

## THE CRUSADE OF THE BELL.

By ELIZABETH OAKES SMITH.

Crusades of every kind, whether of limited proportions or expanding to that vastness which may involve the condition of Empires, will be estimated with approval or disapprobation by the stand-point taken by him who considers them. The Mohammedan, defending the holy sepulchre of our Lord, was as religious in his defence as the Christian who traversed continents to wrest it from his grasp. So the history of the Bell which I shall relate, was regarded as a holy crusade by the sim-ple-hearted, but cruel Roman Catholic Indians of St. Luis, Canada, while to the no less earnest Colonists of Deerfield, Massachusetts, the wresting of it from them was not the less regarded, as it truly was, an atrocious, cruel aggression.

Father Nicholas, one of those zealous, untiring Priests of the Society of Jesus, whose footsteps traversed the inhospitable wilds of the St. Lawrence and Northern Lakes before any other white man's foot had ever penetrated this region, had collected a large number of his flock together at St. Luis, not far from the present city of Montreal. The Indians of the North had readily imbibed

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Now began the preaching which was to usher in the Crusade of the Bell. Father Nicholas represented to his converts that the blessed instrument was held in wicked thrall; that its sacred motto had been expunged, its proud baptismal name obliterated, and its silvery voice prostituted to the unholy use of calling heretics, who despised the Cross, to their unsanctified worship. It would be a Christian work, and one pleasing to God, to wrest this baptized Bell out of the hands of these heretics. Peter the Hermit did not use his impassioned tongue to a more fervid result, than did this Crusader of the frozen North. Religion, patriotism, interest, were all brought to appeal, and the hearts of the unlettered savages, always ready for raids of plunder or bloodshed, were eagerly enlisted in the cause. A chosen band presented themselves before the priest, who not only received his benediction but were marshaled onward in his own person. It was the dead of winter when the hardy band went forth upon their mission through tangled forests bedded deeply in snow; down the frozen rivers; over icy lakes; by craggy mountain sides, till Lake Champlain, and the hills of Vermont, were left behind them. At length, after incredible hardships, they descended the Connecticut River, and on the night of the 20th of February, 1704 (two years, be it remembered, before the birth of the great Franklin), reached the doomed village of Deerfield.

The weather was intensely cold, the inhabitants profoundly buried in sleep, when suddenly from every side arose the fearful yell of savages, and the work of slaughter made night hideous. I will not describe the terrible scene; helpless women and innocent children, unarmed men and exasperated youth, all alike fell under the remorseless tomahawk. The pastor, Rev. John Williams, saw two of his children die while he was helpless to save them; being bound hand and foot to a tree. More than a hundred were slaughtered, and fifty carried into captivity.

The cruel work of destruction closed as the morning sun glistened through the frosty atmosphere to look upon the scene of carnage, and at the same moment a silvery, joyous peal of the Bell rang out upon the air, and stole away over hillside and forest, announcing that the triumph of the Crusaders was complete. With childish delight the Indians pulled the rope, and listened to the voice of the instrument which had for so long a time proclaimed their imaginations.

the idea of worship under the symbolism of the Cross, the more readily that all who do not accept the form were heretics, and not under its protection, and might justly be regarded as not only hostile to the Church, but hostile also to the interests of the red man.

It had been the policy of this remarkable priesthood, the Jesuits, to reclaim the Indians from their wild life, and induce them to cultivate the earth and establish themselves in villages of a more permanent character than had hitherto been their custom. For this purpose Father Nicholas had aided them in the construction of a little church, with a small bell, into which they might go, and by a communion of worship awaken the ideas of social intercourse. The church, with its bell, completed, the next step must be the bell. The good Father dwelt eloquently upon the benefits to be derived therefrom; the silvery notes that should steal through the solitudes, like a tender voice from the Great Father calling his children to prayer.

The people listened with awe; new and beautiful harmonies seemed already awakened, and they hastened to bring forth their little store of wealth, in the shape of choice skins of the beaver, mink, and sable, which were to be sold, and the proceeds devoted to its purchase; in due time a sufficient quantity was shipped to France, and the bell with its holy inscription, christened Le Grande Monarque by the prayers, and laying on of holy hands, was on its way to its home in the wilderness. Had it reached it without molestation, a long catalogue of sufferings and death, together with a history of heroic devotion, would not have stood written in our Colonial history. The war between France and England prevailed at the time, and the Indians were the allies of the former. The vessel bearing the precious bell was seized, and the prize carried into Salem, Massachusetts Bay.

