

XI

LE LUTIN.

A Legend of the Goblin Horseman.



IN 1796, when the Stars and Stripes first waved in proud exultation over the haughty standard of England, there lived on the banks of the beautiful Lake Sainte Claire, at Grosse Pointe, an old French habitant named Jean Marie Tetit, *dit le merveilleux*.

It was a noticeable custom in those early days to give each other soubriquets, and with that wonderful perceptiveness of the French which almost amounts to a sixth sense, the nickname would be a happy hit at some marked character-

istic. To-day some of the descendants of these old families are known only by the soubriquet ; other branches still bear the original name, but in several cases the old name has entirely disappeared.

Jean Marie was a famous raconteur, equaling Vernon, of the Long Bow. On autumn afternoons the habitants would congregate at his house, and only when the shadows had lengthened into twilight and the church bell pealed the evening hour, would the spell-bound listeners slowly come back to the realities of life and give a thought to the impatient housewife and waiting meal. Perhaps it was the soft beauty of the scene, lit up by the hazy, luminous atmosphere peculiar to Indian summer which gave a more brilliant hue to the glowing forest trees, a rosy tint to the placid waters of the lake, a touch of picturesqueness to the group of habitants, with their eager, expectant faces, which lent its seductive charm to Jean Marie's imagination. Quietly taking a few whiffs from his loved pipe filled with killikanick (a weed used by the Indians in the absence of tobacco, and from which a fancy brand of Virginia tobacco takes its name), and in the midst of that hushed silence which is in itself an eloquent tribute to the raconteur's powers, he would relate the wonderful stories of

“Le Lutin,” and “Le Loup Garou” (wehrwolf); the first of which is as follows :

Jacques L'Esperance, or Jaco, as he was familiarly called “for short,” on the death of his father found himself sole proprietor of a fine “concession” at Grosse Pointe. The soil was rich, the arpents numerous, and all bespoke goodly promise to the industrious farmer. Jaco was not lazy, but somehow his efforts did not meet with the success which crowned his neighbors. His tastes ran towards horses, and he became one of the most celebrated horse breeders in that section of the country, and was referred to as an oracle on the subject. He was in fact the Tom Ochiltree of his day. It was in the winter races on the ice along the lake shore and Grand Marais that Jaco gained his greatest triumph. Perched on the high seat of his cariole, well protected from the rude blasts by his Indian-blanket coat with its deep black stripe, the hood of which was drawn tightly over his head, a wide red sash encircling his waist, his hands covered with mole-skin gloves, his ringing voice could be heard loud above the others as he urged his little Canadian pony on : “Avance donc Caribou ! avance Lambreur !” With lightning speed he flew, and ere the sound of his voice had died away only a tiny speck on the ice marked the steed and its driver. Arriv-

ing at the Hotel of the Grand Marais, under the genial influence of the "liqueur de pêche" (peach brandy) and the subtle incense of flattery, in his enthusiasm he would claim for his pony a speed which even in these days of St. Julien and Maud S., with their unprecedented records, would be considered marvelous, "clearing at a bound," he said, "cracks in the ice twenty feet wide."

We must acknowledge that the present Canadian pony is a degenerate scion of a fine stock, for they are mostly descended from a cross between a noble stallion, caught wild on the prairies of Mexico, the breed half Arabian and Spanish, (having been introduced there by Hernando Cortes in his conquest of that country in 1520 and brought here by the Indians in 1750,) and a splendid Norman mare, brought to this country by Gen. Braddock and taken from him at his defeat near Fort Duquesne (Pittsburgh). Ten years later Capt. Morris, of his Majesty's Seventeenth Regiment of Infantry, who visited the country of the Illinois under the guidance of Jacques Godfroy in 1764, mentions in his journal seeing this handsome milk-white horse still in possession of the Indians.

Jaco could be seen every day driving his favorite along the lake shore, and L'Éclair (lightning), as he called her, carried herself as if

conscious of the admiration which she created.

