



FOR FAITH and KING
a Romance of Ville-Marie

BY BLANCHE L. MACDONELL

CHAPTER VIII.—Continued.

This was no longer a heedless, guileless child, the soul of a woman, ardent, seductive, passionate, flames in the sweet, blue eyes. Pierre's glance, first gently pleading, then sternly disapproving, changed to some keener emotion. He flushed with sudden mortification. He had been tolerably calm until he reached this point, now the blood began to course hotly through his veins; he found himself drifting upon wild, unknown currents, beyond the safe limits of ecclesiastical restraint, leaving far behind the calm regions of philosophy. This girl's beauty kindled an idea that glowed in his brain, and presently leaped like wildfire from conjecture to conclusion, carrying all before it, in an irresistible exhilaration.

"Diane, Diane," breaking off suddenly as if suffocated.

All the girlish fun and mischief faded, Mademoiselle de Monesthol's cheeks flamed with shame and fierce resentment. How dared Pierre look at her like that. She could have killed him as he stood.

"Halloo. Diane and—and Pierre," as he parted the branches of the thicket and stood revealed before the actors in this extraordinary scene, his own surprise quite as great as their own, Du Chêne's expression of utter consternation was so extremely comic that Diane burst into peals of ringing laughter. Giddy, as if buffeted by wind and tide, in the midst of his heat and passion, Pierre paused with a shiver that convulsed him. He was conscious of falling from a great height, a sob, suppressed yet irrepressible, the heaving of a bosom filled to overflowing with unaccustomed emotion and misery, escaped him. All three, moved by a common instinct glanced apprehensively up at the window, where, from the heights of superior scanty, the recluse might be looking down upon the trivial worldly passions and interests of her kindred. Pierre disappeared, as the girl, laughing and panting, sank down on the grass.

Du Chêne's look of wonder smote Diane through and through; he never divined that in the midst of her fun and frolic she was shamed to the depths of her soul.

"That *croquemort* of a Pierre. He is never content with me, and I—I punished him," Diane defiantly explained, instinctively resenting the youth's meditative gaze. He still regarded her curiously and intently.

"Pierre—but Pierre is a saint," he hazarded. His voice had a caressing sound when he spoke to women. A smile that showed the white teeth gleaming through his dark moustache, parted his lips as he threw himself upon the grass beside her.

"And they are indeed detestable, these saints."

The audacious serenity of her reply startled the young man. He watched her with an eager, wistful scrutiny. Du Chêne was not a thoughtful man, but his perceptions were swift, his powers of observation keen. Could it be possible that Diane loved Pierre, and that this affection had rendered her cruel to the many lovers who had already sighed at her feet? It was an agitating and extraordinary supposition, but it would certainly account for many caprices that had puzzled him. With a jealous and fervid allegiance, he was loyal to the core, both to his brother and to the girl who had filled a sister's place. Pierre was vowed to an ascetic life, still that glamor which accompanies the indefinite brightness of early youth, as from certain bewitching and as yet intangible possibilities, which had enthralled his own imagination, disposed him to accept the brightest view of everything.

"And Crisasi, too," speaking without reflection,

awkwardly and anxiously. There were whimsical, half annoyed lines on his brow.

"Oh, the Chevalier is too absurd, doleful and not even amusing." Diane strove to speak lightly, notwithstanding the rising tremor in her throat. Why should there be any restraint in the frank, pleasant comradeship which had united them since early childhood. Du Chêne comprehended none. He was so kind, so cordial, so honestly satisfied with his own good intentions that it was difficult to hold him at a distance. A vague resolve that had been floating through his mind suddenly assumed definite proportions.

"He is a brave and gallant gentleman. Spare the Chevalier, Diane, he is a disappointed and heart-broken man."

Mademoiselle de Monesthol was suddenly aroused from the maze of soft fancy, in which all her senses had been enwrapped. The blood, in a rich, carmine flood, mantled over the delicate face, the eyes dilated, deepened and darkened until the soft blue changed to black. What was this man's disapproval to her that her heart should thrill and tremble at his words? A terrible dread, latent in her heart, ran throbbing through her veins. A sentiment which she despised, which she had fought desperately and persistently, inch by inch, had conquered, yet to hide the wound, to hold up her head smiling, and, if need be, die hiding it, was her natural instinct. Her entire being was quickened by that thrill of feeling which was at once sweetness and pain and anguish. The shame of defeat drove her frantic. At the same time there was a rash excitement in the consciousness of peril. Detection might be worse than death, yet to dare discovery, to push danger to the very verge of exposure, furnished a thrilling agitation which offered relief from pain. Raising her head as though courting rather than avoiding scrutiny, with cool audacity she met his searching gaze.

"Sainte Dame! and what is that to me," with a gesture of haughty repudiation. "Were I answerable for the disappointment of every gentleman of New France, my lot would be, indeed, a sad one."

