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The Ryerson Canadian History Readers

LORNE PIERCE, Editor

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MADAME LA TOUR

By

MABEL BURKHOLDER

Author of "Before the White Man Came"

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THE RYERSON CANADIAN HISTORY READERS

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"Children will really know and learn to love Canadian History when it is introduced by such charming booklets. They meet the real need of the school-room."—The Canadian Teacher.

IN THE early years of the seventeenth century there grew up in the town of Mons, France, a young woman by the name of Françoise Marie Jacquelin. She was not "a noble lady," for her father was but a humble barber. Françoise Marie, however, was high-spirited to a degree, and doubtless dreamed of a future that would carry her far beyond the boundaries of her native place, though during her early years she saw no chance of having her dreams come true.

Then without warning fate stepped in and marked her out a course more adventurous than anything she could have planned. She was approached by a man named Desjardins, who introduced himself as the agent of Charles Saint-Etienne de la Tour, a gentleman adventurer in Acadia, Canada. The delicate subject which Desjardins had come to discuss had to do with Monsieur La Tour's urgent need of a wife. In fact, La Tour had instructed his agent to ship out to Acadia a healthy young French woman, whom he could install as mistress of his fur-

post. The selection was to rest entirely with Desjardins, who, in this case, proved himself no mean judge of womankind.

The rank of Charles St-Etienne de la Tour was considerably above that of the daughter of the barber of Mons. La Tour had come from a good family, originally called Turgis, belonging to the neighbourhood of Evreux, in Normandy, and by enterprise in the new world had become one of the chief men of Acadia, with power over a vast, halfexplored region, now embraced by Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and parts of Maine. But Desiardins resolved that La Tour's bride must be chosen for physical fitness rather than rank. It was more important that she should know how to meet pioneer conditions than that she should play the fine lady.

Her enemies liked to insinuate that Francoise Marie had entered her husband's family in an undignified manner, having been "shipped out to him like a bale of goods!" But it was not unusual for French girls of that period to undertake the hazardous journey to Canada, with the expectation of being married upon their arrival to

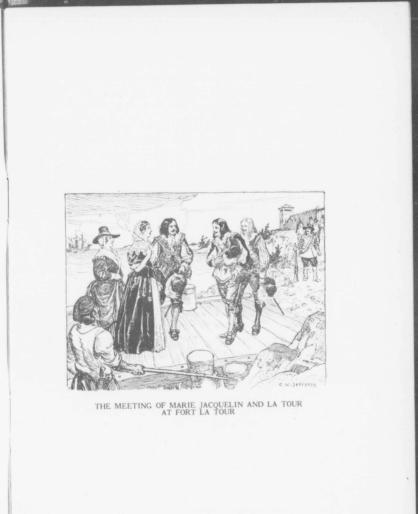
men whom they had never seen. Parkman tells us that ship-loads of young women were sent annually to Quebec to furnish wives for the young men of the colony.

"Many kings and princes have obtained their wives in this way," comments Dr. Hannay, in his history of Acadia. "At all events, no man had a more devoted, energetic, or heroic wife than La Tour, and if his lieutenant selected the lady for him, he made a wise choice."

Françoise Marie Jacquelin seems not to have demurred at the terms proposed by Desjardins. Perhaps she had little to say in the matter, for older people usually arranged their children's love affairs in those days, and it was the wish of all who had large families to see their daughters settled early in life. But the poor young girl, just separated from her family, must have looked with misgivings upon the uncertain adventure before her. One of the most perilous undertakings of her colourful career was to start out across the Atlantic Ocean, in a sailing vessel of the period, which might be delayed many weeks in passage, being equally at the mercy of storms and calms.

