

L'ANGE DE DIEU.

Autumn in the Province of Quebec, 1648. The crops half garnered for the winter, and the Mohawks from beyond the Great Lakes devastating the land.

The village of L'Ange de Dieu, lying far away from all kindred settlements, lay peculiarly exposed to the attacks of these savage hordes; and when, after weeks of blockade and ruthless ambush, the enemy seemed suddenly to have withdrawn from the neighbourhood, the settlers made the best possible use of the interim of peace, harvesting what crops the Indians had spared, and constructing a strongly-built block-house, large enough to contain the entire population, in the centre of the village square.

The waning sunlight gleams brightly on the stubble fields, and softens, with a tender glory, the rough outlines of the log cabins that form an irregular circle around the central building.

A little group of farmers, home from the long day's labour in the fields, linger chatting to each other by the block-house, their soft *patois* sounding musically through the twilight, and on the threshold of the various cabins, the quick click of their needles keeping time to the conversation, gossip their wives and sweethearts, looking picturesque and beautiful in quaint Normandy costumes, surmounted by brilliant kerchiefs, bound turban-wise around the head.

To home and kindred turns the talk; to France the Beautiful, across the sea, and to those who, dearer than love of country and ties of kinship, have led their loving hearts from old provincial homes across the stormy ocean to lonely hearths and the western wilds.

Ah, L'Ange de Dieu! outpost of the old world's faith and honour! May the Angels of God indeed hover over you with sheltering wings, for peril lurks behind every shrub and tree, where the roaring redman points his flinted arrow, or grasps the glittering tomahawk to render sudden death!

From the shadowy edge of the forest that walls in the oval clearing bursts a small band of men, shouting lustily and firing their muskets in the air as a sign of their peaceful intentions. Only a young lieutenant and a score of soldiers sent by the French commander to assist the farmers in defending the frontier, armed with pikes and muskets, that, clumsy as they were, did deadly execution among the skin-clad Indians.

But neither shout nor powder is needed to gain them a welcome to the village. Are they not soldiers of France, with mayhap in their ranks some old-time friend or relation, with whom to exchange remembrances? All alike drop the occupations of the moment. The priest hurries from his little chapel, the group at the block-house suddenly dissolves, and, with women and children, crowd around the strangers; while the canine population comes out *en masse* to add to the uproar.

In the meantime, the young officer, singling out the *curé*, demands the latest news of the enemy.

"Ah, monsieur," says the *curé* sadly, "things are bad as bad can be; we are under arms while cutting the corn, and at night we have to watch in turn. Some of our cattle have been stolen, and there's not even enough food to last through the winter for the remainder; and a week ago poor Bossière, with his wife and family, was massacred. His cabin was built at some distance from the others, and, when news of the invasion came, he refused to move into the village; and when the Indians attacked us one morning at daybreak, we had all we could do in defending our own homes and defeating them without giving him any assistance. In the fight we heard one cry, no more; and, in the morning, the charred remains of the cabin, with the mutilated body of a child, were all we found. Since then the Indians have retired."

Lowly and quietly as the old priest spoke, his breast heaved and his eyes flashed with passion as he thought how soon the same fate might overtake the rest of his flock.

"The fiends!" cried the lieutenant. "Are they in force?"

"Several hundreds," answered the *curé*; "but, thank God, even if they return, your arrival puts us at ease."

Night closed in. The men were billeted around the village, Lieutenant D'Aubeney sharing the Jesuit's cottage. Though the forest was reported clear, a sentinel was posted at each end of the square.

Time went by and the village remained undisturbed, though tales of murder and rapine were frequently brought in from the neighbouring settlements; so a careful watch was always kept.

The farmers, freed from night-watching and the bearing of arms during the day, laboured heartily at their various pursuits: some finished harvesting and prepared the ground for the spring sowing; while others were employed in raising a strong palisade around the block-house, as an additional means of defense, and sufficiently large to accommodate their cattle if they were besieged for any length of time. The outpost was an important one, and, consequently, was better guarded than the French settlements in general were at this date.

One morning, as the men were separating to their daily tasks, a voyageur from one of the neighbouring clearings rushed up. How he escaped death seemed a miracle. Twelve miles of virgin forest to traverse, streams to cross, and chief of all, the difficulty of evading the enemy, who seldom wandered far from L'Ange de Dieu.

The man's tale was soon told. Surprised at night, the villagers managed to throw themselves into the chapel, the only building capable of defence, before the enemy fell upon them, firing the houses and murdering and scalping all who were cut off; and when at last, after an hour's hard fighting, they were repulsed and driven off, hardly half of the little band of settlers were left to rejoice. Aid was imperative to restore the place to a defensible condition, so he had volunteered to seek it from the well-manned outpost.

This assistance could not be refused, and fifteen soldiers and peasants were despatched to the ruined village. This left them only forty men and youths who were able to bear arms in defence of the station.

