

A REVIEW.

MIDNIGHT MASS ON CHRISTMAS EVE, 1535, ON BOARD
JACQUES CARTIER'S LITTLE SQUADRON, NEAR
HARE POINT, ON THE ST. CHARLES,
AT QUEBEC.

(Une Fête de Noël sous Jacques Cartier.—ERNEST MYRAND.)

II.

In a previous chapter it was our pleasant office to follow the erratic footsteps of Ernest Myrand, led by his genial phantom, as far as the threshold of the Basilica, in Quebec, on the eve of Christmas, 1535. We left him within its sacred portals at a quarter to twelve, with a few minutes to spare before the intonation of Midnight Mass.

We must now prepare for one of those wondrous feats peculiar to fairy tales, where genii convey their heroes through the realms of space with slender regard to time or distance.

Fully three miles intervene between the Basilica—the trysting place of our two mysterious visitors at a quarter to twelve—and the Lairet stream,* where the Grande Hermine, the Petite Hermine and the Emerillon, Cartier's craft, were laid up for the winter of 1535-6. For all that, the eager pilgrims are expected to reach the spot in time for Midnight Mass, celebrated there three hundred and fifty years ago.

After trudging briskly over the crisp, whitened surface, glistening under the bright starry Canadian skies, the benighted travellers struck on a dense wood, where Donnacona, the great Sachem of Stadacona, and his unreliable—shall we say—unfriendly warriors, held sway. They both crossed it very cautiously—in the deepest silence—lest even the snapping of a dry twig might rouse from their lairs the quick-eared and light-footed foe. Soon they reached the bank of a frozen river, which the great explorer of Canadian wilds had called Ste. Croix, on account of the exaltation of the Holy Cross, on the 14th of September, 1535, when he entered it. To Donnacona it was known as Cabir Coubat, which means "many windings." Eighty years afterwards the Recollet Friars named it the Saint Charles, in honour of Charles de Boies, Grand Vicairé de Pointoise, the pious ecclesiastic, who founded their mission in New France. Presently, whilst listening in rapt silence to the faint sound of a bell, as if at a great distance off, they were startled by meeting two stalwart Indians, dragging along a toboggan with a dead caribou.

"Who are they and where are they going?" asked Mr. Myrand.

"They are," replied the phantom, "Jacques Cartier's interpreters—Taignoagny and Domagaya. They are going to Stadacona."

And I marvelled how he could know all this. Passing over the singular and striking resemblance which the spectre pointed out to his travelling friend between the contour of the Lairet stream and Jacques Cartier's familiar profile, Ernest Myrand was plodding on meditatively, pondering in his own mind as to whether Donnacona's Indian capital really occupied, as Laverdière had said, the site at the Coteau Ste. Geneviève, whereon St. John's Suburbs would be built in after years, when the phantom, stopping short, outstretched the transparent hand, pointing excitedly to these objects in view round the point, exclaimed in a shrill, piercing voice, "Jacques Cartier's three ships!"

Really, Monte Cristo Dumas could not have pronounced in a more dramatic way "*Mes Trois Mousquetaires!*"

The author favours us next with an elaborate discussion as to the size, † build and ornament of the discoverer's vessels: The diminutive ocean-craft of other days, such, for instance, the cockle-shell with which, in 1598, the Marquis de La Roche crossed the Atlantic—"que du pont, on pouvait se laver les mains dans la mer"—so very small and low in the water "that a person from deck could, according to an old narrative, wash his hands in the sea." Two hundred and twenty-five years later, in 1860, the Great Eastern, 22,500 tons, would be steaming past a mile or more to the east of where La Grande Hermine and her two consorts were safely wintering in 1535—after braving the perils of the stormy Atlantic.

But let us hurry on, heedless of the wealth of antiquarian lore so profusely spread through Mr. Myrand's curious dialogue, and advance closer to the historic Grande Hermine, where we will be formally introduced to the St. Malo captain, his devoted lieutenants and intrepid mariners—all fully described and identified. We must refer the reader, for further particulars of this very interesting portion of Canadian history, to the several prize essays, just published on Jacques Cartier and his times.

LA GRANDE HERMINE.

Dom Guillaume Le Breton, the first almoner of the fleet, in the absence of his supplanted colleague, Dom Anthoine, was just then reading from the sacred book the account of

*The Lairet stream, says Abbé Chs. Trudelle, borrows its name from François Lairet, one of the pioneer settlers at Charlesbourg—*Histoire de Charlesbourg*.

†A striking sketch of both appear at page 77 of Mr. Myrand's work.

‡The tonnage of Cartier's three ships is given as follows:—The Grande Hermine, 120 tons; the Petite Hermine, 60 tons; the Emerillon, 40 tons.

