

# Charles George Douglas Roberts



*By the Marshes  
of Minas*

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# Prefatory Note

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The stories in this collection all deal with that romantic period in Canadian history when the French were making their last struggle to retain their hold upon the peninsula of Acadie--now called Nova Scotia. The book is named from those wide sea-meadows and that restless water around which chiefly clusters the romance of Acadian story. Two of the tales--"The Eye of Gluskâp" and "A Tragedy of the Tides"--are here reprinted from the volume entitled *Earth's Enigmas*, for the reason that their subjects bring them obviously within the scope of this collection rather than the other.

C. G. D. R.

LONDON, July, 1899

# **BY THE MARSHES OF MINAS**

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# **THE RAMPARTS OF PORT ROYAL**

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# **Being an Adventure of Captain Seth Waldo, of the Connecticut Battalion, Serving under Sir William Phips in Acadie.**

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"Boston Harbour itself is scarce more sightly, nor half so spacious!" exclaimed Major Ephraim Whitman, as he leaned upon the bulwarks of the Boston ketch *God's Mercy*, and gazed with great content across the wide waters of the Basin to the low green ramparts of Port Royal.

In very truth, there was nothing in the bay of Boston to compare with it. Nor even in the havens of my own Connecticut could one match that great and sheltered expanse of safe anchorage, lying in wondrous peace between rich shores and high umbrageous hills. But Major Ephraim was a Boston man, and I thought it not well to contend with him in the matter. He had paid this place of Port Royal, this lovely lair of our most pestilent annoyers, the highest compliment that lay within his compass. I answered, therefore, in such a manner as to stir no contention.

"'Tis indeed a fair water and a fair shore," said I. "And fair would seem our chance of soon possessing that same fairness." But in my heart was the thought of something fairer far, the possession of which I held of more account by an infinite deal than all the lands commanded by the ramparts of Port Royal.



As Major Ephraim, wrapped in glad contemplation of some imagined similitude to the bay of Boston, spoke no further at the moment, I was free to think of my good fortune in being once more within a neighbourhood that held Diane de Menneval. One year ago, I being then a poor captive in Montreal, Diane had looked upon me with a pity whose high kinship to love she had at last sweetly confessed to me. My exchange being accomplished (I was held at the price of a little pock-marked French colonel whom I might have stowed away in one of my jack-boots), I had gone back to New England with an ill-disguised reluctance; but at parting with Diane I had sworn that I would come to her in the following spring. Since that parting and that oath she had removed to Acadie, that her gracious presence might cheer the loneliness of her uncle, the Sieur de Menneval, Governor of Port Royal. Now, thanks to a favouring wind and honest piloting, here was I at my lady's very threshold, so to speak, making good my oath. But would she pardon the manner of my coming? Would she welcome the gallant a-wooing sword in hand? I shifted uneasily from one foot to the other, as I bethought me of a certain imperiousness in her stately carriage, of a certain aptitude for scorn in the green dusks of her deep eyes. As I gazed desirously across the smooth yellow tide to the clustering cottages of the village and the green ramparts guarding them, something of my solicitude must have shown itself in my face, for Major Ephraim spoke suddenly.

"Seth," said he, with a sly chuckle, "I've heard say there is a maid in Port Royal whose name dwelleth more in thy heart than on thy lips; and in sooth I begin to believe it.

Such a moonsick face as thine have I never seen on a man except he were in love!"

"She is there, behind those very earthen walls, Ephraim," returned I soberly; "and so fair a maid as never came out of Boston."

The Major laughed dryly. He had taken two wives out of Boston.

"I feel for thee, Seth; verily I feel for thee," said he. "If she be a maid of any spirit, she will scarce thank her gallant for the shots that will presently be bringing down the walls about her ears. Thou hadst done better, to my thinking, to have held back from this venture of our Sir William's, and suffered thy wooing to abide a more convenient season." And the Major searched my countenance with his merry shrewd eyes, right full of wisdom of the worldly as well as of the godly sort.

"You touch me on the raw," I answered, confessing to my trouble of heart. "But I had sworn to come at this time; and there was no other way that consisted with honour. It seemed to me, moreover, that I might be so fortunate as to do her some service during the contention or thereafter. Had I not thought more of this than of her good-will, I had surely stayed behind."

"Well, well," said Major Ephraim in a voice of encouragement, "'tis an ancient and well-accredited custom to woo a maid with the sword's point; and there may yet be women to commend it, though it fits not well with these mincing days. And who is the damsel, Seth?"

"Mademoiselle de Menneval," said I.

Major Ephraim whistled, and was silent.

"The Governor's niece," I continued.

