

"It is not necessary for you to marry, mademoiselle. You are not poor Louise Bibelot."

"I meant nothing of the kind. We played together, my child. Why should you accuse me of a taunt?—me who have so little command of my own fortune that I cannot lay down a dozen gold pieces to your dower. No! I have passed the ordeal of meeting the bishop. My spirits rise. I am glad to dip in this new experience. Do you know that if they send me back it cannot be for many months? One who comes to this colony may only return by permission of the king. The bishop himself would be powerless there. And now I shall hear no more about husbands!"

"Louise Bibelot," summoned Mother Mary, appearing at the door, "come now to the hall. Mademoiselle Laval will dispense with thee. The young men are going about making their selections. Come and get thee a good honest husband."

III.

THE KING'S DEMOISELLE.

BETRAYING in her face some disposition to pry into the customs of the New World, Claire inquired:

"What is this marriage market like, reverend mother?"

"It is too much like an unholy fair," answered Mother Mary of the Incarnation, with mild severity. "The gallants stalk about and gaze when they should be closing contracts. The girls clatter with their tongues; they seem not to know what a charm lies in silence."

Mademoiselle Laval stood up and closed her cloak.

"With your permission, reverend mother, I will walk through the fair with you."

"Not *you*, mademoiselle!"

"Why not?"

"You are not here to select a husband. The holy cloister is thy shelter. Common soldiers and peasant farmers are not the sights for thee to meet."

"Reverend mother, I must inure myself to the rough aspect of things in New France, for it is probable I am tossed here to stay. You and Madame Bourdon gaze upon these evil things, and my poor Louise is exposed to them."

"I do not say they are evil. I only say they are not befitting thee."

"Dear and reverend mother," urged Claire, with a cajoling lift of the chin and a cooing of the voice which had been effective with other abbesses, "when the nausea was so great on shipboard and poor Louise nursed me so well, I did not think to turn my back on her in her most trying ordeal."

"We will say nothing more, mademoiselle," replied Mother Mary, shaking her black-bound head. "Without orders from his reverence the vicar, I should never think of taking thee into the marriage market." She went directly away with Louise Bibelot.

As Louise left the door she cast back a keen look of distress at her mistress. It was merely her protest against the snapping of the last shred which bound her to France. But Claire received it as the appeal of dependent to superior; and more, as the appeal of maid to maid. She unlatched a swinging pane no larger than her hand, hinged like a diminu-

The most successful wooers among these two or three hundred wife-seekers, however, were soldiers holding grants under their former officers. They pushed ahead of the slow habitant, and held their rights above the rights of any bush-ranger. Their minds were made up at a glance, and their proposals followed with military directness. So prompt and brief were their measures that couples were formed in a line for a march to the altar. Thirty at a time were paired and mustered upon the world by notary and priest.

The notary had his small table, his ink-horn and quills, his books, papers, and assistant scrivener, in an angle of the lower hall. To find the priest it was necessary to open a door into a temporary chapel created in one of those closet-like offshoots which people of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries dignified by the name of rooms. Here fifteen pairs at a time were packed, their breath making a perceptible cloud in the chill, stone-inclosed air as the long ceremony proceeded.

Madame Bourdon rustled from upper to lower hall, repeating instructions to her charges. They were not forced to accept any offer which did not please them. They might question a suitor. And in some cases their questioning seemed exhaustive; for though a sacred propriety radiated throughout the bazar from nun and matron, here and there a young

