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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.

XIII.

A SUCCESSFUL MISSION.

At ten o'clock, on the morning of the 8th November, the day after his arrival, Roderick Hardinge presented himself at the residence of the Commandant of Three Rivers. It was the hour agreed upon between them for a conference, which circumstance did not prevent the Commandant from manifesting some surprise on seeing the young officer.

"You surely are not ready to start for Quebec already?" he asked.

"If possible, sir, I should very much like to do so. My horse is not as fresh as he was yesterday, and he will delay me longer, and besides I think my presence will be required in Quebec before midnight."

"Very well. Time is pressing, I know. I have jotted down a few lines giving Lieutenant-Governor Cramahé all the information in my possession. Here is the letter. But you have doubtless wandered about the town a little this morning, and thus learned many details which have escaped me."

"I have heard much more than I am willing to believe," said Hardinge, with a laugh.

"Tell me briefly what you have heard, and I will correct or confirm it."

"I have heard that Montreal has fallen."

"Not yet. Montgomery is still on the plateau between St. Johns, which he captured about a week ago, and Montreal, which is his next point of attack. But there are two obstacles which retard him. The first of these is the skirmishing of the British troops on his flank, and the second, the discontent among his own soldiers. Many men from Vermont and New York have returned home. Montreal is, however, really defenceless, and cannot hold out more than a few days, especially as Montgomery is anxious to get there in order to house and clothe his naked, suffering men. What else have you heard?"

"That the French of Montreal are secretly working for the enemy."

"It is false. Those who told you so are treacherous friends, and we have several here in Three Rivers. Next?"

"That the Indians under La Corne have dug up the hatchet which they buried in Recollets church one month ago, and declared against us."

"That would be terrible news if true, but it is not true. My last courier from the west, who arrived not an hour ago, has particular information from the Indians about Montreal. They still maintain the neutrality pledged in Recollets church. I admit, however, that it would not take much to turn them into foes, and I know that Montgomery has already his emissaries among them. But LaCorne is a true Frenchman, and so long as our own people retain their allegiance, he will maintain his."

After a pause, Hardinge said:

"I have heard, sir, in addition, that Colonel McLean, at the head of his Highlanders, has not been able to form a junction with Governor Carleton, at Longueuil, so as to intercept Montgomery between St. Johns and Montreal."

"It is true."

"That, owing to the defeat of Governor Carleton at Longueuil by a Vermont detachment, and the spread of Continental troops through the Richelieu peninsula, Colonel McLean was forced to fall back precipitately to Sorel."

"That is unfortunately too true. Do you know more?"

"That is all."

"Then, I will tell you more. McLean will have to retreat from Sorel. My *courriers des bois* and Indian messengers have been arriving in succession all last night and this morning. They inform me that while Montgomery is marching on Montreal, a considerable body, under one of his best officers, is moving towards Sorel, with a view of occupying it, and thus commanding the river. McLean is in no condition to withstand this attack. What will hasten his retreat is the news he has by this time received from Quebec. Last night, so soon as I had read the despatches which you brought me, I sent him one of my fleetest messengers with the intelligence. The messenger must have reached Sorel early this morning. The special messenger to Governor Carleton, with the same news, will arrive in Montreal about noon today."

During the whole of this conversation, Hardinge's face had been grave and almost downcast. But at the last words of his interlocutor, it suddenly flushed with an expression of enthusiasm.

"If Colonel McLean and Governor Carleton know exactly how we stand at Quebec, I am content," he exclaimed.

"Then you may be content. I have stated all this briefly to Lieutenant-Governor Cramahé, but you may repeat it to him with emphasis."

"I will not fail."

And after a few parting words, he respectfully took his leave.

When he had cleared the streets of Three Rivers, and was alone upon the road, he could not restrain a long, loud whoop of exultation.

"The game is up," he cried. "The war is in full blaze. In twenty-four hours, my name has gone from one end of the province to the other. My mission has indeed succeeded. How proud little Pauline will be of her cavalier!"

