

SPENCER WOOD.

Through thy green groves and deep receding bowers,
Loved Spencer Wood! how often have I strayed,
Or musied away the calm, unbroken hours,
Beneath some broad oak's cool, refreshing shade.
(ADAM KIDD.)

On the south side of the St. Louis road, past Wolfe and Montcalm's famed battle field, two miles from the city walls, lies embosomed in verdure, the most picturesque domain of Sillery—one might say, of Canada—Spencer Wood.

This celebrated Vice-Regal Lodge, was formerly known as Powel Place, when occupied by General Powel; it took its name of Spencer Wood, from the Right Honorable Spencer Perceval, the illustrious relative of the Hon. Michael Henry Perceval whose family owned and occupied it from 1815 to 1833, when it was sold to the late Henry Atkinson, Esquire, an eminent and wealthy Quebec merchant. Hon. Mr. Perceval had been H. M. Collector of Customs, at Quebec for many years and until his death about 1830. Like several royal villas of England and France, Spencer Wood had its periods of splendor alternated by days of loneliness and neglect, short though they were. Spencer Wood, until 1849, comprised the adjoining property of Spencer Grange. Mr. Atkinson that year sold the largest half of his country seat to the Government, as a Gubernatorial residence for the hospitable and genial Earl of Elgin, reserving the smaller half, (now owned by the writer), on which he built conservatories, vineries, an orchid house &c., far more extensive than those of Spencer Wood proper. Though the place was renowned for its magnificence and princely hospitality, in the days of Lord Elgin, there are amongst the living plenty to testify to the fact that the lawns, walks, gardens and glass houses, were never kept up with the same intelligent taste and lavish expenditure as they were during the sixteen years (1833-1849) when this country seat owed for its master, Henry Atkinson.

Well can we recall the time when this lordly demesne extended from Wolfesfield adjoining Marchmont, to the meandering *Belle Borne* brook which glides past the porter's Lodge at Woodfield due west: the historic stream *Ruisseau Saint Denis*, up which clambered the British hero, Wolfe, to conquer or die, intersecting it at Thornhill. It was then a splendid old seat of more than one hundred acres, a fit residence for the proudest nobleman England might send us, as Vice-Roy—enclosed east and west between two streamlets—hidden from the high-way by a dense growth of oak, maple and dark pines and firs, the forest primeval—letting in here and there, the light of heaven on its labyrinthine avenues; a most striking landscape, blending the sombre verdure of its hoary trees with the soft tints of its velvety sloping lawn, fit for a ducal palace. An eldritch plot of a flower garden, alas! now no more, then stood in rear of the dwelling to the north: it enjoyed the privilege of attracting many eyes. It had also an extensive and well kept fruit and vegetable garden, enlivened with flower beds, the centre of which was adorned with the loveliest possible circular fountain in white marble, supplied with the crystal element from the *Belle Borne* rill, by a hidden aqueduct; conservatories; graperies, peach and forcing houses, pavilions picturesquely hung over the yawning precipice on two headlands, one looking towards Sillery, the other towards the Island of Orleans, the scene of many a

(*) We give here the whole of the poetical tribute paid by Adam Kidd to a spot where he appears to have spent many happy hours, as a guest of the Percevals, together with his notes to the poem.

SPENCER WOOD.

Through thy green groves, and deep receding bowers,
Loved Spencer Wood! how often have I strayed,
Or musied away the calm, unbroken hours,
Beneath some broad oak's cool, refreshing shade.

There, not a sound disturbed the tranquil scene,
Save welcome hummings of the roving bee,
That quickly flitted over the tufted green,
Or where the squirrel played from tree to tree.

And I have paused beside that dimpling stream,
Which slowly winds thy beautiful groves among,
Till from its breast retired the sun's last beam,
And every bird had ceased its vesper song.

The blushing auburns of those classic days,
Through which the breathings of the slender reed,
First softly echoed with Arcadia's praise,
Might well be pictured in this sheltered mead.

And blest were those who found a happy home
In thy loved shades, without one throb of care—
No murmurs heard, save from the distant foam,
That rolled in columns o'er the great Chaudière. (1)

And I have watched the moon in grandeur rise,
Above the tinted maple's leafy breast,
And take her brilliant path-way through the skies,
Till half the world seemed lulled in peaceful rest.