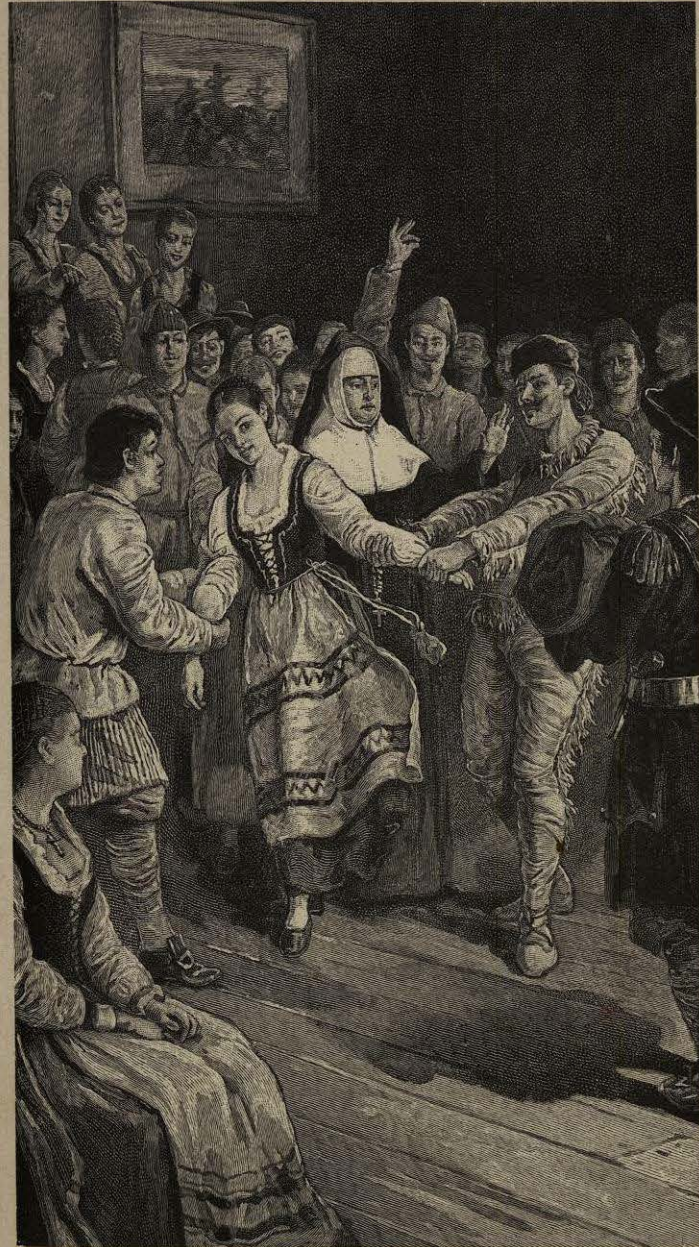
man sat on a bench beside a damsel, holding her hand and pressing it and his suit.

The sun penetrated dust and cobweb on narrow high windows, finding through one a stone fire-place and wasting the light of several logs which lay piled in stages of roseate coals and sap-sobbing wood-rind.

Madame Bourdon encountered Claire with surprise; but as she followed Mother Mary, it was evident that the abbess sanctioned her presence, so nothing was to be said on the subject. In all that buzz and trampling the abbess could not hear her demoiselle's silken step, and she was herself a woman who never turned gazing about, but kept her modest eyes cast down as she advanced.

The instant that Claire entered this lower hall she recoiled, feeling degraded in the results of her disobedience. She shaded her face. But the pride and stubbornness of her blood held her to her ground, though from mouth to mouth flew a whispered sentence, and she heard it, comprehending how current tattle was misrepresenting her in New France.

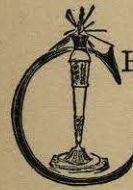
"The king's demoiselle! V'là! See you? There she goes to choose her husband—the king's demoiselle!"



"Choose now between these two men," said Madame Bourdon, sternly.

IV.

THE HUSBAND.



CHATEAU of St. Louis though the government building of Canada was called, it had none of the substantial strength of Jesuit and Ursuline possessions; but was a low, wooden structure, roofed with shingles, and formed one side of the fort. Galleries, or pillared porches, with which Latin stock love to surround themselves in any climate, were built at the front, whence the governor could look down many sheer feet at the cabins of Lower Town.