"I know, I know!" exclaimed the Major. "This enterprise of ours will, without doubt, commend you to her mightily, my boy. She cannot but love you, if only for the kindness we will do her uncle!" And without another word he turned again to lean upon the bulwarks. The yellow bubbles on the tide, as they raced smoothly past the black side of the ketch appeared to engross his meditation; and I walked aft with a very downcast spirit. Never till now had my eyes been fully opened to the loftiness of the obstacles before me. I had thought of them as barriers to be surmounted with some boldness and some firmness, such as I held myself not altogether lacking in; but when I minded me of Diane's pride of race, I confess that I felt daunted. For was I not helping to put a manner of discredit upon her house?

It was by this a little past noon hour. As I stood beside the wheel I must have worn a black countenance, for everyone avoided me. The ketch *God's Mercy* (which ever seemed to me a strange name for a battailous craft) swung easily at her anchor. A little over by lay Sir William's own ship, and in my bitter mood I went nigh to cursing his pennon as it flaunted jauntily from the mizzen peak. Our stout commander had one frigate and six smaller vessels, sloops and ketches, for this Acadian venture of his; and they swung now in ominous array before the menaced ramparts. On his decks he had seven hundred good men of New England, of an excellent fervour to fight, to trade, to pray, or to harry the Quakers. Of Port Royal, the word had gone abroad that she was ill-garrisoned and her walls in a condition of grievous disrepair. I could not doubt that we

should soon be masters of the place. But for me what comfort in this? In that hour I saw all black, so completely had Major Ephraim's view of the matter dashed me.

Whilst I was thus buried in my gloom a message came aboard from the commander's ship, and I found myself summoned to his presence. Sir William Phips had already honoured me with his confidence in more than one affair of import, and he knew that the French tongue was to me almost as that of my own people. The upshot was that a half-hour later my boat thrust out from the frigate, and as fast as four good oars could speed me I made for the long grey pier beneath the ramparts of Port Royal.

I, of all men upon that expedition, was bearing to the Sieur de Menneval a peremptory summons to surrender!

What would come of it all I durst not think. I had my orders, and could but obey them to the best of my power. I put on a face of iron as the boat pulled in under the dripping shadow of the pier. I mounted the weedy stairs. My white flag of parley had been marked, of course, from the moment that I put out from the ship, and a guard awaited me at the stair-head. Right well did I know those white Bourbon uniforms, grown familiar during my long captivity.

With all courtesy I was conducted up through a curious crowd of Acadian villagers,--short, swarthy, gesticulating men, and bright-eyed women whose faces looked out demurely from their hoods of unbleached linen. The great gate of the fort swung open to me. I had time to note how ruinous were the ramparts. I had time to mark the heavy guns which lay waiting to be mounted on their carriages. I saw right well that we had come in time, catching our

adversary while he was yet unready. Then I passed through a low doorway and a dark passage. A thick red curtain lifted, and I stood before the Governor.

The Sieur de Menneval, standing beside a table covered with red cloth, faced me in an attitude of extreme haughtiness, which was somewhat belied, however, by the fine courtesy of his greeting. He was tall,--almost of my own inches--but spare exceedingly. His uniform of fine white cloth was brave with gold lace, and his breast glittered with many a jewelled decoration. He was not only a brave soldier and of most honourable lineage, as I well knew, but he was Diane's uncle; and I think that the deep respect of my obeisance left him nothing to complain of. His dark and hawk-like features softened to a marvellous graciousness, insomuch that I almost forgot Major Ephraim's discouragement.

When I had delivered my harsh message, Monsieur de Menneval seemed no whit perturbed thereby, but smiled upon me with a certain indulgence which much bewildered me.

"Captain Waldo," said he,--and smiled the more as he noted my astonishment at being called by name,--"Captain Waldo will hardly, I think, persuade himself that a stronghold like Port Royal is to be got for the asking?"

"Your Excellency," I replied gently, "it is not for me to have any opinion upon this matter. I am but a plain soldier obeying my orders. I would to God this duty had been required of any other rather than of me. But I had no choice. I am ordered to demand of your Excellency nothing less than instant and unconditional surrender."

I spoke with a sufficient firmness, but in my distress of spirit I lowered my eyes before his searching scrutiny. His long, fine hand, which was resting lightly on the red cloth, pressed hard upon the table at my words, and I saw the fingernails whiten. But his voice betrayed no anger as he made reply, "And if I refuse, what then?"

"The ships will open fire at once, your Excellency," I answered in a low voice. I could not dream that he would let it come to that, and the place so ill-prepared to make resistance.

"The demand is a most preposterous one," said he coldly. "What can I do but refuse, Captain Waldo?"

"Oh, sir," I broke out, with a great earnestness, looking suddenly into his eyes, and catching a meaning there which I could not fathom, "I entreat you, do not refuse! I have seen your helplessness. Where is your garrison? Where are your guns? In what state are your defences? You cannot hold out for one hour against our heavy metal. But in that hour what mischief may not befall! For your own sake, for the sake of-- for the sake of those whose destinies you control, do not push the lost game to an extremity!"

