

The French and Indian War just after Braddock's defeat is again the background for an Altsheler triumph.

Young Robert Lennox and his friend Tayoga, an Onondaga Indian, undertake to make a dangerous journey through the northern wilderness to warn the garrison and settlers gathered at Fort Refuge of the hostile forces. Afterwards they join the army as scouts, preceding it on an expedition to Lake George and Lake Champlain, where they engage in many fierce encounters. The story concludes with the battle of Lake George, in which the Colonists win their first great success of the war.

The story takes place almost wholly in the wilderness, and gives a picture of Iroquois life and warfare, historically true. The description of life in the wilderness, of the intrigue and cunning necessary in dealing with the French and Indians, of repeated encounters where ultimate success depends on quick wit and wily cleverness, makes fascinating reading for boys and girls.

FOREWORD

"The Rulers of the Lakes" is a complete story, but it is also the third volume of the French and Indian War Series, following "The Hunters of the Hills" and "The Shadow of the North." Robert Lennox, Tayoga, Willet, and all the important characters in the earlier romances reappear.

CHARACTERS IN THE FRENCH AND INDIAN WAR SERIES

ROBERT LENNOX A lad of unknown origin
TAYOGA A young Onondaga warrior
DAVID WILLET A hunter
RAYMOND LOUIS DE ST. LUC A brilliant French officer
AGUSTE DE COURCELLES A French officer
FRANÇOIS DE JUMONVILLE A French officer
LOUIS DE GALISSONNIÈRE A young French officer
JEAN DE MÉZY A corrupt Frenchman
ARMAND GLANDELET A young Frenchman
PIERRE BOUCHER A bully and bravo
PHILIBERT DROUILLARD A French priest
THE MARQUIS DUQUESNE Governor-General of Canada
MARQUIS DE VAUDREUIL Governor-General of Canada
FRANÇOIS BIGOT Intendant of Canada
MARQUIS DE MONTCALM French commander-in-chief
DE LEVIS A French general
BOURLAMAQUE A French general
BOUGAINVILLE A French general
ARMAND DUBOIS A follower of St. Luc
M. DE CHATILLARD An old French Seigneur
CHARLES LANGLADE A French partisan
THE DOVE The Indian wife of Langlade
TANDAKORA An Ojibway chief
DAGANOWEDA A young Mohawk chief
HENDRICK An old Mohawk chief
BRADDOCK A British general
ABERCROMBIE A British general
WOLFE A British general
COL. WILLIAM JOHNSON Anglo-American leader
MOLLY BRANT Col. Wm. Johnson's Indian wife
JOSEPH BRANT Young brother of Molly Brant,
afterward the great Mohawk

chief, Thayendanegea

ROBERT DINWIDDIE Lieutenant-Governor of Virginia

WILLIAM SHIRLEY Governor of Massachusetts

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN Famous American patriot

JAMES COLDEN A young Philadelphia captain

WILLIAM WILTON A young Philadelphia lieutenant

HUGH CARSON A young Philadelphia lieutenant

JACOBUS HUYSMAN An Albany burgher

CATERINA Jacobus Huysman's cook

ALEXANDER MCLEAN An Albany schoolmaster

BENJAMIN HARDY A New York merchant

JOHNATHAN PILLSBURY Clerk to Benjamin Hardy

ADRIAN VAN ZOON A New York merchant

THE SLAVER A nameless rover

ACHILLE GARAY A French spy

ALFRED GROSVENOR A young English officer

JAMES CABELL A young Virginian

WALTER STUART A young Virginian

BLACK RIFLE A famous "Indian fighter"

ELIHU STRONG A Massachusetts colonel

ALAN HERVEY A New York financier

STUART WHYTE Captain of the British sloop,

Hawk

JOHN LATHAM Lieutenant of the British sloop,

Hawk

EDWARD CHARTERIS A young officer of the Royal
Americans

ZEBEDEE CRANE A young scout and forest runner

ROBERT ROGERS Famous Captain of American Rangers

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The RULERS OF THE LAKES

A STORY OF GEORGE AND CHAMPLAIN

CHAPTER I

THE HERALDS OF PERIL

The three, the white youth, the red youth, and the white man, lay deep in the forest, watching the fire that burned on a low hill to the west, where black figures flitted now and then before the flame. They did not stir or speak for a long time, because a great horror was upon them. They had seen an army destroyed a few days before by a savage but invisible foe. They had heard continually for hours the fierce triumphant yells of the warriors and they had seen the soldiers dropping by hundreds, but the woods and thickets had hid the foe who sent forth such a rain of death.