The young woman's first acquaintance with the unhospitable shores of the new world was gained as the vessel approached Cape Sable, the extreme south-western tip of Nova Scotia. Here La Tour had established a rude fort, called Fort Loméron, overlooking the bay which is still known as Port Hither the bride was conducted Latour. and installed as mistress. La Tour seemed to have been satisfied with the choice of his agent, and as for Francoise Marie, no record of her thoughts and feelings have come down to us. Certainly she proved a worthy helpmeet to the adventurer, immediately identifying herself with his interests and espousing his quarrels with passionate vehemence.

As a lad of fourteen Charles La Tour had come with his father, Claude de la Tour, to the settlement of Port Royal, so it seems probable that he had received little education. But while the fortunes of the elder La Tour, who was a Huguenot, were crippled in various war-like adventures, the son adapted himself with marked success to wilderness conditions, often "living a vagabond life with no exercise of religion." He became a



successful fur-trader with the Indians, an intrepid adventurer, and under the French king, Louis XIII, a veritable feudal chief with unlimited powers.

At the time of his marriage young La Tour was approaching the age of thirty. That he was reckless, self-seeking, and not very loyal to either his church or his king, we may read from the pages of history. Parkman says that he was "a chameleon, whose principles took on the colour of his interests." Yet we feel that he must have possessed a gay and winsome personality, by the way he made friends and held them to his cause.

About the year 1635 Charles La Tour moved his wife and household possessions to a large new fortress and trading-post at the mouth of the St. John river, a strategic position in the control of the fur-trade. The five arms of the sea here run inland like the fingers of a human hand, with rocky headlands jutting out between. Since the St. John river took second place only to the St. Lawrence as a trade route, it was considered that he who possessed its harbor controlled the way to the Baie Chaleur district and to Quebec.

The Indians, who called the river Ouangondy, had long considered this route as "the Highway," *par excellence*, and annually they brought their rich harvest of furs down the splendid waterway. Therefore when La Tour established his fort on a rocky headland overlooking the Reversing Falls, it was an intimation to his rivals to keep out of the entire St. John river district.

The site of Fort St. Jean, or Fort La Tour, as it is often called, is not definitely known. It was either at Portland Point, on the east side of the river, or on the opposite western bluff—in any case within the present city limits. The huge log building was a hundred and eighty feet square, with a bastion at each corner, and surrounded by a palisade.

Many exciting events must have broken the monotony of life at Fort La Tour. The coming of the Indians, with their boat-loads of furs, caused a pleasurable commotion. Then there was the arrival of the annual supply ship from France, which carried ammunition, clothes, food, books and letters. Also attached to the post were many retainers, who served as soldiers and traders.

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Then, too, there were a few Récollet friars, whose work was to cultivate the religious life of both French and Indians, though La Tour was not religiously inclined, being described as "neither true Catholic nor true Protestant, but joining hands with anybody who could serve his turn." His wife was a Huguenot and a consistent supporter of the Protestant cause.

But though life at the fort was colourful, and men numerous, women were few. Except her maid Madame La Tour probably saw no white woman during her ten years' sojourn at St. John. Her nearest neighbor was Madame Charnisay, wife of Charles de Menou D'Aulnay Charnisay, a fur-trader and feudal chief, who had established himself at Port Royal, on the Nova Scotian side of the Bay of Fundy. The two women were separated, however, by something more formidable than forty miles of turbulent water, for such a deadly feud existed between their husbands that the history of Acadia for the next ten years is little more than the development and final settlement of their quarrel.

With the opening of the seventeenth century began a bitter and prolonged contest

for the ownership of the Atlantic sea-board. The kings of both France and England gave extravagant grants of land to their favorites, and as these tracts were largely unexplored, with poorly defined boundaries, the interests of the adventurers to whom they had been apportioned often overlapped, and each resented the claims of the other. Around Acadia this situation developed into a deadly conflict between the rival chiefs, La Tour and Charnisay.

Charnisay was a gentleman of noble family, who had received many royal favors, and possessed great influence at the French court. He now occupied a strong position at Port Royal on the Annapolis Basin, where he maintained a fort, a dungeon, and a church, defended by three hundred fighting men and sixty cannon.

