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THE RAID FROM BEAUSEJOUR

AND

HOW THE CARTER BOYS LIFTED THE MORTGAGE

TWO STORIES OF ACADIE

BY CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS

CONTENTS.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

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THE RAID FROM BEAUSEJOUR.

CHAPTER I.

"BEAUBASSIN MUST GO!"

On the hill of Beausejour, one April morning in the year 1750 A.D., a little group of French soldiers stood watching, with gestures of anger and alarm, the approach of several small ships across the yellow waters of Chignecto Bay. The ships were flying British colors. Presently they came to anchor near the mouth of the Missaguash,

a narrow tidal river about two miles to the southeast of Beausejour. There the ships lay swinging at their cables, and all seemed quiet on board. The group on Beausejour knew that the British would attempt no landing for some hours, as the tide was scarce past the ebb, and half a mile of red mire lay between the water and the firm green edges of the marsh.

The French soldiers were talking in loud, excited tones. As they spoke a tallish lad drew near and listened eagerly. The boy, who was apparently about sixteen or seventeen years of age, was clad in the rough, yellow-gray homespun cloth of the Acadians. His name was Pierre Lecorbeau, and he had just come from the village of Beaubassin to carry eggs, milk, and cheeses to the camp on Beausejour. The words he now heard seemed to concern him deeply, for his dark face paled anxiously as he listened.

"Yes, I tell you," one of the soldiers was saying, "Beaubassin must go. Monsieur the abbe has said so. You know, he came into camp this morning about daybreak, and has been shut up with the colonel ever since. But he talks so loud when he's angry that Jacques has got hold of all his plans. His Reverence has brought two score of his Micmacs with him from Cobequid, and has left 'em over in the woods behind Beaubassin. He swears that sooner than let the English establish themselves in the village and make friends with those mutton-head Acadians, he will burn the whole place to the ground."

"And he'll do it, too, will the terrible father!" interjected another soldier.

"When will the fun begin?" asked a third.

"O!" responded the first speaker, "if the villagers make no fuss, and are ready to cross the river and come and settle over here with us, they shall have all the time they want for removing their stuff--all day, in fact. But if they are stubborn, and would like to stay where they are, and knuckle down to the English, they will see their roofs blazing over their heads just about the time the first English boat puts off for shore. If any one kicks, why, as like as not, one of His Reverence's red skins will lift his hair for him."

A chorus of exclamations, with much shrugging of shoulders, went round the group at this; and one said thoughtfully: "When my fighting days are over, and I get back to France, I shall pray all the saints to keep Father Le Loutre in Acadie. With such fierce priests in old France I should be afraid to go to mass!"

Pierre listened to all this with a sinking heart. Not waiting to hear more, he turned away, with the one thought of getting home as soon as possible to warn his father of the destruction hanging over their happy home. At this moment the soldier who had been doing most of the talking caught sight of him, and called out:

"Hullo, youngster, come here a minute!"

Pierre turned back with obvious reluctance, and the speaker continued:

"Your father, now, the good Antoine--whom may the saints preserve, for his butter and his cheeses are right excellent--does he greatly love this gentle abbe of yours?"

The boy looked about him apprehensively, and blurted out, "No, monsieur!" A flush mounted to his cheek, and he continued, in a voice of bitterness, "We hate him!" Then, as if terrified with having spoken his true thought, the lad darted away down the slope, and was soon seen speeding at a long trot across the young grass of the marsh to the ford of the Missaguash.

At the time when our story opens, events in Acadie were fast ripening to that unhappy issue known as "the expulsion of the Acadians," which furnished Longfellow with the theme of "Evangeline." The Acadian peninsula, now Nova Scotia, had been ceded by France to England. The dividing line between French and English territory was the Missaguash stream, winding through the marshes of the isthmus of Chignecto which connects Acadie with the mainland. The Acadians had become British subjects in name, but all the secret efforts of France were devoted to preventing them from becoming so in sentiment. What is now New Brunswick was still French territory, as were also Prince Edward Island and Cape Breton. It was the hope of the French king, Louis XV, that if the Acadians could be kept thoroughly French at heart Acadie might yet be won back to shine on the front of New France.

As the two nations were now at peace, any tampering with the allegiance of the Acadians could only be carried on in secret. In the hands of the French there remained just two forces to be employed--persuasion and intimidation; and their religion was the medium through which these forces were applied. The Acadians had their own priests. Such of these as would lend themselves to the schemes of the government were left in their respective parishes; others, more conscientious, were transferred to posts where their scruples would be less inconvenient. If any Acadian began to show signs of wishing to live his own life quietly, careless as to whether a Louis or a George reigned over him, he was promptly brought to terms by the threat that the Micmacs, who remained actively French, would be turned loose upon him. Under such a threat the unhappy Acadian made all haste to forget his partiality for the lenient British rule.

The right hand of French influence in Acadie at this time was the famous Abbe Le Loutre, missionary to the Micmac Indians at Cobequid. To this man’s charge may well be laid the larger part of the misfortunes which befell the Acadian people. He was violent in his hatred of the English, unscrupulous in his methods, and utterly pitiless in the carrying out of his project. His energy and his vindictiveness were alike untiring; and his ascendency over his savage flock, who had been Christianized in name only, gave a terrible weapon into his hands. Liberal were the rewards this fierce priest drew from the coffers of Quebec and of Versailles.

In order to keep the symbol of French power and authority ever before Acadian eyes, and to hinder the spread of English influence, a force had been sent from Quebec, under the officers La Corne and Boishebert, to hold the hill of Beausejour, which was practically the gate of Acadie. From Beausejour the flourishing settlement of Beaubassin, on the English side of the Missaguash, was overawed and kept to the French allegiance. The design of the French was to induce all those Acadians whom they could absolutely depend upon to remain in their homes within the English lines, as a means whereby to confound the English counsels. Those, however, who were suspected of leaning to the British, either from sloth or policy, were to be bullied, coaxed, frightened, or compelled by Le Loutre and his braves into forsaking their comfortable homes and moving into new settlements on the French side of the boundary.

But the English authorities at Halifax, after long and astonishing forbearance, had begun to develop a scheme of their own; and the fleet which, on this April morning, excited such consternation among the watchers on Beausejour, formed a part of it. Lord Cornwallis had decided that an English force established in Beaubassin would be the most effective check upon the influence of Beausejour; and the vessels now at anchor off the mouth of the red and winding Missaguash contained a little army of four hundred British troops, under command of Major Lawrence. This expedition had been sent out from Halifax with a commendable secrecy, but neither its approach nor its purpose could be kept hidden from the ever-alert Le Loutre. Since Beaubassin was on British soil, no armed opposition could be made to the landing of the British force; and the troops on Beausejour could only gnaw their mustaches and gaze in angry silence. But Le Loutre was resolved that on the arrival of the British there should be no more Beaubassin. The villagers were not to remain in such bad company!

Pierre Lecorbeau was swift of foot. As he sped across the gray-green levels, at this season of the year spongy with rains, he glanced over his shoulder and saw the abbe, with his companions, just quitting the log cabin which served as the quarters of Boishebert. The boy’s brow took on a yet darker shadow. When he reached the top of the dike that bordered the Missaguash, he paused an instant and gazed seaward. Pierre was eagerly French at heart, loving France, as he hated Le Loutre, with a fresh and young enthusiasm; and as his eyes rested on the crimson folds, the red, blue, and white crosses that streamed from the topmasts of the English ships, his eyes flashed with keen hostility. Then he vanished over the dike, and was soon splashing through the muddy shallows of the ford. The water was fast deepening, and he thought to himself, "If Monsieur the abbe doesn’t hurry, he will have to swim where I am walking but knee-deep!"

There was another stretch of marsh for Pierre to cross ere reaching the gentle and fruitful slopes on which the village was outspread. On the very edge of the village, halfway up a low hill jutting out into the Missaguash marsh, stood the cabin of Pierre’s father amid its orchards. There was little work to do on the farm at this season. The stock had all been tended, and the family were gathered in the

kitchen when Pierre, breathless and gasping, burst in with his evil tidings.

Now in the household of Antoine Lecorbeau, and in Beaubassin generally, not less than among the garrison of Beausejour, the coming of the English fleet had produced a commotion. But in the heart of Lecorbeau there was less anxiety than curiosity. This temperate and sagacious farmer, had preserved an appearance of unimpeachable fidelity to the French, but in his inmost soul he appreciated the tolerance of the British rule, and longed to see it strengthened. If the visitors were coming to stay, as was rumored to be the case, then, to Antoine Lecorbeau's thinking, the day was a lucky one for Beaubassin. He thought how he would snap his fingers at Le Loutre and his Micmacs. But he was beginning to exult too soon.

When Pierre told his story, and the family realized that their kindly home was doomed, the little dark kitchen, with its wooden ceiling, was filled with lamentations. Such of the children as were big enough to understand the calamity wept aloud, and the littler ones cried from sympathy. Pierre's father for a moment appeared bowed down beneath the stroke, but the mother, a stout, dark, gentle-faced woman, suddenly stopped her sobs and cried out in a shrill voice, with her queer Breton accent:

"Antoine, Antoine, we will defy the wicked, cruel abbe, and pray the English to protect us from him. Did not Father Xavier, just before he was sent away, tell us that the English were just, and that it was our duty to be faithful to them? How can we go out into this rough spring weather with no longer a roof to cover us?"

This appeal roused the Acadian. His shrewd sense and knowledge of those with whom he had to deal came at once to his aid.

"Nay, nay, mother!" said he, rising and passing his gnarled hand over his forehead, "it is even as Pierre has said. We must be the first to do the bidding of the abbe, and must seem to do it of our own accord. It will be hours yet ere the English be among us, and long ere Le Loutre will have had time to work his will upon those who refuse to do his bidding. Do thou get the stuff together. This night we must sleep on the shore of the stream and find us a new home at Beausejour. To the sheds, Pierre, and yoke the cattle. Hurry, boy, hurry, for there is everything to do and small time for the doing of it."

From Lecorbeau's cottage the news of Le Loutre's decree spread like wildfire through the settlement. Some half dozen reckless characters declared at once in the abbe's favor, and set out across the marsh to welcome him and offer their aid. A few more, a very few, set themselves reluctantly to follow the example of Antoine Lecorbeau, who bore a great name in the village for his wise counsels. But most of the villagers got stubborn, and vowed that they would stay by their homes, whether it was Indians or English bid them move. The resolution of these poor souls was perhaps a little shaken as a long line of painted and befeathered Micmacs, appearing from the direction of the wooded

hills of Jolicoeur, drew stealthily near and squatted down in the outermost skirts of the village. But Beaubassin had not had the experience with Le Loutre that had fallen to the lot of other settlements, and the unwise ones hardened their hearts in their decision.

As Le Loutre, with his little party, entered the village, he met Antoine Lecorbeau setting out for Beausejour with a huge cartload of household goods, drawn by a yoke of oxen. The abbe's fierce, close-set eyes gleamed with approval, and he accosted the old man in a cordial voice.

"This is indeed well done, Antoine. I love thy zeal for the grand cause. The saints will assuredly reward thee, and I will myself do for thee the little that lies in my poor power! But why so heavy of cheer, man?"

"Alas, father!" returned Lecorbeau, sadly, "this is a sorrowful day. It is a grievous hardship to forsake one's hearth, and these fruitful fields, and this well bearing orchard that I have planted with my own hands. But better this than to live in humiliation and in jeopardy every hour; for I learn that these English are coming to take possession and to dwell among us!"

The abbe, as Lecorbeau intended, quite failed to catch the double meaning in this speech, which he interpreted in accordance with his own feelings. Like many another unscrupulous deceiver, Le Loutre was himself not difficult to deceive.

"Well, cheer up, Antoine!" he replied, "for thou shalt have good lands on the other side of the hill; and thou wilt count thyself blest when thou seest what shall happen to some of these slow beasts here, who care neither for France nor the Church so long as they be let alone to sleep and fill their bellies."

As the great cart went creaking on, Lecorbeau looked over his shoulder, with an inscrutable gaze, and watched the retreating figure of the priest.

"Thou mayst be a good servant to France," he murmured, "but it is an ill service, a sorry service, thou dost the Church!"

Within the next few hours, while Antoine and his family had been getting nearly all their possessions across the Missaguash, first by the fords, and then by the aid of the great scow which served for a ferry at high tide, the tireless abbe had managed to coax or threaten nearly every inhabitant of the village. His Indians stalked after him, apparently heedless of everything. His few allies among the Acadians, who had assumed the Indian garb for the occasion, scattered themselves over the settlement repeating the abbe's exhortations; but the villagers, though with anxious hearts, held to their cabins, refusing to stir, and watching for the English boats to come ashore. They did not realize how intensely in earnest and how merciless the abbe could be, for they had nothing but hearsay and his angry face to judge by. But their awakening was soon to come.

Early in the afternoon the tide was nigh the full. At a signal from

the masthead of the largest ship there spread a sudden activity throughout the fleet, and immediately a number of boats were lowered. For this the abbe had been waiting. Snatching a blazing splinter of pine from the hearth of a cottage close to the church, he rushed up to the homely but sacred building about which clustered the warmest affections of the villagers. At the same moment several of his followers appeared with armfuls of straw from a neighboring barn. This inflammable stuff, with some dry brush, was piled into the porch and fired by the abbe's own hand. The structure was dry as tinder, and almost instantly a volume of smoke rolled up, followed by long tongues of eager flame, which looked strangely pallid and cruel in the afternoon sunshine. A yell broke from the Indians, and then there fell a silence, broken only by the crackling of the flames. The English troops, realizing in a moment what was to occur, bent to their oars with redoubled vigor, thinking to put a stop to the shameless work. And the name of Le Loutre was straightway on their lips.

CHAPTER II.

PIERRE VISITS THE ENGLISH LINES.

The ships were a mile from shore, and the shore nearly a league from the doomed village. When that column of smoke and flame rolled up over their beloved church the unhappy Acadian villagers knew, too late, the character of the man with whom they had to deal. It was no time for them to look to the ships for help. They began with trembling haste to pack their movables, while Le Loutre and a few of his supporters went from house to house with great coolness, deaf to all entreaties, and behind the feet of each sprang up a flame. A few of the more stolid or more courageous of the villagers still held out, refusing to move even at the threat of the firebrand; but these gave way when the Indians came up, yelling and brandishing their tomahawks. Le Loutre proclaimed that anyone refusing to cross the lines and take refuge at Beausejour should be scalped. The rest, he said, might retain possession of just so much of their stuff as they could rescue from the general conflagration. The English, he swore, should find nothing of Beaubassin except its ashes.

Presently the thin procession of teams, winding its gloomy way across the plains of the Missaguash toward Beausejour, became a hurrying throng of astonished and wailing villagers, each one carrying with him on his back or in his rude ox cart the most precious of his movable possessions; while the women, with loud sobbing, dragged along by their hands the frightened and reluctant little ones. By another road, leading into the wooded hills where the villagers were wont to cut their winter firewood, a few of the more hardy and impetuous of the Acadians, disdaining to bend to the authority of Le Loutre, fled away into the wilds with their muskets and a little bread; and these the Indians dared not try to stop.

The English boats, driven furiously, dashed high up the slippery beach, and the troops swarmed over the brown and sticky dikes. Major Lawrence led the way at a run across the marshes; but the soft soil clogged their steps, and a wide bog forced them far to one side. When they reached the outskirts of the village the sorrowful dusk of the April evening was falling over the further plains and the full tide behind them, but the sky in front was ablaze. There was little wind, and the flames shot straight aloft, and the smoke hung on the scene in dense curtains, doubling the height of the hill behind the village, and reflecting back alike the fierce heat and the dreadful glare. At one side, skulking behind some outlying barns just bursting into flame, a few Indians were sighted and pursued. The savages fired once on their pursuers, and then, with a yell of derision and defiance, disappeared behind the smoke. The English force went into camp with the conflagration covering its rear, and philosophically built its camp fires and cooked its evening meal with the aid of the burning sheds and hayricks.

As Pierre Lecorbeau drove his ox cart up the slope of Beausejour toward the commandant’s cabin, where his father was awaiting him, he halted and looked back while the blowing oxen took breath. His mother, who had stayed to the last, was sitting in the cart on a pile of her treasures. The children had been taken to a place of safety by their father, who had left the final stripping of the home to his wife and boy, while he went ahead to arrange for the night’s shelter. Antoine Lecorbeau had lost his home, his farm, his barns, his orchards, and his easy satisfaction with life; but thanks to Pierre’s promptitude and his own shrewdness he had saved all his household stuff, his cattle, his hay and grain, and the little store of gold coin which had been hidden under the great kitchen hearth. His house was the last to be fired, and even now, as Pierre and his mother stood watching, long red horns of flame were pushed forth, writhing, from the low gables. The two were silent, save for the woman’s occasional heavy sobs. Presently the roof fell in, and then the boy’s wet eyes flashed. A body of the English troops could be seen pitching tents in the orchard. "Mother!" said the boy, "what if we had stayed at home and waited for these English to protect us? They are our enemies, these English; and the abbe is our enemy; and the Indians are our enemies; and our only friends are--yonder!"

As Pierre spoke he turned his back on the lurid sky and pointed to the crest of Beausejour. There, in long, dark lines, stood nearly a thousand French troops, drawn up on parade. The light from the ruined village gleamed in blood-red flashes from their steel, and over them the banner of France flapped idly with its lilies.

That night, because Antoine Lecorbeau was a leader among the villagers of Beaubassin, he and his family had shelter in a small but warm stable where some of the officers’ horses were quartered. Their goods were stacked and huddled together in the open air, and Pierre and his father cut boughs and spread blankets to cover them from the weather. In the warm straw of the stable, hungry and homesick, the children clung about their mother and wept themselves to sleep. But they were fortunate compared with many of their acquaintances, whom Pierre could see

crowded roofless about their fires, in sheltered hollows and under the little hillside copses. The night was raw and showery, and there was not houseroom in Beausejour for a tenth part of the homeless Acadians.

By dawn Pierre was astir. He rose from his cramped position under a manger, stretched himself, shook the chaff and dust from his thick black hair, and stepped out into the chilly morning. The cattle had been hobbled and allowed to feed at large, but the boy's eye soon detected that his pet yoke had disappeared. Nowhere on Beausejour could they be found, and he concluded they must have freed themselves completely and wandered back home. Pierre had no reason to fear the English, but he dreaded lest the troops should take a fancy to make beef out of his fat oxen; so, after a word to his father, he set out for the burned village. Early as it was, however, Beausejour was all astir when he left, and he wondered what the soldiers were so busy about.

As Pierre approached the smoldering ruins of his home, an English soldier, standing on guard before the tents in the orchard, ordered him to halt. Pierre didn't understand the word, but he comprehended the tone in which it was uttered. He saw his beloved oxen standing with bowed heads by the water trough, and he tried to make the soldier understand that he had come for those oxen, which belonged to him. On this point Pierre spoke very emphatically, as if to make his French more intelligible to the Englishman. But his struggles were all in vain. The soldier looked first puzzled, then vacuously wise; then he knit his brows and looked at the oxen. Finally he laughed, took Pierre by the elbow, and led him toward one of the tents. At this moment a pleasant-faced young officer came out of the tent, and, taking in the situation at a glance, addressed Pierre in French:

"Well, my boy," said he, kindly, "what are you doing here so early?"

Pierre became polite at once; so surely does courtesy find courtesy.

"Sir," said he, taking off his hat, "I have come after my father's oxen, those beasts yonder, which strayed back here in the night. This was our home yesterday."

Pierre's voice quivered as he spoke these last words.

The officer looked very much interested.

"Certainly," said he, "you shall have your oxen. We don't take anything that doesn't belong to us. But tell me, why is not this your home to-day? Why have you all burnt down your houses and run away? We are the true friends of all the Acadians. What had you to fear?"

"_We_ didn't do it!" replied the boy. "It was monsieur the abbe and his Indians; and they threatened to scalp us all if we didn't leave before you came!"

The young officer's face grew very stern at the mention of the abbe, whom he knew to mean Le Loutre.

