

The White Father of Ungava.

By CLEMENT KEYES.

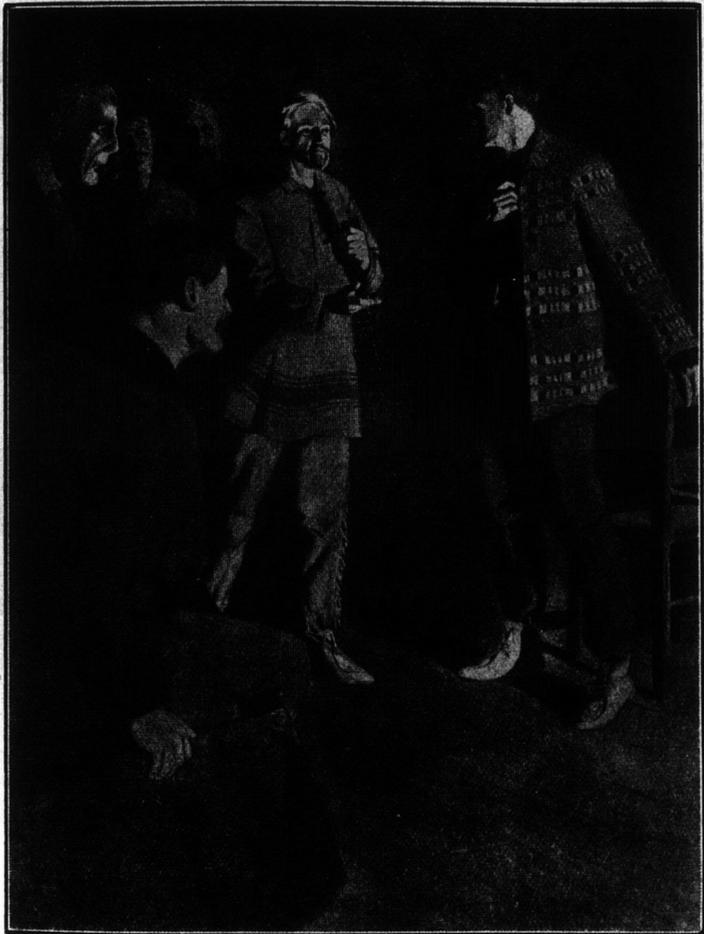


EARLY in January, 1903, the following item appeared in the press of the American cities, being apparently an Associated Press dispatch from Montreal:

Montreal, Jan. 3. — The schooner Belle Nancy, arrived at Quebec yesterday from Rigolet, Hamilton Inlet, Labrador, brought dispatches telling of the death of Father Gaspard, better known as the White Father of Ungava. He died at Fort Naskopie, on Petbauliskopau Lake, in December. He was brought to that point by a party of South River Mission Indians who found him wandering on the plains between Leaf Lake and Seal Lake. N. E. T. He had left the former point

story from one of the actors in it. It was on a Christmas night, 1878, and in a log cabin in the woods at the head of the French River that the story was told French River runs into the Georgian Bay, that northern extension of Lake Huron, far north of the American frontier. It comes down, by sleepy stretch and tumbling rapids, from the pine lands of the Height of Land. They call the upper waters of it Wahnipitae. It creeps down from the great land now called Algonquin Park, in those days a lonely wilderness known only of the wild. Near where the Wahnipitae loses its Indian name and becomes the French, our hut lay beneath the pines. That was where I met Pere Gaspard and heard his story.

In those days he was the new chopper in the gang of lumbermen ruled



"Pierre walked round the circle to Gaspard."

early in the month to minister to the spiritual needs of the Seals, the Indians of the Seal Lake district. His attendant Indians had all been swept away by the smallpox, and he was left alone in the wilderness. When the Indians found him he was dying. His feet and hands were badly frozen, and Dr. Clark, the Presbyterian minister at Fort Naskopie, found it impossible to do anything for him. He died two days after reaching the mission.

By his death the Roman Catholic church loses one of its pioneer missionaries in the great wilderness. Father Gaspard has labored for twenty years in the barren land known as Ungava. A mystery surrounds his early life and his parentage. He was a mysterious being. The records of the Jesuit College at Montreal alone contain the true story of his early years, and could possibly throw some light upon the motives that led him into the Great Lone Land.

As I read this item of news I knew that the closing sentence was not strictly true. The records of the Jesuit College at Montreal may contain the true story of the motives that actuated Pere Gaspard, but even that is doubtful. I heard the true

story from one of the actors in it. He was a loosely built young fellow, tall, broad shouldered, dark haired, dark eyed. He had come out of the forests in the summer time, no one knew whence or why. The men of the deep woods are not inquisitive. He asked Jean for a job, and Jean had taken him on, having a rare eye for a man when he saw one. By instinct he was a natural woodsman, but he lacked strength, as the term is known in the timber lands. His great height and broad shoulders were not the blind to hide a constitutional weakness of lung and throat that robbed him of persistency, and left him faded and weak after long effort. Old Pierre Laussan, mere composite of tanned leather and gristle, could outlast him—and Pierre was near seventy in years.

Jean spared the quiet recruit all he could. He tried to persuade him to give up the axe and take the driving of a team instead. Gaspard was not to be coaxed. His heart was strong as his body was weak. He would come into camp at night time, weary, aching—too tired to talk. He would "roll in" while all the rest sat around the open grate and told their wonderful tales.

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