

VISIT TO ST. JEROME.

How little is known in Montreal of the neighbouring country districts and of the beauties of the scenery in the immediate vicinity. There are lovely spots to be found within an hour's journey which have never been visited and are not even known to exist except in name. They are out of the ordinary routes of travel, and are thought of, if thought of at all, as rough, rude, uncivilized, with no attractions, well enough fitted, it may be, for the homes of unlettered and ignorant farmers, where a little grain or hay may be raised—*et voilà tout*.

Yet in our northern country, stretching out from Montreal for miles, are to be found scenes of exquisite beauty and streams flowing through valleys which in summer laugh in the sun, and are sheltered in winter from the rough northern wind by the clumps of trees so disposed as to form natural barriers to its angry sweep from the Polar regions. How many have travelled over these roads or penetrated to the Laurentian hills, whose savage grandeur may well fill the heart of an artist with delight? But few, we imagine, in this busy, bustling, money-making city of Montreal have ventured on this unknown land, which, regarded from a merely pecuniary point of view, is full of interest to them.

Of late the village of St. JEROME, one of these northern settlements, has become more generally known than ever previously. Some years ago it had been somewhat notorious, but now, thanks to the exertions of its Mayor, Mr. Laviolette, its energetic curé, Mr. Labelle, and other public spirited inhabitants, it may one day become famous, and from the humble rank of a village may rise to the dignity of a city, with a large population and untold wealth. It was here the design for a Northern Colonization Railway was, if not conceived, at least most energetically advocated, until from the modest proposal for a cheap narrow gauge line, with wooden rails, the project has burgeoned out into the grand conception of a Canadian Pacific line, the first stages of which are to be a direct route to Ottawa, on to Pembroke, and still onward to the West, and along which is to flow the unceasing traffic of China, Japan, British India, and the Australasian Colonies. Such a project may be realized some day, but there must first be a beginning. To ascertain whether, and when this would be made, the Corporation of St. Jerome invited the Corporation of Montreal to visit them, to enjoy their hospitality, and view the land.

On Tuesday, the 31st of January, the excursion took place. The rendezvous, the City Hall; the hour, half-past nine; the conveyances, various. After the intense cold of the preceding week the temperature was felt to be balmy. A light mist was hovering over the river, and as the procession started a slight, very slight drizzle fell, or rather exuded from the mist. Passing through the city and up St. Lawrence street, Mile End was soon reached, and passing through the toll-bar, we are fairly in the open country. Acres of snow are on each side, but the road itself has been carefully ploughed, a superficial foot or two having been first cut in blocks and built up in walls glittering from its many points in the sun as he fitfully peeped out from rifts in the grey clouds which almost covered the sky, Mount Royal itself being covered with a fleecy mantle, shrouding its beauty as with a bridal veil. A short turn of the road and we are passing beside a hard-wood grove, a little further and we come upon men, busily engaged tracing out with horses and ploughs the lines on which already men are busily engaged sawing out ice, to be stored away in a painfully new-looking ice-house erected in the field, a short distance from the pond from which the ice is being transferred. A cheery call comes occasionally from one sleigh to another, and the "naked beauty" of cigars sends its aroma into the morning air. There are but few objects of interest on this part of the road; houses are thinly scattered, but such as are passed are in clumps, on every window-pane the noses of women and children being flattened in their eager acquisition of knowledge as to the why and wherefore of so unusual a sight as a long string of city sleighs with painted panels headed by a red cariole, with a red superstructure, leading the way. It cannot be a marriage procession, for there is no blushing bride, nor are there any lively bridesmaids. Tired with the mental effort, the noses are withdrawn and resume their pristine shape, and in most cases a friendly wave of the hand in answer to a silent salutation from one of the sleighs in advance, greets the inmates of the last conveyance.

