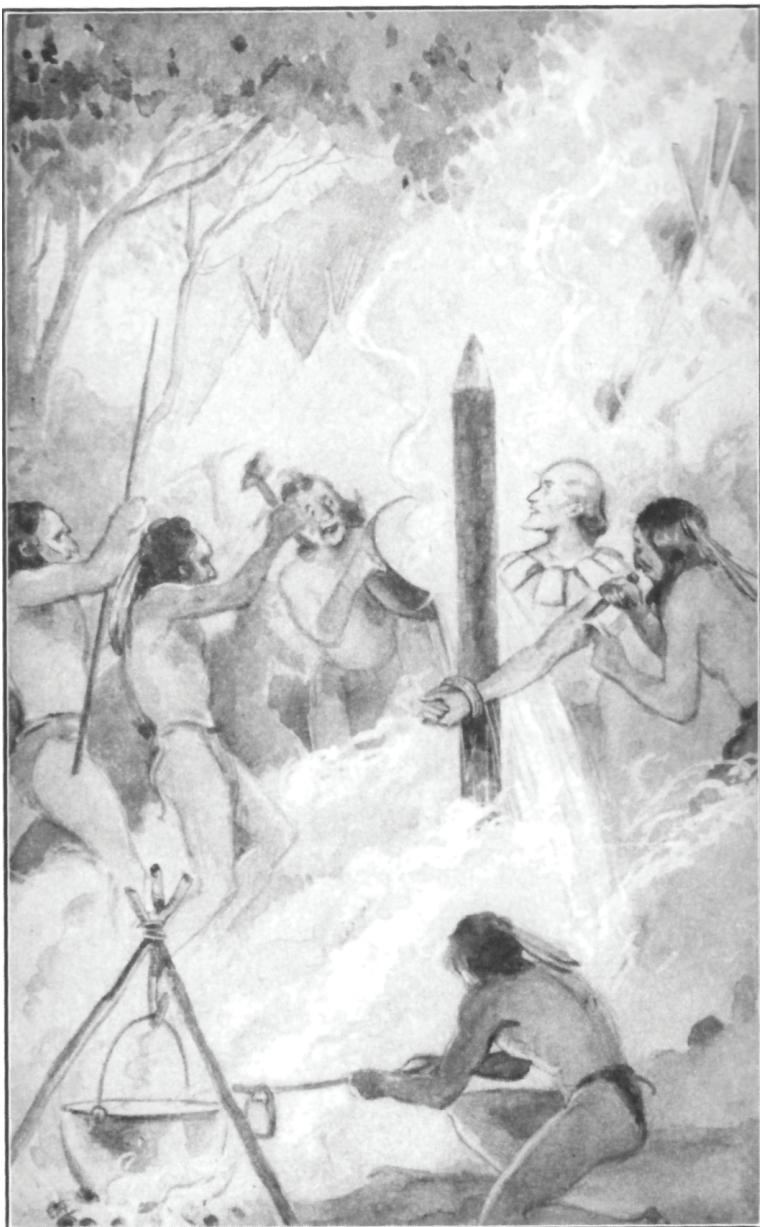
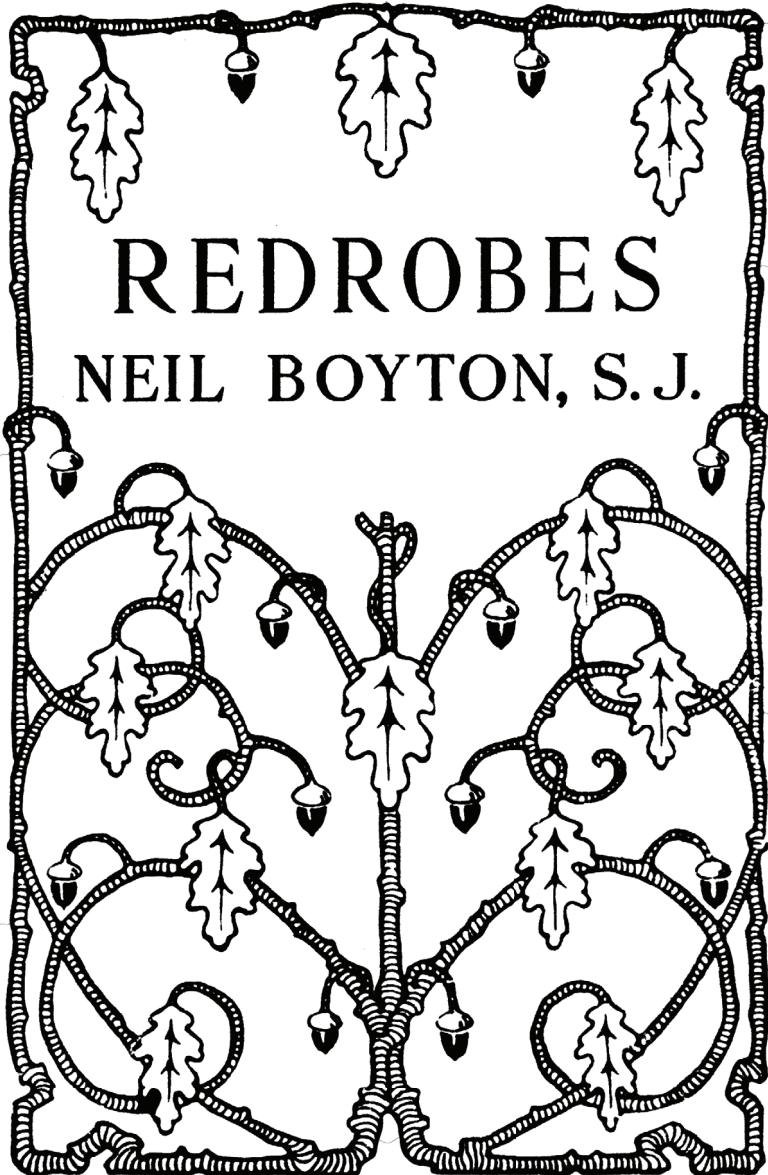