§Our medals were offered by His Honour Lieut. Governor Angers to competitors for prize Essays—subject: "Jacques Cartier and His Times." Silver medal awarded by judges to Joseph Pope, Civil Servant, Ottawa; silver medal, Dr. N. E. Dionne, Quebec; bronze medal, H. B. Stephens, Montreal; silver medal, Touon de Longrais, Rennes, France.

the birth of Christ, of the Star in the East, of the Magi, when the spectre drew the attention of his companion to the joyful Christmas decoration of the ship. The hull was hidden under wreaths of evergreen, taken from the neighbouring spruce and pine forest; the port-holes festooned alike; in the aft part of the main cabin, encircled in a shield of small arms, floated, conspicuously, the white banner of Francis I., with the word "France" in large letters on a white ground; the sailors bore lighted tapers, whose flame brought out, in this improvised *chambre ardente* in strong relief, the blue uniforms of the stalwart Breton sailors, who surrounded their respected chief—easily recognisable by his sharp features and long flowing beard—who was next to his lieutenants—Marc Jalobert, master and pilot of the Petite Hermine, and Guillaume Le Breton Bastille, master and pilot of the Emerillon.

LA PETITE HERMINE.

Laverdière's ghost then beckoned me to follow. We crossed over the frozen space lying between the Grande Hermine and her consort, the Petite Hermine, and climbed her low side and descended to the cabin below through its dimly lit companion ladder.

A strange, an overpowering spectacle awaited us in the narrow abode. For an instant I fancied I was stalking through the sick wards of the Hotel Dieu Hospital.

Careful precautions had been taken to exclude the icy breath of winter from this miserable den, whose inmates—plague-stricken and forlorn—twenty-five all told—where writhing in anguish and tossing in disturbed dreams, and visions of the homes of their youth. Here were huddled in rows in their hammocks the victims of the terrible disease—*le mal de terre*—known as scurvy, with swollen gums, cancerous and loathsome pustules over their persons, which made them pray for death as a release from their intolerable sufferings. The atmosphere was too close and unhealthy, even for a ghost. We were hurrying away and cast our eyes for a last time on this array of suffering humanity, when we spied Dom Anthoine leaning over the emaciated form of a scorbutic subject, a Breton, by name Reumenel, whom he was trying to rouse by telling him of the birth of a Saviour; but the sick man, turning away his face, uttered in despair the words, "Landerneau, my dear village."

The author then presents, in connection with the Petite Hermine, transformed by Cartier from the nonce into an hospital ship, a vivid, very circumstantial, enumeration of the afflicted tars—their names, origin, etc. St. Malo, Lorient, Quiberon, St. Bruno, St. Cast, Dol, Landerneau could each count more than one sturdy son among the scorbutic patients. Several could doubtless have been saved had Chief Donnacona announced earlier his infallible Indian cure—a decoction of spruce boughs, styled "Améda," and subsequently applied with wondrous success.* In the midst of Dom Anthoine's errand of mercy, a loud report shook the timbers of the vessel, and the roused sick sailors, realizing at once its meaning, made an effort to leave their hammocks. It was a salvo of guns from Jacques Cartier's fort, built close by, fired at the elevation of the Host in the Grande Hermine. Forgetting for an instant their anguish, the sick men tried to repeat after their kind monitor the sweet, solemn, old anthem of the Roman Catholic liturgy—*Veni Creator Spiritus!* Amidst the moans of the dying sailors, racked with the dear memories of that unforgotten home far away across the sea, La Bretagne, we left the cabin of the Petite Hermine and emerged into the keen wintry air, with the sound of Cartier's salvo of artillery still booming in our ears, reverberated by the wild echoes of the Laurentides Mountains to the north.

THE EMERILLON.

On quitting the dismal infirmary of the Petite Hermine, the weird travellers, according to Mr. Myrand, agreed to call at and inspect Jacques Cartier's solid palisaded fort, erected by him on the shore of the St. Charles, close by, as a protection against Indian surprises.

Laverdière attempted to force open its massive door. It yielded not, however, to his ghostly effort. The noise called forth a loud and prolonged yelping from the Indian curs in the neighbourhood, which soon was taken up and responded to by the dogs of Stadacona. The din was increased by the shrill bark of foxes and dismal howling of some hungry wolves prowling about the thickets on the neighbouring heights.

"There, there lies the Emerillon," ejaculated Laverdière. Not my old favorite, the swift Emerillon, ‡ of the Quebec Yacht Club, but Jacques Cartier's tiny ocean craft.

It is especially, when trying to portray such thrilling scenes as the one that follows, that the sober-minded historian fails and has to admit his inferiority, for effect, compared to the narrator of the Jules Verne romantic school. Here shines Ernest Myrand.

*Scurvy—*le mal de terre*—was supposed to be caused by too prolonged a use of salted meat as food. It was not confined to New France. Benjamin Sulte notices its ravages in Acadia in 1604-5.