"Ah!" he muttered, "I see it all now! We might have expected as much from that snake! But tell me," he continued to Pierre, "what is going on over on the hill this morning? They are not going to attack us, are they? We are on English soil here. They know that!"

"I don't know," said Pierre, looking about him, and over at Beausejour. "They _were_ very busy getting things ready for something when I left. But I wanted my oxen, and I didn't wait to ask. May I take them away now, monsieur?"

"Very well," answered the officer, and he offered Pierre a shilling. To his astonishment Pierre drew himself up and wouldn't touch it. The young man still held it out to him, saying: "Why, it is only a little memento! See, it has a hole in it, and you can keep it to remember Captain Howe by. I have many friends among your people!"

"My heart is French," replied Pierre, with resolution. "I cannot take money from an enemy."

"But we English are _not_ your enemies. We wish to do you good, to win your love. It is that wicked Le Loutre who is your enemy."

"Yes," assented Pierre, very heartily. "We all hate him. And many of us love the English, and would be friends if we dared; but _I_ do not love any but the Holy Saints and the French. I love France!" and the boy's voice rang with enthusiasm.

A slight shade of sadness passed over the young captain's earnest face. Edward Howe was known throughout Acadia as a lover of the Acadians, and as one who had more than once stood between them and certain well-deserved restraint. He was attracted by Pierre's intelligence of face and respectful fearlessness of demeanor, and he determined to give the young enthusiast something to think about.

"Do you not know," said he, "that your beloved France is at the back of all this misery?" And he pointed to the smoking ruins of the village. "Do you not know that it is the gold of the French king that pays Le Loutre and his savages? Do you not know that while King Louis instructs his agents in Quebec and Louisburg and yonder at Beausejour, to excite the Indians, and certain of your own people too, to all sorts of outrages against peaceful English settlers, he at the same time puts all the blame upon _your_ people, and swears that he does his utmost to restrain you? O, you are so sorely deceived, and some day you will open your eyes to it, but perhaps too late! My heart bleeds for your unhappy people."

The young man turned back into his tent, after a word to the sentry who had brought Pierre in. The boy stood a few moments in irresolution, wanting to speak again to the young officer, whose frank eyes and winning manner had made a deep impression upon him. But his faith in the France of his imagination was not daunted. Presently, speaking to his oxen in a tone of command, he drove the submissive brutes away

across the marsh.

As he left the English camp a bugle rang out shrilly behind him, and a great stir arose in the lines. He glanced about him, and continued his way. Then he observed that the slopes of Beausejour were dark with battalions on the march, and he realized with a thrill that the lilies were advancing to give battle. In another moment, looking behind him, he saw the scarlet lines of the English already under arms, and a signal gun boomed from the ships.

Trembling with excitement, and determined to carry a musket in the coming fray, Pierre urged his oxen into a gallop, and made a detour to get around the French army. By the time he got back to his stable, and possessed himself of his father's musket, and started down the hill at a run, expecting every moment to hear his father's voice calling him to return, the soldiers of France had reached the river. But here they halted, making no move to cross into English territory. To have done so would have been a violation of the existing treaty between France and England.

Major Lawrence, however, did not suspect that the French movement was merely what is known as a demonstration. He took it for granted that the French were waiting only for some favorable condition of the tide in order to cross over and attack him in his position. He saw that the French force three or four times outnumbered his own; and as his mission was one of pacification, he decided not to shed blood uselessly. He ordered a retreat to the ship. The men went very reluctantly, hating to seem overawed; but Major Lawrence explained the situation, and declared that, Beaubassin being burned, there was no special object in remaining. He further promised that later in the summer he would come again, with a force that would be large enough for the undertaking, and would build a strong fort on the hill at whose foot they were now encamped. Then the red files marched sullenly back to their boats; while a body of Indians, reappearing from the woods, yelled and danced their defiance, and the French across the river shouted their mocking ballads.

CHAPTER III.

FRENCH AND ENGLISH.

When it was seen that the English were actually reembarking, a fierce indignation broke out against Le Loutre for the useless cruelty and precipitancy of his action. The French troops had some little feeling for the houseless villagers, and they were angered at being deprived of their chief and most convenient source of supplies. The fierce abbe insisted that the movement of the English was a ruse of some sort; but when the ships got actually under way, with a brisk breeze in their sails, he withdrew in deep chagrin, and returned with his Micmacs

to his village on the muddy Shubenacadie. Relieved of his dreaded presence the Acadians set bravely to work building cabins on the new lands which were allotted them back of Beausejour, and along the Missaguash, Au Lac, and Tantramar streams. A few were rash enough to return to their former holdings in Beaubassin, rebuilding among the ashes; but not so Antoine Lecorbeau. On the northwest slope of Beausejour, where a fertile stretch of uplands skirts the commencement of the Great Tantramar marsh, he obtained an allotment, and laid his hearthstone anew. The burning of Beaubassin had not made him love France the more, but it had cooled his liking for the English. The words of Captain Howe, nevertheless, which Pierre had repeated to him faithfully, lay rankling in his heart, and he harbored a bitter suspicion as to the good faith of the French authorities. He saw that they professed disapproval of the methods of Le Loutre, but he began to doubt the sincerity of this disapproval. Pierre, however, was troubled by no such misgivings.

The summer, though a laborious one, slipped by not at all unpleasantly. Mother Lecorbeau soon had a roof to shelter her little brood of swarthy roisterers; a rough shed, built over a hillside spring in a group of willows, served as the dairy wherein she made the butter and cheese so appreciated by the warriors on Beausejour. Lecorbeau got in crops both on his new lands and on the old farm, and saw the apples ripening abundantly around the ruins of his home in Beaubassin. As for Pierre, in his scanty hours of leisure he was always to be found on the hill, where an old color sergeant, pleased with his intelligence and his ambition to become a soldier of France, was teaching him to read and write. This friendly veteran was, in his comrades' eyes, a marvel of clerkly skill, for in those days the ability to read and write was by no means a universal possession among the soldiers of France.

One evening in the first of the autumn, when here and there on the dark Minudie hills could be seen the scarlet gleam of an early-turning maple, just as the bay had become a sheet of glowing copper under the sunset, a rosy sail appeared on the horizon. The pacing sentry on the brow of Beausejour stopped to watch it. Presently another rose into view, and another, and another; and then Beausejour knew that the English fleet had returned. Before the light faded out the watchers had counted seventeen ships; and when the next morning broke the whole squadron was lying at anchor about three miles from the shore.

With the first of daylight Pierre and his father hastened up the hill to find out what was to be done. To their astonishment they learned that the troops on Beausejour would do just nothing, unless the English should attempt to land on the French side of the Missaguash. They had received from Quebec a caution not to transgress openly any treaty obligations. To Antoine Lecorbeau this news seemed not unwelcome. He was for quiet generally. But Pierre showed in his face, and, indeed, proclaimed aloud, his disappointment. The old sergeant laughed at his eager pupil, and remarked:

"O, my young fire eater, _you_ shall have a chance at the beefeaters if you like! His Reverence the abbe arrived in Beausejour last night about

midnight, and he’s going to fight, if we can’t. Treaties don’t bother him much. He’s got all his Micmacs with him, I guess. There they go now--the other side of the stream. In a bit you’ll see them at work strengthening the line of the dike. They’re going to give it to the beefeaters pretty hot when they try to come ashore. There’s your chance now for a brush. His Reverence will take you, fast enough."

"Pierre shall do nothing of the sort, whether he wants to or not," interrupted Lecorbeau, with sharp emphasis.

"I wouldn’t fight under him!" ejaculated the boy, with a ring of scorn in his voice.

The old sergeant shrugged his shoulders.

"O, very well," said he. "I’m of the same way of thinking myself. But all your people are not so particular. Look now, over at the dike. Did you ever see an Indian that could handle the shovel as those fellows are doing. I tell you, half those Indians are just your folks dressed-up, and painted red and black, and with feathers stuck in their hair. The abbe ropes a lot of you into this business, and you’re lucky, Antoine Lecorbeau, that he hasn’t called on you or Pierre yet."

At this suggestion Lecorbeau looked grim, but troubled. As for Pierre, however, with a boy’s confidence, he exclaimed:

"Just let him call. I think I see him getting us!"

Yet, for all his bitterness against Le Loutre, Pierre felt the fever of battle stir within him as he watched the preparations behind the long, red Missaguash dike. His father, seeing the excitement in his flashing eyes and flushed countenance, exacted from him then and there a promise that he would take no part in the approaching conflict.

On that September day the tide was full about noon, and with the tide came in the English ships. Knowing the anchorage, they came right into the river’s mouth, in a long, ominously silent line. The mixed rabble of Le Loutre crowded low behind their breastworks; and hundreds of eager eyes on Beausejour strained their sight to catch the first flash of the battle.

"Do you see that little knoll yonder with the poplars on it?" said Pierre to his father and the sergeant. "Let’s go over there and hide in the bushes, and we can see twice as well as we can from here. There’s a little creek makes round it on the far side, and we’ll be just as safe as here!"

"Yes," responded the sergeant, "it’s a fine advanced post. We’ll just slip down round the foot of the hill as if we were bound for the dikes, so there won’t be a crowd following us."

[Illustration "They sped rapidly across the marsh."]

As the three sped rapidly across the marsh, Antoine Lecorbeau said significantly to his son:

"Do you see how these English spare our people? They haven't fired a single big gun, yet with the metal on board their ships they could knock those breastworks and the men behind them into splinters. They could batter down the dike, and let the tide right in on them."

"Aye! aye!" assented the old sergeant, "they're a brave foe, and I would we could have a brush with them. They're landing now without firing a shot!"

At this moment the irregular firing from the breastwork grew more rapid and sustained, and our three adventurers hurried on to the knoll, eager for a better view. They found the post already occupied by half a dozen interested villagers, who paid no attention to the new arrivals.

By this time the English boats had reached the water's edge. On this occasion Major Lawrence had nearly eight hundred men at his command, and was resolved to carry his enterprise to a successful issue. The troops did not wait to form, under the now galling fire from the breastwork, but swarmed up the red slope in loose skirmishing order, pouring in a hot dropping fire as they ran. As they reached the dike a ringing cheer broke out, and they dashed at the awkward and slippery steep.

A few reached the top, and for a moment the English colors crowned the embankment. But at the same time the painted defenders rose with a yell, and beat back their assailants with gunstock and hatchet. The red flag was seized by a tall savage, and Pierre gave a little cry of excitement as he thought the enemies' colors were captured. But his enthusiasm was premature. The stripling who carried the colors, finding no chance to use his sword, grasped the Indian about the waist and dragged him off the dike, when he was promptly made captive.

Now the English withdrew a few paces, held back with difficulty by their officers, and one, whom the watchers on the knoll took for Lawrence himself was seen giving orders, standing with his back half turned to the breastwork, as undisturbed as if the shower of Micmac bullets were a snowstorm. Presently the redcoats charged again, this time slowly and silently, in long, regular lines.

"Ah!" exclaimed the sergeant under his breath, "they'll go through this time. That advance means business!"

In fact, they did go through. At the very foot of the dike a single volley flashed forth along the whole line, momentarily clearing the top of the barrier. The next instant the dike was covered with scarlet figures. Along its crest there was a brief struggle, hand to hand, and then the braves of Le Loutre were seen fleeing through the smoke.

The Missaguash is a stream with as many windings as the storied Meander, and about half a mile beyond the lines which the English had just carried

the contortions of the channel brought another and almost parallel ridge of dike. Over this the flying rout of Micmacs and Acadians clambered with alacrity, while the English forces halted where they found themselves.

To the little knot of watchers on the knoll the contest had seemed too brief, the defeat of their people most inglorious.

"As a fighting man monsieur the abbe makes rather a poor show, however good he may be at burning people's houses!" exclaimed Pierre, in a voice that trembled with a mixture of enthusiasm for the cause, and scorn for him who had it in charge.

"You will find, my son," said Lecorbeau, sententiously, "that the cruel and pitiless are often without real courage!"

"O!" laughed the old sergeant, "I'll wager my boots that His Reverence is not in the fight at all. It's likely one of his understrappers, Father Germain, perhaps, or that cutthroat half-breed, Etienne Le Batard, or Father Laberne, or the big Chief Cope himself, is leading the fight and carrying out the saintly abbe's orders."

"Fools! Fools and revilers!" exclaimed a deep and cutting voice behind them; and turning with a start they saw the dreaded Le Loutre standing in their midst. Lecorbeau and Pierre became pale with apprehension and superstitious awe, while the old sergeant laughed awkwardly, abashed though not dismayed.

The abbe's sallow face worked with anger, and for a moment his narrow eyes blazed upon Lecorbeau and seemed to read his very soul. Then, as he glanced across the marsh, his countenance changed. A fanatic zeal illumined it, taking away half its repulsiveness.

"Nay!" he cried, "I am _not_ there in the battle. France and the Church need me, and what am I that I should risk, to be thought bold, a life that I must rather hold sacred. Should a chance ball strike me down which of you traitors and self-seekers is there that could do my work? Which of you could govern my fierce flock?"

To this tirade, which showed them their tormentor in a new light, Pierre and his father could say nothing. Wondering, but not believing, they exchanged stolen glances. It is probable that the abbe, in his present mood, was sincere; for in a fanatic one must allow for the wildest inconsistencies. The old sergeant, more skeptical than the Acadians, was, at the same time more polite. He hastened to murmur, apologetically:

"Pardon me, Reverend Father! I see that I misunderstood you!"

Le Loutre made no answer, for now events on the battlefield were enchaining every eye.

Behind the second line of dikes the Micmacs and Acadians had again intrenched themselves. Major Lawrence, perceiving this, at once ordered another charge. Then the Indians resolved on a bold and perilous stroke.

The right of their position was nearest the attacking force. At this point, acting under a sudden inspiration, they began to cut the dike. Almost instantly a breach began to appear, under the attack of a dozen diking spades wielded with feverish energy.

An involuntary cry of consternation went up from the group of Acadians on the knoll, but the grim abbe shouted, "Well done! Well done! my brave, my true Laberne!" And he rushed from his hiding place on some new errand, leaving the air lighter for his absence.

The English detected at once the maneuver of their opponents. They broke into a fierce rush, determined to stop the work of destruction before it should be too late. From his left Major Lawrence threw out a few skilled marksmen, who concentrated a telling fire upon the diggers, delaying but not putting an end to the furious energy of their efforts. Already a stream of turbid water was stealing through. Presently it gathered force and volume, spreading out swiftly across the marsh, and at the same time the crest of the dike was fringed with smoke and the pale flashes of the muskets.

The tide was now on the ebb, and a current set strongly against the point of dike where the diggers were at work. This fact tended to make the results of their work the more immediately apparent, rendering mighty assistance to every stroke of the spade. At the same time, however, it told heavily in favor of the English, for, in order to counteract the special stream, the dike at this point was of great additional strength. Moreover, in the tidal rivers of that region the ebb and flow are so vast and so swift, that the English hoped the tide would be below a dangerous level before the destruction of the dike could be accomplished.

In this hope they were right. Ere they had more than half crossed the stretch of marsh the waters of the Missaguash were oozing about their ankles. But as they neared the dike it had grown no deeper. They saw the diggers throw down their spades, pick up their muskets, and fall in with their comrades behind the dike. The fire from the top of the barrier ceased, and in silence, with loaded weapons, the Indians awaited the assault. From this it was plain to Major Lawrence that the defense was in the hands of a European. He straightened out his lines before the charge.

CHAPTER IV.

PREPARING FOR THE RAID.

"Thank heaven!" ejaculated Antoine Lecorbeau, "they have saved the dike!"

In Acadian eyes to tamper with the dikes was sacrilege.

"Well!" said the sergeant, with a somewhat cynical chuckle, "at least the English have got their feet wet!"

Pierre broke off his laugh in the middle, for at this moment the red lines charged. The deadly volley which rang out along the summit for an instant staggered the assailants; but they rallied and went over the barrier like a scarlet wave. The dike was much easier to scale when thus approached on the landward side.

And now ensued a fierce hand-to-hand struggle. The spectators could hardly contain their excitement as they saw their party, fighting doggedly, forced back step by step to the edge of the water. Some, slipping in the ooze of the retreating tide, fell and were carried down by the current. These soon swam ashore--discreetly landing on the further side of the river. The rest seeing the struggle hopeless, now broke and fled with a celerity that the English could not hope to rival. Along the flats, for perhaps a mile, a detachment of the English pursued them till a bugle sounded their recall. Then Major Lawrence, finding himself master of the field, directed his march to that low hill where he had encamped the previous spring, and a fatigue party was set to repair the dike.

On this hill the English proceeded to erect a fortified post, which they called Fort Lawrence; and in an incredibly short time the red flag was waving from its battlements, not three miles distant from Beausejour, and an abiding provocation to the hot-headed soldiery of France. As for Le Loutre, after his disastrous repulse, he yielded to the inevitable, and gave up all thought of preventing the establishment of Fort Lawrence. But he was not discouraged; he was merely changing his tactics.

The Missaguash being the dividing line between the two powers, he caused his Acadian and Indian followers to enrage the English by petty depredations, by violations of the frontier, by attacks and ambuscades. Soon the English were provoked into retaliations; whereupon the regulars of Beausejour found an excuse for taking part, and the turbid Missaguash became the scene of such perpetual skirmishes that its waters ran redder than ever.

Even then there might have been erelong an attempt at reconciliation, to which end the efforts of Captain Howe were ceaselessly directed. But Le Loutre made this forever impossible by an outrage so fiendish as to call forth the execration of even his unscrupulous employers. One morning the sentries on Fort Lawrence were somewhat surprised to see one who was apparently an officer from the garrison of Beausejour, with several followers, approaching the banks of the Missaguash with a flag of truce. The party reached the dike, and the bearer of the flag waved it as if desiring to hold a parley. His followers remained behind at a respectful distance, standing knee-deep in the heavy aftermath of the fertile marsh.

In prompt response to this advance Captain Howe and several companions, under a white flag, set out from Fort Lawrence to see what was wanted.

When Howe reached the river he detected something in the supposed officer's dress and language which excited his suspicions of the man's good faith, and he turned away as if to retrace his step's. Instantly there flashed out a volley of musketry from behind the dike on the further shore, and the beloved young captain fell mortally wounded. The pretended officer was one of Le Loutre's supporters, the Micmac chief, Jean Baptiste Cope, and the fatal volley came from a band of Micmacs who had, under cover of darkness, concealed themselves behind the dike.

The assassins kept up a sharp fire on the rest of the English party, but failed to prevent them from carrying off their dying captain to the fort. The scene had been witnessed with horror by the French forces on Beausejour, and their officers sent to Fort Lawrence to express their angry reprobation of the atrocious deed. They openly laid it to the charge of Le Loutre, declaring that such a man was capable of anything; and for a few weeks Le Loutre did not care to show himself at Beausejour. At last he came, and met the accusations of the French officers with the most solemn declaration that the whole thing had been done without his knowledge or sanction. The Indians, he swore, had done it by reason of their misguided but fervent religious zeal, to take vengeance on Howe for something he was reported to have said injurious and disrespectful to the Church. "The zeal of my flock," said he, solemnly, "is, perhaps, something too rash, but it springs from ardent and simple natures!"

"Aye! aye!" said the old sergeant to his companions-in-arms, when he heard of the abbe's explanations, "but I happened to recognize His Reverence myself in the party that did the murder."

There were many more on Beausejour whose eyes had revealed to them the same truth as that so bluntly stated by the sergeant. But the abbe was most useful--was, in fact, necessary, to do those deeds which no one else would stoop to; and, therefore, his explanation was accepted. At this time, moreover, there was a work to be done at Beausejour requiring the assistance of the abbe's methods. Orders had been sent from Quebec that a strong fort should straightway be built at Beausejour, as an offset to Fort Lawrence. And this fort was to be built by the ill-fated Acadians.

