

The Trail of the Sword, Volume 3.

Gilbert Parker

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THE TRAIL OF THE SWORD

By Gilbert Parker

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CHAPTER XIII

"AS WATER UNTO WINE"

Three months afterwards George Gering was joyfully preparing to take two voyages. Perhaps, indeed, his keen taste for the one had much to do with his eagerness for the other--though most men find getting gold as cheerful as getting married. He had received a promise of marriage from Jessica, and he was also soon to start with William Phips for the Spaniards' country. His return to New York with the news of the capture of the Hudson's Bay posts brought consternation. There was no angrier man in all America than Colonel Richard Nicholls; there was perhaps no girl in all the world more agitated than Jessica, then a guest at Government House. Her father was there also, cheerfully awaiting her marriage with Gering, whom, since he had lost most traces of Puritanism, he liked. He had long suspected the girl's interest in Iberville; if he had known that two letters from him--unanswered--had been treasured, read, and re-read, he would have been anxious. That his daughter should marry a Frenchman--a filibustering seigneur, a Catholic, the enemy of the British colonies, whose fellow-countrymen incited the Indians to harass and to massacre--was not to be borne.

Besides, the Honourable Hogarth Leveret, whose fame in the colony was now often in peril because of his Cavalier propensities, and whose losses had aged him, could not bear that he should sink and carry his daughter with him. Jessica was the apple of his eye; for her he would have borne all, sorts of trials; but he could not bear to see her called on to bear them. Like most people out of the heyday of their own youth, he imagined the way a maid's fancy ought to go.

If he had known how much his daughter's promise to marry Gering would

cost her, he would not have had it. But indeed she did not herself guess it. She had, with the dreamy pleasure of a young girl, dwelt upon an event which might well hold her delighted memory: distance, difference of race, language, and life, all surrounded Iberville with an engaging fascination. Besides, what woman could forget a man who gave her escape from a fate such as Bucklaw had prepared for her? But she saw the hopelessness of the thing, everything was steadily acting in Gering's favour, and her father's trouble decided her at last.

When Gering arrived at New York and told his story--to his credit with no dispraise of Iberville, rather as a soldier--she felt a pang greater than she ever had known. Like a good British maid, she was angry at the defeat of the British, she was indignant at her lover's failure and proud of his brave escape, and she would have herself believe that she was angry at Iberville. But it was no use; she was ill-content while her father and others called him buccaneer and filibuster, and she joyed that old William Drayton, who had ever spoken well of the young Frenchman, laughed at their insults, saying that he was as brave, comely, and fine-tempered a lad as he had ever met, and that the capture of the forts was genius: "Genius and pith, upon my soul!" he said stoutly; "and if he comes this way he shall have a right hearty welcome, though he come to fight."

In the first excitement of Gering's return, sorry for his sufferings and for his injured ambition, she had suddenly put her hands in his and had given her word to marry him.

She was young, and a young girl does not always know which it is that moves her: the melancholy of the impossible, from which she sinks in a kind of peaceful despair upon the possible, or the flush of a deep desire; she acts in an atmosphere of the emotions, and cannot therefore be sure of herself. But when it was done there came reaction to Jessica. In the solitude of her own room--the room above the hallway, from which she had gone to be captured by Bucklaw--she had misgivings. If she had been asked whether she loved Iberville, she might have answered no. But he was a possible lover; and every woman weighs the possible lover against the accepted one--often, at first, to fluttering apprehensions. In this brief reaction many a woman's heart has been caught away.

A few days after Gering's arrival he was obliged to push on to Boston, there to meet Phips. He hoped that Mr. Leveret and Jessica would accompany him, but Governor Nicholls would not hear of it just yet. Truth is, wherever the girl went she was light and cheerfulness, although her ways were quiet and her sprightliness was mostly in her looks. She was impulsive, but impulse was ruled by a reserve at once delicate and unembarrassed. She was as much beloved in the town of New York as in Boston.

Two days after Gering left she was wandering in the garden, when the governor joined her.

"Well, well, my pretty councillor," he said--"an hour to cheer an old man's leisure?"

"As many as you please," she answered daintily, putting her hand within his arm. "I am so very cheerful I need to shower the surplus." There was a smile at her lips, but her eyes were misty. Large, brilliant, gentle, they had now also a bewildered look, which even the rough old soldier saw. He did not understand, but he drew the hand further within

his arm and held it, there, and for the instant he knew not what to say. The girl did not speak; she only kept looking at him with a kind of inward smiling. Presently, as if he had suddenly lighted upon a piece of news for the difficulty, he said: "Radisson has come."

"Radisson!" she cried.

"Yes. You know 'twas he that helped George to escape?"

"Indeed, no!" she answered. "Mr. Gering did not tell me." She was perplexed, annoyed, yet she knew not why.

Gering had not brought Radisson into New York had indeed forbidden him to come there, or to Boston, until word was given him; for while he felt bound to let the scoundrel go with him to the Spaniards' country, it was not to be forgotten that the fellow had been with Bucklaw. But Radisson had no scruples when Gering was gone, though the proscription had never been withdrawn.

"We will have to give him freedom, councillor, eh? even though we proclaimed him, you remember." He laughed, and added: "You would demand that, yea or nay.

"Why should I?" she asked.

"Now, give me wisdom all ye saints! Why--why?"

"Faith, he helped your lover from the clutches of the French coxcomb."

"Indeed," she answered, "such a villain helps but for absurd benefits. Mr. Gering might have stayed with Monsieur Iberville in honour and safety at least. And why a coxcomb? You thought different once; and you cannot doubt his bravery. Enemy of our country though he be, I am surely bound to speak him well--he saved my life."

Anxious to please her, he answered: "Wise as ever, councillor. What an old bear am I: When I called him coxcomb, 'twas as an Englishman hating a Frenchman, who gave our tongues to gall--a handful of posts gone, a ship passed to the spoiler, the governor of the company a prisoner, and our young commander's reputation at some trial! My temper was pardonable, eh, mistress?"

The girl smiled, and added: "There was good reason why Mr. Gering brought not Radisson here, and I should beware that man. A traitor is ever a traitor. He is French, too, and as a good Englishman you should hate all Frenchmen, should you not?"

"Merciless witch! Where got you that wit? If I must, I kneel;" and he groaned in mock despair. "And if Monsieur Iberville should come knocking at our door you would have me welcome him lovingly?"

"Surely; there is peace, is there not? Has not the king, because of his love for Louis commanded all goodwill between us and Canada?"

The governor laughed bitterly. "Much pity that he has! how can we live at peace with buccaneers?" Their talk was interrupted here; but a few days later, in the same garden, Morris came to them. "A ship enters harbour," he said, "and its commander sends this letter."

An instant after the governor turned a troubled face on the girl and said: "Your counsel of the other day is put to rapid test, Jessica. This comes from monsieur, who would pay his respects to me."

He handed the note to her. It said that Iberville had brought prisoners whom he was willing to exchange for French prisoners in the governor's hands.

Entering New York harbour with a single vessel showed in a strong light Iberville's bold, almost reckless, courage. The humour of it was not lost on Jessica, though she turned pale, and the paper fluttered in her fingers.

"What will you do?" she said.

"I will treat him as well as he will let me, sweetheart." Two hours afterwards, Iberville came up the street with Sainte-Helene, De Casson, and Perrot,--De Troyes had gone to Quebec,--courteously accompanied by Morris and an officer of the New York Militia. There was no enmity shown the Frenchmen, for many remembered what had once made Iberville popular in New York. Indeed, Iberville, whose memory was of the best, now and again accosted some English or Dutch resident, whose face he recalled.

