lips trembled, overcome with emotion.

The kind faced priest raised his hand and, laying it on Tsohahissen's shoulder, said, consolingly: "Fear not, great chief! I am going on an errand of peace. Geronimo is calling me—his child needs me. My life is in God's hands and I will have nothing to fear. With Him I can face any danger. And some day, who knows, Geronimo and Tsohahissen may yet become great friends—and I will join the two large families into one."

Tsohahissen opened his eyes eagerly and shook his feather-crowned head, as if what the priest said was nigh to impossible.

In another few minutes Father Menard was in the canoe and Flying Eagle's strong arms raised the paddles in the air. Another second and they smote the water. There was great sparkling and gurgling and the two were off and long the Indians stood and watched until the canoe and its occupants seemed like a small speck on the distant blue waters.

For evening after, there was one solitary watcher on the river shore. It was Tsohahissen—poor man! His red face bore a saddened look as he gazed into the troubled, angry waters. Again and again he raised his hand to his mouth and shouted wild-sounding words into the lonely night around him, but the splashing, moaning waves alone answer.

It was late when Father Menard and Flying Eagle reached their destination. The good priest was very tired—most of the journey having been made on foot. Geronomo stood waiting at the edge of the forest in the moonlight to extend his friendly greeting and to escort the illustrious visitor to the villiage. The great chief of the Iroquois was a very old man; his shoulders were slightly stooped but his gait was still strong and steady. On his fierce, swarthy rough face, however, which was surrounded by a mass of raven-black hair, one could see a few soft lines, that were ready to run into a smile at the slighest provocation. His cheek-bones were very prominent, his glance was quick and penetrating and somewhat stern, but it melted into kindness as he eyed the Blackrobe intently.

In the central part of the village, a bonfire was glowing and, thickly grouped around, sat the braves, holding their pipe and smoking in silence. When the party drew nearer, Flying Eagle gave one shrill cry and made for the anxious faces, staring into the flames. In a moment he was amongst them and all the men took up the cry. It was so loud and shrill that bird and beast alike became suddenly frightened.

When Geronimo drew near, leading Father Menard by the arm, heads turned and hundred of eyes flashed suddenly upon the Blackrobe, who looked with a kindly face upon them all. They had heard much about this great man and they looked upon him with a feeling of awe.

"Come!" said Geronimo kindly to the priest, "you must be hungry —the meal is ready," and together they sat down at a rude table nearby and partoo freely of venison and choise cuts of salmon and white-meated partriges, served on hard beechwood platters.

The old chief spoke tenderly of Winona and when Father Menand answered, in the Iroquois tongue, that he would do all he could to save the life of the sick child, the earnest red-face burst into a smile of gratitude.

When the two entered Geronomo's wigwam, but a few feet away, the chattering voices outside suddenly ceased. The braves loved their chief — to them he was greatness itself. His arrows never missed in a chase, his battle-axe and spear never failed to draw blood in battle. He was skilled in magic and knew the language of beast and bird. And above all he was wealthy. When the priest entered the wigwam his glance at once took in the surroundings. Scattered about everywhere were rich furs fo black fox, snowy ermine, brown otter, beaver and deer. Spears, war-axes, bows, arrows, tomohawks, shields and much bead-work hung from every corner.

Upon several fine skins of snowy ermine law Winona—the dying girl—the gloryof Geronimo's wild heart. She could not have been more than eighteen, this lovely princess of a mighty nation. She was extremely beautiful — her face had no rough lines or prominent angles, It was so un-Indian like. Her complexion, too, was not that deep bronze, but a very soft, light yellow. Her lips had the color of the crimson twilight, her long, flowing hair was black as the night. Necklaces of white beads and strings of wampum lay on her throbbing bosom, and her dress was of fine deer skin, thinned and cured so that it was soft as silk. A pair of fine buckskin moccasins, embroidered with quill-work, beads and shells, covered her feet. Beside her knelt the medicine man. He was gaunt and wild eyed and it seemed almost incredible that a heart could go on beating and sustain life in so thin and wasted a body. But he was a power in his community — this strange-looking individual with the white flowing hair, the long fingernails and muffled momotones.

"Wise as the wisest in council grave,
He sat with the chief around him—
He knew of the roots that ever save;
He sought them down by the Blackstream's wave,
He knew the star of each warrior brave
And knew where the fates had found him."