The labor of the Acadians was supposed to be voluntary. That is, they were invited to assist, without pay other than daily rations; and those who appeared reluctant were presently interviewed by the indefatigable and invaluable Le Loutre. His persuasions, with blood-thirsty Indians in the background, invariably produced their effect. To be sure, there was money sent from Quebec for payment of the laborers; but the authorities of Beausejour having Le Loutre to depend upon, found it more satisfactory to put this money in their own pockets.

With his customary foresight, Antoine Lecorbeau had promptly evinced his willingness to take part in the building. Either he or Pierre was continually to be found upon the spot, working diligently and, without complaint--which was a disappointment to Le Loutre. The abbe had not forgotten the remark of Antoine which he had caught the day of the battle on the Missaguash. He was seeking his opportunity to punish him for the

rash utterance. For the present, however, there was nothing to do but commend the prudent Acadian for his zeal.

Upon Pierre and his father this fort building fell not heavily. They had a tight roof and a warm hearth close by. But their hearts ached to see hundreds of their fellow-countrymen toiling half-clad in the bitter weather, with no reward but their meager daily bread. These poor peasants had many of them been the owners of happy homes, whence the merciless fiat of Le Loutre had banished them. The hill of Beausejour lies open to the four winds of heaven, one or the other of which is pretty sure to be blowing at all seasons; and some of the dispirited toilers had not even rawhide moccasins to protect their feet from the biting frost. Le Loutre was continually among them working in his shirt sleeves, and urging everyone to his utmost exertions. But as the winter dragged on the Acadians became so weak and heartless that even the threats of the abbe lost their effect, and the fort grew but slowly. Upon this it became necessary to increase the rations and even to give a small weekly wage. The effect of this was magical, and in the following spring the fortress of Beausejour was ready for its garrison. Its strong earthworks overlooked the whole surrounding country, and in the eyes that watched it from Fort Lawrence formed no agreeable addition to the landscape. Across the tawny Missaguash and the stretches of bright green marsh the red flag and the white flapped each other a ceaseless defiance.

Elated at the completion of the fort, Le Loutre concluded the times were ripe for a raid upon the English settlements. On the banks of the Kenneticook there was a tiny settlement which had been an eyesore to the abbe ever since its establishment some three years before. There were only a half dozen houses in the colony and against these Le Loutre decided to strike. In the enterprise he saw an opportunity of making Lecorbeau feel his power. He would make the careful Acadian take part in the expedition. To assume the disguise of an Indian would, he well knew, be hateful to every instinct of the law-abiding Lecorbeau. As the abbe took his way to the Acadian’s rude cabin his grim face wore a sinister gleam.

It was about sunset, and the family were at their frugal meal. All rose to their feet as the dreaded visitor entered, and the children betook themselves in terror to the darkest corners they could find. The abbe sat down by the hearth and motioned his hosts to follow his example. After a word or two of inquiry as to the welfare of the household, he remarked abruptly:

"You are a true man, Antoine--a faithful servant of the Holy Church and of France!"

His keen eyes, as he spoke, burned upon the dark face of the Acadian.

Lecorbeau did not flinch. He returned the piercing gaze calmly and respectfully, saying:

"Have I not proved it, Reverend Father?"

A phantom of a smile went over the priest's thin lips, leaving his eyes unlightened.

"It is well! You shall have yet another chance to prove it. It is just such men as you whose help I want in my next venture. I have business on hand which my faithful flock at Cobequid are not sufficient for, unaided. You and certain others whom I need not name shall join them for a little. I will bring you such dress, equipment, and so forth, as you will need to become as one of them. Be ready to-morrow night."

As he spoke he studied intently the face of Lecorbeau. But the sagacious Acadian was a match for him. Lecorbeau's heart sank in his breast. He was a prey to the most violent feeling of hatred toward his guest, and of loathing for the task required of him. He saw in it, also, the probability of his own ruin, for he believed the complete triumph of the English was at hand. Notwithstanding, his face remained perfectly untroubled, while Pierre flushed hotly, clenching his hands, and Mother Lecorbeau let a sharp cry escape her.

"Be not a child, Jeanne!" said Lecorbeau, rebuking her with his glance. Then he answered to the demand of Le Loutre.

"In truth, Reverend Abbe, I should like to prove my zeal in some easier way. Have I not obeyed you with all diligence and cheerfulness, nor complained when your wisdom seemed hard to many? Surely, you will keep such harassing service for younger men, men who have not a family to care for! Will you not deal a little gently with an old and obedient servant? I pray you, let young men go on such enterprises, and let me serve you at home!"

"I am too lenient to such as you," cried the priest, in a voice grown suddenly high and terrible. "I know you. I have long suspected you. Your heart is with the English. You shall steep your hands in the blood of those accursed, or I will make you and yours as if you had never been!"

Antoine Lecorbeau held his countenance unmoved and bowed his head. "It shall be as you will, father," he said, quietly. "But is this the way you reward obedience?"

The abbe's reply was interrupted by Pierre, who stepped forward with flashing eyes and almost shouted:

"Our hearts are _not_ with the English! We are the children of France!"

The abbe, strange to say, seemed not offended by this hot contradiction. The outburst rather pleased him. He thought he saw in Pierre the making of an effective partisan. Diverted by this thought, and feeling sure of Antoine after the threat he had uttered, he rose abruptly, blessed the household, all unconscious of the irony of the act, and stepped out into the raw evening. There was silence in the cabin for some minutes after his going forth. The blow had fallen, even that which Lecorbeau had most dreaded.

CHAPTER V.

THE MIDNIGHT MARCH.

The children crept forth from their corners and looked wonderingly at their sobbing mother.

"O, you will certainly be killed," wailed the good woman, thoroughly frightened.

"There is little danger of _that_," rejoined Lecorbeau. "The abbe prefers to strike where there is small likelihood of a return blow. There will be as little of peril as there will be of glory in attacking a few sleeping villagers and perhaps murdering them in their beds. The thought of such cold-blooded butchery is terrible, but anything is better than that you and the little ones should be exposed to the rage of those savages. It may mean ruin for us, however, for the English governor at Halifax is likely to hear of me being concerned in the raid; and, you remember, I was one of those that took the oath when I was a lad. I shall be an outlaw, that's all!"

Reassured as to the immediate physical peril of the enterprise, the good wife dried her eyes. The scruples that troubled her husband were too remote to give her much concern.

"Well, if you _must_ go," said she, "I suppose you, must! Do try and please that hard-hearted priest; and you must put on warm clothes, for you'll be sleeping out at night, won't you?"

"But, father!" began Pierre--and then he stopped suddenly. "I wonder if I foddered the steers," he went on. As he spoke he rose from the bench whereon he was sitting, and went out to the barn.

Pierre had been on the point of saying that _he_ was the one to go on the raid, as he had not taken any oath of allegiance to the English. It had occurred to him, however, that his father would probably forbid him thinking of such a thing, and he knew that in such a case he would be unable to put his plan in execution, as he had not learned in that simple neighborhood the lesson of disobedience to parents. He saw that if he went on the raid the requirements of Le Loutre were likely to be satisfied, while at the same time his father would be delivered from the danger of an accusation of treason. It was quite certain in Pierre's mind that his design would commend itself to the clear wisdom of his father, but he felt that the latter would forbid it because of his mother's terrors. He decided to act at once, and he turned his steps toward the fort. Certain misgivings troubled his conscience at first, but he soon became convinced that he was doing right.

While good wife Lecorbeau was wondering what kept Pierre so long at the barn, Pierre was at the commandant's quarters talking to the abbe. The latter greeted the boy kindly, and asked at once what brought him.

"I came to speak about to-morrow night, Reverend Father!" began the boy, doubtfully.

"Well, what of it?" snarled the priest, in a harsh voice, his brow darkening. "Your father isn't trying to beg off, is he?"

"O, no, no!" Pierre hastened to reply. "He's getting ready, and he doesn't know I've come to see you. He'd have forbidden me had he known, so I stole away. But _I_ want to go instead of him. See, I'm young and strong; and I love fighting, while he loves peace; and he has pains in his joints, and would, maybe, get laid up on the march, whereas I can be of more use to the cause. Besides, _he_ can be of more use to the cause by staying home, which I can't be. Take me instead--!"

Pierre broke off abruptly, breathless in his eagerness. For a moment his hopes died within him, for the abbe's face remained dark and severe. That active brain reviewed the situation rapidly, and at length approved the proposal of Pierre. It was obvious that Pierre, ardent and impetuous, would be more effective than Antoine in such a venture; and it occurred to Le Loutre that in taking the boy he was inflicting a sharper punishment upon the father.

"You are a right brave youth," he said, presently, "and it shall be as you ask. You shall see that I do well by those that are faithful. As for the traitors, let them beware, for my arm is longer than they dream. I reach to Annapolis and Fort St. John and Louisburg as easily as to Minas or Memramcook." Here the abbe paused and was turning away. Looking back over his shoulder he added, but in a low voice:

"Come hither at dusk to-morrow. I will send a messenger to your father in the morning, saying that I release him from the expedition. See that you say nought to him, or to any living soul, of that which is to be done!"

When Pierre returned to the cabin his mother began to question him. He answered simply that he had to go up to the fort. "What for?" inquired his mother persistently. But Lecorbeau interposed.

"Pierre is as tall as his father," he said, smiling at the youth. "See how broad his shoulders are. Is he not old enough, anxious mother, to be out alone after dark?"

The good woman, assenting, gazed at her son proudly. And Pierre felt a pang at the thought of what his mother's grief would be on learning that he had gone on the abbe's expedition. His heart smote him bitterly to think he should have to leave without a word of explanation or farewell; but he knew that if his mother should get so much as a hint of his undertaking, her fears would ruin all. He crept to his bed, but lay tossing for hours, wide-eyed in the dark, before sleep put an end

to the wearying conflict of his thoughts.

The following morning brought unexpected joy to the cabin at the foot of Beausejour. Antoine Lecorbeau could hardly believe his ears when a messenger came to tell him that the abbe, in consideration of faithful services already rendered, would release him from the duty required of him. A load rolled off the Acadian's prudent soul, though he remained in a state of anxious perplexity. Had he known our Shakespeare he would have said, in the strict privacy of his inward meditations, "I like not fair terms and a villain's mind." But as for his good wife, she was radiant, and reproached herself volubly for the evil thought she had harbored against the good abbe. Pierre himself, seeing that Le Loutre was sticking to his promise, found a good word to say for him, for the first time that he could remember.

That same evening, supper being over about dusk, Pierre said he would go up to the fort and see the old sergeant. As he got to the cabin door he turned and threw a kiss to the dear ones he was leaving. Had the light been stronger his mother could not but have noticed his set mouth and the moisture in his eyes. He dared not trust himself to speak.

"Bring us back what news you can of the expedition, lad!" cried Lecorbeau after him; and it was with a mighty effort that Pierre strained his voice to answer "All right!"

At the fort everything was very quiet. Le Loutre was at the commandant's quarters with a half dozen befeathered and bepainted braves, in each of whom Pierre presently recognized a fellow-Acadian skillfully disguised. In fact, there was not an Indian among them. The real Indians were awaiting their leader and spiritual father in the woods beyond Fort Lawrence.

Pierre was warmly greeted by his fellow-villagers, all of whom had evidently worked themselves up into something like enthusiasm for their undertaking. Of the regular French soldiery there were none about. Not even a sentry was to be seen. The commandant was on hand, helping to complete the disguises of the Acadians, and he did not choose that any of his men should be able to say they had seen him give personal countenance to a violation of the treaty.

The commandant was very well disposed to the family of Antoine Lecorbeau, from whom he bought farm produce at ridiculously low terms, to sell it again in Louisburg at a profit of one or two hundred per cent. He spoke good humoredly to Pierre, and even helped him with his paint and feathers. Unscrupulous and heartless where his own interests were at stake, in small matters he was rather amiable than otherwise.

"Won't your father and mother be terribly anxious about you, when you fail to put in an appearance to-night? The good abbe tells me they are not to know of your whereabouts!" said the officer to Pierre, in a low voice.

"What, sir!" cried Pierre, aghast at the thought. "Won't they be told

where I’ve gone?"

"His Reverence says not," replied the officer. "His Reverence is very considerate!"

Pierre was almost beside himself. He knew not what to do. His hands dropped to his side, and he could only look imploringly at the commandant.

"Well, well, lad!" continued the latter, presently, "_I’ll_ let them know as soon as the expedition is safely out of this. This priest is quite too merciless for me. I’ll explain the whole thing to your father and mother, and will assure them that there’s no danger; as, indeed, is the truth, for it is pretty safe and easy work to shoot a man when he’s not more than half awake. Now, be easy in your mind, and leave the hard work and any little fighting there may be to those red heathens that His Reverence talks so much about."

With these words, which relieved Pierre’s mind, the commandant turned away, and left the youth to perfect his transformation into a Micmac brave.

It was drawing toward midnight when the abbe’s imitation Micmacs, after a hearty supper of meat, took their way from Beausejour. They saw no sentry as they stole forth. Le Loutre was with them, and himself led the way. The night was raw and gusty, with rain threatening. As they descended the hill they could hear the stream of the Missaguash brawling over the stones of the mid-channel, for the tide was out. Across the solitary marshes could be seen the lights of Fort Lawrence gleaming from their hilltop. Overhead was the weird cry of flocks of wild geese voyaging north. The gusts made Pierre draw his blanket closer about him, and the strangeness of his surroundings, with the dreadful character of the venture on which he was bound, filled his soul with awe. He was determined, however, to produce a good impression on the dreaded abbe. He stalked on with a long, energetic stride, keeping well to the front and maintaining a stoical silence.

Le Loutre led the way far up the Missaguash, so giving Fort Lawrence a wide berth. Once beyond the fort he turned south, skirting the further edge of what had been peaceful Beaubassin. At this point he led his party into the woods, and for perhaps half an hour the journey was most painful and exhausting. Pierre was running against trees and stumbling over branches, and at the same time, in spite of his discomfort and the novelty of the situation, growing more and more sleepy. The journey began to seem to him like a dismal nightmare, from which he would soon awaken to find himself in his narrow but cosy bunk at home.

Suddenly he was startled by the half-human cry of the panther, which sounded as if in the treetops right overhead. "Is that a signal?" inquired one of the startled travelers, while Pierre drew closer to his nearest comrade.

"It’s a signal that Monsieur Loup Cervier wants his supper, and would be quite willing to make it off a fat Acadian!" replied the abbe with

a grim laugh.

The party upon this began to talk and laugh aloud, which probably daunted the animal, for nothing more was heard of him. In the course of another ten minutes a light was seen glowing through the trees, and immediately the abbe hooted thrice, imitating perfectly the note of the little Acadian owl. This signal was answered from the neighborhood of the fire, whereupon the abbe gave the strange, resonant cry of the bittern. A few moments more and Pierre found himself by a camp fire which blazed cheerfully in the recess of a sheltered ravine. Around the fire were gathered some twoscore of Micmacs in their war dress, who merely grunted as the abbe and his little party joined them.

Here, wrapped in his blanket, his feet to the fire and his head on an armful of hemlock boughs, Pierre slept as sweet a sleep as if in his bed at home. At dawn he woke with a start, just as the abbe drew near to arouse him. For a moment he was bewildered; then gathering his wits he sprang quickly to his feet, looking ready for an instant departure. Le Loutre was content and turned away. Not many minutes were consumed in breakfasting, and the raiders were under way by the time the sun was up.

All that day the stealthy band crept on, avoiding the trails by which communication was kept up between the settlements. Early in the evening Le Loutre called a halt, and Pierre, exhausted, fell asleep the moment he had satisfied his hunger. Next morning the sun was high ere the party resumed its march, and not long after midday Le Loutre declared they had gone far enough as they were now near the settlement of Kenneticook. There was now nothing to be done but wait for night. A scout was sent forward to reconnoiter, and came back in a couple of hours with word that all was quiet in the little village, and no danger suspected.

About nine o’clock the abbe gave his orders. Not a soul in the village was to be spared, and not a house left standing. The enemy were to be destroyed, root and branch, and the English were to receive a lesson that would drive them in terror within the shelter of the Halifax stockades. In a few minutes the party was on the march, and moving now with the greatest secrecy and care.

During that silent march, every minutest detail of which stamped itself indelibly on Pierre’s memory, the lad clung desperately to the thought of all the injuries, real or pretended, which the English had inflicted upon his people. He dared not let himself think of the unoffending settlers trustfully sleeping in their homes. He strove to work himself up to some sort of martial ardor that might prevent him feeling like an assassin. Presently the rippling of the Kenneticook made itself heard on the quiet night, and then the dim outlines of the lonely and doomed hamlet rose into view.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SURPRISE.

The midnight murderers were at the very doors before even a dog gave warning. Then several curs raised a shrill alarm, and a great mastiff, chained to his kennel in the yard of the largest house, snapped his chain and sprang upon the raiders. The dog bore an Indian to the ground, and then fell dead, with a tomahawk buried in his skull. At the same moment the long, strident yell of the Micmacs rang through the hamlet, and a half dozen hatchets beat in every door. There was no time for resistance. The butchers were at the bedsides of their victims almost ere the latter were awake. Here and there a settler found time to snatch his rifle, or a andiron, or a heavy chair, and so to make a desperate though brief defense; and in this way three Micmacs and one Acadian were killed. The yells of the raiders were mingled with the shrieks of the victims, and almost instantly the scene of horror was lighted up by the flames of the burning ricks.

Pierre, with rather a vague idea of what he was going to do, had rushed to the attack among the foremost, and had plunged headlong over the body of the dead mastiff. In the fall he dropped his rifle, but clung to his hatchet, and in a moment he found himself in the hallway of the chief house. His perception of what took place was confused. He felt himself carried up the stairs with a rush. A faint light was glimmering into existence in the large room, in the middle of which he saw a man standing rifle in hand. There was a deafening report, and everything was wrapped in a cloud of smoke. Then a sudden glare filled the room as a barn outside blazed to heaven; and the man, clubbing his rifle, sprang at his assailants. Pierre did not wait to see his fate, but darted past him into a room beyond.

This was plainly the children’s bedroom. Pierre’s eye fell on a small, yellow-haired child, who was sitting up amid her bedclothes, her round eyes wild with terror. She shrieked at the sight of Pierre’s painted visage, but the lad’s heart went out to her with passionate pity as he thought of the little folk at home. He would save her at all hazards. He was followed into the room by three or four of the fiercest of his party. Pierre sprang with a yell upon the child’s bed, throwing her upon her face with one hand while he buried his hatchet in the pillows where she had lain. In an instant the little one was hidden under a heap of bedclothes, and too frightened to make an outcry. Somewhere in the room the butchers had evidently found another victim in hiding, for their triumphant yell was followed by a gasping groan, which smote Pierre to the heart, and filled him with an avenging fury.

A cloud of smoke blown past the window, for a moment darkened the room. An Indian ran against Pierre and grunted, "Ugh! All gone?"

"All gone!" replied the lad, and he saw the murderers glide forth to seek their prey. But one remained, delaying to remove a victim’s scalp. The room again became bright, and as the Indian passed Pierre his quick eye caught a motion in the heap of bedclothes. His eyes gleamed, and he

jerked the coverings aside. Pierre thrust him back violently and angrily, just as the child sat up with a shrill cry. The savage hesitated, impressed by Pierre’s uncompromising attitude, then turned with a grunt to seek satisfaction elsewhere.

The child was apparently five or six years old, but a tiny, fairylike creature.

"Sh-sh-sh!" said Pierre, soothingly, taking it for granted that she would not understand French. The child comprehended the sign, and stopped her cries, realizing that the strange and dreadful-looking being was her protector. Pierre, knowing that the house would soon be in flames, made haste to wrap the child in a thick blanket. He saw that beneath the window there was a shed with a sloping roof, by which he could easily reach the ground. He waited a few moments, with the child in his arms, covered as much as possible by his blanket, and so held as to look like a roll of booty. When the smoke once more blew in a stifling volume past the window, Pierre stepped out upon the roof with his precious burden, dropped to the ground, and made haste away in the direction of the least glare and tumult.