Sault au Recollet reached, a short halt is made, and a few who had started before the main body welcome the arrivals. The partially covered bridge passed and the toll carefully collected by a jolly looking Canadian, who does not appear to have "took a pike" out of misanthropy, or to get out of the way of "widders," as he has a wife and family of his own comfortably installed, and we are on Isle Jesus, the scene for many a long day of the indefatigable Dr. Smallwood's labours in the cause of science. A sharp pull up the hill overlooking the river, a sudden descent, during which we catch a glimpse of the handsome church of Sault au Recollet, another steep pitch and we turn to the left, the road to the right leading to Terrebonne. Skimming along with varied talk of railway projects, guesses at the condition of the land as evidenced by the signs of vegetation visible above the snow, talks of journeys in past days, reminiscences by the senior denizen of the sleigh of lumbering scenes and "moving accidents by flood and field," we seem in running to devour the way, till suddenly we turn off the main road, and enter upon a short cut through a maple grove, "a capital chance for cogs," as one of the party remarked, on business thoughts intent,—a wretched place for *cahots*, as all were fully sensible of, despite the softness of the cushions. However, two miles were saved by this road, and in spite of the breaking of a trace on one of the leading sleighs and the consequent delay till it was remedied, the two spired church of St. Rose were sighted in good time, and a few minutes more, there was not a window nor a door without its tenant, each staring, smiling, bowing to the dignitaries. Good, well built stone houses, and every appearance of prosperity, a beautiful church and good *Presbytère*, the registry office, well filled shops, and waggon, carriage and plough-makers show St. Rose to be a place of some importance. No

stoppage here; a rush round a sharp corner and with a dash we are on the Rivière de Chêne, a wide shallow branch of the Ottawa, over which the travel in summer is by a long, rickety wooden bridge, supported on what seem to be numberless piers, not so substantial as they might be. Leaving the river we are again on the solid land and at a short distance from the river, we turn at right angles to the road which continues onwards to St. Eustache, and speed on our way to Ste. Thérèse. As the village street is entered, the coaches, who have been, like the Irish postillion, "keeping a gallop for the avenue," make a dash through, followed by admiring gazers, and passing by the large church, halt in front of the *Hotel du Peuple*, a comfortable hostelry at which good entertainment is provided for man and beast. Descending, the whole party proceeds to the College, where the reverend gentlemen in charge, headed by the Superior, the Rev. Mr. Nantel, slim of figure and courtly in manner, and the Rev. Mr. Charlebois, offer hearty welcome. A pleasant conversation takes place, then the village dignitaries are announced, and filing in one by one, they take their places, forming a semicircle within the door-way, the city dignitaries opposite, and round the room the reverend fathers and the minor members of the deputation. The Mayor, with all the dignity of his office, read an address of welcome, expressing the hope that the railway would now be built, and promising on the part of the inhabitants of the village that they would do what they could. Aldermen Rodden and David replied for the Corporation, and Mr. Justice Coursol for the Directors of the railway, Mr. Dansereau and Mr. Brymner replying for the Press, the Ste. Thérèse people, with a wise discretion, believing that they should make friends with the Fourth Estate, having included its representatives in the address of welcome.

The College is a large substantial building of stone, with no architectural pretensions, but having a look of massiveness and solidity, very suitable to an institution designed for the education of youth in all branches of solid learning. Under an able staff of professors are about a hundred and eighty pupils, ranging from small boys of ten or twelve years of age, up to young men nearly ready for entering on the battle of life; to many how sore a conflict! Some are light-hearted and merry with the soft downy cheeks of early boyhood; others with the shadow of the coming cares of life fitting across their features and lending a seriousness to their eyes: all are healthy looking and evidently well cared for and tended. A large play-ground, divided into senior and junior classes, affords ample accommodation for healthful exercise, a large field a little distance off being made use of in fine weather for cricketing and other games requiring greater room than can be obtained around the building. In winter days, when cold winds blow, or the snow falls heavily, or in wet weather, the pupils collect in two large *salles d'exercice*, in which, during certain hours, they may indulge in noisy games to their hearts' content, one of the reverend fathers being near to check any horse play, or restrain anything that would annoy the weaker. Up the broad flight of stairs the deputation were conducted, every class-room, study-room, hall and dormitory being thrown open to their inspection. When all had been passed in review, and the view from the upper windows admired, the descent was effected, cordial greetings exchanged and again into the open air.

But not for long. The good fathers had provided for the bodily wants of the travellers at the *Hotel du Peuple*. Mr. and Mrs. Boismenu had made every preparation, and it was well they had, the fresh air had sharpened every appetite and rendered luncheon a matter of necessity. Father Nantel presided with courtesy and grace, and after a reasonable time spent at the table, the order was given that the journey must be resumed.