Charles de Menou Seigneur d'Aulnay Charnisay, scion of an old and distinguished family of Torraine, above all things took pride in his character of *gentilhomme francais*. True, both he and La Tour engaged in the fur trade, which in France would have detracted from their claims as gentlemen; but in America men of all ranks dipped in

for a share of the profits from the sale of furs.

Although in a single year the Indians are said to have brought in to Port Royal three thousand moose skins, besides beaver and fox, yet Fort La Tour, at the mouth of the St. John river, was considered a better post, and greedily did Charnisay long to possess it.

Before the coming of Charnisay, La Tour had set himself up to be the chief man in Acadia; but now he was forced to consider the claims of this favorite of the French king, a man of superior birth, influential at court, and of boundless pride and ambition. La Tour became exceedingly jealous and apprehensive, and to strengthen himself against such a formidable rival, he obtained from the Company of New France the grant of an immense tract of land, regardless of the fact that part of the same region had already been given by the king to Charnisay.

The French court attempted to settle the dispute when it came to their ears, but in their ignorance of new world geography only succeeded in complicating matters.

One of the first encounters between the rival chiefs, after the establishment of Madame La Tour at Fort St. Jean, was when La Tour seized nine of Charnisay's soldiers, with provisions and munitions, near Penobscot in Maine. It is said that these prisoners were badly treated during their imprisonment at Fort La Tour.

Four months later when Charnisay heard of this raid he sailed to Penobscot with two vessels, and on the way back was met by La Tour with two armed pinnaces. In the engagement which followed Charnisay was victorious, carrying off La Tour, his new wife, and the agent Desjardins to his dungeon at Port Royal. Although a pious man in the eyes of the Capuchin priests who were attached to his household, Charnisay was a hard taskmaster when he got the upper hand. Denys, the severe critic of Charnisay, says that he loved to rule, and that "his custom was always to maltreat his inferiors."

In this dungeon Madame La Tour was to taste for a short time the bitterness of prison fare. But as the Capuchin friars pleaded for their release, Charnisay soon set them all free, after compelling La Tour to

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sign a statement to the effect that he would keep the peace in future. This promise was no sooner made than broken. Both parties now resolved to lay the case before the French king, but Charnisay, with his superior influence in court circles, prevailed. The king took an unfavourable view of La Tour's case, revoked his commission, and ordered him to report in person in France to receive the royal commands. La Tour, trusting to the unsettled state of the country, and judging himself a safe distance from his irate majesty, ignored the order and remained in Acadia, exercising his authority as before.

Charnisay's father, who lived in Paris, and who was keenly awake to his son's interests, reported La Tour's rebellious conduct to the royal ears. Louis then issued a decree instructing Charnisay to seize his rival's fort. As the frugal king sent only six soldiers to enforce his order, all Charnisay could do was to show the document to his enemy, and offer him a passage to France in one of his ships if he decided to obey. La Tour tore the document in pieces and heaped scorn on its bearer.

Charnisay may not have been as black a villain as some historians have painted him, but from this time forward he was guite unscrupulous in his efforts to ruin his enemy. One could wish that his patience and perseverance had been directed to a worthier cause. Again he reported to the king the outrageous conduct of the rebel La Tour. Another royal decree was issued, empowering Charnisay to take his enemy prisoner and send him to France. Charnisay sent three gentlemen in a boat to read the king's order to La Tour. This time La Tour snatched the papers, destroyed them, and threw the envoys into prison, where they remained for over a year.

Although the La Tours kept up a brave front, they realized that they could not hold out long against an enemy who had the law and the royal favor on his side. La Tour had placed himself in open revolt, and now his only hope lay in obtaining aid from the Puritans of Boston, who hated all Catholics and thought it a righteous act to plunder them. The French in turn were suspicious of their Puritan neighbors and called them heretics. La Tour, who could scarcely have

told whether he was at heart a Catholic or a Protestant, listened to the sagacious counsel of his wife. Her advice was that her husband should seek the favor of the Puritans and go to Boston to ask help against the enemy.

