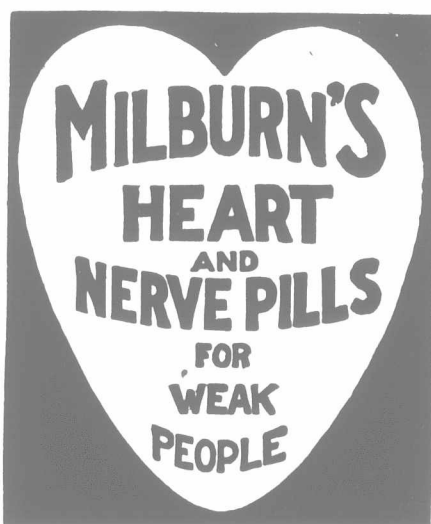




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DOUGLAS BROWN, Ayr P.O. and Station

ing—over the tree-tops, out of the north-west sky? Holy Virgin, what chorus was that?

"Un Canayen errant,
Banni de ses foyers,
Parcourait en pleurant
Des pays étrangers."

"Si tu vois mon pays,
Mon pays malheureux,
Va, dis a mes amis
Que je me souviens d'eux."

The slow, sad minor of the old chanson came weirdly out of the night on the wings of the storm. Louis Latoche trembled in every limb. Dragging himself to the opening, he forced himself to look out.

"Hello, Louis, hello!"

His own name, in a voice that he remembered; a voice from the storm-racked sky that paralyzed him with fear!

"Hello, Louis, hello!" came the hail again.

Louis looked up. High overhead, through the storm and the snow, a great canoe hung in mid-air; and as soon as he saw it Louis knew that it came from the great northland, and that the men who sat in it were no living men. Cold terror clutched at his heart as he recalled the old story of the phantom Chasse Gal'rie which brings back the dead men on New Year's Eve, to kiss the girls of their heart and to dance unseen at the old fireside.

He started at the ghostly crew. Through the whirling snow he recognized one and all in their dress of hardy voyageurs. All of them, at one time or another, had gone out from this district into the wild northland, and none of them had ever returned. Dead men all, yet there they sat and trotted out to the savage winter night the old canoeing song.

But Louis trembled most at the sight of him who held the paddle in the stern of the canoe. The long hair hung down like an Indian's on his neck.

"Hello, Louis, hello! Ha-ha!"

The voice, and the long sandy hair, and the reckless laugh! It was the wraith of his rival that called his name.

"Hello, 'Poleon," said Louis.

"Come up here, Louis," called the phantom. "Come and steer for us, old friend. It is a long way that we have paddled, all the way from Saskatchewan to-night; and dead men's arms grow tired, mon gar."

Louis had crawled out of his retreat. His limbs well-nigh failed beneath him.

"I have lost my way," he faltered;

"I do not know the bearings in the storm."

"To be sure—a devil of a night! But see, we have a merry corpse-candle to light us, Louis."

Sure enough, in the prow of the canoe a pale light flickered, unquenched by the raging gale.

"Up here you can see lights," said 'Poleon. "Maybe 'tis St. Pierre. Make haste, Louis."

The specters leaned over the side of the canoe and beckoned.

Louis crossed himself. Before he realized what had occurred he was sitting in the stern of the canoe, with the steering-paddle in hand. Far away, below the canoe and the swaying tree-tops, he discerned through the swirling snow-clouds a faint twinkle of lights. Thitherward he steered the canoe, while the ghostly crew again made his heart quake with the sound of their mournful song.

"O jours si pleins d'appas,
Vous etes disparus;
Et ma patrie, hélas!
Je ne la verrai plus!"

"Time to have a little drink," said 'Poleon, as they glided toward the lights. A black bottle passed from one to another, and each as he drank cried "Salut!" to the rest.

The black bottle came to Louis last, and having crossed himself again, he essayed to drink. But nothing came from the bottle. The crew of phantoms laughed.

"Dead men's wine is good wine, hein, Louis?" said Desbarres.