Robert Lennox could not yet stop the quiver of his nerves when he recalled the spectacle, and Willet, the hunter, hardened though he was to war, shuddered in spite of himself at the memory of that terrible battle in the leafy wilderness. Nor was Tayoga, the young Onondaga, free from emotion when he thought of Braddock's defeat, and the blazing triumph it meant for the western tribes, the enemies of his people.

They had turned back, availing themselves of their roving commission, when they saw that the victors were not pursuing the remains of the beaten army, and now they were watching the French and Indians. Fort Duquesne was not many miles away, but the fire on the hill had been built by a party of Indians led by a Frenchman, his uniform showing when he passed between eye and flame, the warriors being naked save for the breech cloth.

"I hope it's not St. Luc," said Robert.

"Why?" asked Willet. "He was in the battle. We saw him leading on the Indian hosts."

"I know. That was fair combat, I suppose, and the French used the tools they had. The Chevalier could scarcely have been a loyal son of France if he had not fought us then, but I don't like to think of him over there by the fire, leading a band of Indians who will kill and scalp women and children as well as men along the border."

"Nor I, either, though I'm not worried about it. I can't tell who the man is, but I know it's not St. Luc. Now I see him black against the blaze, and it's not the Chevalier's figure."

Robert suddenly drew a long breath, as if he had made a surprising recognition.

"I'm not sure," he said, "but I notice a trick of movement now and then reminding me of someone. I'm thinking it's the same Auguste de Courcelles, Colonel of France, whom we met first in the northern woods and again in Quebec. There was one memorable night, as you know, Dave, when we had occasion to mark him well."

"I think you're right, Robert," said the hunter. "It looks like De Courcelles."

"I know he is right," said Tayoga, speaking for the first time. "I have been watching him whenever he passed before the fire, and I cannot mistake him."

"I wonder what he's doing here," said Robert. "He may have been in the battle, or he may have come to Duquesne a day or two later."

"I think," said Willet, "that he's getting ready to lead a band against the border, now almost defenseless."

"He is a bad man," said Tayoga. "His soul is full of wickedness and cruelty, and it should be sent to the dwelling place of the evil minded. If Great Bear and Dagaogoga say the word I will creep through the thickets and kill him."

Robert glanced at him. The Onondaga had spoken in the gentle tones of one who felt grief rather than anger. Robert knew that his heart was soft, that in ordinary life none was kinder than Tayoga. And yet he was and always would be an Indian. De Courcelles had a bad mind, and he was also a danger that should be removed. Then why not remove him?

"No, Tayoga," said Willet. "We can't let you risk yourself that way. But we might go a little closer without any great danger. Ah, do you see that new figure passing before the blaze?"

"Tandakora!" exclaimed the white youth and the red youth together.

"Nobody who knows him could mistake him, even at this distance. I think he must be the biggest Indian in all the world."

"But a bullet would bring him crashing to earth as quickly as any other," said the Onondaga.

"Aye, so it would, Tayoga, but his time hasn't come yet, though it will come, and may we be present when your Manitou deals with him as he deserves. Suppose we curve to the right through these thick bushes, and from the slope there I think we can get a much better view of the band."

They advanced softly upon rising ground, and being able to approach two or three hundred yards, saw quite clearly all those around the fire. The white man was in truth De Courcelles, and the gigantic Indian, although there could have been no mistake about him, was Tandakora, the Ojibway. The warriors, about thirty in number, were, Willet thought, a mingling of Ojibways, Pottawattomies and Ottawas. All were in war paint and were heavily armed, many of them carrying big muskets with bayonets on the end, taken from Braddock's fallen soldiers. Three had small swords belted to their naked waists, not as weapons, but rather as the visible emblems of triumph.

As he looked, Robert's head grew hot with the blood pumped up from his angry heart. It seemed to him that they swaggered and boasted, although they were but true to savage nature.

"Easy, lad," said Willet, putting a restraining hand upon his shoulder.

"It's their hour. You can't deny that, and we'll have to bide a while."

"But will our hour ever come, Dave? Our army has been beaten, destroyed. The colonies and mother country alike are sluggish, and now have no plans, the whole border lies at the mercy of the toma-

hawk and the French power in Canada not only grows all the time, but is directed by able and daring men."

"Patience, lad, patience! Our strength is greater than that of the foe, although we may be slower in using it. But I tell you we'll see our day of triumph yet."

"They are getting ready to move," whispered the Onondaga. "The Frenchman and the band will march northward."