The St. Clement, a ship which La Tour's agent, Desjardins, had sent him from Rochelle, lay out to sea with supplies, manned by a hundred and forty Huguenots. It could not enter the mouth of the river because Charnisay had blockaded the entrance with two armed ships and a pinnace. In fact Charnisay had mortgaged his possessions to gather a force of five hundred men, that he might lay siege to Fort St. Jean and starve out its bold defenders. He would leave no loop-hole by which they could escape and when they surrendered he would take them in irons to France.

One dark night, accompanied by his dauntless wife, La Tour stepped into a frail shallop and pushed off from shore. They ran the blockade and passed silently and safely out to sea, boarding the *St. Clement*, on which they sailed for Boston to seek aid of the Puritans. Charnisay kept up the

blockade for weeks, fondly believing that his enemies were slowly being reduced to starvation within the fort.

On the 12th of June, 1643, the little town of Boston was set in commotion by the arrival of a French ship in the harbor. The Puritan colony was only in its thirteenth year, and Boston was a settlement of log houses, clustering around a plain wooden meeting-house. The fort on an adjacent island was defenceless, because its garrison had been temporarily withdrawn, and all the inhabitants feared that the Frenchmen on the *St. Clement* might seize this position and turn the guns on the town. But La Tour soon convinced them that his errand was peaceable.

Ludicrous stories are told about the conduct assumed by the gay La Tour in an endeavor to behave acceptably to the Puritans. While in Boston he would do as the Bostonians did. Immediately he attached himself to Governor Winthrop, who became his friend. As a "papist," though an indifferent one, La Tour knew that he would be an object of suspicion in Puritan eyes. Reckless adventurer that he was, he found

that he had set himself no easy task in drawing a long face and attending all the services at the "meeting-house," where even to smile would have been a deadly sin. But he succeeded, for we are informed that "the gravity of his demeanor in church gave great satisfaction." During his prolonged stay in Boston, he and Winthrop went to church arm in arm every "Sabbath," and La Tour exhibited exemplary patience in listening to the tedious sermons preached by the Rev. John Cotton.

From the first Madame La Tour made a favorable impression on the Bostonians. She is described as "a sound Protestant of excellent virtues."

The La Tours only asked for sufficient aid to enable them to bring their own ship, the *St. Clement*, into their own port of St. John. But endless discussions were raised before Winthrop and the magistrate permitted them to hire ships, and such men as felt disposed to join the expedition. The La Tours returned with four armed vessels, before which Charnisay's three ships were compelled to fly back to the shelter of Port Royal.

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But only a temporary respite was gained, for the next time the La Tours heard of their enemy it was to learn that he was returning from another visit to France, with large reinforcements. There seemed nothing to do but turn back for more help from Massachusetts. This was becoming increasingly difficult to obtain, as the Puritans were very chary about being drawn into a profitless guarrel.

Charnisay, too, had sent his agent down among the Bostonians, who showed them papers under the great seal of France, setting forth La Tour as a rebel, and ordering the arrest of both him and his wife. In fact, the agent declared that Madame La Tour was worse than her husband, being the mainspring of his rebellion.

About this time Lady La Tour sailed for France in the *St. Clement* to enlist sympathy in her husband's cause. For him to go would be to put his head into a noose, but it was thought that the resourceful Françoise Marie might meet with some success. But it was impossible to keep her going a secret from Charnisay, and although she did her utmost in the home-land, the enemy's agents

proved too much for her. She was charged with being an accomplice in her husband's rebellion, and forbidden under pain of death to leave France.