As he was stealing past a small cottage just burst into blaze, two of the raiders stepped in front of him. Pierre’s heart sank, but he grasped his hatchet, and a sort of hunted but deadly look gleamed in his eyes. The men didn’t offer to stop him, but one cried:

"What have you there?"

As he spoke Pierre recognized them for two of the Acadians, and his fears ceased.

"It’s a child I’m saving," he whispered. "Don’t say anything about it."

"Good boy!" chuckled the singular marauders; and Pierre hastened on, making for a wood near by.

Ere he could reach that shelter, however, Fate once more confronted him in the shape of a tall Micmac, whom Pierre recognized as one of the subchiefs of the tribe, a nephew of Cope. The chief, supposing Pierre was carrying off something very rich in the way of booty, stopped him and demanded a share. Pierre protested, declaring it was all his. When he spoke the savage recognized him, and having a lofty contempt for one who was both an Acadian and a mere boy, coolly attempted to snatch the bundle from his arms.

Pierre’s eyes blazed, as he grasped the Indian’s wrist and wrenched the cruel grip loose. He looked the savage straight in the eye.

"That’s _mine!_" said he steadily. "Keep your hands off!"

The Indian snatched again at the bundle, this time ineffectually; and then he drew his knife as if to attack Pierre. The latter jumped back, laid his burden on the ground, and stood before it, hatchet in hand.

Seeing he was not to be intimidated, and willing to avoid a hand-to-hand struggle with one who seemed so ready for it, the savage withdrew grumbling, at the same time resolving that he would force Pierre later on to divide his booty. As soon as he was gone Pierre snatched up his charge and sped away exultant.

The boy's design was to follow the Kenneticook to its mouth, and thence to ascend the Piziquid to the Acadian settlement, which he knew stood somewhere on its banks. He did not dare to try and find his way back to Beausejour. He knew that if he followed the trail of his party he would be captured and the child killed; and we was equally certain that if he deserted the trail he should be lost inevitably. Once at Piziquid, however, he counted on getting a fisherman to take him to Beausejour by water.

After toiling through the woods for perhaps an hour, keeping ever within hearing of the stream, Pierre set his burden on the ground and threw himself down beside her to snatch a moment's rest. The little one was in her bare feet, so it was impossible for her to walk in that rough and difficult region. Indeed, she had nothing on but a woolen nightdress, and Pierre had to keep her well wrapped up in the blanket he had brought from her bed. The little one had been contentedly sleeping in her deliverer's arms, all unconscious of the awful fate that had befallen those whom Pierre supposed to be her people. She remained asleep while Pierre was resting, nor woke till it was clear dawn.

Long ere this Pierre had found easier traveling, having come out upon a series of natural meadows skirting the stream. Beyond these meadows were wide flats, covered at high tide, and Pierre, with an Acadian's instinct, thought how fine it would be to dike them in. He had little fear now of being followed. His party would take it for granted, not finding him or his body, that he had fallen in the attack and been burnt in the conflagration. He felt that they would not greatly trouble themselves. As for those four who had seen him with his prize, two at least would not tell on him and he had strong hopes that the two Micmacs whom he had encountered would forget his prize in the confusion of the hour. Beside a rivulet, in the gray of dawn, he stopped to wash himself; that his appearance might not frighten the child on her awaking.

When the little one opened her eyes she looked about her in astonishment, which became delight as she saw the glittering brook close beside her and the many-colored sky overhead. She crept out of her blanket and stood with her little white feet shining in the short spring grass. Then she stepped into the brook, but finding it too cold for her she came out again at once. Then she stood shivering till Pierre, after drying her feet on his blanket, once more wrapped her up and seated her on a fallen tree beside him. The child kept up a continual prattle, of which, of course, Pierre understood not a word. He could only smile and stroke the little fair head. When he spoke to her in his own language the child gazed at him in wide-eyed wonder, and at last laughed gleefully and began to pat his face, talking a lot of baby gibberish, such as she imagined Pierre was addressing to her.

By and by Pierre remembered he was hungry. Taking some barley bread and dried meat out of the bag he carried at his waist, he offered the choicest bits to his tiny companion, and the two made a good breakfast. Out of a strip of birchbark the lad twisted a cup and gave the child to drink. Then, lifting her to his shoulder, he resumed his journey.

As the sun rose and the day grew warm Pierre let the child walk by his side; but the tender little feet were not used to such work, and almost immediately she cried to be taken up again. On this Pierre improvised her a clumsy pair of moccasins, made of strips of his blanket.

These the little one regarded at first with lofty contempt, but when she found they enabled her to run by her protector's side she was delighted. It was necessary to stop often and rest long, so our travelers made slow progress; but at noon, climbing a bluff which overlooked the river for miles in either direction, Pierre was delighted to find himself within two or three miles of the mouth. He marked, moreover, a short cut by which, taking advantage of the curve in the main river, he could cut off five or six miles and strike the banks of the Piziquid without difficulty or risk.

"By this time to-morrow, if all goes well, we'll be safe in Piziquid, cherie!" he cried joyously to the child, who responded with a mirthful stream of babble. Pierre's conversation she regarded as a huge and perpetual joke.

That night Pierre built a rough lean-to under the shelter of a great white plaster-rock, and there in a heap of fragrant branches, the child wrapped closely in the lad's arms, the lonely pair slept warm and secure. The next day was mild and our travelers found their path easy. Ere noon they arrived within sight of Piziquid.

They were on a hill with the Acadian village stretched out before them far below, but a broad river rolling between them and their destination. Pierre had forgotten about the St. Croix, but he recognized it now from description. He saw, to his disappointment, that he would have to make a long detour to pass this obstacle, so he sat down on the hill to rest and refresh his little companion. The little one was now so tired that she fell instantly to sleep, and Pierre thought it wise to let her sleep a good half hour. Even he himself appreciated well the delay; and the view that unrolled beneath him was magnificent.

Right ahead, in the corner of land between the Piziquid River and the St. Croix, rose a rounded hill crowned with the English post of Fort Edward. Beyond to right and left expanded plains of vivid emerald, with a line of undulating uplands running back from Fort Edward and dividing the marshes of the St. Croix from those of the Piziquid. The scene was one of plenty and content. Pierre concluded that it would be necessary for him to avoid being seen by the garrison of the fort, lest he should be suspected of being one of the raiders. He decided to seek one of the outermost houses of the settlement about nightfall and there to tell his story, relying upon the good faith of one Acadian toward another. The child, he made up his mind must stay in his care and go with him to

Beausejour. Having risked and suffered so much for her, he already began to regard her with jealous devotion and to imagine she was indeed his own.

The child woke as joyous as a bird. Hand in hand the quaint-looking pair--a seeming Indian with a little white-skinned child in a flannel nightgown--trudged patiently up the stream, till in the middle of the afternoon they came to a spot where Pierre thought it safe to wade across. By this time the little one's feet were so sore that she had to be carried all the time; and it was well after sunset when Pierre set his armful down at the door of an outlying cottage of Piziquid, well away from the surveillance of the fort.

In answer to Pierre's knock there came a woman to the door, who started back in alarm. With a laughing salutation, however, Pierre followed her into the blaze of firelight which poured from the heaped-up hearth. In spite of his disguise he was at once recognized by the man of the house as an Acadian, and the wanderers found an instant and hearty welcome. Over a hot supper (in the midst of which the tired child fell asleep with her head in her plate, and was carried to bed by the motherly good wife) Pierre told all his story.

"We shall have to keep you hidden till we get you away!" said the villager, one Jean Breboeuf by name. "You see, their eyes are open at the fort. They got word at Halifax, somehow, that our precious abbe (whom may the saints confound!) was planning some deviltry, and messages were sent to the different posts to guard the outlying settlements. It's a wonder you didn't find English soldiers at Kenneticook, for a company started thither. However, if the English catch you in this dress they won't take long deciding what to do with you."

Pierre was greatly alarmed.

"Can't you give me something to wear?" he cried.

"O, yes!" answered the host, "we'll fix you all right in the morning so nobody will ever suspect you. Then I'll get Marin--he's got a good boat--to start right off and sail you round to Beausejour. But what about the little one?"

"O, she goes wherever I go!" said Pierre, decidedly.

"Yes, yes! But she's got to be kept out of sight," replied Breboeuf "She looks English, every inch of her; and if the people at the fort get eyes on her there'll be an investigation sure!"

"Can you speak English?" queried Pierre.

"Well enough!" replied his host.

"There'll be no trouble then," continued Pierre. "You can tell her to keep quiet and keep covered up when we're taking her to the boat. She'll mind, I'll answer you. And then, if Madame Breboeuf can give her a little homespun frock and cap, we'll pass her off all right

should anyone see her. And when we get to Beausejour my father will make it all right for the clothes."

"He won't do anything of the sort," answered both Breboeuf and his wife in one breath. "We all know Antoine Lecorbeau, and we're proud to do his son a service. If we poor Acadians did not help each other, I'd like to know who'd help us, anyway!"

It was with a light heart that Pierre slept that night, and joyfully in the morning he put away the last trace of his hated disguise. His little charge showed plainly that she considered the change an improvement. The child told Breboeuf (whom she understood with difficulty) that her name was Edie Howe. At this Breboeuf was surprised, for, as he said to Pierre, there were no Howes at Kenneticook. When the Acadian tried to question Edie more closely, her answers became irrelevant, which was probably due to the deficiencies of Monsieur Breboeuf's English.

Pierre kept indoors most of the morning, as the little one would not let him out of her sight, and he dared not be seen with her. Soon after noon the tide was all ready for a departure, and not behindhand was the fisherman, Marin, with his stanch Minas craft. Marin had brought his boat up the St. Croix and into a little creek at some distance from the fort, because at the regular landing place there were always some English soldiers strolling about for lack of anything better to do. It was with some trepidation that Pierre set out for the creek. The little girl walked between her dear protector and their host, holding a hand of each, and chattering about everything she saw, till with great effort Breboeuf got her to understand that if she didn't keep quite quiet, and not say a word to anybody till they got safely away, in the boat, something dreadful might happen to her Pierre. She was dressed like any of the little Acadian maidens of Piziquid, and her blue cap of quilted linen was so tied on as to hide her sunny hair and much of her face; but the danger was that she might betray herself by her speech.

Before the party reached the boat they had a narrow escape from detection. They were met by three or four soldiers who were strolling across the marsh. In passing they gave Breboeuf a hearty good-day in English, and one of them called Edie his "little sweetheart." The child looked up with a laugh, and cried, coquettishly, "Not yours! I'm Pierre's." Then, as Breboeuf squeezed her hand sharply, she remembered his caution and said no more, though her small heart was filled with wonder to think she might not talk to the nice soldiers.

"Why, where did the baby learn her English?" asked the soldier in a tone of surprise. "_You_ never taught her, I'll be bound."

"Her mother taught her. Her mother speaks the English better than you yourself," was Breboeuf's ready reply. Later in the day that soldier suddenly remembered that the good wife Breboeuf did not speak a word of English, and he was properly mystified. By that time, however, Pierre and the little one were far from Piziquid. With a merry breeze behind them

they were racing under the beetling front of Blomidon.

On the day following they caught the flood tide up Chignecto Bay, and sailed into the mouth of the Au Lac stream, almost under the willows of Lecorbeau’s cottage. The joy of Pierre’s father and mother on seeing the lad so soon returned was mingled with astonishment at seeing him arrive by water, and with a little English child in his care. The little one, with her exciting experiences behind her, did not dream of being shy, but was made happy at once with a kind welcome; while Pierre, the center of a wondering and exclaiming circle, narrated the wild adventures of the past few days, which had, indeed developed him all at once from boyhood to manhood. As he described the massacre, and the manner in which he had rescued the yellow-haired lassie, his mother drew the little one into her arms and cried over her from sympathy and excitement; and the child wiped her eyes with her own quilted sunbonnet. At the conclusion of the vivid narrative Lecorbeau was the first to speak.

"Nobly have you done, my dear son," he cried, with warm emotion. "But now, where are your companions of that dreadful expedition? Not one has yet arrived at Beausejour!"

CHAPTER VII.

PIERRE’S LITTLE ONE.

This question which Lecorbeau asked, all Beausejour was asking in an hour or two. That night an Indian, sent from Le Loutre, who was lying in exhaustion at Cobequid, arrived at the fort and told the fate of the expedition.

As already stated, the English authorities in Halifax had been warned of the movements of the Indians--though they could only guess the part that Le Loutre had in them. Without delay they had sent small bands of troops to each of the exposed settlements, but that dispatched to Kenneticook arrived, as we have seen, too late. When the breathless soldiers, lighted through the woods by the glare of the burning village, reached the scene of ruin, of all who had that night lain down to fearless sleep in Kenneticook there remained alive but one, the little child whom Pierre had snatched from death.

When the English emerged from the woods and saw the extent of the disaster, they knew they were too late. Not a house, not a building of any kind, but was already wrapped in a roaring torrent of flame, and against the broad illumination could be seen the figures of the savages, fantastically dancing. The English captain formed his line with prudent deliberation, and then led the attack at a run.

Never dreaming of so rude an interruption, the raiders were taken utterly by surprise and made no effective resistance. A number fell

at the first volley, which the English poured in upon them in charging. Then followed a hand-to-hand fight, fierce but brief, which Le Loutre didn’t see, as he had wisely retired on the instant of the Englishmen’s arrival. He was followed by two of the Acadians, and two or three of the more prudent of the Micmacs; but the rest of his party, fired with blind fury by the liquor which they had found among the village stores, remained to fight with a drunken recklessness and fell to a man beneath the steel of the avengers.

Left masters of the field, the rescue party gazed with horror on the ruin they had come too late to avert. With a grim, poetic justice they cast the bodies of their slain foes into the fires which had already consumed the victims of their ferocity. While this was going on the leader of the party, a young lieutenant, stood apart in deepest dejection.

"What’s the matter with the general?" inquired a soldier, pointing with his thumb in the direction of his sorrowing chief.

"I’m afeard as how that little niece of his’n, as you’ve seed him a-danderin’ many a time in Halifax, was visitin’ folks here. If so be what I’ve hearn be true, them yellin’ butchers has done for her, sure pop. I tell ye, Bill, she was a little beauty, an’ darter of the cap’n they murdered last September down to Fort Lawrence."

"I ricklecs the child well" replied Bill, shaking his head slowly. "It _was_ a purty one, an’ _no_ mistake! An’ Cap’n Howe’s darter, too. I swan!"

In a little while the careless-hearted soldiers were asleep amid the ashes of Kenneticook village, while the young lieutenant lay awake, his heart aching for his golden-haired pet, his widowed sister’s child. The next day he gave his men a long rest, for they had done some severe forced marching. When at length he reached Piziquid he little dreamed that the child whose death he mourned was at that very moment sailing down the river bound for Beausejour and a long sojourn among her people’s enemies.

In the house of Antoine Lecorbeau things went on more pleasantly than with most of his fellow-Acadians. With the good will of Vergor, the commandant of Beausejour, who made enormous profits out of the Acadian’s tireless diligence, Lecorbeau became once more fairly prosperous; and Le Loutre had grown again friendly. But most of the Acadians found themselves in a truly pitiable plight. There were not lands enough to supply them all, and they pined for the farms of Acadie which Le Loutre had forced them to forsake. Threatened with excommunication and the scalping knife if they should return to their allegiance, and with starvation if they obeyed the commands of their heartless superiors at Quebec, they were girt about on all sides with pain and peril. Vacillating, unable to think boldly for themselves, they were doubtless much to blame, but their miseries were infinitely more than they deserved. The punishments that fell upon them fell upon the wrong shoulders. The English, who treated them for a long time with the most patient forbearance, were compelled at length, in self-defense, to adopt an

attitude of rigorous severity; and by the French, in whose cause they suffered everything, they were regarded as mere tools, to be used till destroyed. At the door of the corrupt officials of France may be laid all their miseries.

After the affair at Kenneticook Le Loutre found that Cobequid was no longer the place for him. He needed the shelter of Beausejour. There, by force of his fanatic zeal, his ability, and his power over the Acadians, he divided the authority of the fort with its corrupt commandant. He never dreamed of the part Pierre had played that dreadful night on the Kenneticook. He knew Lecorbeau had somewhere picked up an English child. But a child was in his eyes quite too trivial a matter to call for any comment.

As time went on Pierre's little one, as she was generally called--"la p'tite de Pierre"--picked up the French of her new Acadian home, and went far to forgetting her English. In the eyes of Lecorbeau and his wife she came to seem like one of their own and she was a favorite with the whole family; but to Pierre she clung as if he were her father and mother in one. As soon as she had learned a little French she was questioned minutely as to her parents and her home. Her name, Edie Howe, had at once been associated with that of the lamented captain.

"Edie," good wife Lecorbeau would say to her, "where is your mother?"

At this the child would shake her head sorrowfully for a moment, and pointing over the hills, would answer:

"Away off there!"--and sometimes she would add, "Poor mamma's sick!"

At last one day she seemed suddenly to remember, and cried as if she were announcing a great discovery, "Why, mamma's in Halifax."

Mother Lecorbeau was not a little triumphant at having elicited this definite information.

On the subject of her father the little one had not much to say. When questioned about him she merely said that she was his little girl, and that he had gone away somewhere, and some bad people wouldn't let him come back again. She said her mamma had cried a great deal while telling her that papa would never come back--and from this it was clear at once that the father was dead. To get any definite idea from the child as to the time of his death proved a vain endeavor; she was not very clear in her ideas of time. But she said he was a tall man and a soldier. She further declared that he hadn't a lot of hair on his face, like father Lecorbeau, but was nice and smooth, like her Pierre, only with a mustache. All this tallied with a description of Captain Howe, so Lecorbeau concluded that she was Howe's child. As for the people with whom she had been visiting in the hapless village of Kenneticook, they were evidently old servants of her father's family.

"I was staying at nurse's," she used to say. "Uncle Willie sent me there because my mamma was sick." Of this Uncle Willie she talked

so much and so often that Pierre said he was jealous.

While several years rolled by, bringing no great event to the cabin in the willows at the foot of Beausejour, a cloud was slowly gathering over the fortressed hill. The relations between France and England in Acadie were growing more and more strained. It was plain that a rupture must soon come. In the cabin, by the light of fire or candle, after the day's work was done, Pierre and his father, with sometimes the old sergeant from the fort, used to talk over the condition of affairs. To Pierre and the sergeant it was obvious that France must win back Acadie, and that soon; and they paid little heed to Lecorbeau's sagacious comparisons between the French and English methods of conducting the government. Lecorbeau, naturally did not feel like arguing his points with much determination; but across the well-scrubbed deal table he uttered several predictions which Pierre recalled when he saw them brought to pass.

"Here's about how it stands," remarked the sergeant one night, shaking the ashes of his pipe into the hollow of his hand, "there's hundreds upon hundreds now of your Acadians shifting round loose, waiting for a chance to get back to their old farms. They don't dare go back while the English hold possession, for fear of His Reverence yonder"--signifying, of course, Le Loutre--"so they're all ready to fight just as soon as France gives the word. They don't care much for France, maybe--not much more than for the English--but they do just hanker after their old farms. When the government thinks it the right time, and sends us some troops from Quebec and Louisburg, all the Acadians out of Acadie will walk in to take possession, and the Acadians in Acadie will bid good day to King George and help us kick the English out of Halifax. It's bound to come, sure as fate; and pretty soon, I'm thinking."

"I believe you're right!" assented Pierre, enthusiastically.

"What would you think, now," said Lecorbeau, suggestively, "if the English should take it into their slow heads not to wait for all this to happen? What would you do up there in the fort if some ships were to sail up to-morrow and land a little English army under Beausejour? You've got a priest and a greedy old woman (begging Monsieur Vergor's pardon) to lead you. How long would Beausejour hold out? And suppose Beausejour was taken, where would the settlements be--Ouestkawk and Memramcook, and even the fort on the St. John? Wouldn't it rather knock on the head this rising of the Acadians, this 'walking in and taking possession' of which you feel so confident?"

"But we won't give the English a chance!" cried the warlike pair, in almost the same breath. "We'll strike first. You'll see!"

