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OUR CENTENNIAL STORY.

THE BASTONNAIS:

A TALE OF THE AMERICAN INVASION OF CANADA IN 1775-76.

By JOHN LESPERANCE.

BOOK I.

THE GATHERING OF THE STORM.

I.

BLUE LIGHTS.

He stood leaning heavily on his carbine. High on his lonely perch, he slowly promenaded his eye over the dusk landscape spread out before him. It was the hour of midnight and a faint star-light barely outlined the salient features of the scenery. Behind him wound the valley of the St. Charles black with the shadows of pine and tamarac. Before him rose the crags of Levis, and beyond were the level stretches of the Beauce. To his left the waterfall of Montmorenci boomed and glistened. To his right lay silent and deserted the Plains of Abraham, over which a vapor of sanguine glory seemed to hover.

Directly under him slept the ancient city of Champlain. A few lights were visible in the Chateau of St. Louis where the Civil Governor resided, and in the guard-rooms of the Jesuit barracks on Cathedral square, but the rest of the capital was wrapped in the solitude of gloom. Not a sound was heard in the narrow streets and tortuous defiles of Lower Town. A solitary lamp swung from the bows of the war-sloop in the river.

He stood leaning heavily on his carbine. To have judged merely from his attitude, one would have said that he was doing soldier's duty with only a mechanical vigilance. But such was not the case. Never was sentry set upon watch of heavier responsibility, and never was watch kept with keener observation. Eye, ear, brain—the whole being was absorbed in duty. Not a sight escaped him—from the changes of cloud in the lowering sky over the offing, to the deepening of shadows in the alley of Wolfe's Cove. Not a sound passed unheard—from the fluttering wing of the sparrow that had built its winter nest in the guns of the battery, to the swift dash of the chipmunk over the brown glacis of the fortifications. Standing there on the loftiest point of the loftiest citadel in America, his martial form detached from its bleak surroundings, and clearly defined, like a block of sculptured marble, against the dark horizon—silent, alone and watchful—he was the representative and custodian of British power in Canada in the hour of a dread crisis. He felt the position and bore himself accordingly.

Roderick Hardinge was a high-spirited young fellow. He belonged to the handful of militia which guarded the city of Quebec, and he resented the imputations which had been continually cast, during the preceding two months, on the efficiency of that body. He knew that the Americans had carried everything before them in the upper part of the Colony. Schuyler had occupied Isle-aux-Noix without striking a blow. Five hundred regulars and one hundred volunteers had surrendered at St. Johns. Bedell, of New Hampshire, had captured Chambly with immense stores of provisions and war material. Montgomery was marching with his whole army against Montreal. The garrison of that city was too feeble to sustain an attack and must yield to the enemy. Then would come the turn of Quebec. Indeed, it was well known that Quebec was the objective point of the American expedition. As the fall of Quebec had secured the conquest of New France by the British in 1759, so the capture of Quebec was expected to secure the conquest of Canada by the Americans in the winter of 1775-76. This was perfectly understood by the Continental Congress at Philadelphia. The plan of campaign was traced out with this view for General Schuyler, and when that officer resigned the command, owing to illness, after his success at St. Johns, Montgomery took up the same idea and determined to carry it out. From Montreal he addressed a letter to Congress in which he said pithily: "till Quebec is taken, Canada is unconquered."

Roderick Hardinge was painfully aware that the authorities of Quebec had little or no confidence in the ability of the militia for the purposes of defence. It was necessary in the interest of that body, as well as in the interest of the city, that this prejudice should be exploded. Hardinge undertook to do it. No time was to be lost. In a fortnight Quebec might be invested. He set to work with the assistance of only one tried companion. Their project was kept a profound secret even from the commander of the corps.

It was the night of the 6th November, 1775. Hardinge left headquarters unnoticed and unattended, and proceeded at once to the furthest outpost of the citadel. He was hailed by the sentinel and gave the countersign. Then, addressing the soldier by name—the man belonged to his own regiment—he ordered him to hand over his musket. No questions were asked and no explanations were given. Hardinge was an officer and the simple militiaman saw no

other course than obedience. If he had any curiosity or suspicion, both were relieved by the further order to keep out of sight, but within hailing distance, until his services should be required. The signal was to be a whistle.