With such thoughts uppermost in his mind, he forgot his bodily fatigue, and rode back to Quebec with more eagerness than he had gone from it.

XIV.

CROSSING THE BOATS.

Notwithstanding the late hour at which he arrived in Quebec—it was considerably after midnight—Hardinge repaired directly to the Chateau St. Louis. There was no bustle in the Castle, but his eye noticed signs of unusual vigilance. The guard about the entry was a double one, and many of the lower windows were lighted. It was evident also that his coming was expected, for, immediately on his dismounting, his horse was taken charge of by a soldier, and he was at once ushered into the presence of the Lieutenant-Governor. Cramahé was in the Council chamber, and several members of the Council were seated around the central table on which was spread a number of papers.

"Welcome back, Lieutenant," said the Governor, with a weary smile and extending both his hands.

Hardinge bowed and at once delivered his despatches. Cramahé having rapidly glanced over them, handed them to his colleagues, then turning to the young officer, said:

"It is clear that the storm which has been gathering over this province must break upon Quebec. This is the old city of destiny. And we shall accept our destiny, Lieutenant," said the Governor, rising from the table, and advancing towards Roderick. "We have not been idle during your absence. Much can be done in a day and a half and we have done it. We have done so much that we can await the arrival of Arnold with some assurance. I see, however, from the despatches you bring me, that Colonel McLean is in some danger at Sorel. I had calculated on his arrival and that of Governor Carleton who knows our exact position by this time. Should they could come to harm, it will go hard with us, but we will do our best all the same."

Hardinge replied that he was exceedingly glad to hear this, because the people of the upper country through which he had ridden looked to Quebec for the ultimate salvation of the province. It was pretty well understood that the rest of the country was lost.

"Your despatches make that painfully clear," replied the Governor, "and increase our responsibility. I rely upon you particularly, Lieutenant. I appreciate so much all that you have done, that I look to you for something more. This is our last day, remember."

"Our last day?"

"Yes, Arnold will be at Point Levis tomorrow."

Hardinge could not help smiling.

"You may well smile. Your prediction was correct. I saw Donald last night. He had been hovering around the enemy all day and informed me that by direct and forced marches they would surely be at Levis tomorrow. This being the case, I have a duty for you to perform. But first you must take some rest."

"I will be ready for orders at daylight, Your Excellency."

"Ten o'clock will be quite early enough. If we worked during the dark we should excite too much curiosity. The city is really ignorant of what is impending, though there are many rumors. The excitement of yesterday has entirely subsided, and it would be very unwise to renew it. At ten o'clock, therefore, you will quietly cross to the other side of the river, with two or three of your men, and under pretence of wanting them for some service or other—I leave you to imagine a plausible pretext—you will cause every species of embarkation, canoe, skiff, flat-boat or punt, to be taken over to this side. Not a floating plank must be left at Levis. If Arnold wants to get over, he will have to hew his boats out of the trees of the forest. Donald will be there to assist you and may possibly be in possession of fresh news."

Roderick thanked His Excellency for entrusting to him this task which he regarded as the crowning act of the services which he had been rendering the cause of his country in the past two days. After giving expression to his obligation, he added:

"The removal of the boats, sir, will give us

three or four days of respite, for I suppose Donald repeated to you that Arnold has no artillery and must procure boats if he really intends to attack the city. In the interval, we may look for Colonel McLean and Governor Carleton."

The Lieutenant Governor nodded assent and ordering the subaltern to report to him when his work was done, he dismissed him to his quarters.

