

CHAPTER XVII.

HOW MADEMOISELLE MONTLUC SUBDUED AN
ELK, AND WHAT FOLLOWED.

Lord Kildare continuing his story, said

"Now I will tell you why I had reason to remember the elk hunt. While Charlot was firing at his elk, Mademoiselle Athenais had fired at hers. Charlot broke an antler, Mademoiselle Athenais wounded a shoulder. As Charlot's elk was savagely springing upon him, that of Mademoiselle was furiously rushing upon us—I say us, for I threw myself before Mademoiselle to defend her more easily. The elk came plunging along with angry bellowings, like that of a bull. But, thank God his bellowings and rage were not enough to disturb me."

"Accordingly, without any faltering, I took Mademoiselle by the hand, and placed her behind an immense tree which threw its shade over the scene of the combat. Then, kneeling on one knee, I awaited the charge, and covering with my rifle the foe, now not more than twenty feet distant, I pulled the trigger."

"I have a steady nerve, Father, and an excellent aim, for I have never tired myself out reading Greek and Roman authors, or works treating on Geometry, I am, thank heaven, abundantly endowed with presence of mind, as a shot with the rifle, leaving out Montluc le Rouge and two or three other of my Canadian acquaintances. I have met no superiors, few equals, then I was not distracted by any thought, save that of rescuing Mademoiselle Montluc. The form of the foe, as you are pleased to call him, was of splendid dimensions, with almost the shape and color of a grand Norman steed, you must then think that with my rifle on my shoulder, my finger on the trigger, and several seconds infinite care, taking aim at an object not twenty feet distant, I must have killed him at the first shot, or at least severely wounded him. No such thing."

"I pulled the trigger. It snapped fire, and of course, did not go off. At the very moment I was about to fire, or rather half a second previously, a mysterious drop of water fell into the pan, dampened the powder and completely disarmed me. My rifle was now no more than a stick, to be sure it was longer, heavier, dearer and clumsier than an ordinary stick, but it was just as little adapted to protect me against the elk."

"The elk came rushing on, quite unaware of my mishap. Quick as the thunder-bolt he swept down upon me, and to avoid the shock I threw myself flat on the ground. He re-

turned again. I avoided him again and in the same fashion. I have no doubt that he believed me the cause of his wounds and sought revenge. I did not like to undeceive him. Was I not too happy to turn upon myself the rage of this ferocious animal?"

"This little strategy to avoid the brunt of the attack—for my rifle being now only a useless piece of furniture—engaged both of us for some minutes which seemed the toughest of my life. To fire on the elk was impossible. To seize the animal round the body like a bear and stab him in the grasp was even more impossible, for the animal was of very unusual figure. Fancy a man trying to hold in his arms and smother a great Norman horse! Madness, is it not? Well, sir, I had no other resource to extricate myself from my dangerous situation."

"To be frank, I was happy to be able to give my life for Mademoiselle Montluc, but, frankly also, I would have been still more happier to preserve it for her, and unfortunately I was afraid I had the choice no longer."

"It was at this moment that Mademoiselle Montluc all at once conceived an idea, to which I owe my life, and which finished the combat. But before explaining this idea and the success which concerned it, I must give you a brief description of the ground. You may judge if I was at my ease."

"In the centre of the thicket where we were both struggling—the elk and myself—there was a magnificent oak tree, from whose roots sprang four immense trunks, or, rather, four bulky trees between which, a man of ordinary size could easily slip and shelter himself from the elk's horns. I wheeled round the oak and entered this open space whither the elk, blinded by his fury, and wishing at any price to kill me, tried to follow, but he got entangled by the horns so that he could get only one of them through with difficulty. I had anticipated him, and avoided the charge by going out at the opposite opening."

"The fearless beast wished then to release himself, but as it often happens to us when we try to unravel a skein of tangled thread, he embarrassed himself only the more. His second antler got fastened in another trunk, and he stood motionless, yet tossing and shaking his head like a madman. He bowed his head, he raised it, he struck with his head a third trunk which was in front of him and prevented his going forward, as the others hindered him from going back, in one word he was a prisoner, and that was precisely what I had been hoping for."