

A DAUGHTER OF NEW FRANCE.

BY MARY CATHERINE CROWLEY. CHAPTER X. FIRE WATER.

Often, as in Cadillac's house at the fort, I sat at my ruddy table casting up accounts of copying letters to the King's Ministers in France—often, indeed, at such times would the piquant face of pretty Barbe come to peep between me and the paper I wrote upon.

Yet, when I sent missives home, I made no inquiries concerning her, or my sister or any one else. I was still hurt that she had not returned from Vercheres in season to bid me adieu and to wish me good fortune upon my coming away into the wilderness.

One winter's evening Sieur Cadillac sat before the hearthstone of his home within the palisade smoking a pipe of tobacco, or Indian weed—the pipe itself being of a curious pattern; the bowl of red clay decorated by bands and ornaments of lead; the stem long, quaintly carved, and ornamented with gayly colored feathers of birds—a gift from a friendly chief.

The room was lighted only by the great fire of forest pine, and opposite to my brother I was encased in a chair like his own—a section of a round log to which had been fastened, to serve as a back, a rude slab of bark.

Oddly would this furniture have contrasted with the elegance of the upholstery of the salon of Madame de Champligny, the carved chairs of the Castle and the hall, the graceful tapestries and tapestries of my uncle Guyon's new home—all of which costly luxuries had been brought from France at great expense.

Without raged a storm of sleet. Back of the fort with its wooden bastions and strong palisade of cedar pickets, for leagues, extended the trackless snows and primeval forests; in front lay the beach, at other seasons a long stretch of yellow sand, and the broad expanse of the lake of the Hurons, which I believe is now known as Lake Michilimackinac.

In many places still and shaggy fir trees fringed the shore with an aspect of desolation; in others they rose in a wall of woods from the water's edge. On clear days we could see, set like a jewel in the gleaming argent of the strait, the enchanted island of Mackinac, the reputed dwelling-place of the great Indian Spirit—an island that with its white cliffs, green foliage and rainbow lights often recalled to my mind a splendid opal I once noticed in the gem encrusted fount of a sword much cherished by Comte Frontenac.

On this evening whereof I write, La Mothe and I were taking of my things—the probable yield of furs for the season, the chances of the future, the disposition of Governor Frontenac in regard to certain measures which my brother had recommended, the state of our provisions. We chatted too of Theresa and of home, in brotherly confidence and sympathy—Cadillac smoking his pipe; I, who could not abide the Indian weed, making no pretence of occupation, but gazing idly into the cheerful blaze.

The wind whistled and moaned, and the sleet drove against the sides of the cabin.

All at once, above the noise of the storm I heard the sound of a step near by, and the next moment there came a sharp knock at the door.

Starting up, I threw it open.

In the doorway, with the darkness for a background, stood a black robed, ascetic figure; a fur cap was thrown carelessly about his slightly stooped shoulders, and over his head was drawn a capouch of beaver skin, beneath which showed a few thin locks of hair that bristled with sleet, as did also the beard that grew about his throat, the upper part of the face being close shaven. It was Father Estienne de Carheil, who had come across the strait from the fort, from his little dwelling in the church.

Cadillac looked up in surprise. He and the missionary were not on such cordial terms as might lead him to expect a social visit from the good father upon such a night as this. In fact, there was much friction between them, and long before, I had noticed that they seemed to have agreed to hold as little intercourse as might be, while preserving each toward the other a punctilious if distant courtesy.

On this occasion, however, my brother's courteous manners appeared to have deserted him. Stretched out at ease before the glowing pipe, he did not rise, but indolently motioned his unlooked-for guest to the place he had vacated, as though, forgetting that his visitor's errand was an unpleasant one, he would waste no time in polite amenities.

Father Estienne was not in the least disconcerted by this rudeness, yet that he felt it, whose gaze was upon him, could see by the flash that leaped into his usually mild eyes. It was gone as quickly, and with a dignified bow he stepped farther into the room.

I made fast the door, and hastened to possess myself of his cloak with its hood and to put me post before the fire, for even in this short distance he had traversed it was broadened with ice.

Instead of taking the place to which my brother had waved him, he said urbanely, with a possible touch of irony—

"Thanks for your courtesy, Monsieur de Cadillac, but I will not tarry to sit down by your hearth."

"Verily, I have seen evenings more favorable for kindly visiting, albeit, it is said, those who love us think not of wind nor weather when they have an opportunity to aid our plans or advance our interests," answered La Mothe, after his sarcastic fashion.

"I have the will to do you a service, if you choose but to look upon it in that light," proceeded the priest, with a faint smile, "although my business is no agreeable affair. In short, Monsieur le Commandant, I am come to tell

you of the scene which a few moments since greeted my eyes."

As the missionary stood beside our rough table, he made an imposing picture despite his lean face, the attenuation of frame caused by his long fasts, and vigils, and disciplines, by the hardships of his frequent journeys to the isolated settlements of Indians, where he had established his missions.