more the Once roval command was ignored. and the quick-witted woman escaped to England, where she found friends. She chartered the ship Gilliflower to take her and the supplies she had collected direct to St. John. But Captain Pilgrim, who commanded the Gilliflower, changed his mind en route, and put into the St. Lawrence, so that half a year slipped by before he headed his course southward. Then when they came almost in sight of St. John, the ship-master was horrified to discover an enemy approaching. It was Charnisay, cruising in the Bay of Fundy, with intent to capture Madame La Tour upon her return to her husband. Pilgrim hurried her down into the hold of the vessel, and when Charnisay stopped him, declared that he was an English skipper going to Boston. So he did, and carried his homesick passenger with him. For breaking his bond Captain Pilgrim was sentenced by the courts of Massachusetts to pay Lady La Tour two thousand

pounds damages. With this money she hired three armed vessels to convey her to St. John, where she joined her husband and children after a separation of sixteen months.

Meanwhile Charnisay hung off the coast, still carrying the royal decree to capture Lord and Lady La Tour and transport them to France. To take them by force might prove too costly, so he again sent messengers who tried to bribe La Tour's men to desert their master and return to their homes. Lives would be spared and back wages paid, if they would simply withdraw themselves from the fray. Madame La Tour, but recently returned from Boston, doubtless felt that she had borne all that she was capable of enduring at the hands of her enemy. A writer of the times, unfavorable to Madame's cause, says that "she fell into a transport of fury and behaved like one possessed of a devil." She berated the Récollet friars, who had been living in the fort, and heaped contempt upon their teachings, until they refused to dwell longer under her roof and set out for Port Royal in the dead of winter. accompanied by eight dissatisfied soldiers.

Relenting, Madame La Tour now gave them food sufficient for the journey, and her husband lent them an old ship in which to make the perilous trip across the Bay of Fundy. Unluckily for the La Tours, they arrived at Charnisay's stronghold in safety and were received with rejoicing. Charnisay paid the soldiers their long arrears of wages. The priests he lodged in the seminary with his Capuchins. Later, when Charnisay questioned them, they gave information which proved the undoing of the defenders at Fort St. Jean.

Madame La Tour's advice to her husband -and how frequently he followed her advice proves her force of character-was to go once more to Boston, ask for a Protestant preacher to minister to his men, unreservedly declare himself a Protestant also, and promise that if the Puritans would help him overcome Charnisay he would divide Acadia with them. Acting upon her advice, La Tour left for Massachusetts just before the Récollet friars and the eight deserting soldiers departed from Fort St. Jean. Thus they knew that the fort was left in the care of a woman, who had only fifty soldiers at

her command, and this was the word which they gleefully passed on to Charnisay.

"He left the fort in his lady's keeping,

And sailed south while the storms were sleeping,

Bold and gay."

And now we come to the darkest page in the history of Sieur d'Aulnay Charnisay. Doubtless many of his questionable acts did not conflict with his idea of the character of a gentilhomme français; but he will never be forgiven for attacking a woman in a poorly defended fort during the absence of her husband. When the deserters informed Charnisay that La Tour had gone to Boston, and that Lady La Tour, with fifty defenders, held the fort, he called his followers together and told them that he had resolved to throw all his strength into one final attack, which should bring the bitter strife to an end. So he mustered every man at Port Royal and embarked them in a ship of three hundred tons, which he had brought from France. Anchoring half a league from Fort La Tour, he sent the Récollet Père André to try to

seduce some more of Lady La Tour's men. The soldiers within the fort flouted the idea of desertion, whereupon Charnisay decided to lie at anchor for an indefinite period, and wait for another ship which was to follow him from Port Royal.

While he waited a Boston merchant by the name of Grafton had been sent up the coast with a message to Lady La Tour from her husband, promising that he would join her in a month. Charnisay seized this messenger, placed Grafton and his men on a rocky island, and finally gave them a leaky sailboat with which to make their way home. Needless to say Madame did not receive her husband's communication.

Thus two months slipped away before Charnisay made an attack. The first attempt was a dismal failure. Madame La Tour beat him off by spurts of fire from her bastions. In this repulse Charnisay had twenty men killed and thirteen wounded. He withdrew under the humiliating reflection of having attacked a woman during the absence of her husband, and receiving at her hands an ample chastisement for his cowardly behaviour.