Roderick Hardinge remained on guard from ten till twelve. As we have seen, he was sharply observant of everything that lay before him. But there was one point of the horizon to which his eye more assiduously turned. It was the high road leading from Levis over the table-land of the Beauce back to the forests. It was evidently from this direction that the object of his watch was to turn up. And he was not disappointed.

Just as the first stroke of twelve sounded from the turret of Notre-Dame Cathedral, a blue light shot into the air from a point on this road, not more than a hundred yards from the river bank.

Roused by the sight, Roderick straightened himself up, snatched his carbine from his left side, threw it up on his right shoulder and presented arms.

The sixth stroke of midnight was just heard, when a second blue light darted skyward, but this time fully fifty yards nearer. The man who fired it was evidently running toward the river.

Roderick made a step forward and uttered a low cry.

The last stroke of the twelve had hardly been heard, when a third light whizzed up from the very brink of the river.

Roderick turned briskly round and gave a shrill whistle. The faithful soldier, whose watch he had assumed, immediately rushed forward, had his musket thrust back into his hands, with an injunction from Hardinge to keep silence. The latter had barely time to recede into the darkness when the relief-guard, consisting of a corporal and two privates, came to the spot and the usual formality of changing sentries was gone through.

II.

BEYOND THE RIVER.

With a throbbing heart, Roderick Hardinge walked rapidly over the brow of the citadel into Upper Town. He glanced up at the Chateau as he passed, but the lights which were visible there two hours before, were now extinguished, and the Governor was sleeping without a dream of the mischief that was riding out upon the city that night. He passed through the square and overheard the wassail of the officers over their wine and cards. He answered the challenge of the sentinel at the gate which guarded the heights of Mountain Hill, and doubled his pace down that winding declivity. The old hill has been the scene of many an historic incident, but surely of none more momentous than this midnight walk of Roderick Hardinge. Along the dark, narrow streets of Lower Town, stumbling over stones and sinking into cavities. Not a soul on the way. Not a sign of life in the square, black ware-houses, with their barricades of sheet-iron doors and windows.

In twenty minutes, the young officer had reached the river at the point where now stands the Grand Trunk wharf. A boat with two oars lay at his feet. Without a moment's hesitation he stepped into it, unfasted the chain that held it to the bank, threw the oars into their locks, and, with a vigorous stroke, turned the boat's nose to the south shore. As he did this, his eye glanced upward at the city. There it stood above him, silent and unconscious. The gigantic rock of Cape Diamond towered over him as if exultant in its own strength and in mockery of his forebodings. He rowed under the stern of the war-sloop. A solitary lantern hung from her bows, but no watchman hailed him from her quarter.

"The Horse Jockey is evidently a myth for them all," he murmured. "But he will soon be found a terrible reality, and it's Roddy Hardinge will tell them so."

The St. Lawrence is not so wide above Quebec as it is at other places along its course, and in a quarter of an hour, the oarsman had reached his destination. As the keel of his boat grated on the sands, a man stepped forward to meet him. The officer sprang out and slapped him on the shoulder:

"Good old boy, Donald."

"Thanks to you, maister."

"Punctual to a minute, as usual, Donald."

"Aye, sir, but 'twas a close scratch. The horse, I fear, feels it mair than I do."

"No doubt, no doubt. Rode much?"

"Nigh on ten hours, sir, and nae slackened rein."

"Oh, but my heart leaped, Donald, when I saw your first rocket. I could hardly believe my eyes."

"Just saved my distance, maister. If I had broken a gairth, I would have been too late. But it's done, sir."

"Yes, old friend, and well done."

The two men then entered upon a long and

earnest conference, speaking in low tones. From the animated manner of the old man and the frequent exclamations of the younger, it was evident that important information was being communicated by the one to the other. During a pause in the conversation, Donald produced a small paper parcel which he handed to Roderick Hardinge.

