

# THE REFUGEES

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(Continued from Tuesday.)

leg sticking straight up into the air from behind a log showed where one bullet at least had gone home, but there was little to aim at save a puff and flash from among the leaves or the shadowy figure of a warrior seen for an instant as he darted from one tree trunk to the other. Seven of the Canadians had already been hit, but only three were mortally wounded. The other four still kept manfully to their loopholes. The women sat in a line upon the ground, beneath the level of the holes, each with a saucerful of bullets and a canister of powder, passing up the loaded guns to the fighting men.

At first the attack had been all upon the south face, but as fresh bodies of the Iroquois came up their line spread and lengthened until the whole east face was girt with fire, which gradually enveloped the north also. The fort was ringed in by a great loop of smoke save only where the broad river flowed past them. Over near the farther bank the canoes were lurking, and one, manned by ten warriors, attempted to pass up the stream, but a good shot from the brass gun dashed in her side and sank her, while a second of grape left only four of the swimmers, whose high sculp locks stood out above the water like the back fins of some strange fish. On the inland side, however, the seigneur had ordered the cannon to be served no more, for the broad embrasures drew the enemy's fire, and of the men who had been struck half were among those who worked the guns.

The old nobleman strutted about with his white ruffles and his clouded cane behind the line of parched, smoke grimed men, tapping his snuffbox and shouting out his little jests.

"What do you think of it, Du Lhut?" he asked.

"They seem to be drawing closer upon the east face, and I think that they will make a rush there before long," said Du Lhut.

The fire had indeed grown much fiercer upon the side which was defended by De Catinat, and it was plain that the main force of the Iroquois was gathered at that point. From every log and trunk and cleft and bush came the red flash with the gray halo, and the bullets sang in a continuous stream through the loopholes. Amos had whittled a little hole for himself about a foot above the ground and lay upon his face, loading and firing in his own quiet, methodical fashion. Beside him stood Ephraim Savage, his mouth set grimly, his eyes flashing from under his down drawn brows and his whole soul absorbed in the smiting of the Amalekites. De Catinat was bearing himself like an experienced soldier, walking up and down among his men with short words of praise or reproof—those fire words, rough and blunt, which bring a glow to the heart and a flush to the cheek. Seven of his men were down, but as the attack grew fiercer upon his side it slackened upon the others, and the seigneur, with his son and Du Lhut, brought ten men to re-enforce him. De la Noue was holding out his snuffbox to De Catinat when a shrill scream from behind them made them both look round. Onega, the Indian wife was wringing her hands over the body of her son. A glance showed that the bullet had pierced his heart and that he was dead.

For an instant the old nobleman's thin face grew a shade paler and the hand which held out the little gold box shook like a branch in the wind.

"The De la Noues always die upon the field of honor," he remarked. "I think that we should have some more men in the angle by the gun."

And now it became clear why it was that the Iroquois had chosen the eastern face for their main attack. It was that the clump of cover lay midway between the edge of the forest and the stockade. A storming party could creep as far as that and gather there for the final rush. First one crouching warrior and then a second and then a third darted across the little belt of open space and threw themselves down among the bushes. The fourth was hit and lay with his back broken a few paces out from the edge of the wood, but a stream of warriors continued to venture the passage until thirty-six had got across, and the little patch of underwood was full of lurking savages. Amos Green's time had come.

From where he lay he could see the white patch where he had cut the bark from the birch sapling, and he knew that immediately underneath it lay the powder bag. He sighted the mark and then slowly lowered his barrel until he had got to the base of the little tree as nearly as he could guess it among the tangle of bushes. The bullet penetrated the bag, and there was an explosion which shook the manor house and swayed the whole line of stout stockades as though they were cornstalks in a breeze. Up to the highest summits of the trees went the huge column of blue smoke, and after the first roar there was a deadly silence, which was broken by the patter and thud of falling bodies.

The blow was a heavy one. Of the thirty-six warriors, all picked for their valor, only four regained the shelter of the woods and those so torn and shattered that they were spent men. Al-

ready the Indians had lost heavily, and this fresh disaster made them reconsider their plan of attack. Their fire gradually slackened.