The governor was not at first cordial; but Iberville's cheerful soldierliness, his courtier spirit, and his treatment of the English prisoners, soon placed him on a footing near as friendly as that of years before. The governor praised his growing reputation, and at last asked him to dine, saying that Mistress Leveret would no doubt be glad to meet her rescuer again.

"Still, I doubt not," said the governor, "there will be embarrassment, for the lady can scarce forget that you had her lover prisoner. But these things are to be endured. Besides, you and Mr. Gering seem as easily enemies as other men are friends."

Iberville was amazed. So, Jessica and Gering were affianced. And the buckle she had sent him he wore now in the folds of his lace! How could he know what comes from a woman's wavering sympathies, what from her inborn coquetry, and what from love itself? He was merely a man with much to learn.

He accepted dinner and said: "As for Monsieur Gering, your excellency, we are as easily enemies as he and Radisson are comrades-in-arms."

"Which is harshly put, monsieur. When a man is breaking prison he chooses any tool. You put a slight upon an honest gentleman."

"I fear that neither Mr. Gering nor myself is too generous with each other, your excellency," answered Iberville lightly.

This frankness was pleasing, and soon the governor took Iberville into the drawing-room, where Jessica was. She was standing by the great fireplace, and she did not move at first, but looked at Iberville in some thing of her old simple way. Then she offered him her hand with a quiet smile.

"I fear you are not glad to see me," he said, with a smile. "You cannot have had good reports of me--no?"

"Yes, I am glad," she answered gently. "You know, monsieur, mine is a constant debt. You do not come to me, I take it, as the conqueror of Englishmen."

"I come to you," he answered, "as Pierre le Moyne of Iberville, who had once the honour to do you slight service. I have never tried to forget that, because by it I hoped I might be remembered--an accident of price to me."

She bowed and at first did not speak; then Morris came to say that some one awaited the governor, and the two were left alone.

"I have not forgotten," she began softly, breaking a silence.

"You will think me bold, but I believe you will never forget," was his meaning reply.

"Yes, you are bold," she replied, with the demure smile which had charmed him long ago. Suddenly she looked up at him anxiously, and, "Why did you go to Hudson's Bay?" she asked.

"I would have gone ten times as far for the same cause," he answered, and he looked boldly, earnestly, into her eyes.

She turned her head away. "You have all your old recklessness," she answered. Then her eyes softened, and, "All your old courage," she added.

"I have all my old motive."

"What is-your motive?"

Does a woman ever know how much such speeches cost? Did Jessica quite know when she asked the question, what her own motive was; how much it had of delicate malice--unless there was behind it a simple sincerity? She was inviting sorrow. A man like Iberville was not to be counted lightly; for every word he sowed, he would reap a harvest of some kind.

He came close to her, and looked as though he would read her through and through. "Can you ask that question?" he said most seriously. "If you ask it because from your soul you wish to know, good! But if you ask it as a woman who would read a man's heart, and then--"

"Oh, hush!--hush!" she whispered. Her face became pale, and her eyes had a painful brightness. "You must not answer. I had no right to ask. Oh, monsieur!" she added, "I would have you always for my friend if I could, though you are the enemy of my country and of the man--I am to marry."

"I am for my king," he replied; "and I am enemy of him who stands between you and me. For see: from the hour that I met you I knew that some day, even as now, I should tell you that--I love you--indeed, Jessica, with all my heart."

"Oh, have pity!" she pleaded. "I cannot listen--I cannot."

"You shall listen, for you have remembered me and have understood. Voila!" he added, hastily catching her silver buckle from his bosom. "This that you sent me, look where I have kept it--on my heart!"

She drew back from him, her face in her hands. Then suddenly she put them out as though to prevent him coming near her, and said:

"Oh, no--no! You will spare me; I am an affianced wife." An appealing smile shone through her tears. "Oh, will you not go?" she begged. "Or, will you not stay and forget what you have said? We are little more than strangers; I scarcely know you; I--"

"We are no strangers," he broke in. "How can that be, when for years I have thought of you--you of me? But I am content to wait, for my love shall win you yet. You--"

She came to him and put her hands upon his arm. "You remember," she said, with a touch of her old gaiety, and with an inimitable grace, "what good friends we were that first day we met? Let us be the same now--for this time at least. Will you not grant me this for to-day?"

"And to-morrow?" he asked, inwardly determining to stay in the port of New York and to carry her off as his wife; but, unlike Bucklaw, with her consent.

At that moment the governor returned, and Iberville's question was never answered. Nor did he dine at Government House, for word came secretly that English ships were coming from Boston to capture him. He had, therefore, no other resource but to sail out and push on for Quebec. He would not peril the lives of his men merely to follow his will with Jessica.

What might have occurred had he stayed is not easy to say--fortunes turn on strange trifles. The girl, under the influence of his masterful spirit and the rare charm of his manner, might have--as many another has--broken her troth. As it was, she wrote Iberville a letter and sent it by a courier, who never delivered it. By the same fatality, of the letters which he wrote her only one was received. This told her that when he returned from a certain cruise he would visit her again, for he was such an enemy to her country that he was keen to win what did it most honour. Gering had pressed for a marriage before he sailed for the Spaniards' country, but she had said no, and when he urged it she had shown a sudden coldness. Therefore, bidding her good-bye, he had sailed away with Phips, accompanied, much against his will, by Radisson. Bucklaw was not with them. He had set sail from England in a trading schooner, and was to join Phips at Port de la Planta. Gering did not know that Bucklaw had share in the expedition, nor did Bucklaw guess the like of Gering.

Within two weeks of the time that Phips in his Bridgwater Merchant, manned by a full crew, twenty fighting men, and twelve guns, with Gering in command of the Swallow, a smaller ship, got away to the south, Iberville also sailed in the same direction. He had found awaiting him, on his return to Quebec, a priest bearing messages and a chart from another priest who had died in the Spaniards' country.

CHAPTER XIV

IN WHICH THE HUNTERS ARE OUT

Iberville had a good ship. The Maid of Provence carried a handful of guns and a small but carefully chosen crew, together with Sainte-Helene, Perrot, and the lad Maurice Joval, who had conceived for Iberville friendship nigh to adoration. Those were days when the young were encouraged to adventure, and Iberville had no compunction in giving the boy this further taste of daring.

Iberville, thorough sailor as he was, had chosen for his captain one who had sailed the Spanish Main. He had commanded on merchant-ships which had been suddenly turned into men-of-war, and was suited to the present enterprise: taciturn, harsh of voice, singularly impatient, but a perfect seaman and as brave as could be. He had come to Quebec late the previous autumn with the remnants of a ship which, rotten when she left the port of Havre, had sprung a leak in mid-ocean, had met a storm, lost her mainmast, and by the time she reached the St. Lawrence had scarce a stick standing. She was still at Quebec, tied up in the bay of St. Charles, from which she would probably go out no more. Her captain--Jean Berigord--had chafed on the bit in the little Hotel Colbert, making himself more feared than liked, till one day he was taken to Iberville by Perrot.