The clear tones, with their intonation of gentle disdain, irritated Du Chêne. He could scarcely restrain a movement of impetuous, affectionate anger, and yet, true friend and tender heart, with the characteristic trust of his nature, tried to believe the best.

"Diane, you know not of what you speak. What do you comprehend of the meaning of true love? the happiness, the suffering, the trust and faith." He spoke hotly. A smile illuminated his kindled, entranced face as he looked down upon her, his glowing boyish heart shining in his eyes. Diane had no power to confront this bewildering and precious possibility. Life was suddenly raised to brilliancy and interest as with a sparkling draught of sunlit elixir.

In a little closet off Mademoiselle de Monesthol's chamber, stood a miniature altar. A fair, ivory image of Our Lady of Sorrow gleamed whitely amidst environment of gorgeous colour, a richly chased silver lamp burned dimly before it, and a tall jar of lilies was set beside the hassock and the hours. In a fervor of devotion the girl sank on her knees before it.

"Holy Virgin, bless me, make me worthy, for life is sweet and fair and good."

CHAPTER IX.

"Heaven's true crown shows earthward as a cross."
—ISABELLA FYVIE MAYO.

Marriageable women were at a premium in the colony. Nanon, in her comeliness, activity and

audacity, had, since her arrival in New France, had many lovers. The two who had remained most persistently faithful to her charms, meekly enduring her tempers and caprices, were Jean and Baptiste Leroux, familiarly known as Bras de Fer.

Baptiste was an enormous man, over six feet in height. The expression of his round face was an exaggeration of simplicity. His beard was black, but the long hair he wore floating on his shoulders was a warm auburn. His eyes, nearly always half closed, gave him an appearance of stupidity, but when moved by any unusual emotion they opened widely, their keen brightness changed the whole character of his countenance. The extreme slowness of his movements imparted an air of apathetic indolence. He wore a striped blue shirt, grey trousers, with a red sash, whose fringed ends hung down on the left side, knotted around his waist. On his head was a beaver cap. His feet were protected by Indian boots, the upper part of sheepskin, drawn up over his trousers, and fastened under the knee by narrow straps of eel skin. The sleeves of his jacket were turned up at the elbows, displaying a muscular development that promised marvellous physical strength; his arms were tattooed with a variety of objects. Malicious people sometimes insinuated that the good fellow's force lay in his physical powers and not in his intellectual faculties. Nevertheless, he had once received a violent blow from an Iroquois tomahawk, which, instead of cracking his skull, as was intended, had slipped, leaving a deep gash, extending to the left eye. The eldest of nineteen children, born to a poor colonist, the youth had been obliged to make his way as best he could. When still a very young lad he had entered Le Ber's service, where he had shared the games and the escapades of Du Chêne and his cousins, the young Le Moyne, teaching the boys the secrets of woodcraft and the joys of forest life. Later Baptiste became a *coureur de bois*, wandering through the trackless forests of Canada, the English colonies and Louisiana, camping, hunting, fighting, fishing, everywhere renowned among the Indians for his unerring skill as a marksman and his extraordinary strength. When very severe laws were enacted against the voyageurs, prohibiting that lawless, delightful life of the woods to which his heart clung tenaciously, Leroux again entered the service of the Le Ber family, to whom he was devoted with the most unswerving loyalty.

Among the colonists extraordinary tales concerning Bras de Fer's adventures were told, and if some allowance must be made for the exaggeration of national pride, it must be admitted that many of these histories had a very substantial foundation of fact.

Once Baptiste and a young brother had been taken prisoners by the Iroquois on the shores of Lake Champlain. The Indians fastened their captives to two oaken stakes, planted firmly in the ground. Fancying that Pierre, who was much the stronger of the two, would endure torture the longest, they selected the brother as their first victim. A savage heated his hatchet red hot and applied it to the boy's naked breast. The sight was too much for Baptiste's patience.

"Forty thousand tribes of demons," shouted the voyageur, bending himself double, and by a supreme effort, tearing the stake out of the earth and bursting the bonds that held him. Seizing the stake he instantly struck down four Indians, one after another, and the others, in their consternation, believing that they were attacked by a species of avenging Manitou, swiftly escaped. Upon which Baptiste and his brother tranquilly wended their way home.

All Bras de Fer's brave exploits never enabled him to compete successfully with his voluble rival. Nanon accepted the homage of both in a sharp, imperious, scornful way, and Baptiste endured the most intense, helpless jealousy of Jean's fluent tongue.

"Aye," Jean declared, "it's the taste of Mademoiselle, as of all women, to coquette."

"Aye, as it is the taste of all men to be fools and heartless apes," insisted his charmer, decisively. "To run to the death after any proud turkey and never to perceive those of real worth."

Jean smoked his pipe reflectively.