When the appointed hour came, Hardinge set about his business which he conducted very quietly and judiciously. In those days every body living on or near the river owned a boat which was almost the only conveyance whereby to reach the markets of Quebec. And the inhabitants had learned from the Indians how to use their craft with skill, so that women were as expert at the oars as men. Those who resided on the banks of the St. Lawrence usually kept their boats chained near a little house on the water's edge, where the women did their washing. The practice is maintained to this day along many parts of the river which are distant from large cities and where there are no ferries. Those who lived a short distance in the interior were in the habit of drawing their boats a little way into the woods, after they had used them, and leaving them there in some marked spot till they were required again. It thus happened that, at the time of which we write, there were perhaps no less than a thousand boats within a radius of three miles up and down from Quebec and on both sides of the St. Lawrence. Directly opposite the city there were probably about a hundred, not belonging only to Point Levis, for that was then an insignificant village, but mostly to farmers of the neighboring parishes. The number was important if Arnold had been able to lay hold of the craft, but it gave Hardinge little or no difficulty to dispose of. Some thirty or forty of them that were leaky, or otherwise disabled, he quietly broke up, sending the fragments afloat down the river. The remainder he despatched over to the other side, at intervals and from different points, with the aid of a dozen men whom he had joined to his party. Operating thus from ten in the forenoon till five in the afternoon, he succeeded in clearing the south shore of all its boats, without exciting undue attention in the city.

He himself came over with the last canoe, about twenty minutes after the sun had gone down and just as the twilight was creeping over the waters. As he neared the landing he distinguished a female figure walking very slowly along the bank. He could not be mistaken. It was she. A few vigorous strokes of the paddle having brought the boat to its destination, he leaped ashore and approached.

Yes, it was Pauline.

XV.

THE MEETING OF THE LOVERS.

Swift as the lightning's flash are the instincts of love. Before a word had been spoken and without being able to read her face in the dusk, Roderick felt in his heart that Pauline's presence there was an omen of ill. But, like a true man, he smothered the suspicion and spoke out bravely.

"Why, Pauline, what an agreeable surprise. How did you know that I had returned? I should have sent you word this morning, but I was so occupied that it was impossible.... You probably heard it from others.... But I am so glad to see you.... How is your father?.... And you, darling, I hope you are well...."

To these words of the young officer, broken by breathing spaces so as to admit of replies, not an answer was returned. But when he had finished, all that Pauline did was to stretch out her arms and lay her two ungloved hands in the hands of Hardinge, while her face looked imploringly into his and she murmured:

"O, Roddy, Roddy!"

They were then standing alone near the water, the two companions of Roderick having ascended to the city. Gently and silently, he drew the yielding form toward him until he could scan her features and learn in those eyes, which he knew so well, the secret of her sorrow. But the light of the eyes was totally quenched in tears, and the usually mobile face was veiled by a blank expression of misery. Hardinge was thunderstruck. All sorts of wild conjectures leaped through his brain.

"Speak to me, Pauline, and tell me what this means," he said imploringly. "Has anything befallen you? Has any one injured you? Or am I the cause of this grief?"

Still holding her extended hands clasped in his, and casting her eyes upon the ground, she replied:

"O, Roddy, you cannot tell, and you will never know how wretched I am, but it is some comfort that I can speak to you, at least once more."

"At least once more!" These words quivered through him, chilling him from head to foot.

"Pauline, I entreat you, explain the meaning of all this," he exclaimed.

"It means, Roddy, that I who have never disobeyed my father in my life, have had the weakness to disobey him this evening. I did not mean to do it. I did it unconsciously."

"Disobeyed your father?"

"Yes, in seeing you again."

"Surely, you do not mean—?"

"Alas! dearest, I mean that my father has forbidden me ever to meet you."

Roderick was so astonished that he staggered, and the power of utterance for a moment was denied him. At last he whispered falteringly:

"Really, there must be some mistake, Pauline."

She shook her head, and looking up at him with a sad smile, replied:

"Ah! I also thought it was a mistake, but, Roddy, it is only too true. These two days I have brooded over it, and these two nights. To day, hearing that you had returned, I could endure the burden no longer. I thought of writing to you, but I had not the heart to put the terrible injunction on paper. I have wandered the whole afternoon in the hope of meeting you. I walked as in a dream, feeling indeed that I was doing wrong, but with this faint excuse for my disobedience, that by telling you of it myself, I would spare you the terrible disgrace of being driven from my father's door, if you presented yourself there without knowing his determination. For myself such a misfortune would have been a death blow."