Charnisay's final attack on the fort lasted three days and three nights. Madame La Tour bore herself throughout with the utmost courage, and seemed able to inspire the same feeling in the fifty men who looked to her for leadership.

"What of the high hope then that graced thee,

Charnisay?

Fifty men and a woman faced me.

And 'O,' she cried, 'if your swords are rusted,

Ye throw shame on a heart that trusted, Far away!'

"All the birds of the sky were singing, Charnisay.

O the song of the gray swords ringing!

'Think,' said she, 'of the one that bore you,

And fight like ten if I stand before you;

Fight and pray!' "

When on the third day Charnisay desisted for a short time, Madame La Tour compelled her men to go to rest, but on the fourth day, which was Easter Sunday, the enemy re-

newed the attack, giving the brave defenders no respite. They warded off every thrust, until finally they were betrayed by a dissatisfied Swiss, who was acting as sentinel. Toward evening Charnisay's men made a breach in the wall, but still the defenders fought with desperation, urged on by their dauntless mistress. Each side suffered severe losses, but numbers prevailed at last. Lady La Tour surrendered in order to save her men, because Charnisay had offered life and liberty to the survivors.

No sooner had he gained entrance to the fort, and observed how weak its defences were, than he changed his mind about sparing the survivors. He ordered that all the men should be hanged, allowing one wretch to save his life by acting as executioner to the rest. The outrage was complete when he compelled Madame La Tour to witness the execution of her brave defenders with a halter around her own neck.

" 'What of the brave men who defended,

Charnisay?'

'On a high tree the fight was ended,

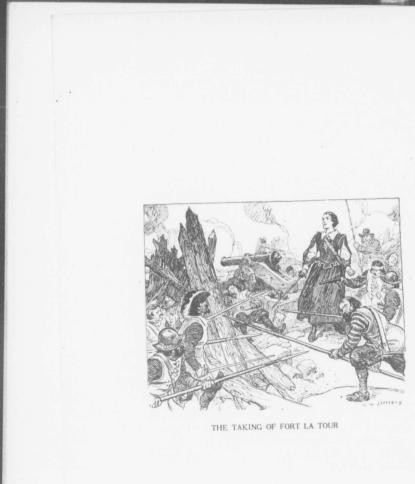
And she, when her great soul did not falter,

I bound her neck in a hempen halter, Even as they.' "

Next day, which was the eighteenth of April, the bodies of the dead were buried, and Charnisay set his men to repairing the fort for his own use. He could not tell how soon La Tour would return from Boston, and though it was unlikely that his mission would prove successful, it was impossible to forecast what reinforcements he might bring.

During the three weeks when Charnisay's men were repairing the fort, Madame La Tour lay sick with despair within the ramparts. She was dying. The enemy's chronicler says "she fell ill with spite and rage." More truly she died of a broken heart, because her proud spirit could not bear up against the overwhelming sense of defeat. It is believed that her body rests somewhere within the present city of St. John, but the exact spot is not known.

We have no record of what La Tour said or thought when he finally returned to his



ruined fort, to find his wife dead and his belongings in the hands of the enemy. Whittier, in his poem, "St. John," writes of his home-coming thus:

"But what of my lady?" Cries Charles of Estienne.
'On the shot crumbled turret Thy lady was seen; Half-veiled in the smoke-cloud, Her hand grasped thy pennon, While her dark tresses swayed In the hot breath of cannon!""

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Unsuccessful in his attempt to secure aid from the Puritans, La Tour now resumed the roving wilderness life of his youth, and for three or four years little was known of his movements.