A bargain was soon struck. The nature of the expedition was not known in Quebec, for the sailors were not engaged till the eve of starting, and Perrot's men were ready at his bidding without why or wherefore. Indeed, when the Maid of Provence left the island of Orleans, her nose seawards, one fine July morning, the only persons in Quebec that knew her destination were the priest who had brought Iberville the chart of the river, with its accurate location of the sunken galleon, Iberville's brothers, and Count Frontenac himself--returned again as governor.

"See, Monsieur Iberville," said the governor, as, with a fine show of compliment, in full martial dress, with his officers in gold lace, perukes, powder, swords, and ribbons, he bade Iberville good-bye--"See, my dear captain, that you find the treasure, or make these greedy English pay dear for it. They have a long start, but that is nothing, with a ship under you that can show its heels to any craft. I care not so much about the treasure, but I pray you humble those dull Puritans, who turn buccaneers in the name of the Lord."

Iberville made a gallant reply, and, with Sainte-Helene, received a hearty farewell from the old soldier, who, now over seventy years of age, was as full of spirit as when he distinguished himself at Arras fifty years before. In Iberville he saw his own youth renewed, and foretold the high part he would yet play in the fortunes of New France. Iberville had got to the door and was bowing himself out when, with a quick gesture, Frontenac stopped him, stepped quickly forward, and clasping his shoulders kissed him on each cheek, and said in a deep, kind voice: "I know, mon enfant, what lies behind this. A man pays the price one time or another: he draws his sword for his mistress and his king; both forget, but one's country remains--remains."

Iberville said nothing, but with an admiring glance into the aged, iron face, stooped and kissed Frontenac's hand and withdrew silently. Frontenac, proud, impatient, tyrannical, was the one man in New France who had a powerful idea of the future of the country, and who loved her and his king by the law of a loyal nature. Like Wolsey, he had found his king ungrateful, and had stood almost alone in Canada among his enemies, as at Versailles among his traducers--imperious, unyielding, and yet forgiving. Married, too, at an early age, his young wife, caring little

for the duties of maternity and more eager to serve her own ambitions than his, left him that she might share the fortunes of Mademoiselle de Montpensier.

Iberville had mastered the chart before he sailed, and when they were well on their way he disclosed to the captain the object of their voyage. Berigord listened to all he had to say, and at first did no more than blow tobacco smoke hard before him. "Let me see the chart," he said at last, and, scrutinising it carefully, added: "Yes, yes, 'tis right enough. I've been in the port and up the river. But neither we nor the English'll get a handful of gold or silver thereabouts. 'Tis throwing good money after none at all."

"The money is mine, my captain," said Iberville good-humouredly. "There will be sport, and I ask but that you give me every chance you can."

"Look then, monsieur," replied the smileless man, "I'll run your ship for all she holds from here to hell, if you twist your finger. She's as good a craft as ever I spoke, and I'll swear her for any weather. The fighting and the gold as you and the devil agree!"

Iberville wished nothing better--a captain concerned only with his own duties. Berigord gathered the crew and the divers on deck, and in half a dozen words told them the object of the expedition, and was followed by Iberville. Some of the men had been with him to Hudson's Bay, and they wished nothing better than fighting the English, and all were keen with the lust of gold even though it were for another. As it was, Iberville promised them all a share of what was got.

On the twentieth day after leaving Quebec they sighted islands, and simultaneously they saw five ships bearing away towards them. Iberville was apprehensive that a fleet of the kind could only be hostile, for merchant-ships would hardly sail together so, and it was not possible that they were French. There remained the probability that they were Spanish or English ships. He had no intention of running away, but at the same time he had no wish to fight before he reached Port de la Plante and had had his hour with Gering and Phips and the lost treasure. Besides, five ships was a large undertaking, which only a madman would willingly engage. However, he kept steadily on his course. But there was one chance of avoiding a battle without running away--the glass had been falling all night and morning. Berigord, when questioned, grimly replied that there was to be trouble, but whether with the fleet or the elements was not clear, and Iberville did not ask.

He got his reply effectively and duly however. A wind suddenly sprang up from the north-west, followed by a breaking cross sea. It as suddenly swelled to a hurricane, so that if Berigord had not been fortunate as to his crew, and had not been so fine a sailor, the Maid of Provence might have fared badly, for he kept all sail on as long as he dare, and took it in none too soon. But so thoroughly did he know the craft and trust his men that she did what he wanted; and though she was tossed and hammered by the sea till it seemed that she must, with every next wave, go down, she rode into safety at last, five hundred miles out of their course.

The storm had saved them from the hostile fleet, which had fared ill. They were first scattered, then two of them went down, another was so disabled that she had to be turned back to the port they had left, and the remaining two were separated, so that their only course was to return to port also. As the storm came up they had got within fighting distance

of the Maid of Provence, and had opened ineffectual fire, which she--occupied with the impact of the storm--did not return. Escaped the dangers of the storm, she sheered into her course again, and ran away to the south-west, until Hispaniola came in sight.

CHAPTER XV

IN THE MATTER OF BUCKLAW

The Bridgwater Merchant and the Swallow made the voyage down with no setbacks, having fair weather and a sweet wind on their quarter all the way, to the wild corner of an island, where a great mountain stands sentinel and a bay washes upon a curving shore and up the River de la Planta. There were no vessels in the harbour and there was only a small settlement on the shore, and as they came to anchor well away from the gridiron of reefs known as the Boilers, the prospect was handsome: the long wash of the waves, the curling, white of the breakers, and the rainbow-coloured water. The shore was luxuriant, and the sun shone intemperately on the sea and the land, covering all with a fine beautiful haze, like the most exquisite powder sifted through the air. All on board the Bridgwater Merchant and the Swallow were in hearty spirits. There had been some sickness, but the general health of the expedition was excellent.

It was not till the day they started from Boston that Phips told Gering he expected to meet some one at the port who had gone to prepare the way, to warn them by fires in case of danger, and to allay any opposition among the natives--if there were any. But he had not told him who the herald was.

Truth is, Phips was anxious that Gering should have no chance of objecting to the scoundrel who had, years before, tried to kidnap his now affianced wife--who had escaped a deserved death on the gallows. It was a rude age, and men of Phips's quality, with no particular niceness as to women, or horror as to mutiny when it was twenty years old, compromised with their conscience for expediency and gain. Moreover, in his humorous way, Bucklaw, during his connection with Phips in England, had made himself agreeable and resourceful. Phips himself had sprung from the lower orders,--the son of a small farmer,--and even in future days when he rose to a high position in the colonies, gaining knighthood and other honours, he had the manners and speech of "a man of the people." Bucklaw understood men: he knew that his only game was that of bluntness. This was why he boarded Phips in Cheapside without subterfuge or disguise.

Nor had Phips told Bucklaw of Gering's coming; so that when the Bridgwater Merchant and the Swallow entered Port de la Planta, Bucklaw himself, as he bore out in a small sail-boat, did not guess that he was likely to meet a desperate enemy. He had waited patiently, and had reckoned almost to a day when Phips would arrive. He was alongside before Phips had called anchor. His cheerful countenance came up between the frowning guns, his hook-hand ran over the rail, and in a moment he was on deck facing--Radisson.

He was unprepared for the meeting, but he had taken too many chances in his lifetime to show astonishment. He and Radisson had fought and parted; they had been in ugly business together, and they were likely to

be, now that they had met, in ugly business again.

Bucklaw's tiger ran up to stroke his chin with the old grotesque gesture. "Ha!" he said saucily, "cats and devils have nine lives."