Meanwhile the English were making ready to do just what Lecorbeau said they might do. At the same time the French at Quebec, at Louisburg, at Beausejour, though talking briskly about the great stroke by which Acadie was to be recaptured, were too busy plundering the treasury to take any immediate steps. Following the distinguished example of the notorious intendant, Bigot, almost every official in New France had

his fingers in the public purse. They were in no haste for the fray.

The English, however, seeing what the French _might_ do, naturally supposed they would try and do it. To prevent this, they were planning the capture of Beausejour. Governor Lawrence, in Halifax, and Governor Shirley, in Boston, were preparing to join forces for the undertaking. In New England Shirley raised a regiment of two thousand volunteers who mustered, in April of the year 1755, amid the quaint streets of Boston. This regiment was divided into two battalions, one of which was commanded by Colonel John Winslow, and the other by John Scott. After a month's delay, waiting for muskets, the little army set sail for Beausejour. The chief command was in the hands of Colonel Moncton, who had been sent to Boston by Lawrence to arrange the expedition.

On the night when Lecorbeau, Pierre, and the old sergeant were holding the conversation of which I have recorded a fragment, the fleet containing the Massachusetts volunteers were already at Annapolis. A day or two later they were sailing up the restless tide of Fundy. On the first day of June they were sighted from the cloud-topped mountain of Chepody, or "_Chapeau Dieu_." As the sun went down the fleet cast anchor under the high bluffs of Far Ouestkawk, not three leagues from Beausejour. As the next dawn was breaking over the Minudie hills there arrived at the fort a little party of wearied Acadians, who had hastened up from Chepody to give warning. Instantly all Beausejour became a scene of excitement. There was much to be done in the way of strengthening the earthworks. Urgent messengers were sent out to implore reinforcements from Louisburg, while others called together all the Acadians of the neighborhood, to the number of fourteen hundred fighting men. As Pierre and his father were taking the rest of the family, with some supplies, to a little wooded semi-island beside the Tantramar, some miles from the fort, Lecorbeau said to his son:

"I rather like the idea of that bold stroke of yours and the sergeant's! When do you think it will be carried out?"

Pierre looked somewhat crestfallen, but he mustered up spirit to reply:

"Just wait till we've beaten off those fellows. Then you'll see what we'll do."

"Well," said his father, "I'll wait as patiently as possible!"

After placing the mother and children in their refuge, which was already thronged, our two Acadians, with a tearful farewell, hastened back to take their part in the defense of Beausejour.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NEW ENGLANDERS.

The refuge of good wife Lecorbeau, and the children, and "Pierre's little one" was a wooded bit of rising ground which, before the diking-in of the Tantramar marshes, had been an island at high water. It was still called Isle au Tantramar. Among the trees, under rude lean-to tents and improvised shelters of all sorts, were gathered the women and children of Beausejour, out of range of the cannon balls that they knew would soon be flying over their homes. The weather was balmy, and their situation not immediately painful, but their hearts were a prey to the wildest anxieties.

By this time the New Englanders had landed over against Fort Lawrence, and had joined their forces with those of the English at the fort. The numbers of the attacking army filled the Acadians with apprehension of defeat. Many of them, like Lecorbeau, had in the past taken oath of allegiance to King George, and these feared lest, in the probable event of the English being victorious, they should be put to death as traitors. This difficulty was solved, and their fears much mitigated, in a thoroughly novel way. The commandant assured them solemnly that if they refused to join in the defense of the fort he would shoot them down like dogs. Upon this the Acadians conceived themselves released from all responsibility in the matter, and went quite cheerfully to work. Even Lecorbeau feeling himself secured by Vergor's menace, was quietly and fearlessly interested in the approaching struggle. Lecorbeau, was no faint-heart, though his far-seeing sagacity often made him appear so in the eyes of those who did not know him well. As for Pierre, he was now in his element, sniffing the battle like a young warhorse, and forgetful of the odds against him. Le Loutre was everywhere at once, tireless, seeing everything, spurring the work, and worth a hundred Vergors in such a crisis as this.

Beausejour was a strong post, a pentagon with heavy ramparts of earth, with two bombproofs, so called, and mounting twenty-five pieces of artillery. Some of the guns were heavy metal for those days and that remote defense. I have seen them used as gateposts by the more aristocratic of Beausejour's present inhabitants. Within the fort was a garrison of one hundred and sixty regulars. Three hundred Acadians were added to this garrison--among them being Pierre and his father. The rest of the Acadians spread themselves in bands through the woods and uplands, in order to carry on a system of harassing attacks.

Across the Missaguash, some distance from its mouth, there was a bridge called Pont-a-Buot, and thither, after a day or two of reconnoitering, Colonel Moncton led his forces from Fort Lawrence. They marched in long column up the Missaguash shore, wading through the rich young grasses. As they approached they saw that the bridge had been broken down, and the fragments used to build a breastwork on the opposite shore. This breastwork, as far as they could see, was unoccupied.

Appearances in this case were deceptive. Hidden behind the breastwork was a body of troops from Beausejour. There were nearly four hundred of them--Acadians and Indians, with a few regulars to give them steadiness. Pierre, as might have been expected, was among the band,

beside his instructor, the old sergeant. Trembling with excitement, though outwardly calm enough, Pierre watched, through the chinks of the breastwork, the approach of the hostile column. Just as it reached the point opposite, where the bridge had been broken away, he heard a sharp command from an officer just behind him. Instantly, he hardly knew how, he found himself on his feet, yelling fiercely, and firing as fast as he could reload his musket. Through the rifts of the smoke he could see that the hot fire was doing execution in the English ranks. Presently, he heard the old sergeant remark:

"There come the guns! Now look out for a squall!"--and he saw two fieldpieces being hurriedly dragged into position. The next thing he knew there was a roar--the breastwork on one side of him flew into fragments, and he saw a score of his comrades dead about him. The roar was repeated several times, but his blood was up, and he went on loading and firing as before, without a thought of fear. At length the sergeant grabbed him by the arm.

"We've got to skip out of this and cut for cover in those bushes yonder. We'll do more good there, and this breastwork, or what's left of it, is no longer worth holding."

Pierre looked about him astonished, and found they were almost alone. He shouldered his musket and strode sullenly into cover, the old sergeant laughingly slapping him on the back.

Firing irregularly from the woods, the French succeeded in making it very unpleasant for the English in their work of laying a new bridge. But, notwithstanding, the bridge grew before their eyes. Pierre was disgusted.

"We're beaten, it seems, already," he cried to the sergeant.

"Not at all!" responded the latter, cheerfully. "All this small force could be expected to do has been already done. We have suffered but slightly, while we have caused the enemy considerable loss. That's all we set out to do. We're not strong enough to stand up to them; we're only trying to weaken them all we can. See, now they're crossing--and it's about time we were out of this!"

It was indeed so. The bridge was laid, the column was hastening across. A bugle rang out the signal for retreat, and the fire from the bushes ceased. In a moment the Acadian force had dissolved, scattering like a cloud of mist before the sun. Pierre found himself, with a handful of his comrades, speeding back to the fort. Others sought their proper rendezvous. There was nothing for the English to chase, so they kept their column unbroken. As Pierre entered the fort he saw the enemy establishing themselves in the uplands, about a mile and a half from Beausejour.

When night fell the heavens were lit up with a glare that carried terror to the women and children on Isle au Tantramar. Vergor had set fire to the chapel, and to all the houses of Beausejour that might shelter

an approach to the ramparts. "Alas," cried the unhappy mother Lecorbeau to the children about her, "we are once more homeless, without a roof to shelter us!" and she and all the women broke into loud lamentations. The children, however, seemed rather to enjoy the scene, and Edie told an interested audience about the great blaze there was, and how red the sky looked, the night her dear Pierre carried her away from Kenneticook.

For several days the English made no further advance, and to Pierre and his fellow-Acadians in the fort the suspense became very trying. The regulars took the delay most philosophically, seeming content to wait just as long as the enemy would permit them. Pierre began to wish he was with one of the guerilla parties outside, for these were busy all the time, making little raids, cutting off foraging parties, skirmishing with pickets, and retreating nimbly to the hills whenever attacked in force. At length there came a change. A battalion of New Englanders, about five hundred strong, advanced to within easy range of the fort, and occupied a stony ridge well adapted for their purpose.

A braggart among the French officers, one Vannes by name, begged to be allowed to sally forth with a couple of hundred men and rout the audacious provincials. Vergor sanctioned the enterprise, and the boaster marched proudly forth with his company. Arriving in front of the New Englanders he astounded the latter, and supplied his comrades in the fort with food for endless mirth, by facing the right about and leading his shame-faced files quietly back to Beausejour. Pierre was profoundly thankful to the old sergeant for having dissuaded him from joining in the sally. Covering Vannes's humiliation the fort opened a determined fire, which after a time disabled one of the small mortars which the assailants had placed in position. Gradually the English brought up the rest of their guns, and on the following day a sharp artillery duel was carried on between the fort and the ridge.

Within the ramparts things went but ill, and Pierre became despondent as his eyes were opened to the almost universal corruption about him. Enlightened by the shrewd comments of the old sergeant, the quiet penetration of his father's glance, which saw everything, he soon realized that fraud and self-seeking were become the ruling impulse in Beausejour. "Like master, like man" was a proverb which he saw daily fulfilled. Vergor thought more of robbing than of serving his country, and from him his subordinates took their cue. Le Loutre, with his fiery fanaticism, went up, by contrast, in the estimation of the honest-hearted boy. As the siege dragged on some of the Acadians became homesick, or anxious about their families. These begged leave to go home; which was of course refused. Others quietly went without asking. An air of hopelessness stole over the garrison, which was deepened to despair when news came from Louisburg that no help could be expected from that quarter, the town being strictly blockaded by the English.

At length, in an ignoble way, came the crisis. In one of the two vaulted chambers of masonry which were dignified with the title of "bombproofs," a party of French officers, with a captive English lieutenant, were

sitting at breakfast. A shell from the English mortars dropped through the ceiling, exploded, and killed seven of the company. Vergor, with other officers and Le Loutre, was in the second bombproof. His martial spirit was confounded at the thought that the one retreat might turn out to be no more "bomb-proof" than the other. Most of his subordinate officers shared his feelings, and in a few minutes, to the pleasant astonishment of the English, and in spite of the furious protests of Le Loutre and of two or three officers who were not lost to all sense of manhood, a white flag was hoisted on Beausejour. The firing straightway ceased, on both sides, and an officer was sent forth to negotiate a capitulation.

Pierre threw down his musket, and looked at his father, who stood watching the proceedings with a smile of grim contempt. Then he turned to the sergeant, who was smoking philosophically.

"Is _this_ the best France can do?" he cried, in a sharp voice.

"The English do certainly show to rather the better advantage," interposed Lecorbeau; but the old sergeant hastened to answer, in a tone of sober grief:

"You must'nt judge _la belle France_ by the men she has been sending out to Canada and Acadie these late years, my Pierre. These are the creatures of Bigot, the notorious. It is he and they that are dragging our honor in the dust!"

"Well," exclaimed Pierre, "I shall stay and see this thing through; but as there is no more fighting to be done, you, father, had better go and take care of mother and the children. There is nothing to be gained, but a good deal to be risked by staying here and being taken prisoner. The English may not think much of the powers of compulsion of a man that can't fight any better than our commandant"

"You're right, my boy," said Lecorbeau, cheerfully. "My situation just now is a delicate one, to say the least of it. Well, good-bye for the present. By this time to-morrow, if all goes as expeditiously as it has hitherto, we shall meet in our own cabin again."

With these words Lecorbeau walked coolly forth, on the side of the fort opposite to the besiegers, and strolled across the marshes toward Isle au Tantramar. Two or three more, who were in the same awkward position as Lecorbeau, proceeded to follow his example. The rest, considering that for them there was now no danger, the fighting being done, stayed to see the end, and to pick up what they could in the way of spoils. As for Le Loutre, realizing that his cause was lost and his neck in the utmost jeopardy, he hid himself in a skillful disguise and fled in haste for Quebec.

The same evening, at seven o'clock, the garrison marched out of Beausejour with the honors of war; whereupon a body of New Englanders marched in, hoisted the flag of England, and fired a royal salute from the ramparts of the fort. By the terms of the capitulation the garrison was to be sent

at once to Louisburg, and those Acadians who in taking part in the defense had violated their oath of allegiance to King George were to be pardoned as having done it under compulsion. All such matters of detail having been arranged satisfactorily, Vergor gave a grand dinner to the English and French officers in the stronghold of which his cowardice had robbed his country. The fort was rechristened "Fort Cumberland," and the curiously assorted guests all joined most cordially in drinking to the new title.

On the following day Lecorbeau brought his wife and family back to the cottage under the willows, and Pierre was reunited to his beloved "petite." Isle au Tantramar was soon deserted, for the families whose homes at Beausejour had just been burnt returned to camp amid the ashes and erected rude temporary shelters. They were all overjoyed at the leniency of the English; but a blow more terrible than any that had yet befallen them was hanging over this most unhappy people.

Among the English officers encamped at Beausejour was the slim young lieutenant who had led the band of avengers at Kenneticook. He spoke French; he was interested in the Acadian people; and he moved about among them inquiring into their minds and troubles. The cabin under the willows, almost the only house left standing in Beausejour village, at once attracted him, and he sauntered down the hill to visit it.

The household was in a bustle getting things once more to rights; and a group of children played chattering about the low, red, ocher-washed door. As the lieutenant approached, Lecorbeau came forth to meet and greet him. The Englishman was just on the point of grasping the Acadian’s outstretched hand, when a shrill cry of "Uncle Willie" rang in his ears, and he found one of the children clinging to him rapturously. For an instant he was utterly bewildered, gazing down on the sunburned fair little face upturned to his. Then he snatched the child to his heart, exclaiming passionately, "My Edie, my darling!" To Lecorbeau, and to his wife and Pierre, who now appeared, the scene was clear in an instant; and a weight of misery rolled down upon the heart of Pierre as he realized that now he should lose the little one he loved so well.

For a few moments the child and her new-found uncle were entirely absorbed in each other. But presently the little one looked around and pointed to Pierre.

"Here’s my Pierre!" she explained in her quaint French--"and there’s papa Lecorbeau, and mamma Lecorbeau, and there’s little Jacques, and Bibi, and Vergie, and Tiste. Won’t you come and live with us, too?"

Her uncle covered her face anew with his kisses. "My darling," he said, "you will come with me to Halifax, to mamma!"

"And leave Pierre?" she cried, her eyes filling. "I can’t leave my Pierre, who saved me from the cruel Indians."

This recalled the young man’s thoughts to the mystery of the little one’s presence at Beausejour. Lecorbeau gave him a bench, and sitting down beside him told the story, while Edie sat with one hand in her

uncle’s clasp and the other in that of Pierre. The young Englishman was deeply moved. Having heard all, and questioned of the matter minutely, he rose and shook Pierre by the hand, thanking him in few words, indeed, but in a voice that spoke his emotion. Then he poured out his gratitude to Lecorbeau and his wife for their goodness, to this child of their foes; and little by little he gathered the Acadian’s feelings toward the English, and the part he had played throughout. At length he said:

"Can you allow me to quarter myself here for the present? I cannot take Edie into the camp, and she would not be willing if I could. I see from her love for you how truly kind she has found you. I want to be with the little one as much as possible; and, moreover, my presence here may prove of use to you in the near future."

The significance of these last words Lecorbeau did not care to question, but after a glance at his wife, who looked dumfounded at the proposition, he said:

"You may well realize, monsieur, that with this small cabin and this large family we can give you but poor accommodation. But such as it is, you are more than welcome to it. Your coming will be to us an honor and a pleasure, and a most valued protection."

The lieutenant at once took up his abode in Lecorbeau’s cabin. When, a few weeks later, the first scenes were enacted in the tragedy known as the "Expulsion of the Acadians," the friendship of the young lieutenant and of Edie stood Lecorbeau in good stead. This storm which scattered to the four winds the remnant of the Acadians, passed harmlessly over the cabin beneath the willows of Beausejour. When Acadie was once more quiet, and Edie and her uncle went to Halifax, Lecorbeau added fertile acres to his farm; while Pierre accompanied his "petite" to the city, where his own abilities, and the lieutenant’s steadfast friendship, won him advancement and success.

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HOW THE CARTER BOYS LIFTED THE MORTGAGE.

[Illustration: "When he reached the door he knocked imperiously."--_See page 159_.]

CHAPTER I.

CATCHING A TARTAR.

As long as they could remember, the roaring flow and rippling ebb of the great tides had been the most conspicuous and companionable sounds in the ears of Will and Ted Carter. The deep, red channel of the creek that swept past their house to meet the Tantramar, a half mile further on, was marked on the old maps, dating from the days of Acadian occupation, by the name of the Petit Canard. But to the boys, as to all the villagers of quiet Frosty Hollow, it was known as "the Crick."

To "the Crick" the Carters owed their little farm. Mrs. Carter was a sea captain's widow, living with her two boys, Will and Ted, in a small yellow cottage on the crest of a green hill by the water. Behind the cottage, framing the barn and the garden and the orchard, and cutting off the north wind, was a thick grove of half-grown fir trees. From the water, however, these were scarcely visible, and the yellow house twinkled against the broad blue of the sky like the golden eye of a great forget-me-not.

I have said that the Carters owed their little farm to the creek. That is to say, their farm was made up chiefly of marsh, or diked meadow, which had been slowly deposited by the waters of the creek at high tide, then captured and broken into the service of man by the aid of long, imprisoned ramparts of sodded clay. This marsh land was inexhaustibly fertile, deep with grass, purple in patches with vetch blossoms, pink and crimson, along the ditches with beds of wild roses. Outside the dikes the tawny current of the creek clamored almost ceaselessly, quiet only for a little while at high water. When the tide was low, or nearly so, the creek was a shining, slippery, red gash, twisting hither and thither through stretches of red-brown, sun-cracked flats, whitened here and there with deposited salt. Where the creek joined the Tantramar, its parent stream, the abyss of coppery and gleaming ooze revealed at ebb tide made a picture never to be forgotten; for the tidal Tantramar does not conform to conventional ideas of what a river should be.

Had the creek been their only creditor the Carters would have been fortunate. As it was, the little farm was mortgaged up to its full value. When Captain Carter died of yellow fever on the voyage home from Brazil, he left the family little besides the farm. To be sure, there was a share in the ship, besides; but this Mrs. Carter made haste to sell, though shipping was at the time away down, and she realized almost nothing from the sale. Had she held on to the property a year longer she would have found herself almost comfortable, for there came a sudden activity in the carrying trade, and shipowners made their fortunes rapidly. But Mrs. Carter cared little for business considerations where a sentiment was concerned; and being descended from one of the oldest and most distinguished families of the country, she had a lofty confidence that the country owed her a living, and would be at pains to meet the obligation. In this confidence she was sadly disappointed; and so it came about that, while Will and Ted were yet but small lads, the farm was mortgaged to Mr. Israel Hand, who greatly desired to

add it to his own adjoining property.

It happened one summer afternoon, when Will was nearly eighteen years of age, and Ted fifteen, that the boys were raking hay in the meadow, while Mr. Israel Hand was toiling up the long hill that led from Frosty Hollow to the yellow cottage. The figure of Mr. Hand was hidden from the boys' view by the dense foliage of the maples and birch trees bordering the road. Toward the top of the hill, however, the line of trees was broken; and in the gap towered a superb elm. Immediately beneath the elm, half inclosed in a luxuriant thicket of cinnamon, rose, and clematis, stood an inviting rustic seat which commanded a view of the marshes, and the windings of the Tantramar, and the far-off waters of the bay, and the historic heights of ramparted Beausejour.

Toward the seat beneath the elm tree Ted kept casting eager but furtive glances. This presently attracted Will's attention.

"What have you, young one, been up to now?" he queried, in a tone half amused and half rebuking.

Ted's eyes sparkled mischievously.