Dollard paused before entering the Château of St. Louis to say to Jacques Goffinet:

“Will you not push your business now while I attend to mine, Jacques? Yonder is the building you want to enter. Go and examine the cargo, and I will be there to help you single out your bale.”

"M'sieur, unless these are orders, I will wait here for you. I am not in a hurry to trot myself before a hundred and fifty women."

"But hurry you must," said Dollard, laughing. "I have no time to spare Quebec, and you know the consequences if we give our Indians a chance to get as drunk as they can."

"Dispatch is the word, *Sieur des Ormeaux*. I'll attack the first woman in the hall if you but stand by to give the word of command."

"Very well, then. But you will remember, not a breath of my sworn purpose to any of the varlets within here."

Jacques pulled off his cap, and holding it in air stood in the mute attitude of taking an oath. Dollard flung his fingers backward, dismissing the subject.

They entered the *Château* of *St. Louis*, where Jacques waited in an anteroom among noisy valets and men-at-arms. He was put to question by the governor's joking, card-playing servants as soon as they understood that he was from *Montreal*; but he said little, and sat in lowering suspense until Dollard came out of the council-chamber.

What Dollard's brief business was with the governor of *Canada* has never been set down. That it held importance either for himself or for the enterprise he had in hand is evident from his making a perilous journey in the midst of Indian alarms; but

that he made no mention of this enterprise to the governor is also evident, from the fact that it was completed before *Quebec* had even known of it. His garrison at *Montreal* and the sub-governor *Maison-neuve* may have known why he made this voyage, which he accomplished in the astonishing space of ten days, both output and return. This century separates *Montreal* and *Quebec* by a single night's steaming. But voyagers then going up-stream sometimes hovered two weeks on the way. Dollard had for his oarsmen four stout *Huron* Indians, full of river skill, knowing the *St. Lawrence* like a brother. He returned through the anteroom, his visionary face unchanged by high company, and with Jacques at his heels walked briskly across *Quebec Heights*.

Spread gloriously before him was *St. Lawrence's* lower flood, parted by the island of *Orleans*. The rock palisades of *Levi* looked purple even under the forenoon sunlight. He could have turned his head over his left shoulder and caught a glimpse of those slopes of *Abraham* where the French were to lose *Canada* after he had given himself to her welfare. Not looking over his shoulder, but straight ahead, he encountered the mightiest priest in *New France*, stout *Dollier de Casson*, head of the order of *St. Sulpice* in *Montreal*. His rosy face shone full of good-will. There shone, also, the record of hardy, desperate mission work, jovial famine, and high forgetfulness

of Dollier de Casson. His cassock sat on him like a Roman toga, masculine in every line. He took Dollard's hand and floated him in a flood-tide of good feeling while they spoke together an instant.

"You here, commandant? Where are the Iroquois?"

"Not yet at Quebec."

"But there have been alarms. The people around Ste. Anne's* are said to be starting to the fort."

"Jacques," exclaimed Dollard, "you must hasten this affair of your marriage. We are here too long."

"The sun is scarce an hour higher than when we landed," muttered Jacques.

"Does n't the king ship enough maids to Montreal?" inquired the priest, smiling at Jacques's downcast figure. "It is a strain on loyalty when a bachelor has to travel so far to wive himself, to say nothing of putting a scandal upon our own town, to the glorifying of Quebec."

"I came with my seignior," muttered the censitaire, "and this ship-load was promised from Rouen."

"My bride is my sword," said Dollard. "The poor lad may perhaps find one as sharp. Anyhow, he must grab his Sabine and be gone."