Yesterday, at sunrise, he had come to Geronimo. His herbs and roots had proved powerless to stay the steady ravages of the disease, and he mumbled distractedly: "Winona must die! I know it— I feel it. For two full days the white flower near the river has been fading in the sunlight—and whenever it fades someone dies. Winona cannot live to see another day." It was then that Flying Eagle was dispatched for the Blackrobe.

When Father Menard approached Winona, the medicine-man slunk away stealthily and dissappeared. The sick child only smiled faintly. The priest laid his finger on her pulse—it was very weak and fluttering, almost imperceptible. Her body was cold and covered with a clammy prespiration.

"The heart is failing, it must be stimulated at once," added the priest-doctor, as he opened his satchel and took from it a small vial. Quickly he poured out a few drops of a light liquid into a little glass syringe, filled partly with water, and injected it into the girl's arm. Then he filled several earthen jars with hot water and placed them around the child to induce reaction and overcome the state of collapse that Winona had fallen into. Geronimo eyed the priest intently and then asked: "Will Winona, my beautiful princess, live?"

The learned Jesuit merely raised his eyes and answered: I will be be better able to tell later on. I will do my best."

To Geronimo, Winona was everything. Since her mother's death two years ago, she had been to him a consolation and a companion.

In thirty minutes the hypodermic injection was repeated—the heart had not yet responded to the stimulus. Small pellets, containing some active medicinal substance were also given by mouth. In a few moments, Winona'a eyes closed and she drifted into a calm, refreshing sleep.

Father Menard then strode to the chief's side. "You must lie down, Geronimo—it is late. You look tired and worn out and to-night you must have a few hours of quiet sleep. I will watch the sick child and, if anything happens, I will call you."

Geronimo at first refused bluntly, but soon the priest's gentle voice mastered the latter's feelings and he sank down upon a pile of buffalo skins and was soon asleep.

The missionary stole to the side of the sick girl—she was sleeping quietly. He felt her pulse and his eyes brightened instantly. Again he raised his eyes to heaven and, laying his crucifix upon her breast, he prayed in silence. Without strong winds shrieked and whistled through the writhing branches and now and then the mournful cry of some wild animal in the forest stole into the lonely wigwam. But neither disturbed the sick child and the devoted watcher at her bedside.

The medicine had been administered at regular intervals and towards morning the priest woke Geronimo from his sleep. The chief yawned, opened and rubbed his eyes, and when he saw the Blackrobe bending over him, a great and mighty fear penetrated every muscle in his body. He shook visibly as he raised himself to his knees.

"Ah! I knew it—she is dead!" he exclaimed, almost with distraction.

"Winona is dead—dead! I felt it—I knew it. In my sleep I heard the North wind calling—and he was calling her—my beautiful daughter—my queen —my Winona!"

Then his head fell into his large, brown hands and he sobbed like a child.

"Geronimo!" exclaimed the priest eagerly. "Raise yourself! Winona is not dead, but lives—lives I say. This morn there is much life in that sick body of yester-night. The danger is past. Winona will not die, but she will live to bless, as princess, the hearts of her Iroquois children."

Quickly he led Geronimo to the sick child, who greeted both with a smile that lingered for some time on two bright, rosy cheeks.

Geronimo bent over the beautiful form and stroked the black locks gently, while Father Menard brushed aside the the heavy curtains at the doorway and left the wigwam. And for some minutes father and child were alone.

The sky was a mass of slate-colored clouds, but far in the East, through the distant cedars and hemlocks, a few long lines of red light told of the birth of another day. The birds were stirring in the trees and flocks of wild geese in the grassy marshes were eyeing the skies to take their morning cruise. On a distant mountain top, a lonely elk bugled forth glad welcomes to the infant day, that lay cradled in the lap of the rosy dawn.

The priest's responsive heart beat gladly within him as his eyes drank in the beauty of the morning hour, and almost suddenly the sun smiled upon the face of nature. Soon there was a great stir in the village. Hundreds of wigwams threw forth their occupants, and women were running around everywhere, preparing the morning meal.

Father Menard quit his place and silently entered the wigwam. There he saw a beautiful picture—one he did not expect to see so soon—and it was all arranged, in his short absence, by the artistic fingers of a powerful Creator. On her snowy bed of costly ermine lay Winona—her glowing face bright in the pure sunlight that stole through a few cracks in the wigwam above, her eyes riveted upon the kneeling figure of her father at the bed-side. Geronimo's head was bowed and in his hands he held fast the crucifix, which the priest had placed upon Winona in the night-time. His eyes were closed and his lips moved slowly and reverently.

