

The Saturday Reader.

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CANADIAN BRIGANDS.

A THRILLING NARRATIVE

Of the exploits of the

NOTORIOUS GANG OF ROBBERS

Who infested

Q U E B E C

In 1834 and 1835.

Translated for the SATURDAY READER from a French pamphlet published in 1837.

CAMBRAJ AND HIS ACCOMPLICES.

CHAPTER VIII.

Carouge Wood—The Robbers' Retreat—Mathieu—Stewart and Lemire—A Conspiracy.

About three o'clock in the afternoon of the 22nd May, 1835, two men passed through St. Lewis Suburbs, and directed their steps towards the plains of Abraham.

"For that business," said Waterworth in a low tone to his companion Cambraj, "we will require at least seven or eight determined fellows. Remember, it is in the very centre of the town."

"Bah, seven or eight men to strangle a few women, and pillage a house. You are nothing but a coward, and know nothing about it; the more accomplices we have, the smaller will be our profits; besides that, it does not do to bring too many into affairs of that kind—some traitor."

"Oh, as to that you are right enough; it does not do to trust our secrets to everybody. In an unlucky moment, we might be intimidated, and through weakness or remorse, or even treason, one might be obliged to swallow his own dose, in order to save himself. This is doubtless true."

"A thousand devils; if ever accomplice plays me that trick, if ever I even suspect that any one dared to think of such a thing, he would not remain a sound man much longer. I'd soon make him forget the taste of his victuals."

"For that reason we ought to select men of energy and trust," said Waterworth, a little embarrassed, "men capable of even sacrificing themselves, if necessary, rather than utter a dangerous word. If Dumas was not in prison now, he would answer capitally; he's a crafty rogue."

"Dumas, he never attempts anything on a large scale; he is too fearful of a dance in the air. I have already told you Mathieu is one I am looking for; he's the very man, desperate as a devil, fearing neither heaven nor earth—cunning, cool, discreet, full of energy, and, above all, able to force a lock better than any man living. He is, moreover, one of whom we need have no suspicion—a miserable old valet, who is unconscious of his own abilities, and is incapable of turning them to account. A few dollars to drink, and be merry, is all he will ask; his aim will be no higher than a night's debauchery. In addition to him, we might find a couple of second rate thieves, whom we could pay so much for the night."

"Certes, Mathieu; let it be so, then, since he is the best, and we will find two others as assistants only."

"Still we will be very few," said Waterworth; and here the two companions jumped over a fence, and discovered at a short distance a group of men and women. It was the band they were in search of.

The plains of Abraham, and the neighbouring woods, particularly that of Carouge, are the

rendezvous of a certain industrial class, who find it more convenient to live upon the goods of their neighbours than to earn any for themselves. These men are the outcasts of society, branded with infamy, united by crime, and in league against the law; having no other resource, their lives are spent in plotting against justice, surrounded by perpetual misery and fear. They know neither peace nor security, nor do they even enjoy the regular pittance of the poor. At one time they are glutted with their prey; at another they are almost dying with hunger. On the open hills they hold their gatherings, and spend their nights the victims of infamy and terror.

They know not the repose of honesty, fearful visions haunt them day and night; they have not even the consolation of friendship—those they meet in this place are destitute of either feeling or sympathy—all sentiments of nature are dead within them—interest, purely personal interest, is the strongest passion they know and baseness, calumny and treason is their current change. When in the spring of the year the prisons are emptied, when navigation throws her hordes of divers people upon our shores, this infected body spreads over our fields, and mutineers, adventurers, bullies and debauched characters add daily to its numbers.

Should you trust yourself within the precincts mentioned, you do so at a considerable risk, for if your appearance indicates contribution, some four of these rascals seize you by the throat, levy their toll, and fly, leaving you half dead upon the spot.

In the adjoining woods they have their hiding places, their rendezvous, and their caves, and in the neighbourhood their taverns and their courts.

When they have succeeded in making a good haul, a feast is sure to follow; the kettle is suspended to the branch of some tree, the fowl is cooked in open air, and eaten on the grass; the moon and stars preside over amorous meetings, disgusting orgies, iniquitous conspiracies, and short and restless repose.