"Is it possible that they are going to abandon the attack?" cried De Catinat joyously.

But the wily Du Lhut shook his head. "A wolf would as soon leave a half gnawed bone as an Iroquois such a prize as this."

"But they have lost heavily."

"Aye, but not so heavily as ourselves in proportion to our numbers. They have lost fifty out of a thousand and we twenty out of three score. No, no; they are holding a council, and we shall soon hear from them again. But it may be some hours first, and if you will take my advice you will have an hour's sleep, for you are not, as I can see by your eyes, as used to doing without it as I am."

De Catinat was indeed weary to the last pitch of human endurance. Amos Green and the seaman had already wrapped themselves in their blankets and sunk to sleep under the shelter of the stockade. The soldier rushed upstairs to say a few words of comfort to the trembling Adele, and then, throwing himself down upon a couch, he slept the dreamless sleep of an exhausted man. When at last he was aroused by a fresh sputter of musketry fire from the woods the sun was already low in the heavens, and the mellow light of evening tinged the bare walls of the room. He sprang from his couch, seized his musket and rushed downstairs. The defenders were gathered at their loopholes once more, while Du Lhut, the seigneur and Amos Green were whispering eagerly together.

"What is it, then? Are they coming on?" he asked.

"They are up to some devilry," said Du Lhut, peering out at the corner of the embrasure. "They are gathering thickly at the east fringe, and yet the firing comes from the north. It is not the Indian way to attack across the open, and yet, if they think help is coming from the fort, they might venture."

"The wood in front of us is alive with them," said Amos. "They are as busy as beavers among the underwood."

"Perhaps they are going to attack from this side and cover the attack by a fire from the flank."

"That is what I think," cried the seigneur. "Bring the spare guns up here and all the men except five for each side."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when a shrill yell rose from the wood, and in an instant a cloud of warriors burst out and charged across the open, howling, springing and waving their guns and tomahawks in the air. Some of those in front bore canoes between them, and as they reached the stockade they planted them against it and swarmed up them as if they had been scaling ladders. Others fired through the embrasures and loopholes, the muzzles of their guns touching those of the defenders, while others again sprang unaided on to the tops of the palisades and jumped fearlessly down upon the inner side. The Canadians fired while they had time to load, and then, clubbing their muskets, they smashed furiously at every red head which showed above the rails.

The din within the stockade was infernal, the shouts and cries of the French, the whooping of the savages and the terrified screaming of the frightened women blending into one dreadful uproar, above which could be heard the high, shrill voice of the old seigneur imploring his censitaires to stand fast. With Du Lhut, Amos, De Catinat and Ephraim Savage, he was ever in the forefront of the defense. So desperately did they fight, the sword and musket butt outreaching the tomahawk, that though at one time fifty Iroquois were over the palisades they had slain or driven back nearly all of them, when a fresh wave burst suddenly over the south face, which had been stripped of its defenders. Du Lhut saw in an instant that the inclosure was lost and that only one thing could save the house.

"Hold them for an instant!" he screamed, and, rushing at the brass gun, he struck his flint and steel and fired it straight into the thick of the savages. Then, as they recoiled for an instant, he stuck a nail into the touch-hole and drove it home with a blow from the butt of his gun. Dashing across the yard, he spiked the gun at the other corner and was back at the door as the remnants of the garrison were hurled against it by the rush of the assailants. The Canadians darted in and swung the ponderous mass of wood into position, breaking the leg of the foremost warrior who had striven to follow them. Then for an instant they had time for breathing and for counsel.

CHAPTER XXIII.

But their case was a very evil one. Had the guns been lost, so that they might be turned upon the door, all further resistance would have been vain, but Du Lhut's presence of mind had saved them from that danger. The two guns upon the river face and the canoes were safe, for they were commanded by the windows of the house. But

their numbers were terribly reduced, and those who were left were weary and wounded and spent. Nineteen had gained the house, but one had been shot through the body, while a second had his shoulder cleft by a tomahawk and could no longer raise his musket. Du Lhut, De la Noue and De Catinat were uninjured, but Ephraim Savage had a bullet hole in his forearm and Amos was bleeding from a cut upon the face.