One night, with the rest of the habitants, Jaco went to Antoine Griffard's, whose magic violin could compel the most unwilling feet to chase the flying hours. At dawn, going to the stable to harness L'Éclair, for he had a long drive, he found her all covered with foam, her mane all tangled with burrs. Annoyed that anyone should have played him such a trick, but not wishing to express any suspicion for fear of making a disturbance, Jaco like a prudent man held his tongue, but determined that when he came to another ball, a less valuable horse would be his companion. But the next morning, and the next, he found his favorite with dejected head, tired and wearied as if she had been driven hard all night. He put a padlock on his barn door, strewed ashes about to discover the footsteps, yet to his great amazement he found L'Éclair in the same lamentable plight, the padlock intact and no impress on the ashes.

At length Jaco, much perplexed, went to consult one of his great cronies who listened attentively to his story, and at its conclusion, gazing around cautiously as if afraid of being overheard, whispered hurriedly, "C'est Le Lutin qui la soigne," (it is the goblin who takes care of her).

Le Lutin was a dreaded monster which had

haunted the Pointe many years before, and was supposed, when for some reason he took a dislike to an habitant, to tantalize him by riding his finest horses by night. Jaco was not credulous. He shook his head smilingly and said it was the work of some enemy jealous of L'Éclair. He had heard of "La bête a Cornes," or horned beast, as some called Le Lutin, but only thought of it as one of the stories his mother would relate to him in his infancy as she rocked him to sleep. His friend told him he should brand his horses with a cross, or put an amulet or charm about their necks. Jaco returned home sad and dejected. He had not met with the counsel he wished, and determined to find out for himself who this enemy was.

One bright moonlight night he stationed himself at his window where he could command a good view of his barn without being seen himself, and armed with his trusty rifle, waited for his foe. Not a sound disturbed the night air save the low murmuring of the waters against the beach, the lone cry of the whip-poor-will, or the occasional splash of some restless bullfrog. All nature seemed to slumber. Suddenly a sound like the troubled neighing of a horse fell on his strained ear, and keeping his eyes on the barn doors, he saw them noiselessly open and his

favorite L'Éclair, trembling like a leaf, fly out. On her back was a fearful apparition. Jaco was no coward, but he felt his courage oozing out at his knees, cold chills chasing each other down his back, and great beads of perspiration standing on his forehead. The monster resembled a baboon, with a horned head, a skin of bristling black hair, brilliant, restless eyes, and a devilish leer on its face. It clutched with one hand L'Éclair's mane, and with the other belabored her with a stick of the thorn bush, for the fiend rode without saddle or bridle.

Jaco recognized in an instant that his rifle was powerless against such a foe, and like a bright inspiration came to him the old mode used to exorcise a demon; he seized the holy water font, one of which hung at the head of every good habitant's bed, and threw it and its contents down upon the monster as he passed beneath the window. A demoniacal shriek rent the air, the horse snorted, reared, and notwithstanding the efforts of the fiend, plunged into the chilly waters of the lake. Jaco rushed in pursuit, but when he arrived at the beach, only the circling eddies marked the spot where the affrighted animal and its fiendish rider had disappeared. Firing his rifle to awaken his neighbors, who, unaccustomed to such signals, rushed to find out what was the

matter, Jaco related his adventure. His disordered appearance, the absence of the horse, the broken fragments of the holy water font, and the thorn-bush stick dropped by the goblin, confirmed his tale. Like a judicious man he marked all his horses thereafter with a cross fearing the return of Le Lutin.* And to this day the Grosse Pointe habitants retain this custom, and whenever in the early morn on going to the barn they find a favorite horse reeking with sweat and foam, and with mane all tangled as if by the claws of a beast, they shake their heads mysteriously and say that it is Le Lutin come again.

* Aubrey in his "Miscellanies" mentions the practice for preventing nightmare in horses, "to hang in a string a flint with a hole in it, by the manger; but best of all they say hung about their necks, and a flint will do it that hath not a hole in it. It is to prevent the nightmare, viz: the hag from riding their horses that will sometimes sweat all night. The flint thus hung does hinder it." Herrick says:

"Hang up hooks and shears to scare
Hence the hag that rides the mare
Till they be all over wet
With the mire and the sweat,
This observed, the manes shall be
Of your horses, all knot free."