

THE REFUGEES

By A. CONAN DOYLE,
Author of "The Return of Sherlock Holmes"

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(Continued from Thursday.)

"On my life," said De Catinat, "if these devils are indeed unchained they will need old Frontenac back if they are not to be swept into the river."
"He was an enemy of the church, and the right hand of the foul fiend in this country," said a voice from the bottom of the canoe.

It was the friar, who had succeeded in getting rid of the buckskin glove and belt with which the two Americans had gagged him.

"Why should we take him farther?" asked Amos. "He is but weight for us to carry, and I cannot see that we profit by his company. Let us put him out."

"And have him maybe in front of us, warning the blackjackets," said old Ephraim.

"On that island, then?"

"Very good. He can haul the first of his folk who pass."

They shot over to the island and landed the friar, who said nothing, but cursed them with his eye. They left with him a small supply of biscuit and of flour to last him until he should be picked up. Then, having passed a bend in the river, they ran their canoe ashore in a little cove, where they laid out their small stock of provisions and ate a hearty breakfast while discussing what their plans should be for the future.

They were not badly provided for their journey. The captain of the Gloucester brig in which the Americans had started from Quebec knew Ephraim Savage well, as who did not upon the New England coast? He had accepted his bill, therefore, at three months' date, and he had let him have in return three excellent guns, a good supply of ammunition and enough money to provide for all his wants. In this way he had hired the canoe and the Indians and had fitted her with meat and biscuit to last them for ten days at the least.

"It's like the breath of life to me to feel the heat of a gun and to smell the trees round me," said Amos. "Why, it cannot be more than a hundred leagues from here to Albany or Schenectady right through the forest."
"Aye, lad, but how is the gal to walk a hundred leagues through a forest? No, no; let us keep water under our keel and lean on the Lord."

"Then there is only one way for it. We must make the Richelieu river and keep right along to Lake Champlain and Lake St. Sacrement. There we should be close by the headwaters of the Hudson."

"It is a dangerous road," said De Catinat, who understood the conversation of his companions even when he was unable to join in it. "We should need to skirt the country of the Mohawks."

"It is the only one, I guess. It is that or nothings."

"And I have a friend upon the Richelieu river who, I am sure, would help us on our way," said De Catinat, with a smile. "You have heard me talk of Charles de la Noue, Seigneur de Ste. Marie. His seignury lies on the Richelieu, a little to the south of Fort St. Louis."

"Good!" cried Amos. "If we have a friend there we shall do well. That clinches it, then, and we shall hold fast by the river."

And so for a long week the little party toiled up the great waterway, keeping ever to the southern bank, where there were fewer clearings. The clearings radiating out from the villages, and every cottage was built with an eye to the military necessities of the whole, so that the defense might make a stand at all points and might finally center upon the stone manor house and the mill.

At every step in this country, whether the traveler were on the St. Lawrence or west upon the lakes or down upon the banks of the Mississippi or south in the country of the Cherokees and of the Creeks, he would still find the inhabitants in the same state of dreadful expectancy and from the same cause. The Iroquois, as they were named by the French, or the Five Nations, as they called themselves, hung like a cloud over the whole great continent.

For half a century these tribes had nursed a grudge toward the French since Champlain and some of his followers had taken part with their enemies against them. During all these years they had brooded in their forest villages, flashing out now and again in some border outrage, but waiting for the most part until their chance should come. And now it seemed to them that it had come. They had destroyed all the tribes who might have allied themselves with the white men. They had isolated them. They had supplied themselves with good guns and plenty of ammunition from the Dutch and English of New York. The long thin line of French settlements lay naked before them.

Such was the situation as the little party of refugees paddled along the bank of the river, seeking the only path which could lead them to peace and to freedom. Yet it was, as they well knew, a dangerous road to follow. All down the Richelieu were the outposts and blockhouses of the French. The blockhouses themselves might hold their own, but to the little

party who had to travel down from one to the other the situation was full of deadly peril. It was true that the Iroquois were not at war with the English, but they would discriminate little when on the warpath, and the Americans, even had they wished to do so, could not separate their fate from that of their two French companions.

As they ascended the St. Lawrence they met many canoes coming down. More than once these wayfarers wished to have speech with the fugitives, but they pushed onward, disregarding their signs and calls. From below nothing overtook them, for they paddled from early morning until late at night.

On the seventh day they rested at a point but a few miles from the mouth of the Richelieu river, where a large blockhouse, Fort Richelieu, had been built by M. de Saurel. Once past this, they had no great distance to go to reach the seignury of De Catinat's friend of the noblesse, who would help them upon their way. They had spent the night upon a little island in mid-stream, and at early dawn they were about to thrust the canoe out again from the sand lined cove in which she lay when Ephraim Savage growled in his throat and pointed out across the water.

A large canoe was coming up the river, flying along as quick as a dozen arrows could drive it. In the stern sat a dark figure, which bent forward with every swing of the paddles as though consumed by eagerness to push onward. Even at that distance there was no mistaking it. It was the fanatical monk whom they had left behind them.

Concealed among the brushwood, they watched their pursuers fly past and vanish round a curve in a stream. "We'd have done better either to put him overboard or to take him as ballast," said Ephraim.

"Well, we can't take the back track, anyhow," said Amos.

"And yet how can we go on?" said De Catinat despondently. "This vindictive devil will give word at the fort and at every other point along the river."

"Let me cipher it out," Amos Green sat on a fallen maple with his head sunk upon his hands. "Well," said he presently, "if it's no good going on and no good going back, there's only one way, and that is to go to one side. We can't go to the north, so it follows that we must go to the south."