"Come, my son," rallied Father de Casson, dropping a hand on the subaltern's shoulder, "marriage is an

* Ste. Anne de Beaupré, twenty miles east of Quebec. "The favorite saint appears to be Ste. Anne, whose name appears constantly on the banks of the St. Lawrence." [J. G. Bourinot.]

honorable state, and the risks of it are surely no worse than we take daily with the Iroquois. Pluck up heart, pick thee a fine, stout, black-eyed maid, and if the king's priest have his hands over-full to make that haste which the commandant desires, bring her to the cathedral presently, and there will I join ye. And thus will Montreal Sulpitians steal one church service out of the hands of Quebec Jesuits!"

"Are you returning directly up river, father?" inquired Dollard over Jacques's mumble.

"Yes, my son; but this day only so far as the remote edge of one of our parishes, lying this side of Three Rivers."

"Why not go in our company? It will be safer."

"Much safer," said Dollier de Casson. "I have only my servant who rows the boat."

"I know you are a company of men in yourself, father."

"Military escort is a luxury we priests esteem when we can get it, my son. Do you leave at once?"

"As soon as Jacques's business is over. We shall find you, then, in Notre Dame?"

"In Notre Dame."

Dollier de Casson made the sign of benediction, and let them pass.

When Dollard strode into the lower bazar it was boiling in turmoil around two wrangling men who

had laid claim on one maid. The most placid girls from the remotest benches left their seats to tiptoe and look over each other's shoulders at the demure prize, who, though she kept her eyes upon the floor and tried to withdraw her wrists from both suitors, laughed slyly.

"It is that Madeleine," the outer girls who were not quarreled over whispered to each other with shrugs. But all the men in delight urged on the fray, uttering partisan cries, "She is thine, brave Picot!" "Keep to thy rights, my little Jean Debois!" to the distress of Madame Bourdon. She spread her hands before the combatants, she commanded them to be at peace and hear her, but they would not have her for their Solomon.

"I made my proposals, madame," cried one. "I but stepped to the notary's table an instant, when comes this renegade from the woods and snatches my bride. Madame, he hath no second pair of leather breeches. Is he a fit man to espouse a wife? The king must needs support his family. Ah, let me get at thee with my fist, thou hound of Indian camps!"

"Come on, peasant," swelled the coureur de bois. "I'll show thee how to ruffle at thy master. Mademoiselle has taken me for her husband. She but engaged thee as a servant."

The two men sprang at each other, but were restrained by their delighted companions.

"Holy saints!" gasped Madame Bourdon, "must the governor be sent for to silence these rioters? My good men, there are a hundred and fifty girls to choose from."

"I have chosen this one," hissed red Picot.

"I have chosen this one," scowled black Jean Debois.

"Now thou seest," said Madame Bourdon, presenting her homily to the spectators, "the evil of levity in girls."

"Mademoiselle," urged Picot at the right ear of the culprit, who still smilingly gazed down her cheeks, "I have the most excellent grant in New France. There is the mill of the seignior. And our priest comes much oftener than is the case in up-river côtes."

"Mademoiselle," whispered the coureur de bois at her other ear, "thou hast the prettiest face in the hall. Wilt thou deck that clod-turner's hut with it when a man of spirit woos thee? The choice is simply this: to yoke thee to an ox, or mate with a trader who can bring wealth out of the woods when the ground fails."

"And an Indian wife from every village," blazed Picot.

"Even there thou couldst never find thee one!" retorted Jean Debois. They menaced each other again.

"Choose now between these two men," said Madame Bourdon, sternly. "Must the garrison of the fort be brought hither to arrest them?"

The girl lifted her eyes as a young soldier hurriedly entered the outer door, carrying a parcel. He wore several long pistols, and was deeply scarred across the nose. Pushing through to the object of dispute, he shook some merchandise out of his bundle and threw it into her hands as she met him.

"This is my husband," the bashful maid said to Madame Bourdon; "I promised him before the others spoke, and he had but gone to the merchant's."

The soldier stared at the beaten suitors; he led his bride to the notary.

All around the hall laughter rising to a shout drove Picot and Jean Debois out of the door through which the soldier had come in, the wood-ranger bearing himself in retreat with even less bravado than the habitant.