"'Twas stuckit in the seat o' my saddle, maister," said he, "an I wadna hae lost it for the world."

Roderick wrapped the parcel in his bandanna, and carefully placed it in his breast pocket, after which he buttoned his coat to the chin.

At the end of half an hour, the two men prepared to separate.

"I will now hurry across," said Roderick. "And you, Donald, return to the inn. You must need rest terribly."

"Two hours or sae will set me to richts, sir."

"And your horse?"

"He's knockit up for gude, sir."

"Then get another and the best you can find. Here are fifty sovereigns. Use them freely in His Majesty's name."

Donald bowed loyally and low.

"I will be awake and awa' a gude hour before dawn, maister Roddy. The sunrise will see me weel out o' the settlements."

"And we meet here again at midnight?"

"Depend upon it, sir, unless the rapscallion rebels should catch and hang me up to one of the tall aiks o' the Chaudière."

"Never fear, Donald; a traitor's death was never meant for an old soldier of the King, like you."

The young officer entered his boat and immediately bent to the oars. The old servant walked up the hill leading to Levis, and was soon lost in the darkness.

III.

AT THE CHATEAU.

Roderick reached the north shore in safety. He fastened his boat to the same green, water-worn bulwark from which he had loosened it not more than an hour before. He walked up to the city along the same route which he had previously followed. Nothing had changed. Everything was profoundly quiescent. Every body was still asleep. If he courted secrecy, he must have been content, for it was evident that no one had been a witness of his strange proceedings.

When he got within the gates of Upper Town, his pace slackened perceptibly. It was not hesitation, but deliberation. He paused a moment in front of the barracks. The lights in the officers' quarters were out and no sound came from the mess-room. This circumstance seemed to deter him from entering, and he continued on his way direct to the Chateau St. Louis. Having passed the guard satisfactorily, he rapped loudly at the main portal. An orderly who was sleeping in his clothes, on a lounge in the vestibule, sprang to his feet at once, snatched up his dark lantern from behind the door, and opened. Throwing the light upon the face of his visitor, he exclaimed:

"Halloa, Hardinge, what the deuce brings you here at this disreputable hour? Come in, it's blasted cold."

"I want to see His Excellency."

"Surely not just now. He was ailing last evening and retired early. I don't think he would fancy being drummed up before daylight."

"Very sorry, but I must see him."

"Some little scrape, eh? Want the old gentleman to get you out of it before the town gets wind of it," said the orderly, who by this time was thoroughly awake and disposed to be in good humour.

"Something far more serious, Simpson, I am concerned to say. You know I would not call here at such an hour without the most urgent cause. I really must see the Governor and at once."

This was said without any signs of impatience, but in so earnest a way, that the orderly, who knew his friend well, felt that the summons could not be denied. He, therefore, proceeded at once to have the Governor awakened. With more celerity than either of the young men had looked for, that official rose, dressed and stepped into his anti-chamber where he sent for Hardinge to meet him. After a few words of apology, the latter unfolded to His Excellency the object of his visit. He stated that while every body in the city was busying himself about the invasion of the Colony from the west, by the Continental army under Montgomery, the other invading column from the east, under Arnold, was almost completely lost sight of. For his part, he declared that he considered it the more dangerous of the twain. It was composed of some very choice troops, had been organized under the eye of Washington himself, and was commanded by a dashing fellow. In addition to his other qualities, Arnold had the incalculable advantage of a personal knowledge of the city from several visits which he had quite lately paid it for commercial purposes. The people of Quebec seemed completely to ignore Arnold's expedition. They had a notion that it was or would be submerged somewhere among the cascades of the Kennebec, or, at least, that it would never succeed in penetrating so far as the frontier at Sertigan.