There was the same sparkle in the eye as of old, the same buoyant voice. For himself, he had no particular quarrel with Radisson; the more so because he saw a hang-dog sulkiness in Radisson's eye. It was ever his cue when others were angered to be cool. The worst of his crimes had been performed with an air of humorous cynicism. He could have great admiration for an enemy such as Iberville; and he was not a man to fight needlessly. He had a firm belief that he had been intended for a high position--a great admiral, or general, or a notable buccaneer.

Before Radisson had a chance to reply came Phips, who could not help but show satisfaction at Bucklaw's presence; and in a moment they were on their way together to the cabin, followed by the eyes of the enraged Radisson. Phips disliked Radisson; the sinister Frenchman, with his evil history, was impossible to the open, bluff captain. He had been placed upon Phips's vessel because he knew the entrance to the harbour; but try as he would for a kind of comradeship, he failed: he had an ugly vanity and a bad heart. There was only one decent thing which still clung to him in rags and tatters--the fact that he was a Frenchman. He had made himself hated on the ship--having none of the cunning tact of Bucklaw. As Phips and Bucklaw went below, a sudden devilry entered into him. He was ripe for quarrel, eager for battle. His two black eyes were like burning beads, his jaws twitched. If Bucklaw had but met him without this rough, bloodless irony, he might have thrown himself with ardour into the work of the expedition; but he stood alone, and hatred and war rioted in him.

Below in the cabin Phips and Bucklaw were deep in the chart of the harbour and the river. The plan of action was decided upon. A canoe was to be built out of a cotton-tree large enough to carry eight or ten oars. This and the tender, with men and divers, were to go in search of the wreck under the command of Bucklaw and the captain of the Swallow, whose name Phips did not mention. Phips himself was to remain on the Bridgwater Merchant, the Swallow lying near with a goodly number of men to meet any possible attack from the sea. When all was planned, Phips told Bucklaw who was the commander of the Swallow. For a moment the fellow's coolness was shaken; the sparkle died out of his eye and he shot up a furtive look at Phips, but he caught a grim smile on the face of the sturdy sailor. He knew at once there was no treachery meant, and he guessed that Phips expected no crisis. It was ever his way to act with promptness, being never so resourceful as when his position was most critical: he was in the power of Gering and Phips, and he knew it, but he knew also that his game must be a bold one.

"By-gones are by-gones, captain," he said; "and what's done can't be helped, and as it was no harm came anyhow."

"By-gones are by-gones," replied the other, "and let's hope that Mr. Gering will say so too."

"Haven't you told him, sir?"

"Never a word--but I'll send for him now, and by-gones let it be."

Bucklaw nodded, and drummed the table with his tiger. He guessed why

Phips had not told Gering, and he foresaw trouble. He trusted, however, to the time that had passed since the kidnapping, and on Gering's hunger for treasure. Phips had compromised, and why not he? But if Gering was bent on trouble, why, there was the last resource of the peace-lover. He tapped the rapier at his side. He ever held that he was peaceful, and it is recorded that at the death of an agitated victim, he begged him to "sit still and not fidget."

He laid no plans as to what he should do when Gering came. Like the true gamester, he waited to see how he should be placed; then he could draw upon his resources. He was puzzled about Radisson, but Radisson could wait; he was so much the superior of the coarser villain that he gave him little thought. As he waited he thought more about the treasure at hand than of either--or all--his enemies.

He did not stir, but kept drumming till he knew that Gering was aboard, and heard his footsteps, with the captain's, coming. He showed no excitement, though he knew a crisis was at hand. A cool, healthy sweat stood out on his forehead, cheeks and lips, and his blue eyes sparkled clearly and coldly. He rose as the two men appeared.

Phips had not even told his lieutenant. But Gering knew Bucklaw at the first glance, and his eyes flashed and a hand went to his sword.

"Captain Phips," he said angrily, "you know who this man is?"

"He is the guide to our treasure-house, Mr. Gering."

"His name is Bucklaw--a mutineer condemned to death, the villain who tried to kidnap Mistress Leveret."

It was Bucklaw that replied. "Right--right you are, Mr. Gering. I'm Bucklaw, mutineer, or what else you please. But that's ancient--ancient. I'm sinner no more. You and Monsieur Iberville saved the maid I meant no harm to her; 'twas but for ransom. I am atoning now--to make your fortune, give you glory. Shall by-gones be by-gones, Mr. Gering? What say you?"

Bucklaw stood still at the head of the table. But he was very watchful. What the end might have been it is hard to tell, but a thing occurred which took the affair out of Gering's hands.

A shadow darkened the companion-way, and Radisson came quickly down. His face was sinister, and his jaws worked like an animal's. Coming to the table he stood between Gering and Bucklaw, and looked from one to the other. Bucklaw was cool, Gering very quiet, and he misinterpreted.

"You are great friends, eh, all together?" he said viciously. "All together you will get the gold. It is no matter what one English do, the other absolve for gold. A buccaneer, a stealer of women--no, it is no matter! All English--all together! But I am French--I am the dirt--I am for the scuppers. Bah! I will have the same as Bucklaw--you see?"

"You will have the irons, fellow!" Phips roared.

A knife flashed in the air, and Bucklaw's pistol was out at the same instant. The knife caught Bucklaw in the throat and he staggered against the table like a stuck pig, the bullet hit Radisson in the chest and he fell back against the wall, his pistol dropping from his hand. Bucklaw,

bleeding heavily, lurched forwards, pulled himself together, and, stooping, emptied his pistol into the moaning Radisson. Then he sank on his knees, snatched the other's pistol, and fired again into Radisson's belly; after which with a last effort he plunged his own dagger into the throat of the dying man, and, with his fingers still on the handle, fell with a gurgling laugh across the Frenchman's body.

Radisson recovered for an instant. He gave a hollow cry, drew the knife from his own throat and, with a wild, shambling motion, struck at the motionless Bucklaw, pinning an arm to the ground. Then he muttered an oath and fell back dead.

The tournament of blood was over. So swift had it been there was no chance to interfere. Besides, Gering was not inclined to save the life of either; while Phips, who now knew the chart, as he thought, as well as Bucklaw, was not concerned, though he liked the mutineer.

For a moment they both looked at the shambles without speaking. Sailors for whom Phips had whistled crowded the cabin.

"A damned bad start, Mr. Gering," Phips said, as he moved towards the bodies.

"For them, yes; but they might have given us a bad ending."

"For the Frenchman, he's got less than was brewing for him, but Bucklaw was a humorous dog."

As he said this he stooped to Bucklaw and turned him over, calling to the sailors to clean the red trough and bring the dead men on deck, but presently he cried: "By the devil's tail, the fellow lives! Here, a hand quick, you lubbers, and fetch the surgeon."

Bucklaw was not dead. He had got two ugly wounds and was bleeding heavily, but his heart still beat. Radisson's body was carried on deck, and within half an hour was dropped into the deep. The surgeon, however, would not permit Bucklaw to be removed until he had been cared for, and so Phips and Gering went on deck and made preparations for the treasure-hunt. A canoe was hollowed out by a dozen men in a few hours, the tender was got ready, the men and divers told off, and Gering took command of the searching-party, while Phips remained on the ship.

They soon had everything ready for a start in the morning. Word was brought that Bucklaw still lived, but was in a high fever, and that the chances were all against him; and Phips sent cordials and wines from his own stores, and asked that news be brought to him of any change.