REDROBES



"MOCKINGLY THE FROG WALKED TO THE FIRES AND TAKING A KETTLE OF BOILING WATER . . . HE POURED THE STEAMING LIQUID ON THE HEAD OF ECHON [FATHER BREBEUF].

(PAGE 262)



REDROBES

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Redrobes.

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We have made no intentional change from the original text except to correct mistakes in spelling and punctuation.

FOR REV. CARLOS BORJA

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TO THE MEMORY
OF
SAINT JOHN BREBEUF
JESUIT
MISSIONER
MARTYR
AND
GIANT OF GOD

REDROBES

Chapter One

Jacques the Little

 ALL THE DAYS of his life, and they were to be many, Father Jacques Bourdon could recall the incidents of an afternoon in June, 1644. But if you knew Jacques intimately he would hasten to explain: "It was a sad day, M'sieur, but a glad one also. For in place of the one I lost, I gained an hundredfold the friendship of one of God's great martyrs. Blessed be the Good God!"

And as Jacques continued his explanation, it would unfold this way. Sister Portress, whose tongue Jacques had known on occasions to be keen-edged, came seeking him at play with small Louis Joliet on Mountain Hill Road. Pity shone in her eyes as she stooped and said: "Come, little one."

Wonderingly, hand in hers, the lad walked with Sister Portress up the narrow steep road till they came to the gray walled Hotel Dieu. Little Jacques had always associated the hospital with pains. Babies' shrill cries had come to his ears. He had seen men of the woods, after a rough fight at the river's edge of the town, carried within. Bearded sailors from the ships and silent Indians also had been taken there. Jacques had held his breath at the groans which even the thick walls could not shut in. Little Jacques knew that stiff still things, that had been these strong men, were borne out of the

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Hotel Dieu and put in the small God's Acre—there to sleep till that Archangel blew his trumpet.