Astonishing as it may seem, these hardened and unnatural beings are the slaves of women even more infamous than themselves; for them they commit their thefts, for them they stake their very existence, and for them they waste in prodigality all they have acquired at the peril of their lives. Even here, amid the corrupt and the wicked, love reigns triumphant, asserting its power over the human heart, even when that heart is dead to all other feelings of humanity. Before its omnipotence, every other passion bows, and in its grasp all are helpless.

But it would be too fearful to reveal the scenes of bloodshed to which it has given rise in the woods of Carouge—to relate the jealousies, the retaliations, and the murders it has occasioned in this place; but which are now buried in oblivion, through the apathy and indifference of the beholders.

"Ah, the idle scamps," said Cambraj, as they neared the group, who had already noticed their arrival. "Look at them running; look, they take us for constables. Ha, ha, ha—those gentlemen are never quite sure of being innocent."

Notwithstanding the state of excitement into which the ragged assemblage was thrown, four or five of the vagabonds refused to budge, for they had recognised their visitors, and heartily enjoyed the confusion their presence had occasioned.

Cambraj now left his companion, and, advancing to them, placed his hand familiarly on the shoulder of one of them—a man of about forty years of age, of middling stature, slightly made, and marked with small-pox. He had a pale complexion, sparkingly black and viva-

cious eyes, a narrow and lowering forehead, thick hair, and uneven and hoarse voice, large whiskers coming up almost to his eyes, thin ears, an extremely small mouth, and the entire expression of his features sharp and angular. Altogether, his physiognomy was stamped with the ferocity of a brute rather than the character of a man.

"Mathieu (for it was he), Mathieu," said Cambraj, "I've a secret for you."

"What?" replied the man springing up from where he was, and striking his sides. "What? A nest to rob? Speak—I'm your man."

"Well, comrade, you remember I have frequently spoken to you of Mrs. Montgomery, but as yet we have done nothing in the matter; that there is money there, you know. What do you say to giving us your help? We have almost forgotten our trade, so long is it since we have worked at it; but remember, perseverance and perfect coolness are indispensable. Be secret and courageous, my boy, and the chicken is ours."

"Courage! the devil knows well enough I'm not the man to be frightened; and as to secrecy, I should think twenty years service have taught me that. I will be ready this evening, if you wish; the night will be dark, there will be no moon, and killing may be done without fear."

"Let it be so," said Cambraj, "give me your hand for this evening; but we shall want assistance. Three will never be able to manage it, and that great calf there (pointing to Waterworth) is little better than a drowned hen. Perhaps you are acquainted with some worthy children, able scamps, who might be useful?"

"Scamps! plenty of them; but as to their being able, that's another question. However, there are some clever numsculls. Stewart, for instance, is a wily fox, and well-suited for our purpose. Then there's Lemire, a young hand, it is true, but with plenty of pluck, soul enough for a beef-eater; he would be worth something."

"But you forget Gagnon," said Waterworth, coming up; "he was an old servant of the lady's, and could give us a good deal of advice."

"His advice," said Cambraj. "Pooh! I have sounded him long ago. Never fear, I know his secret, and that's all we want; he would ask too much for his services."

"It will teach him in future not to tell where his nests may be found," said Mathieu, "by my faith, but it will be a rare trick to cook the pear without his knowledge—he who has reckoned upon it for such a length of time. Hallo! Stewart—Lemire—come here, my boys."

At this call two men left the group of thieves, who were lying at a short distance, jealous of being excluded from the secret of the conspiracy which was apparently on foot, and came forward to join their three friends. One of them was a man of about thirty-six years of age, small in stature, but well made, and with rather a passable countenance, considerably at variance with his character, although somewhat severe in expression. This man was an old delinquent, named Stewart, not so much that he was a great criminal as a vicious and corrupt being. The other was much more characteristic and revolting in physiognomy; his copper-coloured skin, like that of an Indian—his demon-like eyes, his pointed and ill-formed head, his gait, his sharp and cunning visage, his figure, his countenance—all bespoke him of dark and dogged disposition, well fitted for the paths of vice. This man could not have been more than twenty years of age; his name was Lemire. He had already appeared on several different occasions at the bar of justice, accused of crimes committed with a fearful degree of audacity, nor had he even escaped the last and solemn sentence of death.