Early in the morning Gering, after having received instructions from Phips, so far as he knew (for Bucklaw had not told all that was necessary), departed for the river. The canoe and tender went up the stream a distance, and began to work down from the farthest point indicated in the chart. Gering continued in the river nearly all day, and at night camped on the shore. The second day brought no better luck, nor yet the third the divers had seen no vestige of a wreck, nor any sign of treasure--nothing except four skeletons in a heap, tied together with a chain, where the water was deepest. These were the dead priests, for whom Bucklaw could account. The water was calm, the tide rising and falling gently, and when they arrived among what was called the Shallows, they could see plainly to the bottom. They passed over the Boilers,

a reef of shoals, and here they searched diligently, but to no purpose; the divers went down frequently, but could find nothing. The handful of natives in the port came out and looked on apathetically; one or two Spaniards also came, but they shrugged their shoulders and pitied the foolish adventurers. Gering had the power of inspiring his men, and Phips was a martinet and was therefore obeyed; but the lifeless days and unrewarded labour worked on the men, and at last the divers shirked their task.

Meanwhile, Bucklaw was fighting hard for life.

As time passed, the flush of expectancy waned; the heat was great, the waiting seemed endless. Adventure was needed for the spirits of the men, and of this now there was nothing. Morning after morning the sun rose in a moist, heavy atmosphere; day after day went in a quest which became dreary, and night after night settled upon discontent. Then came threats. But this was chiefly upon the Bridgwater Merchant. Phips had picked up his sailors in English ports, and nearly all of them were brutal adventurers. They were men used to desperate enterprises, and they had flocked to him because they smelled excitement and booty. Of ordinary merchant seamen there were only a few. When the Duke of Albemarle had come aboard at Plymouth before they set sail, he had shrugged his shoulders at the motley crew. To his hint Phips had only replied with a laugh: these harum-scarum scamps were more to his mind than ordinary seamen. At heart he himself was half-barbarian. It is possible he felt there might some time be a tug-of-war on board, but he did not borrow trouble. Bucklaw had endorsed every man that he had chosen; indeed, Phips knew that many of them were old friends of Bucklaw. Again, of this he had no fear; Bucklaw was a man of desperate deeds, but he knew that in himself the pirate had a master. Besides, he would pick up in Boston a dozen men upon whom he could depend; and cowardice had no place in him. Again, the Swallow, commanded by Gering, was fitted out with New England seamen; and on these dependence could be put.

Therefore, when there came rumblings of mutiny on the Bridgwater Merchant, there was faithful, if gloomy, obedience, on the Swallow. Had there been plenty of work to do, had they been at sea instead of at anchor, the nervousness would have been little; but idleness begot irritation, and irritation mutiny. Or had Bucklaw been on deck, instead of in the surgeon's cabin playing a hard game with death, matters might not have gone so far as they did; for he would have had immediate personal influence repressive of revolt. As it was, Phips had to work the thing out according to his own lights. One afternoon, when Gering was away with the canoes on the long search, the crisis came. It was a day when life seemed to stand still; a creamy haze ingrained with delicate blue had settled on land and sea; the long white rollers slowly travelled over the Boilers, and the sea rocked like a great cradle. Indefiniteness of thought, of time, of event, seemed over all; on board the two ships life swung idly as a hammock; but only so in appearance.

Phips was leaning against the deck-house, watching through his glass the search-canoes. Presently he turned and walked aft. As he did so the surgeon and the chief mate came running towards him. They had not time to explain, for came streaming upon deck a crowd of mutineers. Phips did not hesitate an instant; he had no fear--he was swelling with anger.

"Why now, you damned dogs," he blurted out, "what mean you by this? What's all this show of cutlasses?"

The ringleader stepped forwards. "We're sick of doing nothing," he answered. "We've come on a wild goose chase. There's no treasure here. We mean you no harm; we want not the ship out of your hands."

"Then," cried Phips, "in the name of all the devils, what want you?"

"Here's as we think: there's nothing to be got out of this hunt, but there's treasure on the high seas all the same. Here's our offer: keep command of your ship and run up the black flag!"

Phips's arm shot out and dropped the man to the ground.

"That's it, you filthy rogues!" he roared. "Me to turn pirate, eh? You'd set to weaving ropes for the necks of every one of us--blood of my soul!"

He seemed not to know that cutlasses were threatening him, not to be aware that the man at his feet, clutching his weapon, was mad with rage.

"Now look," he said, in a big loud voice, "I know that treasure is here, and I know we'll find it; if not now, when we get Bucklaw on his feet."

"Ay! Bucklaw! Bucklaw!" ran through the throng.

"Well, then, Bucklaw, as you say! Now here's what I'll do, scoundrels though you be. Let me hear no more of this foolery. Stick to me till the treasure's found--for God take my soul if I leave this bay till I have found it!--and you shall have good share of booty."

He had grasped the situation with such courage that the mutineers hesitated. He saw his advantage and followed it up, asking for three of their number to confer with him as to a bond upon his proposal. After a time the mutineers consented, the bond was agreed to, and the search went on.

CHAPTER XVI

IN THE TREASURE HOUSE

The canoes and tender kept husking up and down among the Shallows, finding nothing. At last one morning they pushed out from the side of the Bridgewater Merchant, more limp than ever. The stroke of the oars was listless, but a Boston sailor of a merry sort came to a cheery song:

"I knows a town, an' it's a fine town,
And many a brig goes sailin' to its quay;
I knows an inn, an' it's a fine inn,
An' a lass that's fair to see.
I knows a town, an' it's a fine town;
I knows an inn, an' it's a fine inn
But O my lass! an' O the gay gown,
Which I have seen my pretty in!

"I knows a port, an' it's a good port,
An' many a brig is ridin' easy there;
I knows a home, an' it's a good home,

An' a lass that's sweet an' fair.
I knows a port, an' it's a good port,
I knows a home, an' it's a good home
But O the pretty that is my sort,
That's wearyin' till I come!

"I knows a day, an' it's a fine day,
The day a sailor man comes back to town.
I knows a tide, an' it's a good tide,
The tide that gets you quick to anchors down.
I knows a day, an' it's a fine day,
I knows a tide, an' its' a good tide
And God help the lubber, I say,
That's stole the sailor man's bride!"

The song had its way with them and they joined in and lay to their oars with almost too much goodwill. Gering, his arms upon the side of the canoe, was looking into the water idly. It was clear far down, and presently he saw what seemed a feather growing out of the side of a rock. It struck him as strange, and he gave word to back water. They were just outside the Boilers in deep water. Drawing back carefully, he saw the feather again, and ordered one of the divers to go down. They could see the man descend and gather the feather, then he plunged deeper still and they lost sight of him. But soon he came up rapidly, and was quickly inside the boat, to tell Gering that he had seen several great guns. At this the crew peered over the boat-side eagerly. Gering's heart beat hard. He knew what it was to rouse wild hope and then to see despair follow, but he kept an outward calm and told the diver to go down again. Time seemed to stretch to hours before they saw the man returning with something in his arm. He handed up his prize, and behold it was a pig of silver!

The treasure was found; and there went up a great cheer. All was activity, for, apart from the delight of discovery, Phips had promised a share to every man. The place was instantly buoyed, and they hastened back to the port with the grateful tidings to Phips. With his glass he saw them coming and by their hard rowing he guessed that they had news. When they came within hail they cheered, and when they saw the silver the air rang with shouts.