"And not back to Duquesne?" said Willet. "What makes you think so, Tayoga?"

"What is left for them to do at Duquesne? It will be many a day before the English and Americans come against it again."

"That, alas, is true, Tayoga. They're not needed longer here, nor are we. They've put out their fire, and now they're off toward the north, just as you said they would be. Tandakora and De Courcelles lead, marching side by side. A pretty pair, well met here in the forest. Now, I wish I knew where they were going!"

"Can't the Great Bear guess?" said the Onondaga.

"No, Tayoga. How should I?"

"Doesn't Great Bear remember the fort in the forest, the one called Refuge?"

"Of course I do, Tayoga! And the brave lads, Colden and Wilton and Carson and their comrades who defended it so long and so well. That's the most likely point of attack, and now, since Braddock's army is destroyed it's too far in the wilderness, too exposed, and should be abandoned. Suppose we carry a warning!"

Robert's eyes glistened. The idea made a strong appeal to him. He had mellow memories of those Philadelphia lads, and it would be pleasant to see them again. The three, in bearing the alarm, might achieve, too, a task that would lighten, in a measure, the terror along the border. It would be a relief at least to do something while the government disagreed and delayed.

"Let's start at once for Fort Refuge," he said, "and help them to get away before the storm breaks. What do you say, Tayoga?"

"It is what we ought to do," replied the Onondaga, in his precise English of the schools.

"Come," said Willet, leading the way, and the three, leaving the fire behind them, marched rapidly into the north and east. Two miles gone, and they stopped to study the sun, by which they meant to take their reckoning.

"The fort lies there," said Willet, pointing a long finger, "and by my calculations it will take us about five days and nights to reach it, that is, if nothing gets in our way."

"You think, then," asked Robert, "that the French and Indians are already spreading a net?"

"The Indians might stop, Robert, my lad, to exult over their victory and to celebrate it with songs and dances, but the French leaders, whose influence with them is now overwhelming, will push them on. They will want to reap all the fruits of their great triumph by the river. I've often told you about the quality of the French and you've seen for yourself. Ligneris, Contrecoeur, De Courcelles, St. Luc and the others will flame like torches along the border."

"And St. Luc will be the most daring, skillful and energetic of them all."

"It's a fact that all three of us know, Robert, and now, having fixed our course, we must push ahead with all speed. De Courcelles, Tandakora and the warriors are on the march, too, and we may see them again before we see Fort Refuge."

"The forest will be full of warriors," said Tayoga, speaking with great gravity. "The fort will be the first thought of the western barbarians, and of the tribes from Canada, and they will wish to avenge the defeat they suffered before it."

It was not long until they had ample proof that the Onondaga's words were true. They saw three trails in the course of the day, and all of them led toward the fort. Willet and Tayoga, with their won-

derful knowledge of the forest, estimated that about thirty warriors made one trail, about twenty another, and fifteen the smallest.

"They're going fast, too," said the hunter, "but we must go faster."

"They will see our traces," said Tayoga, "and by signaling to one another they will tell all that we are in the woods. Then they will set a force to destroy us, while the greater bands go on to take the fort."

"But we'll pass 'em," said Robert confidently. "They can't stop us!"

Tayoga and the hunter glanced at him. Then they looked at each other and smiled. They knew Robert thoroughly, they understood his vivid and enthusiastic nature which, looking forward with so much confidence to success, was apt to consider it already won, a fact that perhaps contributed in no small measure to the triumph wished so ardently. At last, the horror of the great defeat in the forest and the slaughter of an army was passing. It was Robert's hopeful temperament and brilliant mind that gave him such a great charm for all who met him, a charm to which even the fifty wise old sachems in the vale of Onondaga had not been insensible.

"No, Robert," said the Great Bear gravely, "I don't think anything can stop us. I've a prevision that De Courcelles and Tandakora will stand in our way, but we'll just brush 'em out of it."

They had not ceased to march at speed, while they talked, and now Tayoga announced the presence of a river, an obstacle that might prove formidable to foresters less expert than they. It was lined on both sides with dense forest, and they walked along its bank about a mile until they came to a comparatively shallow place where they forded it in water above their knees. However, their leggings and moccasins dried fast in the midsummer sun, and, experiencing no discomfort, they pressed forward with unabated speed.

All the afternoon they continued their great journey to save those at the fort, fording another river and a half dozen creeks and leaping across many brooks. Twice they crossed trails leading to the east and twice other trails leading to the west, but they felt that all of them would presently turn and join in the general march converging upon Fort Refuge. They were sure, too, that De Courcelles,