Sister Portress stopped at the lodge room and there another nun awaited them. Little Jacques knew her name. This was Sister Angela. Once she had given him an Agnus Dei to wear and, better, a cake to eat. She also smiled down tenderly now. Then she did a startling thing. She knelt on the stone floor till her headpiece was on a level with Jacques' wondering upturned face. Her hands rested on his shoulders and her lips brushed against Jacques' brown curls.

It was all so strange, this new kindness, and it made little Jacques silent and fearful. The woman, who casually looked after him in her small wooden cabin on Notre Dame Road, gave blows if he did not obey with a jump. And, when she was sober, her tongue was as keen as the winds of winter that swept across the St. Lawrence.

Sister Angela took the lad's hand in hers and led his steps into the softly lighted chapel. God was there back of that golden door. He was more powerful than King Louis across the ocean. This Jacques knew. God could do terrible things to bad children. If boys repeated the words the sailors from the ships used in their cups He would hear and be angry. God owned the terrifying lightning and He could make the earth open and swallow you up like that, if you made Him angry. You had to be good for God. Once God had sent some hungry black bears right out of the woods and they had eaten up a lot of boys who were bad. Jacques had never forgotten that Biblical story, heard around a winter's fireplace.

But now Sister Angela was saying, "Kneel down, little one, and ask the Good Boy Jesus in there to keep you always His sinless boy."

With silently moving lips Jacques obeyed, wondering if Boy Jesus would speak back to him.

Then Sister Angela whispered: "Now ask Little Jesus to make you brave and watch you always."

Jacques the Little

“I did, Sister.”

“Then come with me. Your father is calling for you.”

Jacques started up. His father was working on a farm on Orleans Island, some miles below the settlement, and would not be back in Quebec till next month.

It was with a timid clasp that the lad took Sister’s hand. She squeezed his hand affectionately and smiled down on him. When Sister Angela smiled she was good to look upon and little Jacques smiled back. The woman who looked after him never smiled. One of the woodsmen who came to her cabin had told Jacques jokingly that the woman’s smile had been cut out by an operation and he believed it.

Into the ward they came. Jacques knew the statued Lady they passed represented God’s Mother. Neat and white were the beds down either side. In the further corner in the bed directly beneath the big crucifix of Jesus, Who had died for all people many, many years ago, lay a bearded white-faced man and it was some seconds before little Jacques recognized him.

Very weakly Jacques’ father lifted his hand and Jacques dutifully bent down and kissed it. He was afraid of his rough father.

Sister Angela brought a stool and when the lad was placed on this the nun stole away.

Was this his woodsman father’s voice, Jacques puzzled. The words came in a hoarse whisper.

“Jacques . . . not long now . . . don’t know what will become of you . . . could have been a better parent . . . the Good God forgive. . . .”

The lad was beginning to be frightened and tears started to come unbidden. His father had never spoken in such terms before.

“What’s the matter, my father?” There was a catch in Jacques’ voice. “I thought. . . .”

Hoarsely came the words, “The great tree fell . . . I saw it too late . . . my poor back . . . they brought me here.”

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Little Jacques could see that giant timber crashing down and his woodsman father leaping desperately to get out of its path. Suddenly he remembered that Louis Joliet's cousin had been crushed that way and how Louis had described the accident. "And when the men took the tree off, my strong cousin René never walked again."

Jacques' father was looking at the lad with staring eyes and it seemed as if he was trying to force words that would not come.

In his extremity the father turned his head slowly and looked down the long white ward. Something comforting that he saw seemed at once to be reflected in his eyes. He sighed contentedly.

Little Jacques turned his head curiously and he beheld Sister Angela returning. With her was a man whose presence instantly made Little Jacques think of giants. The tall man wore a long black-robe, belted at the waist and patched in many places. Jacques knew he was a Father, who lived at the Jesuits' House. The tall priest seemed to swell up as he approached. Severe were his bearded features. Wide were his shoulders and although graying hairs were scattered freely among his naturally brown hair and beard, he carried himself with the easy, ever youthful swing of the woodsman. Sister Angela seemed immensely tiny, walking at the tall priest's side.