As Gering stepped on board with the silver Captain Phips ran forwards, clasped it in both hands, and cried: "We are all made, thanks be to God!"

Then all hands were ordered on board, and because the treasure lay in a safe anchorage they got the ships away towards it.

Bucklaw, in the surgeon's cabin, was called out of delirium by the noise. He was worn almost to a skeleton, his eyes were big and staring, his face had the paleness of death. The return to consciousness was sudden--perhaps nothing else could have called him back. He wriggled out of bed and, supporting himself against the wall, made his way to the door, and crawled away, mumbling to himself as he went.

A few minutes afterwards Phips and Gering were talking in the cabin. Phips was weighing the silver up and down in his hands.

"At least three hundred good guineas here!" he said. There was a shuffling behind them, and, as Phips turned, a figure lunged on him, clutched and hugged the silver. It was Bucklaw.

"Mine! mine!" he called in a hoarse voice, with great gluttonous eyes. "All mine!" he cried again. Then he gasped and came to the ground in a heap, with the silver hugged in his arms. All at once he caught at his throat; the bandage of his wound fell away and there was a rush of blood over the silver. With a wild laugh he plunged face forward on the metal --and the blood of the dead Bucklaw consecrated the first-fruits of the treasure.

As the vessel rode up the harbour the body was dropped into the deep.

"Worse men--worse men, sir, bide with the king," said Phips to Gering. "A merry villain, that Bucklaw." The ship came to anchor at the buoys, and no time was lost. Divers were sent down, and by great good luck found the room where the bullion was stored. The number of divers was increased, and the work of raising the bullion went on all that day. There is nothing like the lust for gold in the hearts of men. From stem to stern of the Bridgwater Merchant and the Swallow, this wild will had its way. Work went on until the last moment of sun. That night talk was long and sleep short, and work was on again at sunrise. In three days they took up thirty-two tons of bullion. In the afternoon of the third day the store-room was cleared, and then they searched the hold. Here they found, cunningly distributed among the ballast, a great many bags of pieces-of-eight. These, having lain in the water so long, were crusted with a strong substance, which they had to break with iron bars. It was reserved for Phips himself to make the grand discovery. He donned a diving-suit and went below to the sunken galleon. Silver and gold had been found, but he was sure there were other treasures. After much searching he found, in a secret place of the captain's cabin, a chest which, on being raised and broken open, was found stocked with pearls, diamonds, and other precious stones.

And now the work was complete, and on board the Bridgwater Merchant was treasure to the sum of three hundred thousand pounds, and more. Joyfully did Phips raise anchor. But first he sent to the handful of people in the port a liberal gift of money and wine and provisions from the ship's stores. With a favourable breeze he got away agreeably, and was clear of the harbour and cleaving northwards before sunset--the Swallow leading the treasure-ship like a pilot. All was joy and hilarity; but there remained one small danger yet: they had raised their treasure unmolested, but could they bring it to Boston and on to England? Phips would have asked that question very seriously indeed had he known that the Maid of Provence was bowling out of the nor'-east towards the port which he had just left.

The Maid of Provence had had a perilous travel. Escaping the English war-ships, she fell in with a pirate craft. She closed with it, plugged it with cannon-shot, and drew off, then took the wind on her beam and came drifting down on her, boarded her and, after a swift and desperate fight, killed every pirate-rogue save one--the captain--whom for reasons they made a prisoner. Then they sank the rover, and got away to Port de la Planta as fast as they were able. But by reason of the storm and the fighting, and drifting out of their course, they had lost ten days; and thus it was they reached the harbour a few hours after the Bridgwater Merchant and the Swallow had left.

They waited till morning and sailed cautiously in to face disappointment. They quickly learned the truth from the natives. There was but one thing to do and Iberville lost no time. A few hours to get fresh water and

fruit and to make some repairs, for the pirate had not been idle in the fight--and then Berigord gave the nose of the good little craft to the sea, and drove her on with an honest wind, like a hound upon the scent. Iberville was vexed, but not unduly; he had the temper of a warrior who is both artist and gamester. As he said to Perrot: "Well, Nick, they've saved us the trouble of lifting the treasure; we'll see now who shall beach it."

He guessed that the English ships would sail to Boston for better arming ere they ventured to the English Channel. He knew the chances were against him, but it was his cue to keep heart in his followers. For days they sailed without seeing a single ship; then three showed upon the horizon and faded away. They kept on, passing Florida and Carolina, hoping to reach Boston before the treasure-ships, and to rob them at their own door. Their chances were fair, for the Maid of Provence had proved swift, good-tempered, and a sweet sailer in bad waters.

Iberville had reckoned well. One evening, after a sail northwards as fine as the voyage down was dirty, they came up gently within forty miles of Boston, and then, because there was nothing else to do, went idling up and down all night, keeping watch. The next morning there was a mist in the air, which might become fog. Iberville had dreaded this; but he was to have his chance, for even when Berigord's face lowered most the look-out from the shrouds called down that he sighted two ships. They were making for the coast. All sail was put on, they got away to meet the newcomers, and they were not long in finding these to be their quarry.

Phips did not think that any ship would venture against them so near Boston, and could not believe the Maid of Provence an enemy. He thought her an English ship eager to welcome them, but presently he saw the white ensign of France at the mizzen, and a round shot rattled through the rigging of the Bridgwater Merchant.

But he was two to one, and the game seemed with him. No time was wasted. Phips's ships came to and stood alongside, and the gunners got to work. The Bridgwater Merchant was high in the water, and her shot at first did little damage to the Maid of Provence, which, having the advantage of the wind, came nearer and nearer. The Swallow, with her twenty-odd guns, did better work, and carried away the foremast of the enemy, killing several men. But Iberville came on slowly, and, anxious to dispose of the Swallow first, gave her broadsides between wind and water, so that soon her decks were spotted with dying men, her bulwarks broken in, and her mainmast gone. The cannonade was heard in Boston, from which, a few hours later, two merchantmen set out for the scene of action, each carrying good guns.

But the wind suddenly sank, and as the Maid of Provence, eager to close with the Bridgwater Merchant, edged slowly down, a fog came between, and the firing ceased on both sides. Iberville let his ship drift on her path, intent on a hand-to-hand fight aboard the Bridgwater Merchant; the grappling-irons were ready, and as they drifted there was silence.

Every eye was strained. Suddenly a shape sprang out of the grey mist, and the Maid of Provence struck. There was a crash of timbers as the bows of the Swallow--it was she--were stove in, and then a wild cry. Instantly she began to sink. The grappling-irons remained motionless on the Maid of Provence. Iberville heard a commanding voice, a cheer, and saw a dozen figures jump from the shattered bow towards the bow of his own ship intent on fighting, but all fell short save one. It was a great

leap, but the Englishman made it, catching the chains, and scrambling on deck. A cheer greeted him--the Frenchmen could not but admire so brave a feat. The Englishman took no notice, but instantly turned to see his own ship lurch forwards and, without a sound from her decks, sink gently down to her grave. He stood looking at the place where she had been, but there was only mist. He shook his head and a sob rattled in his throat; his brave, taciturn crew had gone down without a cry. He turned and faced his enemies. They had crowded forwards--Iberville, Sainte-Helene, Perrot, Maurice Joval, and the staring sailors. He choked down his emotion and faced them all like an animal at bay as Iberville stepped forwards. Without a word Gering pointed to the empty scabbard at his side.