By this time a drizzle had begun, necessitating the closing up of the covered sleighs, for a time narrowing the views, which it is the general belief travel expands. Nestling at the foot of a hill up which the road ascends, glimpses can be caught for a short way along of the College, now to the right, now to the left as the sleighs wind up the hill, till the summit reached, Ste. Thérèse is shut out from view as quickly as if the cover had been clapped on the camera when the photographer was satisfied. To the right as we drive along the ground rises gradually, backed in the distance by clumps of trees; on the left a valley, flat and stretching for some miles towards the river and in the direction of St. Eustache, the hills overlooking the Ottawa looking white and cold beyond. For some miles inwards to the little village of St. Janvier, the road is carried along a high dry ridge, evidently of no great fertility, yet with houses dotted down every here and there, showing by the barns and outbuildings with which, as a rule, they are surrounded, that their inhabitants are comfortable and by no means straitened in circumstances. One peculiarity which may be remarked is that more pains have been taken to build good barns and stables than fine houses, and the fences are almost all good. Right and left of this narrow strip, itself bordered with thin white birch and scrubby second growth, the tall hard wood trees with here and there some stately pines with feathering foliage give indications of a fertile soil needing only the labour of man to yield bounteous crops. Past the church of St. Janvier, with a few houses gathered almost under its wing, and the sandy strip comes to an end; from side to side level, somewhat rolling fields, well fenced along the road; a substantial stone house or comfortable frame building, or snug looking log hut, all give evidence that the soil still yields its increase. Need it be said that every house has its children, or that the same curiosity to see the procession, manifested nearer town, is not lessened as we enter further into the northern country. Gradually, very gradually, ascending all the way, we can see the hollow down which the North River runs, which taking its rise in the Laurentian range passes St. Odell; chafes and frets and fumes over the rocks at St. Jerome and trending to the south-east is finally swallowed up in the Ottawa at St. Andrew's.

The talk does not languish; the hail from sleigh to sleigh comes every now and then, and at intervals some musical genius striking up a song is joined by others, and the music is wafted along to those who can enjoy its tunes. The rain ceases and there is a cry of St. Jérôme, as we near the pleasant village and drive along above the high steep bank which overlooks the North River. Conspicuous stands the mill owned by Mr. Laviolette, the Mayor, a low fronted building, but having, as afterwards ascertained, much greater capacity than its first appearance would indicate; to the right a large row of houses each with its little flower plot in front, now filled with snow; the window panes variegated in colour; flags flying from every point; a group of men, distinguishable among them the jolly figure of Father Labelle, who was

hastening along to be ready to receive the deputation as they alighted from the sleighs at the door of mine host Grignon. Beyond these and the inevitable flattened noses at the windows, scarcely a soul was to be seen, till the corner of the long street was turned, the sight of the first horse's head being the signal for the firing of guns, the blaring of a brass band and the cheers of the assembled population, drawn up opposite the hotel door. A short rest and a voyage of discovery and exploration is begun, to investigate the capabilities of the village, which, it may be stated, contains 1,500 inhabitants.

At no great distance to the North the Laurentian hills can be seen overlooking the valley in which St. Jerome is placed. It is impossible in the time at disposal to visit the falls, but we learn that within a distance of six miles there is a fall of 305 feet, divided over that space by a succession of cascades or rapids, affording an enormous horse-power. On one of these is the mill occupied by Mr. Laviolette, to which a visit was paid. From long distances the farmers draw their grain to be ground, and the seven runs of stones which it contains are kept pretty constantly employed. Although a holiday, and getting nearly dark before the inspection could be made, one of the runs of stones was set in motion to show its action, and the rapidity with which it ground up the grain and the ease with which it was done were highly appreciated by those who possessed a knowledge of this business. Mr. Laviolette stated he had room for five additional runs of stones, and then there would be a large amount of waste power. Besides this mill there is another of the same description, as also two saw mills, one shingle machine, one carding mill, and a cloth factory turning out 200 yards of tweed daily. But very much more ambitious projects are contemplated. An elaborate survey made upwards of a year ago resulted in a plan to give two hundred and sixty mill lots, which would employ upwards of forty-six thousand horse-power, still leaving for future wants nearly seventy-three thousand five hundred horse-power additional. As we left the building the darkness was coming on, and the object of the variegated window-panes could now be seen, every house being illuminated simply yet effectively, the varied colours having a fine effect. A dinner, speech-making, music, and a few dances for the more agile, closed the day's proceedings, the most friendly feelings and thorough gratification being expressed on all sides, and best wishes for the accomplishment of the railway scheme, to talk over which had been one of the principal objects of the expedition.