Every word went burning to Roderick's heart, but he had to master his own agony a moment, in the effort to support Pauline who had utterly broken down. When she had recovered sufficiently, he protested tenderly that there was a mystery in all this which he was unable to fathom, and entreated her to help him discover it by telling him minutely all that had happened since they had last met. She gradually summoned strength and composure enough to do so, relating in detail the scene in Cathedral square; the arrival of the Lieutenant Governor's aide-de-camp; his delivering of a letter to her father; the conversation that took place between the latter and the officer; her father's visit to the Chateau; his return therefrom; and, relapsing into tears, she narrated how her father had found her reading a note from Roderick, and how he had ordered her to cast it into the fire.

The young officer did not lose the significance of a word. At first the mystery remained as impenetrable as ever, but after a while a thread of suspicion wove itself into his brain. He tried to brush it away, however, by rubbing his hand violently over his brow and eyes. It was too painful. It was too odious. Finally, he asked:

"Did your father give any reason why you should burn my note?"

"Ah! Roddy, why do you force me to say it? When I told him that you had sent him your regards, he replied 'he has just sent me his hate!'"

These words solved the mystery. Hardinge saw through it all, distinctly, sharply, unmistakably. He drew a long breath, and his broad chest swelled with the fresh air from the river.

"Pauline, my dear," he said with that tender authority with which a strong man can miraculously revive a weak, drooping woman. "Pauline, take heart. It is all a terrible mistake and it will be explained. Your father has suspected me of a dreadful thing, but I am innocent and will convince him of it. I will see him this very night and make him and you happy."

She raised her hands imploringly.

"Fear nothing, darling, I am as certain as that we are standing here together, that it is all a fearful misunderstanding, and that I will make it clear to your father, in a quarter of an hour's conversation."

"But why not tell me, and I will tell him?"

"Because there are several points connected with the matter with which you are not familiar, and because he might misconstrue both your motives and mine. No. It is a matter to be settled between man and man. Besides, it is late and your absence must not be prolonged. I, too, have a military report to make to the authorities without delay."

Pauline suffered herself to be convinced, and the two, after a few mutual words of love which wonderfully recuperated them, bent their way up Mountain Hill. At the gate they separated.

"I will be with you within two hours," said Hardinge, as he took the direction of the Chateau.

Pauline stepped into the old church on her way, and in its consecrated gloom poured out a prayer at the feet of Her whom she worshipped as the Comforter of the Afflicted. *Consolatrix Afflictorum*.

XVI.

THE ROUND TABLE.

There was high festival at the Chateau St. Louis. Sieur Hector Théophile Cramahé, Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Quebec, and Commander of the Forces in the capital, during the absence of Guy Carleton, Captain General and Governor in Chief, was a man of convivial spirit. He had for years presided over a choice circle of friends, men of wealth and standing in the ancient city. They were known as the Barons of the Round Table. An invariable rule with them was to dine together once a week, when they would rehearse the memories of old times and conduct reveals worthy of the famous Intendant Bigot himself. They numbered twenty-four, and it so happened that in five years not one of them had missed the hebdomadal banquet—a remarkable circumstance well worthy the attention of those who study the mathematical curiosities of the chapter of accidents.

The ninth of November was dinner night. The Lieutenant Governor had a moment's hesitation about the propriety of holding it, but all objections were at once drowned in a flood of valid reasons in favor of the repast. In the first place, His Excellency had been particularly burdened with the cares of office during the past two days. That young fellow Hardinge had kept him as busy as he could be. In the next place, though the citizens of Quebec really knew nothing of the true state of affairs, they were making all kinds