"No, pardon me," said Iberville drily, "not as our prisoner, monsieur. You have us at advantage; you will remain our guest."

"I want no quarter," said Gering proudly and a little sullenly.

"There can be no question of quarter, monsieur. You are only one against us all. You cannot fight; you saved your life by boarding us. Hospitality is sacred; you may not be a prisoner of war, for there is no war between our countries."

"You came upon a private quarrel?" asked Gering.

"Truly; and for the treasure--fair bone of fight between us."

There was a pause, in which Gering stood half turned from them, listening. But the Bridgwater Merchant had drifted away in the mist. Presently he turned again to Iberville with a smile defiant and triumphant. Iberville understood, but showed nothing of what he felt, and he asked Sainte-Helene to show Gering to the cabin.

When the fog cleared away there was no sign of the Bridgwater Merchant and Iberville, sure that she had made the port of Boston, and knowing that there must be English vessels searching for him, bore away to Quebec with Gering on board.

He parted from his rival the day they arrived--Perrot was to escort him a distance on his way to Boston. Gering thanked him for his courtesy.

"Indeed, then," said Iberville, "this is a debt--if you choose to call it so--for which I would have no thanks--no. For it would please me better to render accounts all at once some day, and get return in different form, monsieur."

"Monsieur," said Gering, a little grandly, "you have come to me three times; next time I will come to you."

"I trust that you will keep your word," answered Iberville, smiling.

That day Iberville, protesting helplessly, was ordered away to France on a man-of-war, which had rocked in the harbour of Quebec for a month awaiting his return. Even Frontenac himself could not help him, for the order had come from the French minister.

CHAPTER XVII

THE GIFT OF A CAPTIVE

Fortune had not been kind to Iberville, but still he kept a stoical cheerfulness. With the pride of a man who feels that he has impressed a woman, and knowing the strength of his purpose, he believed that Jessica should yet be his. Meanwhile matters should not lie still. In those days men made love by proxy, and Iberville turned to De Casson and Perrot.

The night before he started for France they sat together in a little house flanking the Chateau St. Louis. Iberville had been speaking.

"I know the strength of your feelings, Iberville," said De Casson, "but is it wise, and is it right?" Iberville made an airy motion with his hand. "My dear abbe, there is but one thing worth living for, and that is to follow your convictions. See: I have known you since you took me from my mother's last farewell. I have believed in you, cared for you, trusted you; we have been good comrades. Come, now, tell me: what would you think if my mind drifted! No, no, no! to stand by one's own heart is the gift of an honest man--I am a sad rogue, abbe, as you know, but I swear I would sooner let slip the friendship of King Louis himself than the hand of a good comrade. Well, my sword is for my king. I must obey him, I must leave my comrades behind, but I shall not forget, and they must not forget." At this he got to his feet, came over, laid a hand on the abbe's shoulder, and his voice softened: "Abbe, the woman shall be mine."

"If God wills so, Iberville." "He will, He will."

"Well," said Perrot, with a little laugh; "I think God will be good to a Frenchman when an Englishman is his foe."

"But the girl is English--and a heretic," urged the abbe helplessly.

Perrot laughed again. "That will make Him sorry for her."

Meanwhile Iberville had turned to the table, and was now reading a letter. A pleased look came on his face, and he nodded in satisfaction. At last he folded it up with a smile and sealed it. "Well," he said, "the English is not good, for I have seen my Shakespeare little this time back, but it will do--it must do. In such things rhetoric is nothing. You will take it, Perrot he said, holding up the letter.

Perrot reached out for it.

"And there is something more." Iberville drew from his finger a costly ring. It had come from the hand of a Spanish noble, whose place he had taken in Spain years before. He had prevented his men from despoiling the castle, and had been bidden to take what he would, and had chosen only this.

"Tell her," he said, "that it was the gift of a captive to me, and that it is the gift of a captive to her. For, upon my soul, I am prisoner to none other in God's world."

Perrot weighed the ring up and down in his hand. "Bien," he said, "monsieur, it is a fine speech, but I do not understand. A prisoner, eh?"

I remember when you were a prisoner with me upon the Ottawa. Only a boy --only a boy, but, holy Mother, that was different! I will tell her how you never gave up; how you went on the hunt after Grey Diver, the Iroquois. Through the woods, silent--silent for days and days, Indians all round us. Death in the brush, death in the tree-top, death from the river-bank. I said to you, Give up; but you kept on. Then there were days when there was no sleep--no rest--we were like ghosts. Sometimes we come to a settler's cabin and see it all smoking; sometimes to a fort and find only a heap of bones--and other things! But you would not give up; you kept on. What for? That Indian chief killed your best friend. Well, that was for hate; you keep on and on and on for hate--and you had your way with Grey Diver; I heard your axe crash in his skull. All for hate! And what will you do for love?--I will ask her what will you do for love. Ah, you are a great man--but yes! I will tell her so."

"Tell her what you please, Perrot."

Iberville hummed an air as at some goodly prospect. Yet when he turned to the others again there grew a quick mist in his eyes. It was not so much the thought of the woman as of the men. There came to him with sudden force how these two comrades had been ever ready to sacrifice themselves for him, and he ready to accept the sacrifice. He was not ashamed of the mist, but he wondered that the thing had come to him all at once. He grasped the hands of both, shook them heartily, then dashed his fingers across his eyes, and with the instinct of every imperfect man,--that touch of the aboriginal in all of us, who must have a sign for an emotion, he went to a cabinet and out came a bottle of wine.

An hour after, Perrot left him at the ship's side.

They were both cheerful. "Two years, Perrot; two years!" he said.

"Ah, mon grand capitaine!"

Iberville turned away, then came back again. "You will start at once?"

"At once; and the abbe shall write."

Upon the lofty bank of the St. Lawrence, at the Sault au Matelot, a tall figure clad in a cassock stood and watched the river below. On the high cliff of Point Levis lights were showing, and fires burning as far off as the island of Orleans. And in that sweet curve of shore, from the St. Charles to Beauport, thousands of stars seemed shining. Nearer still, from the heights, there was the same strange scintillation; the great promontory had a coronet of stars. In the lower town there was like illumination, and out upon the river trailed long processions of light. It was the feast of good Sainte Anne de Beaupre. All day long had there been masses and processions on land. Hundreds of Jesuits, with thousands of the populace, had filed behind the cross and the host. And now there was a candle in every window. Indians, half-breeds, coureurs du bois, native Canadians, seigneurs, and noblesse, were joining in the function. But De Casson's eyes were not for these. He was watching the lights of a ship that slowly made its way down the river among the canoes, and his eyes never left it till it had passed beyond the island of Orleans and was lost in the night.

"Mon cher!" he said, "mon enfant! She is not for him; she should not be. As a priest it were my duty to see that he should not marry her. As a man" he sighed--"as a man I would give my life for him."

He lifted his hand and made the sign of the cross towards that spot on the horizon whither Iberville had gone.

"He will be a great man some day," he added to himself--"a great man. There will be empires here, and when histories are written Pierre's shall be a name beside Frontenac's and La Salle's."

All the human affection of the good abbe's life centred upon Iberville. Giant in stature, so ascetic and refined was his mind, his life, that he had the intuition of a woman and, what was more, little of the bigotry of his brethren. As he turned from the heights, made his way along the cliff and down Mountain Street, his thoughts were still upon the same subject. He suddenly paused.

"He will marry the sword," he said, "and not the woman."