Several years passed away; and the fate of the bell seemed likely to remain unknown to those who had labored so strenuously for its possession. But they were not idle: their emissaries found many pretenses for visiting secretly and peacefully the English white settlements, and at length traced it to its new destination. The people of Deerfield, upon the Connecticut River, had built to themselves a meeting-house, and the sacred bell swung in the new structure, over which presided in Apostolic wise, the Rev. John Williams, doomed to pay dearly for this piece of "sounding brass and tinkling cymbal."



Thus has the tragic story of the massacre of Deerfield a two-fold interest; on the one side, one of the most cruel slaughters that ever characterized our Colonial history—treacherous, cold, black, and ghastly; and on the other side, a religious expedition, projected with consummate skill, and carried out with toilsome, self-sacrificing energy, to redeem a sacred symbol from the hands of usurpers, who but half appreciated the sacredness of its character. To us it was a horrible massacre—to the Indian, a Religious Crusade.

The rescue of the Bell was accomplished; and now with tender care it was lowered from the belly, and suspended upon a strong beam carried by four young Indians, and again they turned themselves toward the great wilderness of the North, shouting as they went hymns of praise. The saddest part of the returning group was the unhappy captives, among whom was Pastor Williams, his wife and five children, forcing their way through the pathless snow. The four delicate women sank by the wayside—there is a gleam of steel, a faint cry, and a pale face is left whitening in the desert. I may as well say here, that the rest were carried to Montreal, and subsequently emancipated. Pastor Williams returned, with four children, the girl Eunice refusing to leave the chief, whom she at length married.

After great hardships the party reached the shores of Lake Champlain; overcome with fatigue and famine, they were compelled to leave the precious burden till the genial spring should let loose the frozen earth, and they could carry it with less of suffering. Accordingly, it was care-fully buried under a heap of green branches, and left, with prayers and benedictions, for a more auspicious season.

Scarcely had the snows of winter yielded to the bland breezes of spring, clothing the trees with tender green, and fanning to life the early wild flowers of this Northern region, before the Indians renewed their Crusade of the Bell. A trusty party provided with a yoke of oxen, made their way to the lake, where the precious treasure was found intact. Carefully they mounted it upon a rude frame, and decorated it with green branches and wild-wood flowers, carried onward with jubilee songs of triumph, they made their way to the shores of the St. Lawrence. Never did the Ro-

In the meanwhile those children of the woods remaining at the village, waited in anxious expectation the return of their friends sent upon this solemn embassy. Their imaginations were fired by dwelling upon the mysterious voice which was to be in their midst, calling them to worship, and resounding along the hills and rocky shores in religious melody. It was a new sound, one which their ears had never heard, but which was to be instinct with delight. As the time approached which was to witness the return of the party, the village was stirred with expectation; eager inquiries went from mouth to mouth; grave surmises were made as to its shape and appearance. Under the breath, the old chiefs referred it to the old Manitou, worshiped for ages by the tribes, who seeing the dangerous dominance of the white man, had sent them a token, a talisman for good, and with the advent of a Christian symbol arose memories of the old faith.

The whole village was assembled upon the green fronting the great river, in silent, solemn expectation: Slowly the day waned, and a soft twilight, flecked by the crimson rays of the departed sun, quieted all nature to a sense of repose. The people, with Indian persistency, waited and listened in silence—there was no sound save the heavy sweep of the river, and the nesting of the birds settling themselves into their nests upon the trees.

There is a faint sound, low and silvery, stealing upon the air, and the people listen to a new echo, which they have no way of recognizing or defining. Again it comes, clearer, more distinct, a strong melody, clear, soft, resonant along the forest glade, and away amongst the hills.

“It is the bell! It is the Bell!” broke from a hundred voices, and the whole people, headed by Father Nicholas, went forth to meet it. Triumphantly garlanded with green branches, it was borne into the village, and there, with holy chant and sacred ritual, elevated to its place in the humble church. There it still hangs, its Latin inscription and august name nearly obliterated, and for more than a hundred and fifty years its silvery voice has awakened the echoes of the St. Lawrence to the matin and vesper hymns of the convents of St. Louis.

man Legionary convey a trophy with more of exultation.