

LE PETIT PAUL.



AR away in the north, at the head-waters of the Black River, in the land of the Moose & the Tête-de-Boulé, there stands, surrounded by an

almost trackless forest, a strange and simple monument. It is a rough cross, six feet high and about a foot thick, hewn out of a block of bird's-eye maple. It occupies a small clearance about four acres large, and is directly upon the site of an old shanty. The traveller or hunter who suddenly comes upon this cross, is at once surprised and pleased : surprised at seeing the sacred sign of Redemption occupying that lonely glade, pleased to think that even here faith has shed its rays. The cross has its history ; a short, simple and pathetic history. In rude letters—perhaps carved “by the unlettered muse,” upon the face of the cross looking towards the south east, are these words.

“LE PETIT PAUL : NOEL, 1849.”

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Forty years ago a Christmas in a back-woods shanty was spent in about the same manner as that holy night is observed, in those forest homes, in our day. The scene is on Christmas Eve, 1849 ; the shanty is at the head of the west branch of the Black River, about one hundred miles from the mouth of that stream, and consequently about one hundred and eighty miles north of Ottawa—then Bytown.

Here is a miniature world—a world with all its joys and sorrows, hopes and fears, loves and hates, toil and rest. Here the greater world is reflected. The same ambitions flit, the same troubles molest, the same repose falls upon the weary, the same grades divide, the same order reigns, the same loneliness intrudes, the same anticipations arise, the same vices lurk, the same virtues embellish, the same God is adored. A world within a world !

Let us look in for a moment upon this strange yet not unpicturesque scene !

It is Christmas Eve ; the cook is going his rounds, now speaking a word to one, now cracking a joke with another. Near the door the chore-boy is washing the dishes ; just in front of the camboose a tall French-Canadian is holding an axe upon a girnding-stone and a low-sized, black-haired Celt is turning that “instrument of torture ;” four teamsters are engaged in disputing the respective merits and demerits of their horses. There are three men seated on the camboose edge, eating bread and syrup, and near them are four others listening to a story the “handy-man” is telling. In the far corner, upon the *van*, there are four playing “forty-fives” for tobacco, and upon the end of a bed is seated a lad with a fiddle. With that old *Cremona* (?) he was amusing the motley crew.

When the tune ceased and due applause was given, one called for a song. Pierre L'Esperance, the hewer, who was the best singer in the shanty, agreed to sing “Brigadier,” on condition that the foreman (Alex. Malois) would favor them with a song afterwards. Malois consented and Pierre began. In his rich tenor he struck the key and for a space the very fire seemed to cease its cracking whizzing sound ; the cook folded his arms over his poker, the card-players looked up ; the story-teller paused ; the axe-grinder suspended his work ; and those in the bunks arose, and leaning on their elbows, looked out to listen. The song once over, each resumed his former occupations : but the singer insisted that the foreman would now sing. Malois was a good singer, but he seldom sang. Perhaps his mind was too full of the business in his charge to permit of such pastime ; however, on this occasion, he broke his usual silence and consented to sing. Before beginning he said that he had a few remarks to make, and then spoke as follows : “Well boys, ye are all good fellows and bully workers, and to-morrow is a day of rest, you know this is Christmas Eve. Now I think you can guess what I want to say better than I can say it. We are all here