After this complete triumph over his enemy, Charnisay felt himself the undisputed master of Acadia, and in a position to enjoy the fruits of his dearly-bought victory. When news of the capture of Fort St. John reached France, the young king, Louis XIV, was highly pleased, and extended Charnisay's power from the St. Lawrence to Vir-

ginnia. To be sure, it was a vain honor, for the king did not offer financial aid, and Charnisay had already spent his substance in trying to civilize a wilderness.

Yet with the coveted St. John post in his possession, everything promised well for a revival of the fur-trade and rich profits from dealing with the Indians. Charnisay's prospects were never brighter when a terrible calamity befell. On the 24th of May, 1650, he was out on the bay at Port Royal, accompanied only by his valet, and in a frail birch canoe. As night came on and a storm developed over the water, the canoe upset. Both men climbed astride of it and floated. partly immersed. So they remained for nearly two hours, when Charnisay died, not from drowning, but from the coldness of the water, which covered him to his waist. The valet survived and was picked up by Indians in an exhausted condition.

This was a surprising turn of events, and La Tour, who had led a roving life since the disaster that ruined his home, took fresh courage at the news of his enemy's death. When he lost his intrepid wife, he lost also the inspiration with which her presence had

always inspired him. He could no longer obtain help from the Puritans of Boston, because they had made peaceable terms with Charnisay. Anyway they suspected La Tour of being a turncoat, and by this time were convinced that they had harbored a knave. "Whereby," observes Winthrop, who had been La Tour's best friend, "it appears (as the Scripture saith) that there is no confidence in an unfaithful or carnal man."

But with the death of Charnisay the scene changed for La Tour. He became possessed of new hope. He still had a few faithful friends in France, who might help him to secure Charnisay's possessions, as the widow of the dead chief was a mild, unambitious sort of woman, and the children were too young to defend their own interests.

So well did the aforesaid agents in France work in his cause, that La Tour finally appears as the favorite of royalty, and the honors formerly given to Charnisay are now heaped upon him. He is called the king's governor and lieutenant in New France.

The widow of Charnisay had eight children, all minors. She seems to have been an

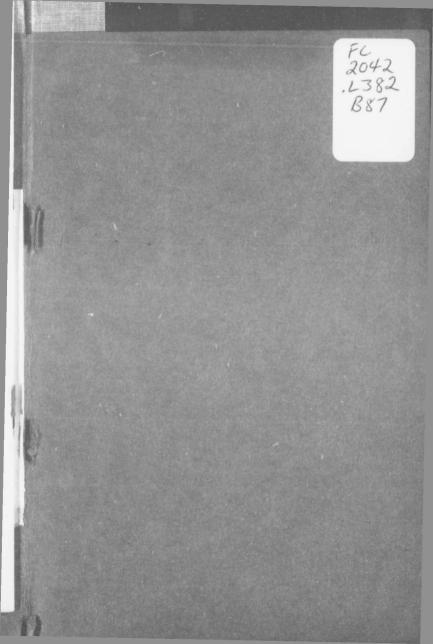
incapable woman, who did not know how to fend for herself. Her case soon became desperate, as she saw herself and her children facing ruin. La Tour tormented her until she restored to him Fort St. John. Finally, in desperation, she consented to marry her enemy, her former husband having been dead about three years. She seems to have done what she did in the interests of her children. But even then they were poorly protected. The four boys were finally killed in the wars, and the girls became nuns. Thus Charnisay left no heirs to carry on his name in the new world to which he had given such prodigious labors.

One wonders what thoughts coursed through the mind of La Tour, when he married the widow of his foe, for business reasons, and "for the peace and tranquility of the country and concord and union between the two families," as frankly stated in the marriage contract. He could scarcely have admired the soft and yielding Madame Charnisay as he had his former gifted and highspirited Françoise Marie.

The intrepid spirit of Madame La Tour still seems to haunt the region of St. John.

Great in toils and dangers, dauntless in adversity, loyal to a failing cause, she has written her name high on the scroll of Canadian heroines. One could wish that her husband had remained true to her memory, for then they might have taken their places in history among the world's immortal lovers.





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