"You plead with eloquence in an enemy's cause, Captain Waldo," said he, with a smile. "But I will not pretend to misunderstand you. I believe you do me the honour of wishing well to my house, and I trust much to your goodwill. I will ask you to allow me two hours for consideration before giving you my answer. And in the meantime. Mademoiselle de Menneval----"

But in a desperation I interrupted him. I knew what he had it on his tongue to say. He was for giving me those two

hours with Diane. The blood surged into my head at the thought of it, and a sickness came about my heart because I must refuse. But I durst not let him speak the words.

"No! no!" I cried, putting out my hands. "Do not make it harder for me, sir, than I can bear. I perceive that you suspect the nature of my sentiments towards Mademoiselle de Menneval, for whose sake I count life nothing save as it may be spent in her service and to her honour. But no one can know better than you the duty of a soldier. Whether you answer or refuse to answer my general's summons, I must return to him at once. There is no room to question as to my duty on this errand!"

De Menneval was silent for some moments, pondering. Whether he was angered or not by my reply I could not guess. His features wore a mask of courteous gravity.

"I must reluctantly acknowledge that you are in the right in this," he replied, "and that I cannot take amiss your refusal. But this at least I can ask, this at least I can put upon your friendship (which, you see, I make so bold as to claim for myself): that when you return to Sir William Phips with my rejection of his demands, you refrain from uncovering to him the helplessness of our condition,--for we *are* helpless, as you say. You see I trust you. Let me tell you this further: immediately on your arrival at the pier I sent agents of my own to your commander, offering to give up the fort on terms not inconsistent with my own honour and the importance of this post. All that this will mean to me and mine I need not remind you. If, now, you should desire to do me a great service, the occasion will without doubt expose itself to you very clearly."

Whilst he spoke I was in an anguish. That I should hold my tongue a little,--it seemed not much to ask of me; yet how much it might mean to him and to Diane! I was shaken, moreover, by the man's kindness, by his unexpected favouring of my hopes. Let me confess it, too, I was flattered by all his speech and bearing. This was no common man who sought my aid, but one whose power and quality would command reverence in any company. To say him yea, to do him this great and lasting service, to so prove my fidelity to Diane's interests, to win admittance, free and favoured, to her adored companionship,--why not? Why not? implored the eager heart within me. But with a rush of heat and shame that set my face a-prickling to the ears, I remembered that 'twas a sheer treason that he asked of me; and at that my manhood came back in some measure. I affected not to see his drift.

"Alas, sir," said I in a pained voice, and looking upon the floor, "I have no interest with the commander at all, that he should put my private petition before the public advantage."

"You mistake me, Captain Waldo!" he exclaimed, with a faint sharpness of irritation in his tones. "I will rest much indebted to you, believe me, if your commander is allowed to think (as he doubtless thinks by now) that Port Royal is in a position for defence! That is the whole matter!"

At that I raised my eyes, and met his with a sorrowful firmness.

"Your Excellency," said I, "there is no one who knows better than you how a man shall keep his honour stainless. This that you ask of me,--if I were to say yea to it, would you hold my honour stainless? Could I--But you know well what it



is you ask! I will give up all but honour to serve Mademoiselle de Menneval. If I would give up *that* for her, then were I utterly unworthy to serve her at all!"

De Menneval turned, with a stern gesture of dismissal. "Be assured," said he, "that the man who stands in my path this day, and uncovers my weakness to my enemy, will be forever after accounted the enemy of my house."

"At least, sir," I answered, "he will not be accounted a traitor. I beg you to tell Mademoiselle de Menneval that!" And somewhat blindly I made for the door.

Now it chanced that there were many red curtains, all of a like fashion, covering the wall of that room. But one curtain was lifted aside, revealing a door. Down the dim passage I blundered, in a fever of pain and wrath and fierce hopelessness. I came, as was natural, to another door. I flung it open and strode through, to find myself, not in the sunlit square of the fort, but in a dim chamber, richly hung and furnished. I had but time to note that it had the air of a lady's withdrawing-room, when the door shut behind me with a click.

I sprung and wrenched at it furiously, but the lock had caught. Was it treachery or an accident? I looked at the window. It was small, high up in the wall, and heavily barred. I caught the glint and shimmering of spring's young leafage against it, and wondered what could be its outlook, for I had seen no tree in the fort yard. Perceiving that there was no escape for me by the window, I turned in a sort of desperation to seek some weapon wherewith to batter at the door. I turned--and found myself face to face with Diane de Menneval. I was dumb with amazement, with doubt, with

impotent wrath at my position, with a consuming hunger of love at the sight of her.