When the two stopped at the bedside, Jacques' father was whispering, "I knew you would come, my father. . . . It is almost too late. . . . Quickly stoop and listen."

The gigantic priest bent low and Little Jacques' gaze took in the thickness and the bronzed roughness of this strange priest's hands. They were so wide at the knuckles and sunbrowned, like a sea captain's.

"My Father . . . this is my neglected little son. . . . His mother, she went to God when he was an infant. . . . Now I know I. . . ."

Big Jacques stiffened with pain and his words came in gasps. "Before . . . I go . . . please . . . my Father . . . be a . . . father . . . to . . . to my little one."

Jacques the Little

Then Little Jacques, as the meaning of the words became evident to him, looked up tearfully into this strange priest's countenance. At once, the lad's first impression that this priest's features were stern vanished like morning mists on the Great River. For the blackrobed one was beaming down on him and Jacques heard him saying, "Big Jacques, your family, the Bourdons, and mine were close friends, back in Conde-sur-Vire. Go home in peace. I shall be Little Jacques' father always."

The lad could see the look of contentment like a softly dawning light in a morning lake, spreading over the face of his woodsman father.

While he was gazing down on the bed, Little Jacques felt a rough hand steal gently around his shoulder and draw him close to the patched black robe.

The next event of that afternoon came so immediately that its memory always blurred in the lad's recollections. He remembered his gaze had traveled to the neighboring cot where lay a wizened old Indian. He looked a century of years. His hair was furrowed after the manner of the Hurons and Little Jacques was watching the alert squirrel-like eyes of the old brave, when he felt himself lifted bodily. As he swung in the air he glanced down on his father. A ruddy torrent was pouring over his lips. Then Sister Angela was holding Jacques' face pressed close to her shoulder. The deep voice of the tall priest began to say prayers in a strange tongue and Sister Angela was making the responses. Other nuns came running. One carried a lighted candle. Then Sister Portress gently took Little Jacques, too startled to weep, and carried him out of the ward.

Jacques' last remembrance of his woodsman father was the silent figure in the rough coffin being carried to the open graveside in God's Acre. Jacques was in the van of the small group of mourners who followed. A thunder storm was coming down the river and

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the lightning was flashing above the proud promontory of Cape Diamond.

Little Jacques never liked lightning. It always seemed to him louder than the guns in Fort St. Louis that guarded the town from the despised English and dreaded Iroquois. Then as the procession reached God's Acre, a crash came, more terrifying than any that went before and a vivid bolt rent a nearby oak.

The boy's fright overcame his grief. He ducked out of Sister Portress' care. He heard her call in vain. But his legs twinkled and he never stopped running down the hill road till he was cowering, soaked to the skin, safely in the lodge room of the Hotel Dieu.

It had rained with all the fury of a summer storm and the artillery of heaven flashed and boomed.

Once over a year before, when Jacques was on Orleans Island in the broad river below the great cliff of Quebec, he vividly remembered another such thunder storm. That time his woodsman father was with him and Little Jacques had stood it as long as he could. Then he had cowered in Big Jacques' arms, trembling with fright at each thunder clap. His rough father had laughed at his timidity and held him up to the open window, where the boy had screamed and kicked impotently.

Now, seemingly without connection with this cruel recollection of a year ago, his present loss came home to Little Jacques. There were no arms of a father—such as he had been—into which he could creep. The stiff silent form of Big Jacques in that rough coffin would be all dripping wet. The gnarled old grave digger would never have had time to throw back all the loose earth before the grave would be half full of mud. This picture made Little Jacques feel very miserable and he wept, while outside the rain was falling dismally.