Louis was mortally cold—from fear and from the storm.

But the sound of voices ascended. The lights were below them. It was St. Pierre de Beaupre.

"Chez Manon," ordered 'Poleon with a leer.

The canoe hovered outside the door of Henriette's father. The phantom crew disembarked, and in diverse directions faded quickly away through the village.

"Stay with the canoe. Don't let it blow away," said 'Poleon with sudden anger. His eyes flashed and he gave his rival a push. It was as though the push sapped all the young man's strength, and he fell back in the canoe.

But very soon the deadly cold overcame all other influences, and he sat up in the canoe trying to persuade himself that he was dreaming. The lights shone from Josef Manon's windows, the music came clear on the frosty air. Louis got out of the canoe and pushed it among some bushes.

A large barn adjoined the Manon homestead. With chattering teeth Louis made his way into the barn, and for a few minutes lay in the grateful warmth, recovering his sensations. High up in the wall dividing the barn from the home a beam of light shone up to the roof from a small glazed window that served as a feeble illuminant; by and by Louis mustered his courage sufficiently to clamber up on a heap of firewood and peep into the living-room.

In the solid, companionable barn his fears had somewhat abated; but lo! on an empty chair near the fire sat 'Poleon Desbarres, wild and weird as he had appeared in the canoe. He sat with his elbows on his knees and his hairy chin in his hands, and he stared at Henriette as she sat at the other side of the room. Nobody seemed to see 'Poleon. Least of all did the young girl appear to be conscious of his presence.

The big viol scraped again. A dance was just beginning. 'Poleon rose and stalked across the room toward Henriette. He approached quite close to where she sat laughing and joking with the others. No one looked up at him.

"They do not see him!" thought Louis. "O, mon Dieu, what does it mean?"

'Poleon stooped over the girl. "He will dance with her and kiss her," thought Louis. Suddenly the conviction came to him that if once 'Poleon got his arm round Henriette, she was lost.

All in a moment Henriette gasped and stood up, deadly pale, her hand to her heart. 'Poleon put out his arm.

From his watching-place Louis Latoche gave a great cry. He raised his hand to strike at the intervening glass. His foot slipped on the loose logs, and with a loud crash he rolled to the ground.

When he came to himself he was lying before the stove. Old Josef Manon was chafing his hands and pouring whisky between his lips, and Henriette was leaning over him, while the company stood around.

"'Poleon—the canoe!" said Louis, wildly.

"Poor boy, he wanders," said old Josef. "But what an escape! Had he lain another half-hour, banoir Louis Latoche!"

Louis sat up and stared round. The company, the viol player, all were there, all save 'Poleon Desbarres. At the back of the room old Monsieur Jarreau, the doctor, whom he had not noticed before, was taking off his great coon-skin overcoat, like a bear emerging from its skin.

"It must have been a presentiment,"

Henriette often used to say to her husband in the after days. "I had such a strange feeling. For a moment I thought I should die. And then in came Monsieur Jarreau with my poor, dear Louis, nearly frozen, on his sleigh. It was lucky the good doctor was called out that bad night."

And as for Louis Latoche, he went fearfully the next morning to the barn and found the stacked lumber all in a tumbled confusion below the little window.

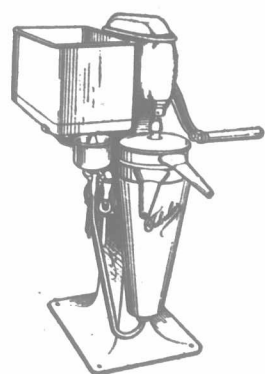
But the mystery of that night was never made clear to him.

It is only in these latter years that he has told the story; for when he spoke about it to the priest, the good father counseled him to say nothing to his wife.

The priest is dead long since, and Louis Latoche is such an old, old man that it is hard to get at the truth of the matter. And, nowadays, even in the Province of Quebec, few people believe in La Chasse Gal'rie. Nevertheless, it is very strange.—Leslie's.

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