Oh! these were hours, whose soft enchanting spell
Came o'er the heart, in thy grove's deep recess,
Where e'en poor Shenstone might have loved to dwell,
Enjoying the pure balm of happiness!

But soon, how soon, a different scene I trace,
Where I have wandered, or oft musied stood;
And those whose cheering looks enhanced the place,
No more shall smile on thee, lone Spencer Wood! (2)

(1) "The Falls of the Chaudière are about nine miles from Quebec, on the South Shore of the St. Lawrence, and for beauty and romantic scenery, perhaps not surpassed in all America. They are not so magnificent as Niagara, but certainly far more picturesque."

(2) "This is one of the most beautiful spots in Lower Canada, and the property (1830) of the late Hon. Michael Henry Perceval, who resided there with his accomplished family, whose highly cultivated minds rendered my visits to Spencer Wood doubly interesting. The grounds and grand walks are tastefully laid out, interspersed with great variety of trees, planted by the hand of nature. The scenery is altogether magnificent, and particularly towards the east where the great precipices overhang Wolfe's Cove. This latter place has derived its name from that hero, who, with his British troops, nobly ascended its frowning cliffs, on the 13th Sept., 1759, and took possession of the Plains of Abraham."—ADAM KIDD, 1839.

(The Huron Chief and other Poems.)

ADAM KIDD.

cosy tea-party; bowers, rustic chairs *perdues* amongst the groves, a superb bowling green, and archery grounds. The mansion itself contained an exquisite collection of paintings from old masters, a well selected library of rare and standard works, illuminated Roman missals, rich portfolios with curious etchings, statues, quaint statuettes, medals and medallions, *objets de vertu* purchased by the millionaire proprietor during a four year's residence in Italy, France, Germany: such we remember Spencer Wood, in its palmiest days, when it was the elegant home of a man of taste, the late Henry Atkinson, Esquire, the President of the Horticultural Society of Quebec.

In the beginning of the century, Spencer Wood, as previously stated, was known as Powel Place. His Excellency Sir James Henry Craig, spent there the summers of 1808-9-10. Even the healthy air of Powel Place failed to cure him of gout, gravel and dropsy. A curious letter (2) from Sir James to his Secretary and *chargé d'affaires* in London, H. W. Ryland Esq., dated "Powel Place 6th Aug. 1810" has been preserved by the historian Robert Christie. It alludes in rather unparliamentary language, to the *coup d'état*, which had shortly before consigned to a Quebec dungeon, three of the most prominent members of the Legislature. Messrs. Bédard, Tachereau and Blanchet, together with Mr. Lefrançois, the printer of the *Canadien* newspaper for certain comments in that journal on Sir James' colonial policy. Very different and, we hope, more correct views, are now promulgated on Colonial matters from Powel Place.

If Sir James, wincing under bodily pain, could write angry letters, there were occasions on which the "rank and fashion" of the city received from him the sweetest epistles imaginable. The 10th August of each year (his birth day perhaps), as he informs us in another letter, was sacred to rustic enjoyment, conviviality and the exchange of courtesies, which none knew better how to dispense than the sturdy old soldier. Let us hear our octogenarian friend P. A. De Gaspé Esq., an eye witness, describe one of these annual gatherings.

A FETE CHAMPETRE AT POWEL PLACE IN 1809.

"At half past eight A.M., on a bright August morning, (I say a bright one, for such had lighted up this welcome *fête champêtre* during three consecutive years) the *déité* of the Quebec *beau monde* left the city to attend Sir James Craig's kind invitation. Once opposite Powel Place (now Spencer Wood) the guests left their vehicles on the main road, and plunged into a dense forest, following a serpentine avenue which led to a delightful cottage in full view of the majestic Saint Lawrence; the river here appears to flow past, amidst luxuriant, green bowers which line its banks. Small tables for four, for six, for eight guests are laid out, facing the cottage, on a platform of *planned* deals—this will shortly serve as a dancing floor *ad fresco*; as the guests successively arrive, they form in parties to partake of a *déjeuner en famille*. I say *en famille* for an *aide-de-camp* and a few waiters excepted, no one interferes with the small groups clubbed together to enjoy their early

(*) Spencer Wood garden is described in *Louison's Encyclopedia of Gardening*, page 341 and also in the *Gardener's Magazine* for 1837, at page 467. Its style of culture, which made it a show-place for all strangers visiting Quebec, was mainly due to the scientific and tasteful arrangements of an eminent landscape gardener, M. P. Low, now in charge of the Cataracts Conservatories.