"O, nothing much!" said he, bending his curly head over the remains of a bird's egg, which he suddenly discovered in the grass. But his denial was not intended to deny so much as to provoke further inquiry. He was a persistent, and sometimes troublesome practical joker; but he usually wanted Will to know of his pranks beforehand, that Will's steady good sense might keep him from anything too extravagant in the way of trickery.

"O, come off now, Ted," exclaimed Will, grinning. "Tell me what it is, or I'll go and find out, and spoil the fun."

"It's just a little trap I've set for a fellow I want to catch," replied Ted, thus adjured.

"Well?" said Will, expectantly.

"Well!" continued the joker. "I've set a tub of 'crick' water--with lots of mud in it--right under the seat up there, and fixed the bushes and vines round it so that it hardly shows. I've sawed the seat almost through, from underneath, so that when a fellow sits down on it--and after climbing the hill, you know, he always sits down hard--well, you can see just what's going to happen."

"O, yes," grumbled the elder boy, "I see _just_ what's going to happen. _I'll_ have to fix a new seat there to-morrow; for _you_ can't make a decent job of it. But, look here, I don't think much of that for a trick: There's nothing clever about it, and you may catch the wrong person. I think you'd better go and fix it, before you do something you'll be sorry for."

"Don’t you worry your old head!" answered Ted, determinedly. "I’m watching to see who comes along. Do you suppose I’d let Mrs. Burton, or the rector tumble into the tub? What d’you take me for, you old duffer?"

"Well," said Will, good-humoredly, "whom do you expect to catch?"

"Is your head so taken up with scientific musings that you haven’t noticed how, lately, Will Hen Baizley has taken to going home this way every afternoon, instead of by the short cut over the back road? I expect he’s got a girl down at the corners, or he wouldn’t be coming such a long way round. Anyway, when he gets to the top of the hill he always sits down on our seat, and fills up his pipe. I’ve been looking for a chance at him this long while!"

Will Hen Baizley was the most objectionable "tough" that Frosty Hollow could boast. He was a bad-tempered bully, cruel in his propensities, and delighting to interfere in all the innocent amusements of the village youngsters. He was a loutish tyrant, and Ted had suffered various petty annoyances at his hands for several years. In fact, the boy was looking forward to the day when he might, without presumption, undertake to give the bully a thrashing and deliver the neighbourhood from his thraldom. As Will Hen, however, was about twenty years of age, large, and not unskillful with his fists, Ted saw some years of waiting yet ahead of him. Such suspense he could not endure. He preferred to begin now, and trust to fate--and his brother Will--to pull him through.

Will raked the hay thoughtfully for a few minutes without replying. He was a clear-headed youth, and he speedily caught the drift of Ted’s ideas.

"It’ll be good enough for him," said Will, at length, "but you’ve got a good deal of gall, it seems to me, young one! Why, Will Hen’ll pound you for it, sure. He’ll know it’s your doing."

"Let him pound, the brute!" answered Ted, defiantly. "Anyway, I don’t suppose _you_ are going to let him handle me _too_ rough! I dare say he won’t actually punch me, for fear of getting into a row with you--though" (and here a wicked twinkle came into Ted’s eye, for he knew the pugnacity that lurked in his big brother’s scientific nature), "though he _does_ say he can particularly knock the stuffing out of you!"

"Dear me," murmured Will, grinning thoughtfully. "If he talks to you about it, tell him there isn’t any stuffing in me to speak of."

During this conversation the boys had both, for a few minutes, forgotten to watch the seat under the elm tree. Suddenly Ted glanced up, a thrill of mingled apprehension and delight went through him as he saw Mr. Israel Hand approaching the fatal spot.

"Look, quick!" he exclaimed, in a gleeful whisper.

Will looked. But Will was not amused.

"Hi! there! _Don’t sit down_, Mr. Hand! Don’t!" He yelled, jumping into the air and waving his hay rake to attract additional attention.

But it was too late!

Mr. Israel Hand was tired and hot from his walk up the hill. He was vexed, too, at the prospect of a disagreeable interview with Mrs. Carter, who would not understand business matters. The seat beneath the elm was a most inviting place. From it he could see the whole farm which he meant presently to annex to his own broad acres. He was on the point of seating himself when he heard Will’s yell. He had a vague consciousness that the boys did not love him, to say the least of it. He concluded they were now making game of him. Why shouldn’t he sit down? If it was their seat now, it would soon be his, anyway.

"Impudent young scoundrels!" he muttered, and sat down firmly.

As the boys saw him crash through, and disappear, all but his head and heels, in a great splash of leaves and blossoms and muddy water, Ted fairly shrieked with uncontrollable mirth. But as for Will, he was too angry to see the fun of the situation.

"There," he exclaimed, bitterly, with a ring in his voice that checked Ted’s laughter on the instant, "your tomfoolery has fixed us at last. Out we’ll go next spring, as sure as you want a licking. Hand’ll foreclose now, for sure; and I can’t say I’ll blame him. No use me trying to stave him off now!"

Ted hung his head, feeling miserable enough, and casting about vainly for an excuse.

"But I never--"

"O, don’t wriggle, now," retorted Will, sternly. "You know you saw him in time to warn him. You _wanted_ to get him into it. You just come along with me, and apologize. If he _is_ an old skinflint, you’ve got to remember he could have sold us out last year, only I succeeded in begging off. Mother’s high and mighty airs to him made the job twice as hard as it might have been; but _you’ve_ made it _impossible_ to do anything more. Now he’ll have us out in a twelve-month--and I was just getting things so into shape that with two years more I could have saved the old place!"

As the boys climbed the hillside Will’s face was very white, and his mouth twitched nervously. He had taken hold of affairs about two years before, stopped a number of leaks, and displayed great tact in neutralizing the effects of Mrs. Carter’s aristocratic and exclusive notions. Mrs. Carter was a woman of untiring industry, most capable in all household matters, but superbly uncommercial. Having got the management into his own hands, and having entirely won his mother’s confidence, Will was beginning to see a gleam of light ahead of him. If he could keep Mr. Israel Hand pacified for two years more, and yet

prevent the schemer from imagining that the mortgage was going to be paid in the end, he felt that victory was his. Mr. Hand wanted the farm--but if he could win a reputation for forbearance, and get the farm not less surely in the long run, he would be all the better satisfied. It was thus Will had gauged him. The boy's ambition was to clear off the debt, and then earn something wherewith to finish his own education and Ted's. Now, seeing the whole scheme nipped in the fair bud by Ted's recklessness, small wonder if his heart grew hard. Presently, however, catching sight of Ted's face of misery, stained with one or two furtive tears, his wrath began to melt.

"Well, Ted," said he, "never mind now. It's no use crying over spilt milk. You hadn't much time to think. I know you wouldn't have had it happen for a good deal if you'd had time to think. Brace up, and maybe we'll find some way out of the scrape!"

At this Ted's face brightened a little, and he ejaculated fervently:

"I wish I wasn't such an idiot!"

"Don't fret!" replied Will, and the two trudged on to the little white gate in front of the yellow cottage, carrying grievous apprehensions in their hearts.

Meanwhile, Mr. Israel Hand had extricated himself from the tub. He was not hurt saving as regards his dignity. But his heart was absolutely bursting with righteous rage. And yet, and yet, it was sweet to think of the revenge that lay so close within his grasp. No one now could accuse him of being too severe. Public feeling would justify his course--and Mr. Israel Hand had a good deal of respect for public feeling.

He did not pause to remove one atom of the sticky creek mud that plastered grotesquely his rusty but solemn suit of black. Drenched and defiled, he felt himself an object of sympathy. He would not even remove the occasional green leaves and rosebuds that clung to him here and there with a most ludicrous effect, making one think of a too festive picnicker. Mr. Hand was quite lacking in a sense of the ridiculous.

When he reached the door he knocked imperiously, and after a second, rapped again. Mrs. Carter was busy in the kitchen. She resented the hastiness of the summons. Under no circumstances would she let herself be seen in the role of kitchen girl. She clung to appearances with a tenacity that nothing could shake. Long practice in this sort of thing, however, had made her very expert; and by the time Mr. Hand had thundered at the knocker four or five times, his wrath getting hotter as his damp clothes got more chilly, Mrs. Carter had made herself presentable and was ready to open the door.

Severe and stately in her widow's garments, cool of countenance as if she had been but sitting in expectancy of callers, she opened the door and confronted Mr. Hand. Recognizing her unwelcome visitor, she drew

herself up to her full height, and the little, dripping old man looked the more grotesque and mean by contrast.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Hand," she began in tones of ice; "can I do anything"--but at this point she took in the full absurdity of his appearance. With all her stateliness she had a keen appreciation of the ridiculous, and it was from her that Ted derived his excess of humor and his love of mischief. Passionately as she scorned Mr. Hand, she could forget herself so far as to let him amuse her. Her large face melted into a smile. She struggled to keep from open laughter.

"Look at me, just look at me, at my condition!" burst forth Mr. Hand "This is some of the work of your two brats of boys, madam. I'll horsewhip them, I'll have them horsewhipped!"

By this time Mrs. Carter was laughing unreservedly. She was consumed with mirth, as Mr. Hand continued:

"O, yes! I don't doubt you put them up to it! I don't doubt you think it is a great joke; a great joke, madam. But I'll make you smart for it! You think there's no one in Frosty Hollow fit to associate with you, eh! You're a pauper, and your brats are paupers! That's what you are. I'll foreclose that mortgage at once, and out you'll go, just as quickly as the course of law will permit. This time next year you'll have no roof over your head, and everyone in the village will say I have done quite right by you! I--"

"Really, Mr. Hand" exclaimed Mrs. Carter, interrupting, "you have no right to appear before me in such a shocking condition. If you wish to talk to me you must call again, and in more suitable attire. Excuse me!" And she shut the door in his face.

Mr. Hand shook his fist at the big brass knocker, then turned to go. The boys were just opening the little white gate. Mr. Hand paused between the beds of sweet williams and canterbury bells. He was in doubt as to the attitude he had better assume to Will and Ted. Glancing along the road he saw the figure of Will Hen Baizley inspecting curiously the ruins of the seat beneath the elm. Here was an ally if need should arise. He decided on prompt retribution, and seized his stick in a firmer grasp.

CHAPTER II.

THE HAND OF THE LAW.

"You pauper brats," began Mr. Hand, advancing along the garden path, "I'll teach you to play your dirty tricks on me!" And he raised his heavy cane.

With a quick movement of his arm, Will had the stick firmly in his grip so that Mr. Hand could not stir it.

"Stop that, Mr. Hand!" said Will, quietly. "You mustn't do that, sir. It was never intended _you_ should fall into that trap, sir. It was set for another person altogether. You know, sir, you heard me yell to you not to sit down on it!"

"Let go of my stick, you young scoundrel!" exclaimed Mr. Hand, somewhat less outrageously than he had spoken before. The firmness of Will's grasp and the steadiness of his glance had a quieting effect on the money lender's temper.

"Certainly, sir," said Will, releasing the cane. "Only don't do anything foolish. I don't wonder you are angry, very angry indeed. But I tried to stop you. And now we want to apologize and tell you how sorry we--"

"Indeed, indeed we are sorry, sir," burst in Ted, impetuously. "We wouldn't have had it happen for worlds, Mr. Hand!"

"Very likely not--not for a farm, in fact," retorted Mr. Hand with elaborate sarcasm.

"But it was only I did it, and I'm the only one to blame, sir," urged Ted, desperately, catching the full meaning of the last remark.

By this time Will Hen Baizley had approached. He paused in the middle of the road, filled with curiosity. Catching sight of Mr. Hand's absurd appearance, he understood what had happened. He saw the whole thing, as he thought, and he relished the joke hugely. Shaking and cackling with laughter, he came over and leaned against the picket fence. His ridicule exasperated Mr. Hand, who suddenly resolved that he did not want Mr. Baizley's assistance. He scowled menacingly at the young ruffian, and then replied to Ted's beseeching plea:

"You needn't talk to me, and think you're going to come round me with your soft soap. You're all alike, the whole lot of you. You play a disgraceful trick on me, and then your mother slams the door in my face. You're a pack of fools. When you're just paupers, at my mercy for the roof that covers you, one'd think, even if you hadn't any decency, you might know what side your bread was buttered on. I reckon you expect everyone to lick your shoes because your name's Carter! Well, your name's mud now. I'm going to foreclose right off, and out you'll go next spring. And I don't want to hear no talk about it."

Ted's face got very red, and it was with difficulty he kept back the tears of shame and bitterness, as he realized the consequences of his folly. But Will Hen Baizley was there, so he held himself manfully erect, and glared defiantly at the tough who was grinning over the fence. Mr. Hand pushed past and was about to open the gate, when Will spoke:

"That's all right, Mr. Hand," said the tactful youth, soothingly. "Of course I can't blame you. Don't think I blame you. Business is business,

and you might have honestly enough turned us out a year ago. We are grateful to you, Ted and I, for having been so forbearing in the past. _We_ won’t complain a bit. And as for mother, why, sir, you mustn’t think hard of her if _she_ complains, because you know she doesn’t understand business. And then, she’s had such a lot of trouble it has made her a little quick tempered to some people."

These remarks were very gratifying to Mr. Israel Hand. They did not alter his determination in the slightest degree, but they soothed his sense of injury. They largely removed his desire for revenge, and left nothing but his desire to possess the farm as soon as possible. The astute Will rightly judged that an opponent with two motives for hostility would be more difficult to handle than one with but a single motive.

"Well," said Mr. Hand, "you know now exactly what I’m going to do. You seem to be a very sensible young man, William, and please remember it was only on your representations and at your earnest request that I waited so long as I have. I look to you to prevent unnecessary fuss. You must yield to the inevitable. So don’t let your mother raise any useless trouble. It won’t do any good."

With a sense of satisfaction that quite outweighed the humiliations he had suffered, Mr. Hand strode off down the hill, ignoring Will Hen Baizley, and forgetful of the mud and rose leaves on his raiment.

"Haw!" exclaimed Will Hen Baizley. "That’s a good un! You done that slick! An’ the old fellow b’lieved yer, too! Couldn’t ’a lied out’n it slicker’n that myself!"

"There was no lying about it," answered Ted, fiercely, flushing redder than ever. But Will replied more calmly:

"What we told Mr. Hand was the exact truth, Will Hen. You can just bet we didn’t want to let _him_ in for that. No, sir-ee! It was another lad altogether that little surprise party was intended for!"

And Will grinned mysteriously.

"Mebbe ’twas me you was after!" suggested Will Hen Baizley, with a snarl.

"I wouldn’t bother my head about who it was intended for, if I were you," said Will, in a good-natured voice.

"Ef’t had been me stidder old Hand, I’d ’a’ broke every bone in yer carkus," growled Baizley.

"It wasn’t Will that fixed the trap, anyway," said Ted. "It was me, and Will never saw it till he came up the hill just now!"

"O, ’twas you, was it!" remarked Will Hen Baizley. "_I_ see, I see! Thought yer’d git square, eh? So it _was_ me you expected to see

flounderin’ in that there old tub! I’ve ’most a mind to lick you fur it right now!"

Ted laughed; and the tough made a motion to spring over the fence.

"Baizley!" said Will. And the fellow paused.

"Go slow, now!" continued Will, with an amiable smile, but with a significant look in his eye. "I dare say you’d sooner fight than eat, but you’d better go home to your supper just now. Anyway, you mustn’t come in here, for I don’t want to be bothered!"

"Do you want to fight?" queried Will Hen Baizley, defiantly, but at the same time withdrawing from the fence. "I can lick you out o’ yer skin!"

"But I don’t want to be licked out of my skin, thank you, not this evening!" responded Will, sweetly.

"Yer dars’n’t come out here an’ stand up to me," said the tough.

"O, go along, Will Hen, and quit talking to your hat," laughed Will, picking up the hoe and beginning to attack some weeds. "Do you suppose I’ve nothing better to do than punching your soft head? Maybe I’ll fight you some day when there’s something to fight about, and then you won’t be half as eager. Bye-bye!"

At this Ted tittered with delight. As for Will Hen Baizley, he was impressed by Will’s confidence and coolness so much that he did not really wish just then to try conclusions with him. Therefore he contented himself with repeating his taunt of "you dars’n’t!" and swaggered slowly away. The boys went into the house.

They found their mother in high good humor. She felt that she had come off victorious in the encounter with Mr. Hand, and she gave the boys a spirited account of the interview. This was received by Ted with unfeigned relish, but Will smiled rather grimly.

"And what was the impertinent old man saying to you out in the garden?" inquired the lady at length.

"O, nothing more than we expected to hear, mother," replied Will. "He merely gave us formal notice that he could let matters run on no longer, but would foreclose instantly."

"By all means let him foreclose, as he calls it!" said Mrs. Carter, loftily.

"We’ve got to let him, as we can do nothing else," answered Will. "But it’s a little tough to think we’ll have to leave the old place next spring!"

"Leave this place!" exclaimed Mrs. Carter, warmly. "Indeed, we won’t

do anything of the sort. I should like to see him try to turn us out! Old Hand, whose father used to blacken your poor grandfather's boots, turn _us_ out of our own house! You don't know what you are talking about, Willie!"

To this Will made no reply. He merely smiled very slightly, and thrust his chin forward with an expression of mingled doggedness and good humor. His mother felt that he was not convinced.

"But, mother," began Ted, "Will does know all about it. Old Hand _is_ going to--"

"You hush at once, Teddie," interrupted Mrs. Carter. "You are only a little boy. As for Hand, if he attempts to interfere with me I will drive over to Barchester and see the Hon. Mr. Germain about it. I will go to law, if necessary, to defend our rights!"

"The trouble is, mother, in this matter we haven't any rights left to speak of. It is the rights of Mr. Hand that the law will think of," said Will, gently.

"Willie," said his mother with severity, "I don't want to hear any more nonsense. I'm sure it was not so when _I_ was young, that the law would allow our domestics to trample upon us. The judges in those days were all gentlemen. I'm sure, Willie, I don't know where you get those low, radical ideas. I fear I have been foolish not to look more closely into the kind of books you read!"

"Now, mother," began Ted, pugnaciously, fired as usual with indiscreet zeal to make his mother see things with Will's eyes.

But Will interrupted him. "Come off, Ted," said he, "mother's right. The very best thing she can do is to go and see Mr. Germain. Come along now, it's time the cattle were tended."

"Hurry in again, then," said Mrs. Carter, mollified. "I'm going to have pancakes for you to-night, because you've been working so hard."

"Bully for you, muz!" cried Ted, joyously, regardless of his mother's aversion to slang. And Will smiled back his gratification as they started for the barn.

In a few minutes the cow stable was musical with the recurrent bubbling swish of the streams of milk which the boys' skilled hands were directing into their tin pails.

"Say, Ted," exclaimed Will, from under the red and white flank of his cow.

"What's up now?" inquired Ted.

"I've just got hold of a brilliant idea," continued Will. "We may escape old Hand yet, and come out of this scrape fairly and creditably."

"But you _are_ a clever old beggar!" responded Ted, in a voice of admiration. "You've got the brains of the family! What is it?"

"Come down to the crick with me after tea, and I'll explain," said Will. "But don't say anything to mother. It's no use worrying her, and she's got enough to attend to!"

"Now don't keep me dying with curiosity," urged Ted, pausing in his milking and turning round. "Just give me a hint, to keep me from 'bursting,' so to speak!"

"Well," answered Will, "it's _new marsh_ I'm after. Some more dike. See? Now wait till we're on the spot. I'm thinking."

"By all means, _let_ it think if it can think like that," exclaimed Ted, jubilantly, and went on with his milking. Already he saw the mortgage lifted, and all their difficulties at an end, so unbounded was his confidence in Will's resources.

After tea Will led his brother down to the marsh. Along the breezy top of the dike the boys walked rapidly, one behind the other, the dike top being narrow. It was near low tide, and the creek clamored cheerfully along the bottom of its naked red channel. A crisp, salty fragrance came from the moist slopes and gullies; and here and there a little pond, left behind by the ebb, gleamed like flames in the low sunset.