Once more the shades of night close lovingly around the settlement. No moon illuminates the sky; but one by one the stars twinkle through the frosty atmosphere, as if the eyes of its own guardian angels were keeping watch and ward.

No sound but the steady tramp, tramp of the two sentinels as they pace their beats. The muskets ready primed in their hands; alert and watchful for their own and their comrades' lives. Silence reigns in all the log-built cabins after the labour and turmoil of the day. Only in the Jesuit's cottage a restless heart is beating, where the young lieutenant tosses sleeplessly upon his couch, thinking of Southern France; of the long wide-reaching vineyards, and the moss-grown chateau with its thousand memories of youth and boyish pleasure, not yet dimmed or blurred by passing years; and nearer and dearer than all these fleeting fancies comes the vision of a dark-haired maid, whose jetty eyes were full of tears when he had said farewell. And treasured on his breast he bears a faded rose, a gift that marks a glowing day of early June, when he and Christine plighted love and troth. And now the same bright eyes, filled with the pure, unquestioning love, which then they did not dare proclaim, seem to look down upon him from the sky of the new-settled world, amid the glittering stars, "the forget-me-nots of the angels." And so the hours flit on, and he, too, slumbers.

Twice the sentinels are changed. The last men rise drowsy from their interrupted repose. The night air is cold, and the stalwart arms relax the muskets little by little, until the weapons lie inert against the nearest cabins.

But what are those dark forms that advance so slowly from the forest's edge? On they come, two or three hundred in number, so quietly that the sentries do not hear them until they are within a few yards of the outermost cottage.

But now one turns and sees the dark forms rushing ever faster; as, seeing their surprise is a failure,

they cast concealment aside and dash towards the sentries, pealing out their savage war-whoop through the air.

A wild, despairing cry, followed by a musket shot, and the men are aroused; but not before the foe is in their midst. Men, women and children hurriedly spring from their couches and pour out into the square, the men gathering around the latter in a wavering circle, holding whatever weapons came first to hand, as they slowly urge their way to the block-house. Around them press the swarming Indians. The cabins nearest the point of attack are fired, and the inmates butchered as they rush from the doors. The flames light up the village with a flickering glow, and make as weird a battle-scene as ever man has triumphed in. Above the surging, undulating mass of combatants, their swarthy features silhouetted by the ruddy flames, looms the star-lit darkness, and shrouding them in on every side the gloomier shadows of the forest. Already the first loud whoops of onset are yielding place to cries of death and carnage. The faces of the peasants and soldiers are rigid and determined, as, with pike and clubbed musket, or even with a simple bowie-knife, they ward off the Indians. The women for the most part are calm and collected, many aiding the men with household utensils, picked up in the moment of flight, or guarding their children from harm.

To and fro, backwards and forwards, sways the struggling mass. And now the fight rages more fiercely and bitterly as they reach the block-house. The men manning it throw the gates of the palisade open, and in they rush—man, woman and child—with the red knife and tomahawk pressing closely on their rear, and then the gates are closed, and the foe recoils a moment before the hail of musket balls, the volley ringing out clear and sonorous above the tumult.

And wounded friends lying as they had fallen among the bleeding bodies of the slain, meet death with calm composure as they know some loved one of their heart has gained the protection of the palisade.

Young and old lie scattered on the ground. Here a child of ten lies dead with a shattered skull, no look of pain or terror marring the beauty of her features, struck down as she left the sheltering cabin. On farther dies a youthful wife, clasping her baby in her nerveless arms, nor stills its weeping. Ah! nevermore shall wife and child await the coming of the father by the cottage door, when sunset seals the day of labour! Fast by her feet, locked in the close embrace of death, soldier and savage, inveterate enemies, pant out their life together, and extended by their side a rugged Breton turns his pallid face to heaven.

Sleep placidly, sons and daughters of Mars! on nightmare of the torture stake or dagger need appal your dreaming; rather may visions of happier times, while yet the red man was not in your thoughts, beguile you in the waiting!

And there beneath another swarthy corpse, the face of the young officer, untouched by the death wound, shows firm and clear-cut in the flickering light, the bright blood slowly soaking through his uniform, where a bowie knife had pierced his guard in the *melee*. He murmurs a smothered name, and half turns on his side. Is it only a sigh or Christine?

"To the death, sir," he had answered the French commandant, when ordered to hold the settlement. Well, death had come. What then? A soldier's death is the same in an unnamed skirmish, as it is on the grand field of battle; to die in the moment of victory or falter and drop in defeat!

But a soldier's death holds more than the mere loss of honour and fame. Far away in La Belle France a dark girl dreams of her handsome lover, and recalls the farewell meeting in the arbour; nor dreams that the red rose of love and remembrance is dyed a brighter crimson than ever it was in the days of its beauty and fragrance.

And what knew old France of this dim battle in the forest? Only this, in official returns—"Killed, in defense of their station, Lieutenant D'Aubeney, twelve men." Of the weird combat in the starlight, hemmed in by murmuring tree-tops; of the surprise, the struggle, and the victory; of the