(2) SIR JAMES CRAIG TO MR. RYLAND.

Quebec, Powel Place 6th August 1810.

My dear Ryland,

Till I took my pen in my hand, I thought I had a great deal to say to you, and now I am mostly at a loss for a subject. We have remained very quiet; whatever is going on is silently. I have no reason to think, however, that any change has taken place in the public mind: that, I believe remains in the same state. Plessis, on the return from his tour, acknowledged to me that he had reason to think that some of his curés had not behaved quite as they ought to have done; he is now finishing the remainder of his visitation.

Blanchette and Tachereau are both released on account of ill health; the former is gone to Kamouraska to bathe, the latter was only let out a few days ago. He sent to the Chief Justice (Sewell) to ask if he would allow him to call on him, who answered by all means. The Chief Justice is convinced he is perfectly converted. He assured him that he felt it to be his duty to take any public occasion, by any act whatever, that he could point out, to show his contrition, and the sense he entertained of his former conduct.

He told the Chief Justice, in conversation that Blanchette came and consulted him on the subject of publishing the paper, "*Prenez vous par le bout du nez*" and that having agreed that it would be very improper that it should appear, they went to Bédard, between whom and Blanchette there were very high words on the occasion. I know not what Panet is about, I have never heard one word of, or about him. In short I really have nothing to tell you, nor do I imagine that I shall have till I hear from you. You may suppose how anxious I shall be till that takes place. We have fixed the time for about the 10th September: till then I shall not come to any final resolution with respect to the bringing the three delinquents to trial or not. I am, however, inclined to avoid it, so is the B—; the C. J. is rather, I think, inclined to the other side, though aware of the inconvenience that may arise from it. Blanchette and Tachereau have both, in the most unequivocal terms acknowledged the criminality of their conduct, and it will be believed that Bédard will do the same, it may be all that will be required of them; at present his language is, that he has done nothing wrong, and that he does not care how long he is kept in prison.

We have begun upon the road to the townships (the Craig Road, through the Eastern Townships). We shall get money enough, especially as we hope to finish it at a time when it would have cost if we would have employed the country people. (It was made by soldiers.)

The scoundrels of the Lower Town have begun their clamor already, and I shall scarcely be surprised if the House should ask, when they meet, by what authority I have cut a road without their permission. The road begins at St. Gilles and will end at the Township of Shipton.

Yours most faithfully

(Signed)

J. H. CRAIG.

(History of Canada—Christie, Vol. VI. P. 126.)

repart, of which cold meat, radishes, bread, tea and coffee form the staples. Those whose appetite is appeased make room for new comers, and amuse themselves strolling under the shade of trees. At ten the cloth is removed; the company are all on the *qui vive*. The cottage, like the enchanted castle in the opera of *Zemira and Azor*, only awaits the magic touch of a fairy; a few minutes elapse, and the chief entrance is thrown open; little King Craig, followed by a brilliant staff, enters. Simultaneously an invisible orchestra, located high amidst the dense foliage of large trees, strikes up *God save the King*. All stand uncovered, in solemn silence, in token of respect to the national anthem of Great Britain.

"The magnates press forward to pay their respects to His Excellency. Those who do not intend to 'trip the light fantastic toe' take seats on the platform where His Excellency sits in state; an A.D.C. calls out, *gentlemen, take your partners*, and the dance begins.