Toward the upper end of the Carter farm the dike curved sharply inland till it joined the steep slope of their pasture lot. Here was a spacious cove, inclosed by the Carter's pasture lot on the south and west, by their dike on the east, and on the north by the channel of the creek. At the time the dike was built the channel had lain close in along the foot of the upland, but it had gradually moved out to a straight course as the cove filled up with sediment. Of this change the dike itself had been the main cause. Now the cove appeared at high water as a bay or lagoon; but very early in the ebb its whole surface was uncovered, and, except along the outermost edge, thin patches of salt grass were already beginning to appear.

To this spot the boys betook themselves, treading the way gingerly over the tenacious but slippery surface. Will pointed to a half barrel sunk level in the ooze. It was full to the brim with fine silt.

"What do you think of that?" inquired Will, mysteriously.

Ted racked his brain for a suitable reply. He could gather no clew to Will's purpose, so he remarked:

"Very nice, healthy looking mud, seems to me? Going to sell it for brown paint?"

"Paint!" exclaimed Will, scornfully. "But how long do you suppose that tub has been there?"

"Looks as if it had been there from the year one," replied Ted, still hopelessly adrift.

"_I_ put _it_ there just three weeks ago!" said Will, watching his brother's face.

"You _did!_" said Ted, blankly. Then a light dawned upon him. "But that's mighty quick work!" he continued. "You don't mean to tell me that all that mud was deposited by the tide in three weeks!"

"Every bit of it!" averred Will. "You see the Tantramar water is just loaded with silt. It has so much that the moment it stops to rest it throws down as much of the load as it can. When it gets moving, regularly under way, it has to pick it up again. But the longer it stops the more it throws down; and the slower it moves the less it picks up again. Inside the tub it is always slack water, so whatever falls there stays there. That's why the tub has filled up so quick. Nearly a foot and a half in three weeks! Why, Ted, a raise of a foot and a half along the outer slope of this cove, and we could dike in the whole cove. See?"

Ted's eyes grew round and triumphant at the suggestion.

"But how can it be done?" he asked

"Won't we have to wait till the tide does it for us?" and his tone dropped gradually from elation to dejection.

"Not much!" said Will, turning back to the dike. "Just look here a minute!"

Seating himself on the dike top, he took a book from his pocket and began making rough diagrams on the fly leaf.

[Illustration: Diagram of Warping Dykes.]

CHAPTER III.

A PIECE OF ENGINEERING.

Ted craned his neck eagerly to watch the movements of Will's pencil.

"You know," began Will, with his head on one side, "in some parts of the world, when they want to make the tide work for them, they use things they call 'warping dikes.' These run on a slant out from the shore toward the channel. They generally slope up stream pretty sharply. The tide comes in, loaded right up with fine mud, flows over and into and around the long lines of warping dike, then stops and begins to unload. Now, you see, when there are no warping dikes, the current

has nothing to delay it, so it soon gets going on the ebb so fast that it washes away pretty near all it has deposited. But these warping dikes bring in a new state of affairs. They so hinder the ebb that there is more silt deposited, and at the same time there is less current on the flats to carry the mud away. As the engineers say, there is not so much 'scouring'--a first-rate word to express it. Haven't you noticed how, in some spots, the current seems to scour away all the mud and leave naked stones and pebbles?"

"Yes," exclaimed Ted, "I get hold of the idea now. And when the warping dikes have got their work in, what then?"

"Why, we'll dike the whole cove in. A short bit of dike from that corner straight across to the point will do it. We'll be able to get at it in a couple of months; and then, if you and I can't put the job through before the ground gets frozen, why, I'll hire help, that's all!"

"But it's a pretty big contract you're giving us, isn't it?" queried Ted, doubtfully. "Those warping dikes you're talking of look to me like an all summer's job. What'll they be like, anyway?"

"O, they'll be very slight. We can run them, with the help of old Jerry to haul for us, in less than no time, working evenings and wet days. We'll just lay lines of brush a foot high, and pile heavy stones along the top to keep it in place. Then we can raise them a little higher as the place fills up!"

"O!" murmured Ted, greatly relieved. "I thought we'd have to _dig_ them all, like the other dikes."

After this the boys' talk was of nothing but deposits and warping dikes and scouring. Their evenings and rainy days, usually spent in their mother's company and in study, were now devoted to the labor of hauling stones and brush down to the shore of the cove. To Mrs. Carter they explained the scheme, but without reference to its connection with Mr. Israel Hand. She grasped its possibilities at once, being clear-headed except where her prejudices were involved.

"How many acres do you expect to reclaim?" she inquired, after praising Will's sagacity warmly.

"Well," said Will, "of course we won't have it surveyed till the work's done and we are sure of the property; but I have an idea it will go a good ten acres, or maybe twelve."

"And good diked land, or _ma'sh_ as these people call it, is worth about two hundred dollars an acre, isn't it?" went on Mrs. Carter.

"_This_ will be, in two or three years, anyway," answered Will, "for it will be _deep_ marsh, alluvial to the bottom and permanently fertile."

"And what do you suppose it ought to be worth next year, as soon as

it’s diked in?" asked Ted.

"O," said Will, carelessly, "maybe a hundred and fifty, or ten better, perhaps!"

"Dear boys," said Mrs. Carter, "if all goes well you’ll both be able to get through college, perhaps. I must keep on steadily with Ted’s Latin this fall and winter. Dear me, I’m so sorry I let them laugh me out of my desire to study Greek when I was a girl. I could be so useful to you both now if I’d learnt it!"

"Don’t you worry about that, muz," said Ted, jumping up to kiss her. "If you plug me up in my Latin, we’ll find some way to manage about the Greek time enough!"

When haying was over there was a slack time on the farm for a few weeks, and these few weeks sufficed the boys, working with eager energy, to get all the warping dikes laid down. To avoid the nuisance of neighbors’ questionings, the idea occurred to Ted of sticking up stakes at intervals along the rows of brush and stone. When these stakes were connected at the tops by binders, they looked like the framework of a long and elaborate series of fish weirs. Gaspereaux were fairly abundant in the creek at certain seasons, so there was nothing unreasonable in the supposition. But the dwellers in Frosty Hollow laughed hugely.

"Them Carter boys thinks they knows everything," was the universal comment, "but they don’t know the first thing about how to run a fish weir. Why, them there weirs ’ll shet every gaspereaux aout o’ the cove, ’n ’tain’t much of a place fur gaspereaux, anyways!"

When such remarks were tendered to the boys they would merely reply, "You just wait till you see how our way works. If it doesn’t work the way we expect, then maybe it’ll be time enough to try your way!" The experiment interested the village for a few weeks, and at length died out of notice.

It was utterly eclipsed, indeed, by a topic of profounder interest. The village learned that Mr. Hand was foreclosing his mortgage, and that the Carters were to be sold out the ensuing spring. Some of the people were sympathetic, but others, resenting Mrs. Carter’s proud exclusiveness, took a malicious delight in the near prospect of her humiliation.

Roused at last to a sense of the reality of the danger, Mrs. Carter, who was quite too busy at her buttermaking and other indoor farmwork to spare time for her threatened visit to Barchester, wrote urgently to the Hon. Mr. Germain. The boys posted her letter, from which they knew nothing could come, and then went to comfort themselves with a sight of the way the silt was piling up inside their warping dikes.

The growth of the deposit had exceeded their most sanguine expectations. Early in August they decided that it was time to begin the permanent dike, the "running dike," as it was called in local parlance. That same

day came a letter from Mr. Germain. When the boys came in to tea they found their mother in tears of indignation and despair.

"_There's_ what he says!" exclaimed she, pointing to the open letter, which she had laid on Will's plate. "I do think things have come to a strange pass in these days. I _certainly_ never dreamed that Charles Germain could change like the rest!"

"Never mind, mother dear," said Will, soothingly. "We're not in our last ditch yet. Trust me!"

And taking up the letter he read aloud for Ted's benefit:

"_My dear Mrs. Carter_: Believe me, it gives me great grief to learn of the difficulties you are in, and to feel myself so powerless to render you assistance. I feel bound to tell you that Mr. Hand, if I understand your letter, is entirely within his rights. You would have not a shadow of a case against him in the courts. There is but one way of escape from the penalty, and that is by payment of your indebtedness to him. In this, alas! I cannot help you at all adequately, as I have lately suffered such losses that I am just now financially embarrassed. Even had you good security to offer I could not lend you the sum you need, as my own borrowing powers (this strictly between ourselves) are just now taxed to their utmost. I think I can, however, offer one of your boys a position in my office on a small salary; and for the other I could, perhaps, within the next few months, obtain a situation in the Exchange Bank of this town. This, perhaps, would relieve your most pressing anxieties, and it would be a great pleasure to me to serve you.

"Yours, with sincerest regards and sympathy,
CHARLES GERMAIN."

"That's a jolly nice letter!" exclaimed Ted.

"Yes, mother," said Will, handing it back to her, "I don't see anything the matter with that."

Mrs. Carter drew herself up proudly. "Don't you see," said she, "that he _puts me off!_ I asked him to extricate me from this difficulty, to defend for me _my rights!_ In reply he offers me, as if I were a beggar, employment for my sons. Practically, he takes the part of old Hand. O, I've no patience with such men! I'm serious!"

"Well, mother, you must allow," said Will, "that if Mr. Germain says so, it's no use thinking of going to law against old Hand, is it? As for Mr. Germain's kind offer to find places for Ted and me, why, if the worst comes to the worst, that wouldn't be _too_ bad. We could live pretty comfortably in Barchester with our little salaries and your clever housekeeping. But maybe we won't have to leave here after all! _That's_ what Ted and I have been up to all summer. We anticipated that Mr. Germain would disappoint you; but we wouldn't say so. Our plan is to _sell the new marsh_, when we get it diked in, and with the proceeds pay off Hand's

mortgage with all the arrears of interest. There ought to be something left over, too!"

"But I was proposing--I wanted to deed that piece of marsh to you boys!" objected Mrs. Carter, in a voice of mingled gratification and doubt.

"O, muz!" answered Will, putting his arm around her, "what do we want of it? The whole farm is ours, in that it's yours. That's all we want the new marsh for--just to clear off the mortgage. And we're going to do it, too! We begin work on the running dike to-morrow."

"You are two dear, good boys!" exclaimed their mother, tenderly. "If only your poor father could have lived! How proud he would have been of both of you!" And her eyes filled with tears. Next day Will and Ted armed themselves with diking spades, and set to work determinedly. They had the old horse, Jerry, on the spot, harnessed to a light cart, ready to haul material as wanted. They began at the lower end of the cove, building upward from the corner of the old dike. Their purpose in this was to keep the scouring in check. By this method of procedure they would have the final outlet (usually so difficult to close) located at the shallowest part of the cove. There would thus, as soon as the dike extended a little distance, be some water left behind after every flood tide, and there would be so much less to make violent escape with the ebb. If there should be left, finally, more imprisoned water than the sun could well evaporate that autumn, Will explained to Ted that it would be a simple matter to drain it off and close up the outlet between tides.

At the end of the first day's work Mrs. Carter came down to note progress, and was shown several feet of sound, shapely dike, with planks and large stones laid on the exposed end as a protection against the tide. A little calculation showed that it would be quite feasible, with perhaps a week or so of hired help toward the last, to finish the dike before hard weather should set in.

Everybody now at the yellow cottage on the hill was cheerful in the hope of speedy success. To their ears the clamor of the ebbing and flowing tides was a jubilant music. Their loved "crick" was becoming their friend-in-need. Its unctuous red flats acquired a new beauty in their eyes, and the mighty, sweeping tides they came to regard as the embodiment of their good genius.

With the rapidly growing dike all went swimmingly for a time. But the neighbors were now completely undeceived. Though nettled at their former dullness, they could not but applaud the ingenuity of the scheme; and they rather approved the reticence which the boys had observed in the matter.

Among the villagers, however, there was one who did not like the turn affairs were taking. Mr. Hand perceived that he might yet be defeated in his effort to gain possession of the Carters' farm. He was an astute old man, if he _didn't_ at first understand the warping dikes.

His first step was to threaten Will with proceedings to stop the work. He owned the marsh on the opposite side of the creek, and he claimed that the building of the new dike would so alter the channel that his property would be endangered. Will presently proved to him, beyond cavil, that the slight deflection of the currents would only throw the scouring force of the stream against a point of rocky upland, some hundreds of yards below his marsh, where it could not possibly do any harm. Then Mr. Hand professed himself entirely satisfied, and departed to devise other weapons.

By the middle of September the dike extended more than halfway across the mouth of the cove, and the work was daily growing easier. The facing of the water front, of course, was being left to do afterwards, when the weather should be unfit for digging.

One morning, after a very high tide, the boys came down to find a good ten feet or more of their work washed away. They were terribly cast down.

"How on earth did it happen?" groaned Ted. "Do you suppose we didn't protect the end properly?"

"I don't see any other explanation," said Will, gloomily.

"But if the stones were _swept_ off by the tide," exclaimed Ted, with sudden significance, "wouldn't they be lying to one side or the other? These look as if they had been pulled off!"

"By the great horn spoon, you've hit it, young one!" cried Will, excited beyond his wont. "Good for you! The tide never did it! Some one has been helping the tide!"

"Will Hen Baizley!" declared Ted. "I shouldn't wonder a bit!" said Will. "Well, Ted, there's nothing to do but go to work and build it up again. And to-night, why, we'll 'lay for him,' that's all!"

Doggedly and wrathfully the boys toiled all day. At tea they told their mother what had occurred. Mrs. Carter was furious. But when Will declared their intention of watching that night for the depredator, her anger vanished in fear. At first she forbid positively all thought of such a thing. Will declared that he _must_ do it--it simply had to be done. Thereupon she said she would forbid Ted going. At this Ted burst forth indignantly.

"What, mother, would you have me leave Will all alone out there?" An idea which was, of course, to Mrs. Carter intolerable. She forgot to be imperative; she became appealing.

"But, muz," said Will, reassuringly, "there is no danger at all. You can trust me, can't you? Ted and I will each take a good, big club, and if, as we think, it is Will Hen Baizley, we'll give him a pounding that will keep him civil for a while."

"But what if he should have some ruffians with him?" urged the mother.

"Well, just to be safe, _I'll_ take my gun, so as to be able to give them a scare, you know. But Ted is so impetuous and bloodthirsty that he'd better not take anything but a club!"

"O, dear me! I suppose you _will_ go!" said Mrs. Carter. "But at least you must wrap up warm and take something in your pockets to eat!"

Just about dark the boys betook themselves to the lower corner of the new dike. Under the shelter of the old dike they fixed themselves a hiding place of brush and grass. From this point they could see distinctly the figure of anyone approaching across the marsh. When they were comfortably established Ted inquired:

"Say, old fellow, have you got your gun loaded?"

"No!" whispered Will.

"Why not?" asked Ted, anxiously.

"You don't suppose I want to shoot anybody, do you?" said Will. "I've got both barrels loaded with powder and wadding, so I can scare them out of their wits. And I've some bird shot in my pocket, to pepper their legs with if I should have to!"

"O!" said Ted.

The boys talked for perhaps an hour, in a cautious undertone, not audible ten feet off by reason of the rushing and hissing and clamoring of the incoming tide. Then they were silent for a while. At length Ted murmured:

"O, I say, but I'm getting sleepy. Can't you let me go to sleep for a bit? Wake me in an hour, and I'll let you snooze."

"S't!" whispered Will, laying his hand on his brother's arm. "I heard something splash in that pool yonder!"

The boys noiselessly raised their eyes to a level with the top of the dike. At first they could see nothing. Then they detected a shadowy figure making for the place where they had last been at work.

CHAPTER IV.

A RESCUE AND A BATTLE.

"He's alone!" whispered Ted. "Shall we jump on him?"

"Hold on; wait till he gets to work," said Will. "Then, if we catch him in the act, he can’t make any excuse, but just take his medicine like a man!"

"It’s Baizley, eh?" murmured Ted.

At this moment they heard the stones and planks being pulled off the end of the dike. Then came the sound of a spade thrust into the clay with violence.

"Now," exclaimed Will, "let’s onto him! let me get hold of him first, and then you take a hand in."

Grasping their clubs, and leaving the gun lying by their nest, the boys slipped over the dike and dashed upon the marauder. So occupied was the latter with his nefarious task that he heard nothing till the boys were within ten feet of him. Then he started up, and raised his spade threateningly.

"Drop that, Baizley, or I’ll blow a hole in you!" cried Will, springing at his neck.

At this instant the silent figure flung itself adroitly off the dike, dropping the spade and eluding Will’s grasp. It started swiftly across the muddy flat, the two boys close on its heels.

For a few yards the boys just held their own. Then Ted, being the swifter, forged ahead. In a few seconds more he overtook the fugitive, sprang upon his neck, and bore him headlong to the ground. The next moment, before either could recover, Will had come up, and his iron grip was on the stranger’s throat.

"No nonsense, now," said Will, in a voice that carried conviction, at the same time tapping the fellow’s cranium lightly with his club. "If you don’t want the life half pounded out of you, keep still!"

The fellow lay quiet, only gasping:

"Don’t choke me!"

Will relaxed his grip, and then exclaimed to Ted, in astonishment:

"Why, it ain’t Baizley!"

"Course, it ain’t!" growled the fallen one, sullenly, appearing indignant at the imputation.

"Sit up, and let’s look at the fellow that goes round nights cutting people’s dikes!" commanded Will.

The fellow turned over on his face.

"Sit up!" repeated Will, in a cold voice, which sounded as if he was in earnest.

"Why," exclaimed Ted. "If it isn't Jim Hutchings!"

"Old Hand's man, eh? I begin to smell a mouse," said Will, sarcastically.

"It's as plain as a pikestaff!" almost shouted Ted. "It's old Hand that ought to get the licking we were going to give you. But we'll have to pound you a little for his sake and your own too!"

"No, Hutchings," said Will, after a moment's thought. "You deserve a licking, but we'll let you off. Only take warning. I'll blame old Hand this time, and you can let him know he's likely to hear from us about this, and about last night's work. But as for you, if we catch you fooling round this dike again, you'll be sorry as long as you live. We're on the watch for you and the likes of you. And over yonder I've got my gun, in case there were more than one of you in the scrape."

"We've loaded her up, both barrels," said Ted, maliciously, "with big charges of bird shot, so she'll scatter well and everybody get his share!"

By this time Jim Hutchings was on his feet.

"Now clear out!" was Will's peremptory direction.

Hutchings started back toward the dike to get his spade.

"No, you don't," laughed Ted. "That's confiscated!'"

"Never mind the spade!" said Will, firmly, as Hutchings hesitated. "We'll keep it and try and find some use for it!"

The fellow would have liked to contest the point, but he remembered the feeling of Will's grip. With an oath he turned on his heel and made for the uplands. Then the boys went back to the dike, possessed themselves of the spade, and repaired the slight damage that had been done.

"Shall we stay any longer?" asked Ted, again getting sleepy.

"No, I fancy we won't be bothered this way any more!" answered Will. "At all events, Jim Hutchings won't come back!" And he chuckled to himself.

Will proved right. The dike was no more molested. By the middle of October it was within two or three yards of completion. At the gap the ground was high, so that at ordinary tides there was small outflow and inflow. Two or three days more of satisfactory work, and the new marsh would be an accomplished fact Will and Ted were in a fever of anxiety, day and night, lest something should happen at the last to mar their plans. Above all, they had a vague dread of some sinister move on the part

of Mr. Hand.

Just at this time it happened that old Jerry lost a shoe. Ted was away in the woods looking for a stray cow, so Will had to take the horse down into the village to the blacksmith.

On his return, about the middle of the forenoon, he passed a field in which Will Hen Baizley was at work digging a ditch. Along the foot of the field ran a clear trout brook, into which it was evidently the intention to drain a little swamp which lay further up the slope. Near where Baizley was digging, the brook widened out into a sandy-bottomed, sunny pool, in which the minnows were always darting and flickering.