As far as St. Jerome elaborate surveys have been made, and three routes have been suggested by which this point can be reached. Beyond this, and to reach Ottawa and the North-Western country beyond, not even an exploratory survey has as yet, so far as we can learn, been undertaken. It would, therefore, be premature to express any decided opinion as to the feasibility of making a line further in this direction. So far as is known the Laurentian hills, seamed and furrowed with great streams, gullies and water-courses interpose a barrier to the building of a railway except by striking off into the interior and reaching the base of the Laurentides, or by running to Grenville and from thence up the north shore of the Ottawa to Hull, crossing there to the south side to reach the Capital. By this latter route seven large streams must be bridged over between Grenville and Hull, and the Ottawa itself would be the eighth. Up till a very recent period the most favoured project was to start from Mile End by Vinet's Bridge, St. Martin, Moulin à la Dalle, St. Thérèse to St. Jerome, partly along the road we have just travelled, but part of it to the left, and out of sight of the high way, shortening the distance by several miles. To connect with the Canada Central it was proposed to go to Grenville and there cross the Ottawa to Hawkesbury, taking the line through the counties of Prescott and Russell, skirting the County of Carleton and into the city of Ottawa. Naturally the Quebec Government favour the Northern route in order to open up their own Province, but it is doubtful how far the scheme will commend itself to commercial men in view of the engineering difficulties to be surmounted as compared with those to be met with by the Southern line beyond Grenville. Up to St. Jerome and onwards to Grenville there would be no difficulty experienced in building a good and sufficient line which would open up the country and wonderfully develop its resources. Even if the larger project were not carried out it would be for the best interests of Montreal to assist the smaller, as its commercial value would be of immense benefit. But there is another point of view from which the scheme may be regarded. Every summer homes are broken up, and the unfortunate master of the household and the young men in business are left to shift for themselves, while the feminine portion of the family and the younger branches are enjoying themselves "by the Sad Sea Waves." Here within easy distance summer quarters could be found from which men in business could reach the city in an hour's time, and return in the evenings after their day's work, instead of having to seek such amusement as the hot and stiff city can afford, or of being left to form habits by no means consistent with the virtues of domestic life. Then attracted by the beauty of the scenery and the fertility of the soil many would acquire homesteads, and by an improved style of agriculture train by their example their less fortunate fellow-farmers to the practice of modern husbandry instead of the rude and antiquated methods now in use. Such has been the case in other countries and even in other portions of our own country. There is nothing visionary in the belief that the construction of this line would have the most beneficent effect in this direction. Supposing that the improvement so greatly to be desired has been attained, and new wants, new desires, new necessities are created. A greater demand will spring up for all that the city must be called on to supply, and the Northern Colonization Road pushing out to the farther valleys along the base of the Laurentians will repay manifold all that it will cost the city for assistance to overcome its first difficulties.

But we are sitting still in the hospitable *Presbytère*, with the warm-hearted, far-seeing energetic curé, engaged in amicable converse, while business demands a return to the city. The horses are harnessed; each man wraps himself up in his warmest covering, for the journey is long, though the day is mild, three jolly cheers and we bid adieu to the hearty welcome of St. Jerome, glide past the houses in the long village street, into the open country, pass over the same ground that we had traversed yesterday, come into the thick of a horse race whose turning point is at the tavern at Sault au Recollet, the scene of great excitement, where we are compelled to wait till the horses have arrived, turned and started on their homeward journey, and so we fare onwards till, Mount Royal reached, we slide down St. Lawrence street, and so once more are swallowed up in the whirling vortex of the city.