Questioning and a sorrowful reproach were in her pale proud face; and for the moment I could answer neither. I stood and gazed upon her, and my utter worship must have burned clearly in my eyes, for her lips softened to a faint smile.

"Do you come as a friend or as an enemy?" she asked.

How could I answer her? I threw myself down at her feet, and pressed my face into the silken folds of her gown.

"Diane," I cried in a broken voice, "I love you! You are more to me than life, than----"

"Set', my dear friend," quoth she softly, speaking in English which I had taught her, and tripping adorably on the last letter of my name, of which her tongue could never win the mastery, "will you not shelter us now against your harsh and grasping general? He knows not the courtesies due to a De Menneval. And his heart is as rough as his own granite hills."

It seemed more than my heart could endure, to say no to this; but gathering all my resolution I forced myself to continue, as if she had not interrupted me. My voice was so shaken that I scarce formed the words articulately.

----"more than my life," I went on, "more than my own soul, beyond measure, more than all else but honour!"

"I heard your conversation with my uncle," said she slowly. "Never will he forgive you or forget to curse you, if you lift a hand to balk him in this matter. And I, Set', I am a soldier's daughter. I have learned the lesson of obedience. I will obey my uncle."

I arose and stood before her, and looked into her grave eyes. There was all my world, and I was throwing it away for this phantom, this bubble that a breath might shatter, this thing called "honour"! My heart was like lead, but I spoke steadily.

"Then," said I, "this is my farewell to hope, to all that might have made this life a paradise. My love for you, Diane, is of such a quality that never will I dishonour you with the love of a traitor. The lips, dear, which have touched yours will not betray a trust. You may hate me forever, but you shall not blush to have once loved me. Give me the key" (for I now perceived for the first time that she was holding a key in her hand), "give me the key, I implore you, and let me go quickly!"

At this, as once before in her uncle's glance, I caught in her eyes a look which I could not understand. But it was gone on the instant.

"No, Set'," she replied very gently, "I will not give you the key."

As I realised what this meant, I could not refrain from a cry at the new torment thrust upon me.

"No! no! you do not mean it, Diane!" I pleaded. "Give me the key, I adjure you! Be merciful!" And in the passion of my entreaty I pressed closer to her side.

"I will not!" she answered, with something of arrogant firmness in her voice; and, lightly avoiding me, she drew aside nearer to the window.

"Then," said I, "I have no choice, Diane. I am only a soldier on duty. I must *take* the key."

At that she turned upon me, her great eyes all ablaze with indignation.

"What!" she exclaimed, "you would dare--" Then something in my look seemed to convince her that I meant what I said, and her face changed on the instant. She looked this way and that, and made as if to thrust the key into her bosom,--in which sanctuary it must have been safe indeed,--and I darted forward to prevent her. But ere I could grasp her arm she had changed her purpose, and with a swift, vehement gesture she hurled the key through the high window.

"There!" she cried, facing me with a defiance that hung on the verge of tears. "*You shall not* bring down upon your head my uncle's curse! And--and"--she added softly, with the little catching of her breath which I knew and loved so well--"neither need you do any dishonour to my love, Set'." She came a step nearer to me, and held out both white hands.

The blood surged back upon my heart so suddenly that for an instant I was dizzied, and as I took her hands I steadied myself by them. It was ever so little, but she understood by it more than a whole book of words could have made plain. She laughed, with a kind and tender merriment, and made as if to hold me up,--me, who overtopped her queenly head by a good seven inches. I thought no more of the price which my general might have to pay for possession of the ramparts of Port Royal. I cared no whit whether I had been tricked or not, but rather if I had, thanked God for it. I felt myself absolved from all the burden of the affair. I was Diane's prisoner, and no act of

mine could set me free! I think I may even say, without vanity, that in praising my lady's wit and resource, which had so delivered me unstained from an intolerable situation, my passion and my gratitude enabled me to achieve some small measure of eloquence. The time in that dim chamber sped by with no great count of it taken, till on a sudden (an hour, perhaps, or two, having elapsed) there came a shrill whistle under the window.

Diane sprang up, and thrust her hand into a niche above the fireplace. Turning to me with eyes of dancing mischief, she held out a key.

"There are two keys to yon door!" she laughed. "This one was within your reach all the time. You are free now, Set'. Port Royal has surrendered upon very honourable terms!"

But I refused to rise.

"I am no longer in haste, then, dear heart," said I. "But you, as a punishment for having dealt so high-handedly with the sacred person of a herald, are now under the necessity of bearing witness for me before Sir William!"

"I will tell him," quoth she, with a sweet petulance, "that you value honour before my love! And if he be a true lover, or ever have been, I swear he will not believe the monstrous tale!"