Not far off stood the house of Mr. Israel Hand, where he guarded the one being he was supposed to love, his little four-year-old orphan grandson. Whether or not he cared for anyone else, it would be hard to say; but there was no questioning the fact that he absolutely worshiped Toddles, as the baby was called. The little one was a blue-eyed, chubby, handsome lad, with long yellow curls and an unlimited capacity for mischief.

As Will passed along the road he saw Toddles playing in the field where Baizley was digging. Presently he was tickled to observe that the child had discovered Baizley's tin dinner pail, hidden in a clump of raspberry bushes. The mischievous little rascal promptly emptied the contents out upon the sward, and then, with his chubby hands full of cheese and pumpkin pie, scampered over to the edge of the pool.

"Pitty pishies! give pishies 'eir dinner! Pishies! Pishies!" cried the gleeful little voice; and splash into the pool went the cheese and pumpkin pie, frightening the "pishies" nearly out of their wits.

Will exploded with laughter; and at the same moment Baizley, looking up from his work, discovered the fate that had befallen his dinner.

Now Will Hen Baizley was in an unusually bad temper. Digging ditches was not a labor he was accustomed to, and it made his back ache. In his best of humors he was a coarse and heartless bully. On this occasion he was filled with rage against the baby depredator. Toddles had annoyed him on several previous occasions, and just now Will's laughter was the one thing best calculated to sting his annoyance into fury. With a roar that frightened Toddles into instant silence, he rushed forward and grabbed the child, giving him a violent cuff on the side of the head.

It happened that Mr. Hand was looking out of the window of his house on the hillside and saw all that happened. With a hoarse cry of rage and terror he rushed out to the rescue. But the house was three or four hundred yards away, and his old knees trembled beneath him as he thought of what the little one might suffer before he could get there.

The poor little fellow was dazed by the blow, and could not get his breath to scream. The next moment Baizley had seized him by the legs and soused him in the pool. When he came out again he found his voice,

and a long shriek of pain and terror went through Mr. Hand's heart like a knife.

All this had happened so quickly that Will was unable to hinder it. He was choking with indignant pity, and found himself on the fence and half way across the field before he could yell:

"Drop that, you brute!"

Baizley was too much occupied to hear or heed. He was just about to duck the little one a second time when Will arrived.

With one hand Will seized the child by the petticoats, and with the other dealt the ruffian a blow in the mouth that staggered him and made him release his victim. Will had just time to drop the little fellow to one side and put up his guard when Baizley was upon him with a curse.

The blow was a mighty one, and so sudden that Will parried it with difficulty, at the same time almost staggering upon Toddles, who lay on his face wailing piteously. Afraid lest the child should get injured in the conflict, Will dodged aside and ran off a few paces. Ascribing this movement to fear, Baizley followed him up impetuously, with oaths and taunts.

On a bit of level, dry turf Will faced his big antagonist. Baizley was heavy of build, strong of arm, and not without some knowledge of the pugilistic art. He was also a little taller than Will. To the casual glance the latter appeared no match for him. Fair-skinned, slender, and with something of a studious stoop to his shoulders, Will's appearance gave small indication of the strength that lurked in his well-corded sinews. Under his pale skin he concealed almost as much sheer lifting power as Baizley's big frame could muster; and the steel-like elasticity of his compact muscles gave his blows swiftness and precision.

Keen of eye, and with a cool, provoking, indulgent smile hovering faintly about his mouth at times, he successfully parried several terrific lunges. He spoke not a word, husbanding his wind prudently, while Baizley, on the other hand, kept interjecting bursts of fragmentary profanity. About this time Mr. Hand arrived upon the scene, panting heavily, and seating himself on the ground, gathered the sobbing Toddles into his arms.

Will's first intention was to act on the defensive till he should weary his opponent; but his opponent's sledge-hammer fists were not easily warded off. He got one heavy blow on the chest that made him gasp for breath; then he tried dodging, and giving ground nimbly and unexpectedly. At length he saw an opening, and quicker than thought he struck heavily with his left fist on Baizley's eye. At the same instant in came a terrific blow which made his head ring and the stars chase themselves before his eyes.

For a moment the two combatants lurched apart. Will was the first to

recover himself. A white rage surged up within him, and he felt his veins prickle, his sinews tighten. A new access of nervous energy seemed to flow into him, and he imagined his strength had been suddenly doubled. The ruffian’s hands struck out both together wildly.

Will’s chance had come, and he grasped it. The bully reeled under a blow between the eyes, and fell headlong.

For a moment he did not stir. Then he began to gather himself up.

"Have you had enough?" inquired Will.

"Yes, I’ve quit!" growled Baizley.

"You are a contemptible, cowardly brute," continued Will, "and it’s in jail you ought to be. Mind you, now, if I catch you, or hear of you abusing a youngster again, it’s in jail you’ll certainly be!"

As Baizley slunk away, Mr. Hand came up with Toddles in his arms. The little one was still shaking with sobs, and his tear-stained face looked so white and pitiful that Will felt like going after Baizley and giving him another thrashing.

"Poor little kid!" he said, compassionately, taking no notice whatever of Mr. Hand.

But Mr. Hand positively refused to be ignored.

"God bless you, God bless you, William!" he exclaimed, with the ring of sincere feeling in his voice. "You’re a noble young man, a _noble_ young man. I can’t thank you; words can’t express what I--what I feel toward you for this."

Here he kissed passionately the yellow head of Toddles as it lay on his shoulder.

"Don’t speak of it, Mr. Hand," said Will, wiping his bleeding face. "Any other fellow would have done the same if he’d had the chance. That cowardly brute! I wish I hadn’t let him off so easy!"

"I’ll have him arrested to-morrow," burst out Mr. Hand, his voice quavering and shrill with anger. "But as for you, William," he continued more quietly, "what you’ve done for my Toddles I never can forget. You sha’n’t have no cause to say I’m ungrateful to one that’s been a friend to Toddles!"

"Well, Mr. Hand," said Will, returning to his wagon, "all I can say is I’m mighty glad I happened along just when I did. Toddles is a great boy, and I’ve always liked him, whatever I may have had against his grandfather since that night on the dike! I hope Toddles won’t be a bit the worse now!"

"Don’t talk about that dike," pleaded Mr. Hand, nervously. "_Don’t_ mention it again! Don’t, William! And, William, you will hear from me

in a day or two about business matters. Or, I'll be in to see you!"

CHAPTER V.

A TRANSFER OF THE MORTGAGE.

When Will reached home Ted met him at the gate with a cry of surprise and commiseration.

"What in the world have you been doing to your face?" he questioned.

"Thrashing Baizley!" said Will, tersely.

Ted's exclamations had brought Mrs. Carter to the door in time to hear Will's reply. She was alarmed at the sight of Will's swollen and discolored features; and her alarm made her angry.

"I'm ashamed of you, Willie," she cried, "stooping to brawl with a low fellow like that. It serves you right if you have got hurt. Come, run in and get your face bathed in hot water. Why, it's dreadful! Go right up stairs and get me the arnica, Teddie!"

As Mrs. Carter bathed the swollen face in hot water, Ted standing by with the arnica bottle, Will managed to get out a somewhat grimly jocose account of the affray. Ted, of course, was jubilant. From time to time he sprang up and shouted. At length, clapping Will on the back, so violently that his mother spilled the hot water, he cried:

"Good boy! _Good_ boy! O, if I'd _only_ been there!"

As for Mrs. Carter, her assumed vexation had quickly disappeared. She listened proudly and in silence. At the end she merely said:

"Dear boy, that was fine of you. It was just what your poor father would have expected of you!"

Will spluttered some discolored water out of his mouth before replying, and twisted his features into a lugubrious attempt at a smile.

"I felt pretty big, myself just after it was over," he said at length, "but now it's sort of different. A fellow can't feel heroic with his face bunged up like this. But say, muz, old Hand can't be as bad as they make out when he's so wrapped up in Toddles. He just worships the youngster!"

There was a pause, and in through the window came the rushing clamor of the creek.

"Well," said Mrs. Carter, rather reluctantly, "Mr. Hand has probably

his redeeming qualities. At least, he appreciated your courage. By your account he did speak quite nicely."

"What do you suppose he meant by saying you would hear from him in a day or two?" queried Ted.

"O," said Will, "I think the old fellow is grateful; and I think he's mighty ashamed of what he got Hutchings to do to our dike that time. I shouldn't wonder if he'd offer us more time, and withdraw proceedings against us!"

"I should _think_ so!" exclaimed Mrs. Carter, indignantly. "He could hardly have the face to sell us out now! But I don't wish to be under any obligation to him, that's certain. When the new marsh is sold we can be entirely independent of him!"

"Yes, muz, that's so," said Will, "but _do_ let _me_ arrange with him! You say you wanted to deed that new marsh to Ted and me! Now I make a request of you. Don't talk business at all with Mr. Hand till I've had a talk with him myself. I promise you I'll consider your wishes in the matter!"

"Well, since you wish it so much, it shall be as you say!" said Mrs. Carter, rather unwillingly, at length.

"And also, muz," continued Will, removing the big, wet sponge from his eyes to make the more potent appeal; "_if_ Mr. Hand should come to see me when I'm out, _do_ promise to be nice to him!"

Mrs. Carter made no reply.

"Ted wishes it as much as I do, don't you, Ted?" added Will.

"You're just right," responded Ted, fervently. "So much depends on little things just now!"

Still Mrs. Carter kept silence. Mr. Hand was her most cordial detestation.

"And you know, muz," went on Will, coaxingly, "you can be _so_ fetching when you want to be, and when you want to be otherwise, well" (and here Will chuckled). "I don't exactly wonder that old Hand doesn't love you much. But no one can smooth him down like you, if you only will. Do it, muz, just for us boys! All you'll have to do will be just smile on him, and talk about the weather!"

"O, you dreadful flatterer," laughed Mrs. Carter. "Do you think it's right to try and soft soap your mother this way? Well, I'll promise to be polite and nice to Mr. Hand if he should call! Will that do?"

"Thank you, muz!" said both the boys together.

The copious use of hot water and arnica soon brought Will's face into something like shape, and work on the dike was not greatly hindered.

In less than three days more the gap was closed, and the tides finally shut out from the new marsh. The expanse of reddish-brown mud, dotted with pools of muddy water and patches of yellow-green salt grass, was not exactly fair to look upon; but the boys' hearts swelled with triumph as they surveyed it, leaning on their victorious spades. There was yet the dike front to be faced, and much ditching to be done besides, ere the land would become productive.

"But it's good for a hundred and fifty an acre, just as it stands," declared Will, his voice trembling a little with exultation.

"Lay it there, old man!" exclaimed Ted, holding out his hand. And the two boys clasped hands in a grip that was full of love and trust, and a pledge of mutual support all through the future.

"Now," said Will, "in a day or two I'd better go and see Mr. Germain and get his advice as to the best way of selling."

"That's a good plan," answered Ted "You take mother with you, she'll enjoy the drive. And I'll stay and look after things."

"As for old Hand," went on Will, "I shouldn't wonder a bit if he would offer to knock off that two hundred and fifteen dollars arrears of interest!"

"Perhaps," said Ted. "It would be decent of him."

That afternoon, as the Carters were sitting down to tea, Jim Hutchings arrived with a note from Mr. Hand. The man looked very uncomfortable as Ted came to the kitchen door. He said he would wait for an answer; but he surlily refused to come in.

Mr. Hand's note was to Will, asking if he would be at home that evening. Will answered that he would, and would be glad to see Mr. Hand.

About eight o'clock Mr. Hand appeared, and was ushered by Ted into the sitting room where Will and his mother were talking over the matter of the new marsh. Mrs. Carter greeted Mr. Hand quite graciously, as Will brought forward a chair. Then she started to leave the room.

But Mr. Hand, flattered by her politeness, begged her to remain.

"I thought," said Mrs. Carter, "that if you had business with my son Will, Ted and I might perhaps be in your way!" and returning to her chair she took up a piece of sewing. Ted hovered over her, too anxious and excited to sit down.

"Yes," said Mr. Hand, "my business is entirely with William; but I should be glad to hear that you approve of it."

Mr. Hand had rather dreaded the possible attitude of Mrs. Carter. It had been his intention not to let the warm regard he felt for Will interfere with the stiffness of his demeanor to Will's mother. But Mrs. Carter's

affability had flattered him in spite of himself. At the same time, he glowed with the consciousness that he was going to perform an act of really distinguished generosity. He was, by second nature, just what he got the credit of being, hard, unscrupulous, avaricious. But his unselfish devotion to his little grandson was gradually opening up a warm and wholesome spot in his heart, where flourished anew the capabilities for good which had not been lacking to him in his youth.

As he gazed about the cozy room, and felt his presence not distasteful, he began to feel very much at ease. The luxury of benefaction was a new one to him, and he wondered at the keenness of its flavor. He began to forget what he had intended to say.

"And how is Toddles, Mr. Hand?" inquired Will, presently.

"None the worse, none the worse at all," said Mr. Hand, recalling himself. "He said he wanted to come and see you, William. He was anxious to give you a kiss; and he's got a lot of pebbles and his favorite jackknife stowed away in a little box, to give you when he sees you!" And Mr. Hand laughed genially. He was prepared to talk all night on the subject of Toddles.

"And what has become of that ruffian Baizley?" asked Mrs. Carter. "I never could have imagined anyone being such a fiend as to treat an innocent baby that way. I hope you have had him arrested."

"He got away. He left on a ship that night," replied Mr. Hand. "But, madam, you should be very proud of your son William."

"I am," laughed Mrs. Carter. "I am very proud of both my sons."

"But William, if you will allow me to say so, is a very unusual young man," persisted Mr. Hand. "Edward, of course, is younger, and I don't know him so well. But I never saw anything like the courage with which William attacked that ferocious Baizley, who must have been twice his weight. And the way he handled him, too! It was truly wonderful, madam. Baizley was just nowhere. I never could have believed it if I had'nt seen it with my own eyes!"

"Now, Mr. Hand, you'll make me vain, if you don't stop," laughed Will.

"You wouldn't think Baizley was just nowhere if you could have seen Will's face when he came home that morning," interrupted Ted.

But Mr. Hand was now on the track he had laid down for himself, and would not be switched off.

"And, moreover," he continued, "you are a judicious young man, William, and you seem to have an excellent head for business. I admire good business abilities. In fact, I may say that for a long time I have felt well disposed toward you. Now, however, allow me to say that I feel the very highest esteem and regard for you; and as a little mark of my gratitude, and in the name of my grandson, I beg that you

will accept what is enclosed in this envelope."

He drew from his pocket a long, official-looking envelope, and handed it to Will with a ceremonious bow.

Will hardly knew what to say. He could not guess what was in it, and all he could do was to stammer a few confused words of thanks. The envelope had a very important look, and he was both impressed and mystified. Ted could not repress his eager curiosity, and came around to Will's side. Even Mrs. Carter was intensely interested, and forgot to refrain from showing it. Mr. Hand looked on with a swelling sense of benevolence. He had anticipated no such delightful sensations.

With his pocketknife Will opened the envelope very carefully along the end. With nervous fingers he drew out a legal document, with red seals and several smaller documents attached.

For a moment the legal verbiage of the instruments bewildered him. Then he exclaimed:

"Why, it's the mortgage! I don't exactly understand! O, Mr. Hand, this is _too_ good of you. You relinquish the mortgage, the whole debt, for nothing. That is _too_ generous, really!"

Mrs. Carter was a little overwhelmed. She rose to try and mingle thanks and protestations, but Mr. Hand cut her short.

"O no, William," he explained, "you have not read all the papers! You will see that I have not released the mortgage at all. I have made it over to another person, to _you_, that's all. This farm is still under mortgage, but you, William, are now the mortgagee. I have nothing more to do with the matter at all. The claim is all yours, with some two hundred and fifteen dollars arrears of interest, which you must collect for yourself the best way you can. But if I may, I would like to intercede for your good mother now, and beg you not to be too severe!"

Mr. Hand chuckled, as he gazed on the mystified faces about him. Then Will sprang forward and grasped his hand. He could not find words to express his gratitude. They simply would not come.

"Then we're not going to be sold out?" cried Ted.

"Not unless William sells you out for the amount of the mortgage. Ask him," replied Mr. Hand.

Such an act of generosity on the part of "old Hand" deprived even the impetuous Ted of his powers of expression. But Mrs. Carter found words.

"Really, Mr. Hand," she said, and her voice trembled with deep feeling. "I wish I could make you see how we appreciate your noble generosity. I wish you could see how bitterly I reproach myself for the injustice I have done you in the past. However hard and merciless you may have seemed to me, I must have grossly misunderstood you; for only a good

and generous heart could prompt you to such an action as this. Neither I nor my sons can even pretend to thank you. We feel your kindness too deeply."

"Mother hits it exactly. That's what I wanted to say, only somehow I couldn't, Mr. Hand," said Will.

"But will you not let us hope we may be honored with your friendship in the future?" continued Mrs. Carter. "You must often be lonely at home, and I should be so pleased to see your little grandson here whenever you can manage to bring him."

"That's so," exclaimed Ted. "I want to see the young hero that fed Will Hen Baizley's dinner to the fishes. _He's_ the one we have to thank for the present jolly state of affairs!"

Mr. Hand was overflowing with good will. Moreover, he was hugely flattered by Mrs. Carter's words and manner. In his heart he attached an extravagant importance to the accidents of pedigree. He was struggling to utter his appreciation of Mrs. Carter's proffered friendship, when there came a knock at the front door. It was Jim Hutchings, whom Mr. Hand had left outside to hold the horse.

"There's somebuddy a-goin' to set your barn afire," he whispered eagerly. "Come quiet, an' we'll ketch him in the act!"

"Fetch a pail of water, Ted," said Will, with prompt presence of mind, running upstairs for his gun.

While he was gone Mr. Hand asked Hutchings how he knew of it.

"I thought I seen a chap slide behind the barn, so I jest hitched the hoss an' crep' over to see what he was up ter," explained Hutchings.

As the boys and Hutchings, followed discreetly by Mrs. Carter and Mr. Hand, emerged from the back door, a glimmer of flame appeared behind the stable. There was a swift rush, and Ted dashed out the growing flame with his bucket of water. At the same moment Will and Jim Hutchings threw themselves upon a man who was just fanning the flame into vigor.

The stranger sprang up, and a revolver shot rang out upon the night. On the instant a blow from Will's gunstock brought him to the ground, and Hutchings grabbed the revolver. "Now keep still, or it'll be the worse for you," said Will. "Ted, bring a rope."

Partly stunned, or realizing that resistance was useless, the stranger lay still with one arm over his face. Presently Ted came back with the rope and a lantern.

"If it isn't Will Hen Baizley back again!" exclaimed Hutchings.

"Thought you'd get even with me before the ship sailed, eh?" inquired

Will, amiably.

"Well," said Mr. Hand, "I'll see that he is taken care of for a good while in the penitentiary. Tie him up so he can't make trouble, and we'll drive him right over to the jail now."

Baizley could not be induced to utter a word, so he was put into the wagon, where Hutchings held him while Mr. Hand took the reins. As he bid good night, Mr. Hand said to Will:

"By the way, William, if you decide to sell your mother out, you had better see the sheriff pretty soon. There'll be some costs, and fees, and so forth, that you'll have to pay, you know."

"All right," laughed Will, happily. "I guess I can manage. I'm pretty rich now, you know."

The boys stood at the garden gate with their arms linked to their mother's and listened to the wagon as it clattered away. Then the rushing of the flood tide, washing up to their dikes, attracted their attention.

"The tide's coming in for us, dear boys," said Mrs. Carter. "How lovely the creek sounds to-night! Surely God has been very good to us, and the prospect, that was so dark a while ago, has become very bright and happy."

"Fifteen hundred dollars' worth of new marsh at least," said Will, joyously, "and no debt on the farm, no foreclosure, no sheriff's sale! You, muz and Ted, I verily believe I'll have to sell you out after all, to keep you from getting too big!"

"Say, old man, let's yell!" exclaimed Ted.

"All right!" began Will; but their mother laid her hands over their mouths.

"O, no! no!" she pleaded "What would the neighbors think--and Mr. Hand?"

THE END.

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