His clear-cut features and high broad nose told of good lineage; above all, there was about him an air of the gentle authority which depends neither upon worldly patronage nor influence, but is commissioned by Heaven itself; and now, as at other times, when I looked at him I felt that Father Estienne was as the voice of God calling to man in the wilderness.

"Monsieur de Cadillac," continued the missionary, fixing the eye of Sieur upon the sternness of his own, "more than a score of years ago, when this place where we now live was but a desolate extent of shore that knew not the foot of the white man, on the opposite side of the strait a devoted missionary gathered together the remnant of the Huron nation including, among their tribes, the Outawas. Here he raised a chapel of our Lord, and around this he and their own lodges the Indians built a palisaded fort which soon became known as St. Ignace of the Michilimackinac.

"The old was into and cultivation difficult, but the Hurons had chosen this site because the neighboring waters teemed with fish, and the missionary heeded not its disadvantages, since from this situation it was easy to gain access to all the tribes of the Lake Country.

"Here he lived and taught them. After a time this good man was called to seek in the Lands of the Great River new nations to instruct. He succeeded here by others who imitated his self-sacrificing toil. The Indians were most exemplary; they settled, flourished; traders from Ville Marie and Quebec came to the mission. Hither brought the skins of the otter and beavers they had trapped during the long winter, to barter them for blankets and the goods of the French; Michilimackinac became the great centre of the fur trade, the key to all the west. A military post was established upon the eastern shore of the strait.

"In my work on the missions I was sent hither. "Then you came, Monsieur de Cadillac. It has pleased you to encourage a trade most disastrous in this region; to bring from Montreal the strong waters that steal tongue and brains and render useless the hands of men.

"Formerly, when the Indians returned from the chase, the fisheries, their long trapping expeditions, they repaired first to the church, there to render thanks to Heaven for the success of their enterprises. Now, look you, to day a large band of Outawas came in with all haste to outrun the approaching storm. You beheld the goodly showing they made with their peltries, their joy at getting back to the protection of the fort."

"And what next, Monsieur de Cadillac? The trader Le Maire takes a cask of brandy into their village; he proposes a game of bowl, the stakes to be a quantity of liquor against their furs. The Indians pile high the peltries before him; the play begins; the air rings with wild cries and guttural laughter, as to and fro are tossed the small, gayly colored pieces of bone.

"All this takes place in the lodge of the Rat, their principal chief. Jules has been gambled away; peace as when they went out into the woods at the beginning of the winter, the Indians reel from the lodge or sink down upon the floor. Now they lie in their wigwams in a drunken stupor. Monsieur de Cadillac, what have you to say to this?"

"During this fervid protest La Mothe had straightened himself in his chair, and several times made as if he would interrupt the Black Robe in no measured terms. Now, however, he leaned back once more, and, taking his pipe from between his lips, answered with a shrug of the shoulders, and as if half addressing the fire—

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go for fire water to our enemies. Since you are so grieved, my dear Monsieur Estienne, that they occasionally succumb to the seductions of our good brandy of New France, be think you would be your sorrow to see your zealous neophytes seek the encampments of our foes, not only to drink freely of English rum, but to imbibe freely of heresy as well?"

"There is no contingency which justifies the doing of even a little wrong, Monsieur de Cadillac," answered Father Estienne, with dignity. "I ask you again, is the work of the founder of this mission and that of the missionaries who came after him, down to this day—is all this to be undone? Have we opened the way for you here only that you may set in the path of the Indian a temptation he knew not hitherto, that with accursed strong waters you should debase him beneath the level of the brute creation?"

In a towering rage Cadillac sprang to his feet. "Monsieur de Carheil, will not brook such speech," he cried hotly. "You allude to the labors here at Michilimackinac of the good Monsieur de Marquette, whose memory is so justly revered by savage and white man. I hold his name in all honor and respect. I regard also the zeal of those who came after him. But, as to this matter, understand me. Your business here is to christianize the red men, to minister to the spiritual needs of the white dwellers at this post, as best you may. With affairs not within your province I counsel you not to interfere. You pay no heed to my request that you should teach the Hurons and Outawas the French language. I furnish brandy to the Indians because I think best to do so. This is the end of the matter."

Notwithstanding this outburst from the Commandant, Monsieur Estienne retained his self-control, although the flash that dyed his cheek, his compressed lips, and the fire of his deep-set eyes showed that to do so cost him an effort. "Sieur Cadillac, I will not contend with you as to what is or is not in his province," he replied.

"You are the Commandant here, and I recognize your civil authority; but as to this being to the end of the matter at issue between us, I warn you such is very far from the case. You say I and my confreres are not in haste to teach the Indians the language of France—it is because we wish to preserve the Children of the Forest from the vices of the settlers. If you would best serve the interests of the government, encourage the red men to follow the person to the end of the matter at issue between us, I warn you such is very far from the case. You say I and my confreres are not in haste to teach the Indians the language of France—it is because we wish to preserve the Children of the Forest from the vices of the settlers. If you would best serve the interests of the government, encourage the red men to follow the person to the end of the matter at issue between us, I warn you such is very far from the case. 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