

THE DOOM OF MAMELONS. A LEGEND OF THE SAQUEBAY, BY W. H. MURRAY.

(From the Quebec Chronicle) CHAP. II.—THE FIGHT AT MAMELONS. "It was a dreadful fight, John Norton, I ween, and a thousand warriors on a side, and in either army were twenty chiefs of fame. We fought the fight at Mamelons, where at sunset, we met the Esquimaux coming up as we were going down. The Montaignes headed the war. The Mountaignes whose fathers were slain at Mamelons had fought the Esquimaux a thousand years ago, and both had wrongs to right. My father died that summer and I, fresh from the fields of France, headed my tribe. You know how small it was; the last remnant of the old Lenape root, but every man a warrior. I knew not the right or wrong of it nor did I care. I only knew our tribe was pledged to the Nasquapees of frozen Ungava, and they were allies of the Mountaignes, and hence the fight held us to its edge. That night we slept under truce, but when the sun came up, went at it. I see that morning now. The sun from out the eastern sea rose red as blood. The Nasquapees, who live as Athabascas with a medicine man, cared not for this; but the Prophet of the Mountaignes painted his face and body black as night, tore his blanket into shreds and lay in the sand, as one dead. The Nasquapees laughed, but we of the mountaignes knew that that dread sign, that our faces looked toward our last battle. We made it a brave doom. We fought till noon upon the shifting sands nor gained an inch, nor did our foes, when suddenly the sun was clouded and a great wind arose that drove the sand so thickly that it hid the battle. The firing and the shouting ceased along the terrace where we fought and a great dread silence fell on the mighty mounds above the sea. The Esquimaux were thus living and dead, friend and foe lay together, our faces plunged into the coarse gravel, our hands clutching the rounded stones that we might breathe and stay until the wind should pass. And such a wind was never blown on man before, for it was hot and came straight down from Heaven, so that our backs winced as we lay flattened. This mixed and mingled we clung to the smooth hot stones while some crept in behind us for shelter. So both were clinging to the ground for an hour's space. Then, suddenly, the sun rushed out, and shaking sand from eyes and hair, and spitting it from our mouths, as it went again. It was an awful sight, John Norton, and more than once, in the mad midst of it, smoke-blinded and sand-choked, I thought of you and fancied I heard your rifle crack.

"I would to God I had been there," exclaimed the Trapper, and he dashed his huge hand into the air as if cheering a line of battle on whilst his eyes blazed and his face whitened. "I would to God you had been!" returned the Chief. "For whether one lived through it or died in it, we made it a great day for the Esquimaux. For we fought it to the end in spite of interruptions!" exclaimed the Trapper. "I do not understand ye Chief, what but death could interrupt a fight like that?" "Listen, Trapper, listen!" rejoined the Chief excitedly. "Listen, ye may understand what stopped the fight; for never since man was born was fought such a fight as we fought, high up above the sea, that day at Mamelons. I told you it was an old feud twixt Mountaignes and Esquimaux, a feud that had its roots in the sand of a thousand years, and we, a thousand on each side, one for each year, fought on the sands, while above, below and around us, the dead of a thousand years, slain in the feud, fought too.

"Nay, nay," cried the Trapper. "Chief, it cannot be. The dead fight not, but live in peace forever, praise be to God," and he bowed his head reverently. "That is your faith, not mine, John Norton, for I hold to an older faith; that men, by a knife's edge, must not be changed, but go with all their passions with them to the spirit land, and there build upwards on the old foundations. And so I say again, that the dead of a thousand years fought in the air above and around us on that day at Mamelons. For in the pauses of the wind, we who fought on the other side, heard shrieks and shouts and rushing sounds as of ten thousand charging feet, and over us were roarings and howlings and hollow noises dreadful to hear, and through all the battle heard the word, that 'the old dead were fighting too; and that made us wild. Both sides went mad. The dying cheered the living and the living cheered the dead. So went the battle, the fathers and the sons, the dead and the living, hand at it. The waters of the Saguenay, a thousand feet below, were beaten into foam by the rush of fighting feet and the roaring of a great battle filled its mouth. Its dark tide whitened with strange deathly frosts from shore to shore; while ever and anon its surface shivered and shook. And under us on the high crest, cloud wrapped, so that more than once we stood clinched, we two, the foe and I, still gripped for death, would pause until the ground grew steady, for its tremblings made us dizzy, then clinch the fiercer, mad with a great madness, at being stopped in such death grapple. Under us all the long afternoon the great mounds rose and sank like waves that have no base to stand upon. The clouds snowed ashes. Showers of mud fell. The air we breathed stank with brimstone and burnt bones. And still it thickened and still both sides, now but a scattered few, fought on until at last with a crash, as the world had split apart, darkness, deep as death, fell suddenly, so that eyes were vain, and we who were not dead, unable to find foe, stood still. And thus the battle ended, even dawn, because God stopped the fight at Mamelons." "At last the morning dawned at Mamelons and never since those ancient beaches saw the world's first morning had the round sun looked down on such a scene. The great terraces on which we fought were all deep with ashes mixed with mud and cinders, black and hard, like burnt iron, and all the sand was soaked with blood. The dead were heaped. They lay like drifted wreckage on a beach, where the eddying waves of the battle took them, in piles and tangled heaps and squares like jammed timber. For in the darkness we had fought by sound and not by sight and where the battle roared loudest thither had we rushed, using axe and knife and the warlike weapons of the damned Esquimaux. And all the later battle was fought breast to breast; for ere half were dead, powder and lead gave out, and the fray was hand to hand, until, by the sickening darkness, God stopped it.