How far he was right we may judge if we enter the house of Governor Nicholls at New York one month later.

CHAPTER XVIII

MAIDEN NO MORE

It was late mid-summer, and just such an evening as had seen the attempted capture of Jessica Leveret years before. She sat at a window, looking out upon the garden and the river. The room was at the top of the house. It had been to her a kind of play-room when she had visited Governor Nicholls years before. To every woman memory is a kind of religion; and to Jessica as much as to any, perhaps more than to most, for she had imagination. She half sat, half knelt, her elbow on her knee, her soft cheek resting upon her firm, delicate hand. Her beauty was as fresh and sweet as on the day we first saw her. More, something deep and rich had entered into it. Her eyes had got that fine steadfastness which only deep tenderness and pride can give a woman: she had lived. She was smiling now, yet she was not merry; her brightness was the sunshine of a nature touched with an Arcadian simplicity. Such an one could not be wholly unhappy. Being made for others more than for herself, she had something of the divine gift of self-forgetfulness.

As she sat there, her eyes ever watching the river as though for some one she expected, there came from the garden beneath the sound of singing. It was not loud, but deep and strong:

"As the wave to the shore, as the dew to the leaf,
As the breeze to the flower,
As the scent of a rose to the heart of a child, 343
As the rain to the dusty land--
My heart goeth out unto Thee--unto Thee!
The night is far spent and the day is at hand.

"As the song of a bird to the call of a star,
As the sun to the eye,
As the anvil of man to the hammers of God,
As the snow to the north

Is my word unto Thy word--to Thy word!
The night is far spent and the day is at hand."

It was Morris who was singing. With growth of years had come increase of piety, and it was his custom once a week to gather about him such of the servants as would for the reading of Scripture.

To Jessica the song had no religious significance. By the time it had passed through the atmosphere of memory and meditation, it carried a different meaning. Her forehead dropped forward in her fingers, and remained so until the song ended. Then she sighed, smiled wistfully, and shook her head.

"Poor fellow! poor--Iberville!" she said, almost beneath her breath.

The next morning she was to be married. George Gering had returned to her, for the second time defeated by Iberville. He had proved himself a brave man, and, what was much in her father's sight, he was to have his share of Phips's booty. And what was still more, Gering had prevailed upon Phips to allow Mr. Leveret's investment in the first expedition to receive a dividend from the second. Therefore she was ready to fulfil her promise. Yet had she misgivings? For, only a few days before, she had sent for the old pastor at Boston, who had known her since she was a child. She wished, she said, to be married by him and no other at Governor Nicholls's house, rather than at her own home at Boston, where there was none other of her name.

The old pastor had come that afternoon, and she had asked him to see her that evening. Not long after Morris had done with singing there came a tapping at her door. She answered and old Pastor Macklin entered, a white-haired man of kindly yet stern countenance, by nature a gentleman, by practice a bigot. He came forward and took both her hands as she rose. "My dear young lady!" he said, and smiled kindly at her. After a word of greeting she offered him a chair, and came again to the window.

Presently she looked up and said very simply: "I am going to be married. You have known me ever since I was born: do you think I will make a good wife?"

"With prayer and chastening of the spirit, my daughter," he said.

"But suppose that at the altar I remembered another man?"

"A sin, my child, for which should be due sorrow." The girl smiled sadly. She felt poignantly how little he could help her.

"And if the man were a Catholic and a Frenchman?" she said.

"A papist and a Frenchman!" he cried, lifting up his hands.

"My daughter, you ever were too playful. You speak of things impossible. I pray you listen." Jessica raised her hand as if to stop him and to speak herself, but she let him go on. With the least encouragement she might have told him all. She had had her moment of weakness, but now it was past. There are times when every woman feels she must have a confidant, or her heart will burst--have counsel or she will die. Such a time had come to Jessica. But she now learned, as we all must learn, that we live our dark hour alone.

She listened as in a dream to the kindly bigot. When he had finished,

she knelt and received his blessing. All the time she wore that strange, quiet smile. Soon afterwards he left her.

She went again to the window. "A papist and a Frenchman--unpardonable sin!" she said into the distance. "Jessica, what a sinner art thou!"

Presently there was a tap, the door opened, and George Gering entered. She turned to receive him, but there was no great lighting of the face. He came quickly to her, and ran his arm round her waist. A great kindness looked out of her eyes. Somehow she felt herself superior to him--her love was less and her nature deeper. He pressed her fingers to his lips. "Of what were you thinking, Jessica?" he asked.

"Of what a sinner I am," she answered, with a sad kind of humour.

"What a villain must I be, then!" he responded. "Well, yes," she said musingly; "I think you are something of a villain, George."

"Well, well, you shall cure me of all mine iniquities," he said. "There will be a lifetime for it. Come, let us to the garden."

"Wait," she said. "I told you that I was a sinner, George; I want to tell you how."

"Tell me nothing; let us both go and repent," he rejoined, laughing, and he hurried her away. She had lost her opportunity.

Next morning she was married. The day was glorious. The town was garlanded, and there was not an English merchant or a Dutch burgher but wore his holiday dress. The ceremony ended, a traveller came among the crowd. He asked a hurried question or two and then edged away. Soon he made a stand under the trees, and, viewing the scene, nodded his head and said: "The abbe was right."

It was Perrot. A few hours afterwards the crowd had gone and the governor's garden was empty. Perrot still kept his watch under the tree, though why he could hardly say--his errand was useless now. But he had the gift of waiting. At last he saw a figure issue from a door and go down into the garden. He remembered the secret gate. He made a detour, reached it, and entered. Jessica was walking up and down in the pines. In an hour or so she was to leave for England. Her husband had gone to the ship to do some needful things, and she had stolen out for a moment's quiet. When Perrot faced her, she gave a little cry and started back. But presently she recovered, smiled at him, and said kindly: "You come suddenly, monsieur."

"Yet have I travelled hard and long," he answered.

"Yes?"

"And I have a message for you."

"A message?" she said abstractedly, and turned a little pale.

"A message and a gift from Monsieur Iberville." He drew the letter and the ring from his pocket and held them out, repeating Iberville's message. There was a troubled look in her eyes and she was trembling a little now, but she spoke clearly.

"Monsieur," she said, "you will tell Monsieur Iberville that I may not; I am married."

"So, madame," he said. "But I still must give my message." When he had done so he said: "Will you take the letter?" He held it out.

There was a moment's doubt and then she took it, but she did not speak.

"Shall I carry no message, madame?"

She hesitated. Then, at last: "Say that I wish him good fortune--with all my heart."

"Good fortune--ah, madame!" he answered, in a meaning tone.

"Say that I pray God may bless him, and make him a friend of my country," she added in a low, almost broken voice, and she held out her hand to him.

The gallant woodsman pressed it to his lips. "I am sorry, madame," he replied, with an admiring look.

She shook her head sadly. "Adieu, monsieur!" she said steadily and very kindly.

A moment after he was gone. She looked at the missive steadfastly for a moment, then thrust it into the folds of her dress and, very pale, walked quietly to the house, where, inside her own room, she lighted a candle. She turned the letter over in her hand once or twice, and her fingers hung at the seal. But all at once she raised it to her lips, and then with a grave, firm look, held it in the flame and saw it pass in smoke. It was the last effort for victory.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Aboriginal in all of us, who must have a sign for an emotion
Learned, as we all must learn, that we live our dark hour alone

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