A few shots from the barricaded windows sufficed to clear the inclosure, for it was all exposed to their aim, but on the other hand the Indians had the shelter of the stockade now, and from the farther side of it they kept up a fierce fire upon the windows. Half a dozen of the censitaires returned the fusillade, while the leaders consulted as to what had best be done.

"We have twenty-five women and fourteen children," said the seigneur. "I am sure that you will agree with me, gentlemen, that our first duty is toward them. Some of you, like myself, have lost sons or brothers this day. Let us at least save our wives and sisters."

"No Iroquois canoes have passed up the river," said one of the Canadians. "If the women start in the darkness they can get away to the fort."

"By Ste. Anne of Beaupre!" exclaimed Du Lhut, "I think it would be well if you could get your men out of this also, for I cannot see how it is to be held until morning."

"Tut! tut! What nonsense is this!" cried De la Noue. "Are we to abandon the manor house of Ste. Marie to the first gang of savages who choose to make an attack upon it? No, no, gentlemen; there are still nearly a score of us, and when the garrison learns that we are so pressed, which will be by tomorrow morning at the latest, they will certainly send us relief."

"If you stand by the fort I will not desert you," said Du Lhut, "and yet it is a pity to sacrifice brave men for nothing."

"The canoes will hardly hold the women and children as it is," cried Theuret. "There are but two large and four small. There is not space for a single man."

The Iroquois were very quiet now, and an occasional dropping shot from the trees or the stockade was the only sign of their presence. The twilight was gathering in and the sun had already sunk beneath the treetops. Leaving a watchman at each window, the leaders went round to the back of the house, where the canoes were lying upon the bank. There were no signs of the enemy upon the river to the north of them.

"We are in luck," said Amos. "The clouds are gathering, and there will be little light."

"It is luck, indeed, since the moon is only three days past the full," answered Du Lhut. "I wonder that the Iroquois have not cut us off upon the water, but it is likely that their canoes have gone south to bring up another war party."

"In an hour it might be dark enough to start."

"I think that there is rain in those clouds, and that will make it darker still."

The women and children were assembled, and their places in each boat were assigned to them. To Onega, the Indian wife of the seigneur, who was as wary and as experienced as a war sachem of her people, the command of the women was intrusted.

"It is not very far, Adele," said De Catinat. "It is but a league or two."

"But I do not wish to leave you, Amory. We have been together in all our troubles."

"My dear love, you will tell them at the fort how things are with us, and they will bring us help."

"Let the others do that, and I will stay. I will not be useless, Amory. Onega has taught me to load a gun. I will not be afraid, indeed I will not."

"You must not ask it, Adele. It is impossible, child. I could not let you stay. It is for my sake, dear. You do not know what a load it will be from my heart when I know that you are safe. And you need not be afraid for me. We can easily hold the place until morning."

Adele was silent, but her hands tightened upon his arm. Her husband was still endeavoring to reassure her when a groan burst from the watcher in the window which overlooked the stream.

"There is a canoe on the river to the north of us!" he cried.

"How many warriors are in it?" asked the seigneur.

"I cannot see. The light is not very good, and it is in the shadow of the bank."

"Which way is it coming?"

"It is coming this way. Ah, it shoots out into the open now, and I can see it! May the good Lord be praised!"

"What is it then?" cried De la Noue impatiently.

"It is not an Iroquois canoe. There is but one man in it. He is a Canadian."

"A Canadian!" cried Du Lhut, springing up to the window. "Who but a madman would venture into such a hornet's nest alone? Ah, yes; I can see him now. He keeps well out from the bank to avoid their fire. Now he is in midstream, and he turns toward us."

"It is a Jesuit," said one, craning his neck. "They are everywhere there is most danger."

"No. I can see his capote," said another. "It is a Franciscan friar."

An instant later there was the sound of a canoe grounding upon the pebbles, the door was unbarred, and a man strode in attired in the long, dark gown of the Franciscans. He cast a rapid glance around and then, stepping up to De Catinat, laid his hand upon his shoulder.

"So! You have not escaped me," said he. "We have caught the evil seed before it had time to root."

(To Be Continued.)

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