

# THE REFUGEES

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

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(Continued from Friday.)

"You know my father," said the young man, with a shrug of his shoulders. "He will have it that he has never left his Norman castle and that he still the Seigneur de la Noue, the greatest man within a day's ride of open and of the richest blood of Normandy. He is now taking his dues and a yearly oath from his tenants. He would not think it becoming, if the governor himself were to visit him, pause in the middle of so august a ceremony. But, if it would interest you, you may step this way and wait until he has finished. You, madame, I will take at once to my mother, if you will be so kind as to follow me."

The sight was, to the Americans at least, a novel one. A triple row of men, women and children were standing round in a semicircle, the men high and sunburned, the women neatly and clean, with white caps up their heads, the children open mouthed and round eyed, awed into an unusual quiet by the reverent bearing of their elders. In the center, on his high-backed carved chair, there sat an elderly man, very stiff and erect, with an exceedingly solemn face. He was a figure of a man, tall and broad, with large, strong features, clean shaven and deeply lined, a huge beak of nose and strong, shaggy eyebrows, which arched right up to the great eyes, which he wore full and long, as had been worn in France in his youth. On his wig was placed a white hat, cocked jauntily at one side, with red feathers streaming round it, and he wore a coat of cinnamon colored cloth, with silver at the neck and pockets, which was still very handsome, though it bore signs of having been saved and mended more than once. As the seigneur rose, his son, who had returned, took De Catinat by the arm.

"Father," said he, "this is M. de Catinat, whom you may remember some years ago at Quebec."

The seigneur bowed with much consideration.

"You are extremely welcome to my states, both you and your body servants."

"They are my friends, monsieur. This is M. Amos Green, and Captain Ephraim Savage. My wife is traveling with me, but your courteous son has kindly taken her to your lady."

"I am honored—honored indeed!" cried the old man, with a bow and a flourish. "I remember you very well, for it is not so common to meet men of quality in this country. Now that I think of it, the second son of our great-grandfather married the niece of one of the De la Noues of Anelys, which is one of our cadet branches. Kinsman, you are welcome!" He threw his arms suddenly round De Catinat.

The young guardsman was only too delighted to find himself admitted to such an intimacy.

"I will not intrude long upon your hospitality," said he. "We are journeying down to Lake Champlain, and we hope in a day or two to be ready to go on."

"A suit of rooms shall be laid at your disposal as long as you do me the honor to remain here. Peste! It is not every day that I can open my gates to a man with good blood in his veins. Ah, sir, that is what I feel most in my exile, for who is there with whom I can talk as equal to equal? You are weary and hungry, you and your friends. Come up with me to the tapestried saloon, and we shall see if my stewards can find anything for your refreshment. You play piquet, if I remember right. Ah, my skill is leaving me, and I should be glad to try a hand or two with you."

The manor house was high and strong, built of graystone in a framework of wood. The large iron clamped door through which they entered was pierced for musketry fire and led into a succession of cellars and storehouses in which the beets, carrots, potatoes, cabbages, cured meat, dried oaks and other winter supplies were placed. A winding stone staircase led them through a huge kitchen, flung and lofty, from which branched the rooms of the servants, or retainers, as the old nobleman preferred to call them. Above this again was the principal suit, centering in the dining hall, with its huge fireplace and rude homestead furniture. The seigneur explained that he had already supped; but, having allowed himself to be persuaded into joining them, he ended by eating more than Ephraim Savage and drinking more than Du Lhut.

asked. Over on the other side, however, the gray plumes of smoke still streamed up above the trees as a sign that their enemies were not very far off.

The refugees were rested now and refreshed and of one mind about pushing on.

"I am not frightened, Amory, and I am quite rested now," said Adele. "We shall be so much more happy when we are in the English provinces, for even now how do we know that that dreadful friar may not come with orders to drag us back to Quebec and Paris?"

It was indeed very possible that the vindictive Franciscan, when satisfied that they had not ascended to Montreal or remained at Three Rivers, might seek them on the banks of the Richelieu. The seigneur was friendly, but the seigneur could not disobey the governor's order. A great hand stretching all the way from Versailles seemed to hang over them, even here in the heart of the virgin forest, ready to snatch them up and carry them back into degradation.

But the seigneur and his son, who knew nothing of their pressing reasons for haste, were strenuous in urging De Catinat the other way, and in this they were supported by the silent Du Lhut.

"You have seen my little place," said the old nobleman, with a wave of his beruffled, ring covered hand. "It is not what I should wish it, but such as it is, it is most heartily yours for the winter if you and your comrades would honor me by remaining. As to madame, I doubt not that my own dame and she will find plenty to amuse and occupy them, which reminds me, De Catinat, that you have not yet been presented. Theuriet, go to your mistress and inform her that I request her to be so good as to come to us in the hall of the dais."

De Catinat was too seasoned to be easily startled, but he was somewhat taken aback when the lady, to whom the old nobleman always referred in terms of exaggerated respect, proved to be as like a full blooded Indian squaw as the hall of the dais was to a French barn.

"Allow me to present you, M. de Catinat," said the Seigneur de Ste. Marie solemnly, "to my wife, Onega de la Noue de Ste. Marie, chateleine by right of marriage to this seigneur, while retaining in her own right the hereditary chieftainship on the distant side of the nation of the Onondagas. My angel, I have been endeavoring to persuade our friends to remain with us at Ste. Marie."