I searched the dreadful field from end to end to find my own, and found them. With blackened hands, clouted with blood I drew them together. Forty in all, I stretched them, side by side, and the savage pride of the old blood in me burst from my mouth in a shrill yell, when I saw that twenty of the warlike beacons showed the knife's thrust deep and wide. They died like warriors, Trapper, true to the old Lenape blood whose tortoise stead-fastness upheld the world. I made a mound above their bodies and heaped it high with the round stones which crown the uppermost beach and made wall above friends and kindly fallen in strange feud. And there they, sleep, on that high

verge, where the unwritten knowledge of my fathers, told from age to age, declare, the waters of the earliest morning first found shore.

"Never did I hear a tale like this," exclaimed the Trapper. "Strange stories of this fight I heard, in the far north, chaunted in darkness, at midnight, with wild wailing of the tribes; but I held it as the trick of someones to frighten with it. Go on and tell me all, Chief, what next befell thee?" "John Norton, thou hast come half a thousand miles to hear a tale of death told by a dying man. Listen and remember all I say, for at the close it touches close on thee. A fate whose meshes, woven when our blood was crossed, has tangled all that bore our name, in ruin, from the start; and with my dying only one remains to suffer there." Here the chief paused while one might count his seconds, then, looking steadily at the Trapper said: "Last month, when the raven was on the moon my warning came. The old wound opened without cause, and lying on the bed, I saw the light of my death, and beyond, three I saw, and beside thee the last and sweetest of our line and the same doom was over her as has been to us all since the fatal cross;— the doom which sends outrage and beauty to one's sick death.

"I do not understand," replied the Trapper. "Tell me what befell thee farther step by step, and how I—a man without a cross, can be connected with the old traditions of thy tribe and home?" "Listen. In coming from the field, I saw, half covered by the ashes, a body clothed in a foreign garb. It lay face downward where the dead were thick; one arm outstretched, the hand of which, gloved to the wrist, still gripped a sword, red to its jewelled hilt. The head was foul with ash and sand, but I noted that the hair was black and long and worn like a warrior's of our ancient race. Then I remembered a habit of boyish days, and I trembled, and stood, lifted the body upward and turned the dead face toward me. And there, there on the field of Mamelons, where it was said of old, before one of my blood, had ever seen the salted shore, the last of our race should die, I found ash and sand and blood, and was knitted with battle rage, teeth bared and tightly set, I saw my brother's face.

"God in heaven," exclaimed the Trapper, "how came he there and who killed him?" "John Norton, you know our cross and that the best blood of the old world and the new, older than the old, is in our veins. My grandsire was the son of one who stood next to the throne of France, and our line have studied in her polished schools since red and white blood mingled in our veins. There did we two, my brother and I, remain until my father called me home. I left him, high to the court's favor. Thence, suddenly, without sending word, with a young wife and high office of trust, he voyaged, hoping to give me glad surprise. A tempest drove his ship on Labrador, but he saved wife and gold. The Esquimaux proved friendly and gave him help and, reckless of consequence, as have been all our line since the French taint came to us, not knowing that he had been the wild horde and came with them to fatal Mamelons and its dread fight. So chanced it, Trapper, I dropped the body from my arms, for a great sickness seized me and my head swam, and in the bloody tangle of dead bodies, I lay limp and lifeless. Then in a frenzy, clutching madly at a straw of hope, I tore the waistcoat, corded with gold, from the stiff breast, to find proof that would not lie. And there, there above his heart, with eyes bloodshot and bulging, I saw the emblem of our Tribe. The forehead with the rounded world upon its back. And through the Totem of our ancient lineage, which our father's hand had tattooed on his chest and mine, ye see through it and the white skin above his heart, there gaped a gash, swollen and red, which my own knife had made. For in the darkness of the fight, bearing up against an Esquimaux rush, ash-blinded, I found a foe who swore in French and had a sword. He and I fought, grappling in the dark, when the earth above us and our feet and ashes rained upon us; and his sword ran through even as I thrust my long knife into him. And thus, at Mamelons, where sits the doom of our race awaiting us, in its dread fight, both fighting without cause, I slew my brother and from his hand I tore the wound from whose old poison I now die.

Thus I stood amid the dead at Mamelons, a chief without a tribe, and my brother's murderer. I moved some bodies and scraped downward, that I might have clean sand to fall upon; then drew my knife to let life out and thus met bravely the old doom foretold for me and mine as waiting us, since man was born, on the first shore of that first world. But even as I bent to the knife's point, a voice called me and I turned. It was an Esquimaux, the only chief left from the fight; my brother's host seeking my brother. He knew me, for he and I had clinched in the great fight, but the earth opening, parted us and so he lived. Each felt for each as warriors feel for a brave foe when the red light is ended and the field of death is heavy. Thus, battle-tired, amid the dead, we lifted hands, palm outward and met in peace. He knew the language of Old France and I told him of my woe; of our old race; of tribesmen dead; of brother slain by my own hand, and of the doom that waited for us over Mamelons. And then he spoke and told me what stayed my hand and held me until farther life. Seven days I journeyed with him and on the eighth came to where she sat, amid his children, in his rude hut on Labrador. Never, since God created woman, was one made so beautiful as she. She was of that old Iberian race, whose birth is older annals, whose men conquered the world and whose women wedded gods. She was Basque and her sweetest ship had anchored under Mamelons a thousand years before the Briton came. Fresh from the dreadful field, with heart of lead, my brother's face staring whitely at me as I talked, I told all—the fight, the death of brother and of tribe and the doom that waited for our blood above the shining sands of Mamelons.

(To be Continued.)

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