Father Menard stood transfixed for a moment, for Winona moved slowly and he thought he had disturbed the quiet serenity of the scene. In an instant, he sank upon his knees and covered his face as he whispered faintly: "O God! I thank Thee!" For some time, all knelt in silence, and to the good priest it seemed that the very wigwam was peopled and alive with other sweet-faced beings, who had stolen in with the sunlight and, in his heart, he felt that he had heard the stir and rustle of angels' wings.

Just then a shadow glided noiselessly into the wigwam. For a second, two eyes rested lovingly upon Winona and a smile crept into the anxious, fierce, red face of the intruder and, when a moment later he brushed aside the heavy curtains with his bow and made for the mountains in search of game, a sigh of relief burst from his lips. It was Flying Eagle, and in his wild heart was cloistered a holy secret.

IV.

One month had passed and Winona had fully recovered from her illness, and Father Menard was beginning to think of his homeward journey. Much had come to pass in all this time, and the good priest felt elated, and justly so. Geronimo and Winona had both become deeply interested in the story of the Christ and many were the searching questions the Blackrobe answered. One thing alone troubled him sorely. On several occasions, Geronimo had given utterance to his great hatred of the Hurons. But he said nothing of their intended invasion.

One evening the three sat together in front of the chief's wigwam. Father Menard had just pictured the birth of the Infant at Bethlehem and now a spell of silence fell upon all. Up in the beeches overhead, a number of squirrels nibbled and frisked exultingly and, several yards away, a limpid brook made sweet music for tired souls.

The priest ran his fingers thoughtlessly through his beads, and Winona gazed upon him intently. Suddenly Geronimo's strong voice broke the lethargy of the moment: "To morrow the Blackrobe leaves us and we will miss his kind face. Chief and daughter will be lonely without him and the wigwam will not be as bright when he is gone. But he will come again—often —and tell us stories of his good God. The way is not long and Flying Eagle will always accompany him. He knows every inch of ground in the big forest." The chief eyed the priest for a moment and his voice melted into a tone of pathos, when he asked: "Will Blackrobe forget us or will he come again, as a friend, to the camp of the Iroquois?"

"Certainly, my good man!" answered the priest, as he rose from the wooden bench. "I will come again—often—to see you. Twice every seven days, in snow or rain, the Blackrobe will journey to your village and, as a sign of trust, he leaves his crucifix with Geronimo. Great chief! I will be happy to meet you and your braves here whenever I come, and you will find in me a good friend," and he handed Geronimo his precious crucifix, as a pledge of his promise.

The old man took the proffered token and pressed it to his bosom. Winona, too, was pleased. Slowly she rose and took the Blackrobe's hand in her own. "I am so glad you will come again," she said. "Winona wants to become your friend and learn more about your God."

Just then, Geronimo strode into the wigwam and soon returned with a bundle of rich furs and skins under his arm. "Geronimo brings his costliest furs and skins to the good Blackrobe," he said kindly, "and asks him to accept them in payment for his trouble and services. Skins and furs are good—the best. They will bring in much money at the trading post."

The priest thanked him kindly in the Iroquois tongue, and added: "But keep your skins and furs, my friend! I do not seek to rob you of these treasures. Only give me your good will—and more—will you let me name my own reward?"

"With pleasure, O my Father!" answered Geronimo thoughtfully.

"May I ask you, then, in the name of my God, Geronimo, to give up all thought of your pre-arranged attack on the Hurons, who dwell peacefully in yonder village? Their lives are dear to me — for I love them. I know the virulence of an Iroquois' hatred — but you must not harm my children! Will you promise?"

Geronimo tossed his head arrogantly and bit his lips in anger. That demon-hatred was again lashing his soul, his face was redder than ever. It seemed as if every drop of blood in his body had suddenly run to his head to stimulate his thoughts. An indignant look crept into his face, as he stepped about proudly, and he was on the verge of refusing, when his eyes stole from the priest to Winona. She trembled and, when he saw that the tears were gathering in her eyes, a shrill cry smote the air and he exclaimed, almost wildly, as his fingers tightened about the crucifix: "Geronimo promises! Geronimo promises! Blackrobe's children shall live in peace!" and he sprang to the priest's side and took the outstretched hand in his own.

V.

When Father Menard again returned to Notre Dame de Larette all hearts were glad. Tsohahissen, himself, had gone down the river in his canoe to meet him at sundown. Nanette also felt glad and, in the little lodge by the pine trees, the table was set and a brisk fire was burning in the grate and the trusty maid sang lustily, as she knitted carelessly. There was a rap at the door. A bright look stole into Nanette's brown eyes when the door opened wide to let in Father Menard.