"At least leave your white lily at Ste. Marie," said the dusky princess, speaking in excellent French and clasping with her ruddy fingers the ivory hand of Adele. "We will hold her safe for you until the ice softens and the leaves and the partridge berries come once more. I know my people, monsieur, and I tell you that the woods are full of murder."

De Catinat was more moved by the impressive manner of his hostess than by any of the other warnings which he had received. Surely she, if any one, must be able to read the signs of the times.

"I know not what to do!" he cried in despair. "I must go on, and yet how can I expose her to these perils? I would fain stay the winter, but you must take my word for it, that it is not possible."

"Du Lhut, you know how things should be ordered," said the seigneur. "What should you advise my friend to do, since he is so set upon getting to the English provinces before the winter comes?"

"There is but one way," said Du Lhut, "though even in it there is danger. The woods are safer than the river, for the reefs are full of cached canoes. Five leagues from here is the blockhouse of Poitou, and fifteen miles beyond that of Auvergne. We will go tomorrow to Poitou through the woods



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and see it all be sure. I will go with you, and I give you my word that if the Iroquois are there Greyolon du Lhut will know it. The lady we shall leave here, and if we find that all is safe we shall come back for her. Then in the same fashion we shall advance to Auvergne, and there you must wait until you hear where their war parties are. It is my mind that it will not be very long before we know."

And so it was at last agreed, and Adele was consigned to the care of the lady of Ste. Marie, while De Catinat swore that without a pause he would return from Poitou to fetch her. The old nobleman and his son would fain have joined them in their adventure, but they had their own charge to watch and the lives of many in their keeping, while a small party was safer in the woods.

From La Noue to Poitou was but twelve miles down the river, but by the woodland route the distance was more than doubled. The four men walked in single file, Du Lhut leading. De Catinat walked behind, then Ephraim Savage, and then Amos, all with their weapons ready and with every sense upon the alert. By midday they were more than halfway and halted in a thicket for a scanty meal of bread and cheese. For an hour more they picked their way through the woods, following in the steps of the old French pioneer.

Suddenly Du Lhut dropped upon his knees and stooped his ear to the ground. He rose, shook his head and walked on with a grave face.

"Did you hear something?" whispered Amos.

Du Lhut put his finger to his lips and then in an instant was down upon his face with his ear fixed to the ground. He sprang up with the look of a man who has heard what he expected to hear.

"Walk on," said he quietly, "and behave exactly as you have done all day."

"What is it, then?"

"Indians."

"In front of us?"

"No; behind us. They are following us—two, I think. Do not look round. Walk on as before. They are Iroquois."

"And pursuing us?"

"No; we are pursuing them."

"How far off are they?"

"About 200 paces, I think."

"They cannot see us then?"

"I think not, but I cannot be sure. They are following our trail, I think."

"What shall we do then?"

"Let us make a circle and get behind them."

Turning sharp to the left, he led them in a long curve through the woods, hurrying swiftly and yet silently under the darkest shadow of the trees. Then he turned again and presently halted.

"This is our own track," said he.

"Aye, and two redskins have passed over it!" cried Amos, bending down and pointing to marks which were entirely invisible to Ephraim Savage and De Catinat.

"A full grown warrior and a lad on his first warpath," said Du Lhut. "They are moving fast, you see, for you can hardly see the heel marks of their moccasins. They walked one behind the other. Now let us follow them as they followed us and see if we have better luck."

He sped swiftly along the trail, with his musket cocked in his hand, the others following hard upon his heels, but there was no sound and no sign of life from the shadowy woods in front of them. Suddenly Du Lhut stopped and grounded his weapon.

"They are still behind us," he said. "This is the point where we branched off. They have hesitated a moment, as you can see by their footmarks, and then they have followed on."

"If we go round again and quicken our pace we may overtake them."

"No; they are on their guard now. Lie here behind the fallen log, and we shall see if we can catch a glimpse of them."

A great rotten trunk, all green with mold and blotched with pink and purple fungi, lay to one side of where they stood. Behind this the Frenchman crouched, and his three companions followed his example, peering through the brushwood screen in front of them. Ten minutes passed, and there was no sign of any living thing behind them.

"They are over in yonder thicket," whispered Du Lhut.

"Have you seen them?"

"No."

"How do you know, then?"

"I saw a squirrel come from his hole in the great white birch tree yonder. He scuttled back again as if something had scared him. From his hole he can see down into that brushwood."

"Do you think that they know that we are here?"

"They cannot see us. But they are suspicious."

"Shall we rush for the brushwood?"

"They would pick two of us off and be gone like shadows through the woods. No; we had best go on our way."

"But they will follow us."

"I hardly think that they will. We are four and they are only two, and they know now that we are on our guard. We must push on fast now, for where there are two Iroquois there are likely to be 200 not very far off. Ah, here is the Ajidamo creek, where the Indians set the sturgeon nets. It is still seven miles to Poitou."

"We shall be there before nightfall, then?"

"I think that we had best wait for nightfall before we make our way in. Since the Iroquois scouts are out as far as this it is likely that they lie thick round us."

(To Be Continued.)

**CHAPTER XXI.**

TWO days were spent by the travelers at the seigneurie of Ste. Marie, and they would very willingly have spent longer, for the quarters were comfortable and the welcome warm, but already the reds of autumn were turning to brown, and they knew how suddenly the ice and snow came in those northern lands and how impossible it would be to finish their journey if winter were once fairly upon them. The old nobleman had sent his scouts by land and by water, but there were no signs of the Iroquois upon the eastern bank, so that it was clear that Du Lhut had been mis-

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