"Close on sixty winters have run by since that day, when I, indefatigable dancer, figured in a country dance of thirty couples. My footsteps, which now seem to me like lead, scarcely then left a trace behind them. All the young hearts who enlivened this gay meeting of other days, are mouldering in their tombs; even she, the most beautiful of them all, *la belle des belles*—she, the partner of my joys and of my sorrows—she, who on that day accepted in the circling dance, for the first time, this hand, which two years after, was to lead her to the hymeneal altar—yes, even she has been swept away by the tide of death.† May not I also say, with Ossian, "Why art thou sad, son of Fingal! "Why grows the cloud of thy soul? The sons of future years shall pass away; another race shall arise! The people are like the waves of the ocean; like the leaves of woody Morven—they pass away in the rustling blast, and other leaves lift their green heads on high."

"After all, why, indeed, yield up my soul to sadness! The children of the coming generation will pass rapidly, and a new one will take its place. Men are like the surges of the ocean; they resemble the leaves which hang over the groves of my manor; autumnal storms cause them to fall, but new and equally green ones each spring, replace the fallen ones. Why should I sorrow? Eighty-six children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, will mourn the fall of the old oak, when the breath of the Almighty shall smite it. Should I have the good fortune to find mercy from the sovereign judge; should it be vouchsafed to me to meet again the angel of virtue, who cheered the few happy days I passed in this vale of sorrow, we will both pray together for the numerous progeny we left behind us. But let us revert to the merry meeting previously alluded to. It is half-past two in the afternoon; we are gaily going through the figures of a country dance "speed the plough" perhaps, when the music stops short; everyone is taken aback, and wonders at the cause of interruption. The arrival of two prelates, Bishop Plessis and Bishop Mountain, gave us the solution of the enigma; an aide-de-camp had mentioned to the bandmaster to stop, on noticing the entrance of the two high dignitaries of the respective churches. The dance was interrupted whilst they were there, and was resumed on their departure. Sir James had introduced this point of etiquette, from the respect he entertained for their persons.

"At three, the loud sound of a hunter's horn is heard in the distance;—all follow His Excellency, in a path cut through the then virgin forest of Powel Place. Some of the guests, from the length of the walk, began to think that Sir James had intended those who had not danced to take a 'constitutional' before dinner, when, on rounding an angle, a huge table, canopied with green boughs, groaning under the weight of dishes, struck on their view—a grateful oasis in the desert. Monsieur Petit, the *chef de cuisine* has surpassed himself; like Vatel, I imagine he would have committed suicide had he failed to achieve the triumph, by which he intended to elicit our praise. Nothing could exceed in magnificence, in sumptuousness this repast—such was the opinion not only of the Canadians, for whom such displays were new, but also of the European guests, though there was a slight drawback to the perfect enjoyment of the dishes—the materials which composed them we could not recognize; so great was the artistic skill, so wonderful the manipulations of Monsieur Petit, the French cook.

"The Bishops left about half an hour after dinner, when dancing was resumed with an increasing ardor, but the cruel manumans were getting concerned respecting certain sentimental walks which their daughters were enjoying after sunset. They ordered them home, if not with that menacing attitude with which the goddess Calypso is said to have spoken to her nymphs, at least with frowns, so said the gay young cavaliers. By nine o'clock, all had reentered Quebec."

Spencer Wood has ever been a favorite resort for our Governors—Sir James Craig—Lord Elgin—Sir Edmund Walker Head—Lord Monk—Lord Lisgar, its latest inmates; none prized it so highly, none rendered it more attractive than

His Excellency Governor Craig went by the name of the Little King, on account of his love of display and despotic rule.

Mr. DeGaspé married in 1811, Susan, daughter of Thomas Allison Esq., a captain of the 6th Regiment, Infantry, and of Thérèse Baby; the latter's two brother officers, Captain Ross Lewis and Bellingham, afterwards Lord Bellingham, married at Detroit, then forming part of Upper Canada, two sisters, daughters of the Hon. Jacques Dupéron Baby.

the Earl of Elgin. Of his *fêtes champêtres*, *recherchés diners*, *château balls*, a pleasant remembrance still lingers in the memory of many Quebecers and others. Several circumstances added to the charms and comfort of Spencer Wood in his day. On one side of St. Louis Road, stood the gubernatorial residence; on the opposite side at Thornhill, dwelt the Prime Minister, Sir Francis Hincks. Over the vice-regal "walnuts and wine," how many knotty state questions have been discussed, how many despatches settled, how many political points adjusted in the stormy days which saw the abolition of the Seigneurial Tenure and Clergy Reserves. At one of his brilliant postprandial speeches, Lord Elgin was much happier at this style of oratory than his successor, Sir Edmund Head. The noble Earl is reported to have said, alluding to Spencer Wood, "Not only would I willingly spend here the rest of my life, but after my death, I should like my bones to rest in this beautiful spot; and still India had other scenes, other triumphs, and his Sovereign other rewards for the successful statesman."