Finally in his lonely misery Little Jacques had slumped down from the wooden bench and great sobs shook him. Never had his neglectful woodsman father seemed dearer than that rainy

Jacques the Little

afternoon, when the lad had lost him. He knew Big Jacques was with the Good God up in the skies and he wished the Good God would take him too, that he might be near Big Jacques again. New misery engulfed the boy till his shoulders shook and shook. . . .

It was a quiet step that made Jacques aware that he was not alone in the lodge room. He thought at first Sister Portress had come back and she was going to scold him for running away from her care. Even that would be better than this awful feeling.

But strong arms were lifting Little Jacques and he was nestled to a black-robed breast. A deep voice, softly lowered, was soothing him with words that a mother would utter. Little Jacques looked up into the bearded face of the tall priest.

“My little adopted son, so here you are! Now let me give you a piece of good advice that I myself follow occasionally. Next time you feel lonely, you steal into the room where the red light burns on guard. Kneel down there, little son, and tell the Good Boy Jesus why your heart is burdened. He is the special friend of all orphan boys and He knows how to soothe you better than an old bachelor.”

Little Jacques asked timidly, “Please, my Father, what is a bachelor? Is it like a bear or something?”

The tall priest laughed and his teeth were very white. “I suspect it is more like the bear than something. Now a bachelor like I am, is a man who gives up the pleasant thought of having his own little sons that he may—so it seems—have the charge of many other nice little boys. For instance, the Good God has sent me another only recently and I hold him in my arms now.”

The tall priest had seated himself on the bench and Little Jacques quite contentedly was resting in his lap.

“Now that I have answered that one, permit me to ask Jacques a question. How old are you now, my child?”

Little Jacques counted carefully on his fingers. Finally he held up the result. “My Father, all the fingers on this left hand and all but the thumb on the right.”

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“Well, unless my friends, the Iroquois, have hacked off several fingers, then I take it you are nine?”

“My Father is right.”

“And when was your birthday?”

“Our Lady’s Day, last March 25th.”

“Now that’s interesting!”

Jacques looked his puzzlement and the priest whispered mysteriously, “Are you good at keeping secrets?”

“I never tell what shouldn’t be told. That my father taught me.”

“Then, little secret sharer, know that you and I were both born on the Feast of Our Lady’s Annunciation. Only I came under her loving care a year over a half a century ago. So we both have the same loving Mother in Heaven. Always invoke her with confidence, for I will testify all the days of my life this Lady All Fair looks after her own better than their sins deserve.”

The tall priest had taken out his pocket handkerchief and gently was drying away the big tears that trembled on the lad’s eyelashes.

Jacques, now that they shared birthdays and a secret, had lost his shyness of this strange priest and he felt emboldened to ask: “Would my Father be pleased to tell me his name, for I do not know it yet?”

“My name! I have had three names. When I was your age and lived in beautiful Normandy, my people called me Johnnie. Up in the lands, many leagues away, where my dear Hurons dwell, I am known as Echon. That is their word which means ‘He who drags the loads.’ You see, my little one, the Good God has given me more strength than He has given to most men. May I always use it for His greater service! Now here in the settlements along the St. Lawrence, my countrymen call me Father John Brebeuf. At your service.”

“Father John Brebeuf,” Little Jacques repeated several times aloud so that the tall priest’s name would stick in his memory.

“And very shortly now I will be addressed as Echon again. For I go once more to Huronia. But first I have arranged to place you at Our Lady of the Angels, the school that our good Father Anthony

Jacques the Little

Daniel started some years ago. Now listen closely. There I want you to play with the Huron boys as much as possible and begin to learn their language."

"Why, my Father?"

"Because, when my Jacques is a few years older, I will send for him. He will be placed in a canoe of the returning Hurons. He will travel up to Huronia——"

Little Jacques' eyes sparkled. This promised adventures. He interrupted: "My Father John Brebeuf will pardon, but where is Huronia?"

