



LA CHASSE GALERIE.

A Legend of the Canadian Shore.

THERE is a strange resemblance in the legends of the different countries which leads one to believe that they derive their source from the same fountain. History places its signet on some, mythology throws its classic veil over others, while the rest, like floating islands which ever and anon appear as bits of stray fairy-land in our large bodies of water, dazzle us by their beauty, charm us by their uniqueness, and glide away as magically as they came, to seek a sheltered nook in some picturesque haven. So with regard to many of these legends once current along "La Cote du Nord"* history is silent.

* "La Cote du Nord." The name by which that section lying east of what is now Woodward avenue was called.

The charming ideas conveyed in them seem akin to the classic, but it is only in the memory of some old habitante who has outlived her age and generation that they find a revered niche. Seated by the side of one of these, whose hair the frosts of ninety years have bleached, and who has never left the banks of the beautiful lake where she first drew the breath of life, one can pick up many of these legends, carelessly thrown aside by this progressive age.

Among the traditions related by this survivor of a past generation, the best known and oldest is that of "La Chasse Galerie," or "The Spectral Aerial Hunt." Many honest, upright people still living will testify to having seen this phenomenon at some period of their lives. It does not always appear under the same form. Sometimes a canoe is visible, manned by twelve men, and in its prow is a dog whose incessant barking attracts the attention or the person who is to see the vision. Always to the north flies the phantom boat. At other times, dogs of a shaggy black, with drooping ears, are constantly seen running on the water, barking as if in the scent of game. Once in seven years a solitary horseman, with gaunt, bronzed face, rifle in hand, followed by his pack of dogs, is seen in the sky after sunset. He who

sees the "chasse galerie"* knows that it betokens death either to himself or to others dear to him.

There once dwelt at Askin Pointe, on the Canadian shore, a Nimrod of the forest called Sebastien Lacelle. So devoted to the chase was he that his friends said that he was born with a gun in his hand, and no persuasion of theirs could induce him to join them in other sports. For weeks at a time he would be gone, and then return laden with game. After one of these excursions it was noticed that Sebastien was more silent than usual, had little to say of his hairbreadth escapes, nor did he boast, as was his wont, of the fruits of his trusty rifle.

The mystery was soon solved. One day, tired and weary, baffled by a deer he was pursuing, Sebastien came to a cabin in the woods. A young girl was caressing a deer and deftly dressing a wound in its side. Sebastien recognized it as the one at which he had shot. She was Zoé de Mersac, who had accompanied her father to help him extract the maple syrup from the trees. In the magic witchcraft of her smile Sebastien buried his heart. Zoé admired the strong arm and the vigorous manhood which could shield her from the rough blasts of the world.

* Galerie is a corruption of galere, a low, flat built vessel with one deck, and propelled by sails or oars.

It was on a glorious September day that Sebastien and Zoé were strolling along the beach, discussing the morrow, which was to be their wedding day. Zoé was possessed of a highly nervous organization which, like the Æolian harp, is played upon by each passing zephyr, and is peculiarly susceptible to superstition. She was telling her lover how she feared her happiness could not last and spoke of that *serrement du cœur* which seemed prophetic of evil. Sebastien, in the superb enjoyment of his healthy physique, could not sympathize with her, and only laughed at her fears.

What had presentiments to do with him, he thought; would he not be obliged to relinquish his bachelor habits and become a serious, home-staying man? An unconscious sigh escaped him. Raising his eyes, he abruptly left Zoé. He returned shortly afterwards accompanied by several men, guns in hand, whom he had called from the "seines" near by, and followed by Sebastien's dog, Chasseur. Whilst his friends were loosening the boat from its moorings Sebastien joined his fiancée who asked him to explain the cause of his sudden departure. He pointed to a flock of ducks flying towards the flats (an unusual occurrence at that season) and said he was going for a farewell hunt. As soon as she heard this she

hid her face in her hands, and the slender, girlish figure was convulsed. In accents tremulous with unshed tears, she besought him not to leave her, for if he did, he would never return. Sebastien tried to reason with her, but it was of no avail. He petted her and tried those arts in which the lover is so proficient. She told him that she had heard the past night the screech-owl in the willow tree near her window, at the same time the barking of dogs and ringing of bells in the air—doleful foreshadowings of approaching disaster.

Sebastien gazed tenderly into the upturned face, so pathetic in its tearful appeal, and felt his resolve melting away. But the impatient call of his friends and a shy feeling of being laughed at prompted him to hastily say good-bye to his promised bride. "When shall you return?" asked Zoé. "To-morrow at dawn, dead or alive, sure," he jestingly added, to quiet her fears. Soon the hunters were off. Sebastien waved the end of his red sash and Chasseur barked a jubilant farewell, for he seemed to share his master's love of the chase.

At early dawn Zoé came to the shore to welcome the returning hunters. She seated herself on one of the great boulders which are strewn upon the shores of the lake, thrown there by the Indian spirit Manabozbo, who cast them at his

father in his memorable combat. Seldom had so glorious a scene burst on her view and all was in harmony with her nature. The dark forests melted with azure softness, the magical veil of misty golden haziness hung over everything, transforming the scene into a sea of gold dissolved in rainbow tints. Lake, sky, land, all seemed flooded and transfigured. The indescribable shades flowed into each other with a beauty which, while enchanting, was the despair of the artist. The girl drank in the delicious draught of loveliness, and thought if this was the dawn of a perfect earthly day which must die in all its splendor, what must be that of the eternal one in its undying beauty. To-day was her wedding day! Why did Sebastien tarry? Had he not a loving impatience to meet his bride? Hour after hour she waited, sending forth her petitions to Ste. Anne, the patroness of mariners, to guide her Sebastien back. Others whose husbands and brothers had gone with Sebastien joined her in her weary watchings. Night came but brought no returning hunters. Day after day Zoé still came to the beach, questioning the vast waters and the horizon for Sebastien. Winter passed, spring again hung her bright blossoms on the trees, but Sebastien came not to gladden the the sorrow-haunted heart of the girl. Yet she

seemed cheerful, as if buoyed up by some inward hope. She constantly said that her lover would return to claim her,—he had promised and he had never deceived any one. Once, shortly after he left, she had heard Sebastien's voice, and looking up saw him in a boat in the clouds. Chasseur was with him, and Sebastien said: "I will come for you in a year and a day." Then towards the north the mystic apparition glided and the voice died away in the moaning wind.

It was a year and a day. The pale cheek with its hectic flush, the fragile figure, the transparent hand told that this was a blossom for the grave.

Zoé desired that she should be dressed as a bride and carried to the beach to watch for her bridegroom. Her chair was brought to the place she designated. The scene was by a strange coincidence of nature, nearly the same as on the bright day she waited Sebastien's return. Nature seemed anxious that the dying girl should take the sweetest and most beautiful memories of earth with her. The wakening waves chanted their low matins as they broke at her feet, the birds greeted her with jubilant notes and the soft, balmy air played hide and seek through the meshes of her hair.

The maiden heeded not the beauty of the scene; her eyes were intently fixed on a spot in

the skies. Suddenly an ecstatic expression crept over her face, and raising herself up she exclaimed, "See! see! there is Sebastien in the boat; he beckons to me, and Chasseur is barking so joyously! Did I not tell you he would come for me? Sebastien, I come, I come." And the pure spirit of the girl leaped from its mortal tenement to rejoin that of her spirit bridegroom. Her awe-stricken friends looked where she pointed and saw a phantom boat drifting on a billow of clouds, and distinctly heard the echo of a barking dog as the vision melted into the boundless blue.