†The presence of Roman Catholic priests with Cartier on his second voyage to Canada, is a question much debated by commentators. The student of Canadian history is referred to the excellent prize Essays on Jacques Cartier, recently published, which sum up nearly all the available evidence *pro* and *con*. Mr. Joseph Pope in his Essay, after adducing many curious texts and authorities, leaves it an open question, pp. 62, 69, 95; whilst Dr. N. E. Dionne, in his volume, pronounces for the affirmative, pp. 120, 121, 283, 284, 286—"*Adhuc sub judice lis est.*"

‡One of the favourite amusements of the abbé, in his later years, was cruising about the Quebec harbour in one of the Quebec Yacht Club's crafts.

"In a trice," says Myrand, "we had reached the Emerillon's deck, removed the forehatch and descended into the forecabin, where a small binnacle lamp threw around an uncertain glare. The flame flickered as the night wind entered through two port-holes, such as ships-of-war had in the olden time. There was perceptible a strong smell as of spruce boards recently planed. In the centre, on blocks, rested a box seven feet long by two feet high. Around it a carpenter's tool chest, a book and some nails with a hammer."

"What did it contain, and the workmen, where were they?"

The spectre, taking down from the ceiling the suspended lamp, allowed its uncertain light to fall on the singular object. "O horror! I saw it was a coffin and that it held the dead body of a man—Philippe de Rougemont," says Ernest Myrand.

The discovery of the remains of young de Rougemont, of Amboise, France—deceased about 32 years of age—the only follower whose death Cartier mentions by name in his narrative, furnishes the author with material for a very touching forecast of the sorrow in store for de Rougemont's poor mother when Cartier's squadron shall return to St. Malo without her son. But of the striking passage, like many others in the volume, we are compelled to omit more notice for lack of space.

Soon Guillaume Sequart and Jehan Duvert, ship carpenters, aided by Eustache Grossin, mariner, made their appearance to prepare the body of their dead companion for interment, performing the solemn duty amidst expressions of deep regret at the early demise of one so full of bright promise.

De Rougemont was tenderly placed on a layer of green, fragrant spruce boughs, in his rude coffin, preparatory to being buried under twelve feet of snow at the mouth of the St. Michel stream, which empties in the St. Charles, as a precautionary measure against the assaults of the ravenous Indian dogs and wild animals infesting the surrounding forest.

The work, or rather the chapter, closes with an account of the discovery to take place at this spot of the decaying timbers of the Petite Hermine, three centuries later, in 1843, by Joseph Hamel, City Engineer, of Quebec. Ample details of this antiquarian *trouvaille* appear in Neilson's old *Quebec Gazette*, in the *Quebec Mercury* and in *Le Canadien*, over the signatures of Geo. B. Faribault and Dr. John Charlton Fisher, of Quebec. Every page of *Une Fête de Noël sous Jacques Cartier* abounds with historical data, with most copious texts in the foot notes in support of Mr. Myrand's application of the Jules Verne process to popularize Canadian history. With the favourable testimony it elicited from the late Rector of the *École Normale-Laval*, at Quebec, Revd. L. N. Begin,* as to the historical matter and Mr. Myrand's mode of treating it, we are happy to agree, hoping this first wont be the last literary effort of the youthful author of *Une Fête de Noël sous Jacques Cartier*.

J. M. LE MOINE.

Spencer Grange, Christmas Eve, 1889.

*Since created Bishop of the Saguenay Diocese, at Chicoutimi. See his able letter printed as an Introduction to Mr. Myrand's Volume.

MILLET'S PICTURES.

Since Millet's death his pictures have become enormously valuable, and now the smallest sketch in colour by him will fetch more than the 2,000 francs first paid for his *chef-d'œuvre*, "The Angelus." Generally it is believed that it has been the *marchands des tableaux* who have profited by their rise in value, but this is not quite the case. Dealers in pictures do not purchase works of art to lay by for many years: their business is to buy and sell as rapidly as they can. It is the rich connoisseur, the man who has knowledge enough to judge for himself, or wit enough to get hold of an honest dealer, who purchases a work and lets it hang for a dozen years in his "collection," and then sells it for two or three times the amount he has paid for it, who eventually reaps the benefit. The sale on May 11, 1875, of Millet's sketches and pictures left at his death realized for the family the remarkable sum of 332,110 francs (£13,284). This being so, the story of Millet's widow finding insufficient the pension given her by the State is merely a pretty legend which gives a very misleading idea of the true position. With three hundred thousand francs in *rentes*, any artist's wife, especially one coming from the ranks of the peasantry, should not require any addition to her pension. But this is the kind of fiction which has grown up around Millet's name. During the exhibition of Millet's works in 1887, nearly every newspaper in Paris spoke of the profound distress in which the artist lived and died. But the other side of the picture is quite as interesting and far more true, and it is the one at which all unprejudiced minds will ultimately arrive. To sum up. We have, in considering Millet's career, to remember that, although he was often in straits for money, he was also—from the beginning applauded and encouraged by his people at home; pensioned by his native town to assist him in his studies; commissioned by the Emperor Napoleon in 1859 to paint an important picture; very happy in his family life; the friend of some of the best artists of his time; and the centre of a group of connoisseurs who thoroughly appreciated his talent, although they could not buy all his works.—*Magazine of Art*.