

# **THE CONQUEST**

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The Conquest by H. Bedford-Jones

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**H. BEDFORD-JONES**

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By  
H. BEDFORD-JONES

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## FOREWORD

The story of Pierre Radisson, which is herein related, has passed into history. That he was the first white man to reach the Mississippi, after De Soto, is now admitted. It was he who founded the Hudson's Bay Company, and who opened up the great Northwest to the world, receiving the basest of ingratitude in return.

The materials and facts used in this narrative I owe in part to Agnes C. Laut, who has rescued him from oblivion and given him his rightful place in history. The manner of his death no man knows to this day, but it is hard to imagine this world-wanderer dying in his bed in London town; one likes to think of him as finding the peace of his "heart's desire" in the far land which he knew and loved and served so well.—*H. Bedford-Jones.*

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## DEDICATED

To my mother, whose picture is the picture of Ruth MacDonald in these pages.





# THE CONQUEST

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

## CHAPTER I.

### WHAT WE FOUND ON THE MOOR.

MY father cocked up one eye at the heavens and stroked his heavy beard, and, as the storm was all but over, he growled assent in the Gaelic tongue that we of the west used among ourselves.

"Aye, come along, Davie. We'll have work to find the sheep and get them together after this blow. Belike they are huddled up in some corner of the moor—over beyond the Clowerie-gap, no doubt."

So blithely enough I whistled to Grim, and the three of us set off across the moors, while mother stood at the door and waved us a cheery farewell. Little she thought what burden we would fetch back with us that day! The great storm had blown itself out, and as we went along I asked permission to go down by the cliffs that afternoon and hunt for washed-up wonders of the ocean.

"Not you, lad," replied my father in his stern fashion, yet kindly enough. "There is work and to spare at home. Besides, the cliffs are no place for you this day. There'll be wreckers out betwixt here and Rathesby."

So with that I fell silent, wishing with all my heart that I might see the wreckers at work. For I was but a boy of nine and the life of a wrecker seemed to me to be the greatest in all the world. Little I knew of the sore work that was done along the west coast that day!

Years before, my great-grandfather, a MacDonald of the isles, had come across to the mainland and settled on Arby farm, and on this same stead I had spent my nine years. All my life had been one of peace and quietness, but I knew full well that the old claymore hanging beside the fireplace could not say as much.

For my father, Fergus MacDonald, had married late in life and my mother had come out of the south to wed him. I had heard strange whispers of the manner of that wedding. It was said, and my father never denied it, that he had been one of those who, many years before, had hoisted the blue banner of the Covenant and ridden behind the great prophet Cameron, even to the end. Then, when the Covenant was shattered by the king's troops, he had fled into the hills of the south, and when the hunting was done and a new King come to the throne, he had brought home as his wife, the woman who had sheltered and hidden him in her father's barn.

How true these things were I never knew, but my father's fame had spread afar. In this year of grace 1701 the days of the Covenant were all but over. The order of things was shifting; rumors were flying abroad that the Stuart was coming to his own ere long, and that all wide Scotland would rise behind him to a man.

Of this my thoughts were busy as we strode over the heather, side by side. Grim following us sedately and inconspicuously, as a sheep dog should when he has age and experience. I always respected Grim more

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and liked him less than the younger brood of dogs, for he seemed to have somewhat of the dour, silent, purposeful sternness of my father in his nature, and was ever rebuking me for my very boyishness.

"Come, Davie," said my father suddenly, "we'll cut off a mile by going down beside the cliffs. Like enough we will strike on a few of the lambs among the bowlders, where there would be shelter."

This set my mind back on the sheep once more, and I followed him meekly but happily to the cliff-path over the sea. Fifteen miles to the north lay the little port of Rathesby, and on rare occasions I would go thither with my father and enjoy myself hugely, watching the fishermen and sailors swaggering through the cobbled streets, and hearing strange tongues—English and Irish, and sometimes a snatch of Dutch or French. I knew English well enough, and south-land English at that, while my mother had taught me a good knowledge of French; but the honest Gaelic was our home speech and this I knew best of all, and loved best.

Our path, to give it that distinction, followed the winding edge of the cliff, where many a gully and ravine led down to the beach below. I cast longing glances at these, and once saw a shattered spar driving on the rocks, but was careful to betray naught of the eagerness that was in me. When my father Fergus had once said a thing, there was no naysaying it, which was a lesson I had learned long before.

Of a sudden Grim made a little dash around me and planted himself in the path before us. He made no sound, but he was gazing across the moors, and to avoid stepping on him we stopped perforce. It was an old trick of his, thus to give us warning, and I have heard that in the old days Grim and Grim's father had accompanied more than one fleeing Covenanter safely through the hills to shelter.

Now these tales leaped into my mind

with full force at a muttered exclamation from my father, and I saw a strange sight. The sun, in the east, was just breaking through the storm clouds, lighting up the rolling heather a quarter-mile beyond us. There, full in its gleam, was a tiny splotch of scarlet.

The old days must have returned on my father, for as I glanced at him I saw his hand leap to his side. But the old claymore hung there no longer, and his face relaxed.

"What is it, Grim?" he said kindly. "Yon is a scarlet coat right enough, lad, but scarlet coats hunt men no longer over the moors. What make you of it, Davie?"

"No more than you, father," I replied, proud that he had appealed to me. The crimson dot was motionless, and no farther from the cliffs than we. So, with a word to Grim, we walked along more hastily, the sheep clear forgot in this new interest. Scarlet coats were uncommon in these parts, and little liked. As we drew nearer we began to see that this could be no man, as at first we had thought, nor yet a woman. Indeed, it seemed to be a garment flung down all in a heap, and I stared at it in vain.

Then the sun outburst all around us. As it did so, the crimson thing yonder seemed to be imbued with life, and my father gave a cry of amazement.

"A lassie! Now, where can she—"

Without finishing, he broke into a run, and I followed excitedly, for the figure was plainly that of a little girl. But what a girl! She was no more than mine own age, and the scarlet cloak fell from neck to heels about her as she came to meet us. Over the cloak was streaming a mass of yellow hair that seemed like spun gold in the sunlight, and presently I slowed my pace to stare at her.

Young though I was, I noted a peculiar quality in her as she ran to meet my father with outstretched hands, tears still upon



*My father gave a cry of amazement.*