Sir Edmund Head's sojourn at Spencer Wood was marked by a grievous family bereavement; his only son, a promising youth of nineteen summers, was, in 1858, accidentally drowned in the Saint Maurice, at Three Rivers, whilst bathing. This domestic affliction, threw a pall over the remainder of the existence of His Excellency, already darkened by bodily disease. Seclusion and quiet were desirable to him.

A small private gate is still shown at Spencer Grange, which at the request of the sorrowful father was opened through the adjoining property with the permission of the proprietor. Each week His Excellency, with his amiable lady, stealing a few moments from the burthen of affairs of State, would thus walk through unobserved to drop a silent tear, on the green grave at Mount Hermon, in which were intombed all the hopes of a noble house. On the 13th March, 1860, on a wintry evening, whilst the castle was a blaze of light and powdered footmen hurried through its sounding corridors, to relieve of their great coats and mufflers, His Excellency's guests at a State dinner that night—Sir John A. Macdonald, Sir Geo. E. Cartier, and others—the alarm of fire was sounded, and in a couple of hours, of the magnificent pile a few charred ruins only remained. There was no State dinner that night.

One of the last acts of the Ministry in retiring in 1861, was the signing of the contract to rebuild Spencer Wood. The appropriation was a very niggardly one, in view of the size of the structure required as a Vice-Regal residence. All meretricious ornaments in the design were of course left out. A square building, two hundred feet by fifty, was erected with the main entrance, in rear, on the site of the lovely flower garden. The location of the entrance and consequent sacrifice of the flower garden for a court, left the river front of the dwelling for the private use of the inmates of the *Château* by excluding the public. Lord Monk, the new Governor General, took possession of the new Mansion and had a plantation of fir and other trees added to conceal the east end from public gaze. Many happy days were spent at Spencer Wood by His Lordship and family, whose private secretary, Denis Gosley, Esq., occupied the picturesque cottage "Bagatelle," facing the Holland road, on the Spencer Grange property. If illustrious names on the Spencer Wood Visitor's Register could enhance the interest the place may possess, foremost, one might point to that of H. R. H. the Prince of Wales, visiting in 1866 the site probably more than once surveyed and admired, in 1791-4, by his grandfather, Prince Edward, Duke of Kent, in his drives round Quebec, with the fascinating Baroness de St. Laurent. Conspicuous amongst all those familiar with the portals of Spencer Wood, may be mentioned two other Royal Princes—the Duke of Edinburgh and Prince Alfred; with Dukes and Earls—the Dukes of Newcastle, Manchester, Buckingham, Prince Napoleon, Generals Grant, Sherman, &c.

Since Confederation, Spencer Wood has been successively tenanted by Sir N. F. Belloc and Lieut.-Governor Caron. The latter still occupies it, and it is unnecessary to state with what zest the traditions of generous hospitality and the elegant courtesies of society have been there kept up by Lieut.-Governor Caron and his amiable family. As we close this hasty sketch, mourning with its sable plume seems hovering over its banquetting halls.

J. M. LEMOINE.

Spencer Grange, December 7, 1876.

HOPKINS & WILY,
ARCHITECTS AND VALUERS,
13-9-52-88 253 ST. JAMES STREET, MONTREAL.

HUTCHINSON & STEEL, ARCHITECTS,
Valuers of Real Estate, Buildings, &c. 1818
James St. A. C. HUTCHINSON. A. D. STEEL.
13-9-52-87

RONAYNE'S POPULAR
SHOE STORE
192 & 194 St. Joseph Street.
WHERE
BOOTS AND SHOES
ARE BEST AND CHEAPEST.