"Leave the canoe?"

"It's our only chance. We can cut through the woods and come out near this friendly house on the Richelieu. The friar will lose our trail then, and we'll have no more trouble with him if he stays on the St. Lawrence."

"There's nothing else for it," said Captain Ephraim ruefully. "It's not my way to go by land if I can get by water, so you must lay the course and keep her straight, Amos."

"It is not far, and it will not take us long. Let us get over to the southern bank, and we shall make a start. If madame tires, De Catinat, we shall take turns to carry her."

"Ah, monsieur, you cannot think what a good walker I am! In this splendid air one might go on forever."

"We will cross, then." In a very few minutes they were at the other side and had landed at the edge of the forest. There the guns and ammunition were allotted to each man, and his share of provisions and of the scanty baggage. Then, having paid the Indians and having instructed them to say nothing of their movements, they turned their backs upon the river and plunged into the silent woods.

CHAPTER XX.

LEAVING Fort St. Louis upon their right, the travelers pushed onward as swiftly as they could, for the sun was so low in the heavens that the bushes in the clearings threw shadows like trees.

Then suddenly as they peered in front of them between the trunks the green of the sward turned to the blue of the water, and they saw a broad river running swiftly before them. Amos and De Catinat had both been upon the bosom of the Richelieu before, and their hearts bounded as they looked upon it, for they knew that this was the straight path which led them, the one to home and the other to peace and freedom.

Across the river was the terrible Iroquois country, and at two points they could see the smoke of fires curling up into the evening air. They followed the track which led down the eastern bank. As they pushed onward a stern military challenge suddenly brought them to a stand, and they saw the gleam of two musket barrels which covered them from a thicket overlooking the path.

"We are friends," cried De Catinat.

"Whence come you, then?" asked an invisible sentinel.

"From Quebec."

"And whither are you going?"

"To visit M. Charles de la Noue, seignury of Ste. Marie."

"Very good. It is quite safe. Du Lhut. They have a lady with them too. I greet you, madame, in the name

of my father."

Two men had emerged from the bushes, one of whom might have passed as a full blooded Indian had it not been for these courteous words, which he uttered in excellent French. He was a tall, slight young man, very dark, with piercing black eyes and a grim, square, relentless mouth which could only have come with Indian descent.

The other was undoubtedly a pure Frenchman, elderly, dark and wiry, with a bristling black beard and a fierce, eager face. Leaning upon his long brown gun, he stood watching the party, while his companion advanced toward them.

"You will excuse our precautions," said he. "We never know what device these rascals may adopt to entrap us. I fear, madame, that you have had a long and very tiring journey. My mother will be very glad to welcome you and to see to every want. But you, sir, I have surely seen you before."

"And I you," cried the guardsman. "My name is Amory de Catinat, once of the regiment of Picardy. Surely you are Achille de la Noue de Ste. Marie."

"Yes, it is I," the young man answered, holding out his hand and smiling in a somewhat constrained fashion. "I do not wonder that you should hesitate, for when you saw me last I was in a very different dress from this. We have one life for the forest and one for the cities, though, indeed, my good father will not have it so and carries Versailles with him wherever he goes. But it is time for our relief, and so we may guide you home."

Two men in the rude dress of Canadian censeitaires, or farmers, but carrying their muskets in a fashion which



"Yes, it is I," the young man answered, told De Catinat's trained senses that they were disciplined soldiers, had suddenly appeared upon the scene. Young de la Noue gave them a few curt injunctions and then accompanied the refugees along the path.

"You may not know my friend here," said he, pointing to the other sentinel, "but I am quite sure that his name is not unfamiliar to you. This is Grey-solon du Lhut."

Both Amos and De Catinat looked with the deepest curiosity and interest at the famous leader of coureurs de bois, a man whose whole life had been spent in pushing westward, ever westward, saying little, writing nothing, but always the first wherever there was danger to meet or difficulty to overcome.

"What do you think of those fires over yonder, Du Lhut?" asked young de la Noue.

The adventurer glanced over at the two little plumes of smoke which stood straight up against the red evening sky. "I don't like them," said he. "They are Iroquois, then?"

"Yes."

"Well, at least it proves that they are on the other side of the river." "I do not know until I saw the fires over yonder."

"And how did they tell you?"

"Tut! An Indian papoose could have told," said Du Lhut impatiently. "Iroquois on the trail do nothing without an object. They have an object, then, in showing that smoke. If their war parties were over yonder there would be no object. Therefore their braves must have crossed the river. And they could not get over to the north without being seen from the fort."

"Then they may be in the woods round us. We may be in danger!" cried de la Noue.

De Catinat cast a glance round him at the grand tree trunks, the fading foliage, the smooth sward underneath, with the long evening shadows barred across it. How difficult it was to realize that behind all this beauty there lurked a danger so deadly and horrible that a man alone might well shrink from it, far more one who had the woman whom he loved walking within hand's touch of him! It was with a long heartfelt sigh of relief that he saw a wall of stockade in the midst of a large clearing in front of him, with the stone manor house rising above it. In a line from the stockade were a dozen cottages, with cedar shingled roofs turned up in the Norman fashion, in which dwelt the habitants under the protection of the seigneur's chateau. At either corner a small brass cannon peeped through an embrasure. As they passed the gate the guard inside closed it and placed the huge wooden bars into position. A little crowd of men, women and children were gathered round the door of the chateau, and a man appeared to be seated on a high backed chair upon the threshold.

(To Be Continued.)

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