"Was there ever such improvidence as among our settlers!" sighed Madame Bourdon, feeling her unvented disapproval take other channels as she gazed after the couple seeking marriage. "They spend their last coin for finery that they may deck out their wedding, and begin life on the king's bounty. But who could expect a jilt and trifer to counsel her husband to any kind of prudence?"

Dollard presented his man's credentials to Madame Bourdon, and she heard with satisfaction of their

haste. It was evident that the best of the cargo would be demanded by this suitor; so she led them up one of those pinched and twisted staircases in which early builders on this continent seemed to take delight. Above this uneasy ascent were the outer vestibule, where bride traffic went on as briskly as below, and an inner sanctum, the counterpart of the first flagged hall, to which the cream of the French importation had risen.

"Here are excellent girls," said Madame Bourdon, spreading her hands to include the collection. "They bring the best of papers from the curés of their own parishes."

In this hall the cobwebby dimness, the log-fire, and the waiting figures seemed to repeat what the seekers had glanced through below; though there was less noise, and the suitors seemed more anxious.

"Here's your fate, Jacques," whispered Dollard, indicating the fattest maid of the inclosure, who sat in peaceful slumber with a purr like a contented cat.

Jacques, carrying his cap in both hands, craned around Dollard.

"No, m'sieur. She's a fine creature to look at, but a man must not wed for his eyes alone. His stomach craves a wife that will not doze by his fire and let the soup burn."

"Here, then, my child, behold the other extreme. What activity must be embodied in that nymph watching us from the corner!"

"Holy saints, m'sieur! There be not eels enough in the St. Lawrence to fill her ribs and cover her hulk. I have a low-spirited turn, m'sieur, but not to the length of putting up a death's-head in my kitchen. A man's feelings go against bones."

"These girls here have been instructed," said Madame Bourdon at the ear of the suitor. "These girls are not canaille from the streets of Paris."

"Do they come from Rouen, madame?" inquired Jacques.

"Some of them came from Rouen. See! Here is a girl from Rouen at this end of the room."

"Now, m'sieur," whispered Dollard's vassal, squeezing his cap in agitated hands, "I shall have to make my proposals. I see the girl. Will you have the goodness to tell me how I must begin?"

"First, hold up your head as if about to salute your military superior."

"M'sieur, it would never do to call a woman your military superior."

"Then say to her, 'Mademoiselle, you are the most beautiful woman in the world.'"

Again Jacques shook his head.

"Pardon, m'sieur. You have had experience, but you never had to marry one of them and take the consequences of your fair talk. I wish to be cautious. Perhaps if I allow her the first shot in this business she may yield me the last word hereafter."

So, following Madame Bourdon's beckoning hand, he made his shamefaced way towards Louise Bibelot. Mother Mary stood beside the log-fire some distance away, in the act of administering dignified rebuke to a girl in a long mantle, who, with her back turned to the hall, heard the abbess in silence. When the abbess moved away in stately dudgeon, the girl kept her place as if in reverie, her fair, unusual hand stretched towards the fire.

"Here, Louise Bibelot," said the good shepherdess of the king's flock, "comes Jacques Goffinet to seek a wife — Jacques Goffinet, recommended by Monsieur Daulac, the Sieur des Ormeaux, commandant of the fort at Montreal, and seignior of the islands about St. Bernard."

Louise made her reverence to Madame Bourdon and the suitor, and Jacques held his cap in tense fists. He thought regretfully of Turkish battle-fields which he had escaped. Louise swept him in one black-eyed look terminating on her folded hands, and he repented ever coming to New France at all.

The pair were left to court. Around them arose murmur and tinkle of voices, the tread of passing feet, and the bolder noise of the lower hall, to which Madame Bourdon hastened back that she might repress a too-frolic Cupid.

Jacques noted Louise's trim apparel, her nicely kept hair and excellent red lips. But she asserted