"Huronia? Well, listen attentively and I will tell you how to get there. It is three hundred leagues from Quebec's Rock. The Huron flotilla paddles up the St. Lawrence, past Three Rivers. At Ville Marie de Montreal the canoes turn into the Ottawa, where the portages begin around the white waters—Allumette Island—Upper Ottawa—many portages—Lake Nipissing—the River of the French. Then through the ten thousand beautiful islands, right down to our Residence at Fort St. Mary.

"Here I will be waiting for you and you will be placed with the boys, who are learning to be mission interpreters. You see why I tell you to play with the Huron boys now and learn all the Huron words you can at Our Lady of the Angels."

"Yes; my Father John Brebeuf."

Now that something definite lay before him, Little Jacques Bourdon felt better. "But if I am to be a Huron interpreter would it not be better if I went to Huronia with you this summer?"

"I'll risk no little boy's life in the Huron-bound canoes this summer. Too many of our good friends, the Iroquois, lie in wait along the St. Lawrence. As a result up in Huronia our missionaries are in dire straits. For the poor Fathers sadly lack supplies. You see the Iroquois have disputed the passage these past two summers and few Huron canoes got down the Ottawa and the St. Lawrence and no supplies for the missions got through.

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“Two years ago dear Father Isaac Jogues fell into Iroquois hands and was their captive till the kindly Dutch at New Amsterdam ransomed him. But last June when the French fleet arrived here he came back to seek his palm branch once more.”

Jacques looked puzzled. “Why a palm branch, my Father?”

“Has my little Jacques seen pictures of Christ’s blessed martyrs?”
“Of a surety.”

“Then what do the painters put in their hands to show——”

Jacques interrupted eagerly: “I know, my Father. A palm branch to show they died for the Good God.”

“And that is what gentle Father Jogues came back to seek again.”

Jacques sat up. “A thousand pardons, my Father, but I have seen him. Is he not the priest with the fingers the savages bit off?”

“That is good Father Isaac Jogues. Then, my little one, you have seen a living martyr of Christ. Next time you meet him in the roads of Quebec, kiss those mangled hands very reverently for they are very dear to Our Good Master.”

“I would be afraid, my Father,” confessed Little Jacques.

“Afraid of gentle Father Jogues! My foolish little one——”

The tall priest broke off. Then he whispered softly, “Speaking of angels!” And Little Jacques looked up.

Another blackrobed figure stood in the doorway of the lodge room. He was a man of medium height, brown bearded, with a high forehead and modest eyes. His hands were hidden in the folds of his much patched blackrobe.

Now those eyes were smiling as they took in the tall priest and the little lad with tear-stained face, who sat in his lap.

“Father John, Sister Angela told me that I would find you here—er, comforting the sorrowful.”

“Come in, Father Isaac, and share my spiritual work of mercy. This is my newly acquired Jacques, our future Huron interpreter.”

Father Brebeuf whispered to the lad: “Kneel down now and ask Father Isaac Jogues for his blessing.”

Jacques the Little

Jacques slipped to the ground and kneeling before the other blackrobed priest bowed his head.

He heard Father Jogues giving the blessing in Latin and he could feel the priest's right hand clumsily tracing the Sign of the Cross on his forehead. Then as Father Jogues finished Little Jacques reached and lifted that right hand to his lips.

Where finger tips should have been were cruel scars and red healed stumps. Remembering Father Brebeuf's words, Jacques kissed this mangled hand very reverently. He arose from his knees smiling happily.

Father Brebeuf had been looking through the small panes of glass in the window and now he said: "Come, Jacques, the thunder storm has gone down the river and here, out from behind the clouds, comes what my dear Hurons call 'The Old Man Above.' Father Jogues and I have a call to make at the Ursuline Convent. You are to stay here at the Hotel Dieu tonight and in the morning I will take you to Our Lady of the Angels myself. Good-bye, my interpreter-to-be, go and seek Sister Angela and you will very likely find your supper."

Obediently Little Jacques went in search of his supper. He felt so happy within his breast that he was smiling broadly.