The Governor wrapped his dressing gown more closely about him, threw his head back on the pillow of his arm chair, and gave vent to a little yawn or two, as if in gentle wonder whether it were worth while to rouse him from his

slumbers for the sake of all this information with which he was quite familiar already. But the Governor was a patient, courteous gentleman, and could not believe that even a militia officer would presume so far on his good nature as come to him at such an hour, unless he had really something of definite importance to communicate. He, therefore, did not interrupt his visitor. Roderick Hardinge continued to say that fearing lest Arnold should pounce like a vulture upon the city while most of the troops of the Colony were with General Carleton, near Montreal, and in the Richelieu peninsula, and while, consequently, it was in an almost defenceless condition, he had determined to find out for himself all the facts connected with his approach. It might be presumption, on his part, but he had not full confidence in the few reports on this head which had reached the city, and wished to satisfy himself from more personal sources.

Here His Excellency smiled a little at the ingenuous confession of the subaltern, but a moment later, he opened his eyes very wide, when Roderick told him in minute detail all the circumstances which we have narrated in the preceding chapters.

"Your man, Donald, is thoroughly reliable?" queried the Lieutenant Governor.

"I answer for him as I would for myself. He was an old servant of my father's all through his campaigns."

"He says that Arnold has crossed the line?"

"Yes, Your Excellency."

"And that he is actually marching on Quebec?"

"Yes, Your Excellency."

"And that he is within —?"

"Sixty miles of the city."

The Lieutenant Governor plucked his velvet bonnet from his head and flung it on the table.

"Did you say sixty miles?"

"Sixty miles, sir."

His Excellency quietly took up his cap, set it on his head, threw himself back in his seat, placed his elbows on the elbows of the chair, closed his palms together perpendicularly, moved them up and down before his lips, and with his eyes cast to the ceiling, entered upon this little calculation.

"Sixty miles. At the rate of fifteen miles a day, it will take Mr. Arnold four days to reach Levis. This is the seventh, is it not? Then, on the eleventh, we may expect that gentleman's visit."

"Arnold will make two forced marches of thirty miles each, Your Excellency, and arrive opposite this city in two days. This is the seventh; on the ninth, we shall see his vanguard on the heights of Levis."

"Ho! Ho! And is that the way the jolly rebel is carrying on? He must have had a wonderful run of luck all at once. The last we heard from him, his men had mutinied and were about to disband."

"That was because they were starving."

"And have they been filled, forsooth?"

"They have, sir."

"By whom?"

"By our own people at Sertigan and further along the Chaudière."

"But horses? They are known to have lost them all in the wilderness."

"They have been replaced."

"Not by our own people, surely."

"Yes, sir, by our own people."

"Impossible. Our poor farmers have been robbed and plundered by these rascals."

"Excuse me, Your Excellency, but these rascals pay and pay largely for whatever they require."

"In coin?"

"No, sir, in paper."

"Their Continental paper?"

"The same."

"Rags, vile rags."

"That may be. But our farmers accept them all the same and freely."

Roderick here produced the small parcel which he had deposited in his breast pocket, and having unfolded it, drew forth several slips which he handed to His Excellency. They were specimens of American currency, and receipts signed by Arnold and others of his officers for cattle and provisions obtained from Canadian farmers.

"Indeed," continued the young officer, "Your Excellency will excuse me for saying that, from all the information in my possession—information upon which I insist that you can implicitly rely—it is beyond question that the population, through which the invading column has passed and is passing, is favorable to their cause. A trumpety proclamation written by General Washington himself, and translated into French, has been distributed among them and they have been carried away by its fine sentences about liberty and independence. These facts account for all the misleading and false reports which we have hitherto received concerning the expedition. We have been purposely and systematically kept in the dark in regard to it. Left to itself, Arnold's army would have disbanded through insubordination, or perished of starvation and hardship in the wilderness. Comforted and replenished by His Majesty's own subjects, it is now marching with threatening front toward Quebec."

"Traitors to the King in the outlying districts cannot unfortunately be so easily reached as those who lie more immediately under our eyes. But their time will come yet. Meanwhile, we have to keep a sharp watch over disaffection and treason within the walls of this very city," said the Lieutenant Governor with great earnestness and very perceptible warmth.

"This parcel may probably assist Your Ex-