



The rock-hedged road near St. Placide that leads to the famous Trappist Monastery at Oka, between Ottawa and Montreal.

Tramping To Oka

The Story of a Week's Walk in Quebec
By J. HARRY SMITH

TRAMPING is hardly the word to use in connection with this trip, despite its alliterative charm. We were walking, or more properly, sauntering. Two of us, like-minded in folly, started from Ottawa. The electric car took us over the bridge to Hull. Parliament Hill, the river and the two cities lay under a blaze of hot morning sunshine. At Hull no one knew the way to the next village on the map, which we found to be always the case in Quebec. But having journeyed two or three hours along a somewhat uninteresting road we arrived at Gatineau Point, and here began the constant succession of delightful scenes that were all about us until, a week or so later, we passed through Lachine and into the grimier suburbs of Montreal.

Quebec's scenery is about as like that of Ontario as the French-Canadian farmer or villager is like either one of Ontario, and that's not much. The very look of the trees, the hills and the cosy little wayside farms would convince you that you were in a different country, even if the unfailing courtesy and evident cheerfulness of every man, woman and child you met did not. Walking through a country you notice these things as you never can from the window of a train.

Farther along the route came Ange, a village of a few cottages and a pretty church, where hospitality even beyond the legal limit was forced upon us by a couple of burly and kindly village dignitaries. Perhaps this was the most typically French-Canadian village we saw. It lay scattered along both sides of a winding street and boasted an inn that in construction and management could be found nowhere outside of Quebec. An hour or so later, as the day drew to a close, we crossed a turbulent river by means of an old-fashioned covered-in bridge, and found ourselves at Masson. A big church, a long row of ugly square-fronted, mispainted or unpainted two-storey shacks fronting a wide, treeless field, and behind that dozens of little houses huddled together as though hiding behind their more pretentious and uglier neighbours.

Masson is unlovely to look upon. But its cooking is fair, and on the next day, Sunday, we saw every able-bodied human being going to the big church. Such costumes—such colours; we do not see them in Ontario. Perhaps you think we do not want to, and perhaps you are wrong. Those flashing colours make up just what Masson needs to be picturesque. But one must not forget the vivacity, flashing eyes and comely features of the French-Canadian girls, who seemed to pour by the dozen out of every little house. Still, Masson needs all this to make it interesting. A mile away the river tumbles and dashes its way through rocky banks, and after walking to it you are sorry for Masson, so ugly near such beauty. But Masson appears to be very happy, especially on Sunday afternoons.

THE road to Papineauville was hot and dusty, and we were glad to arrive at the town, finding there much of the old-world charm that had impressed us at Ange. You hear but little English in this part of the country, but you meet with many Scotch names. We came across a Macdonald and a Mackay, both of them in appearance and language purely French, and one of them a descendant of

Papineau.

Another hot, dusty road, led on to Lachute. We knew it was hotter and dustier than any of the others had been, because we saw it—from the windows of a stuffy local train. There may be those who would sneer and call this a train-assisted walking tour. Not so—there were good reasons. I believe it looked like rain—in fact, I'm sure it did rain.

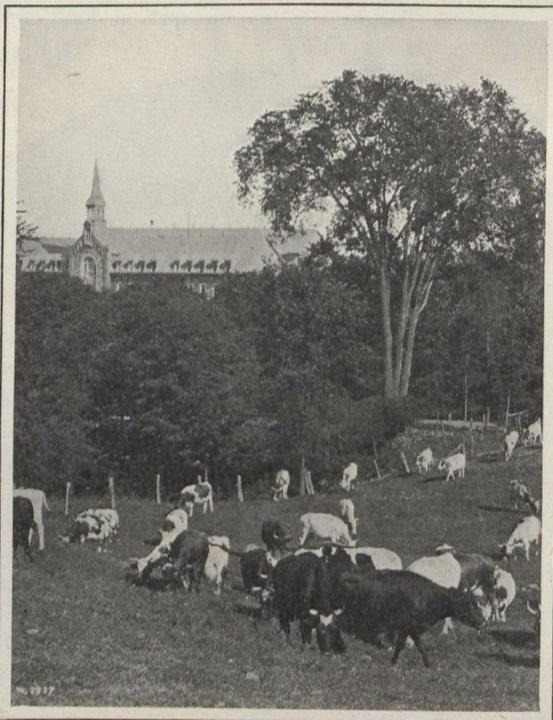
Lachute appeared inviting—to the eye, very pretty indeed; but, of course, its hotel had nothing to do with that and we decided to go on to East St. Andrews. Now, freely and without shame, I confess I did not walk this eight or so miles.

I was driven to St. Andrews by one who looked like a robber, talked English like a Toronto carter and was as French in name and habit as a man might be. He told me of a settlement "way back" somewhere where neither French nor English is spoken, only pure Gaelic. A couple of miles of soft sand winding through a bush, then a good road through such pastoral scenery as I never expected to see in Canada. On either hand a wide stretch of undulating country that looked as if it had been tilled for centuries. Beautiful houses, big and little, of rough-cast and stone that had been lived in and loved for generations; fine, fat cattle, and behind it all forest-clad hills running on into the blue. But great, purple clouds began to pile up behind us and we dashed into a little inn yard at St. Andrews as the big drops fell.

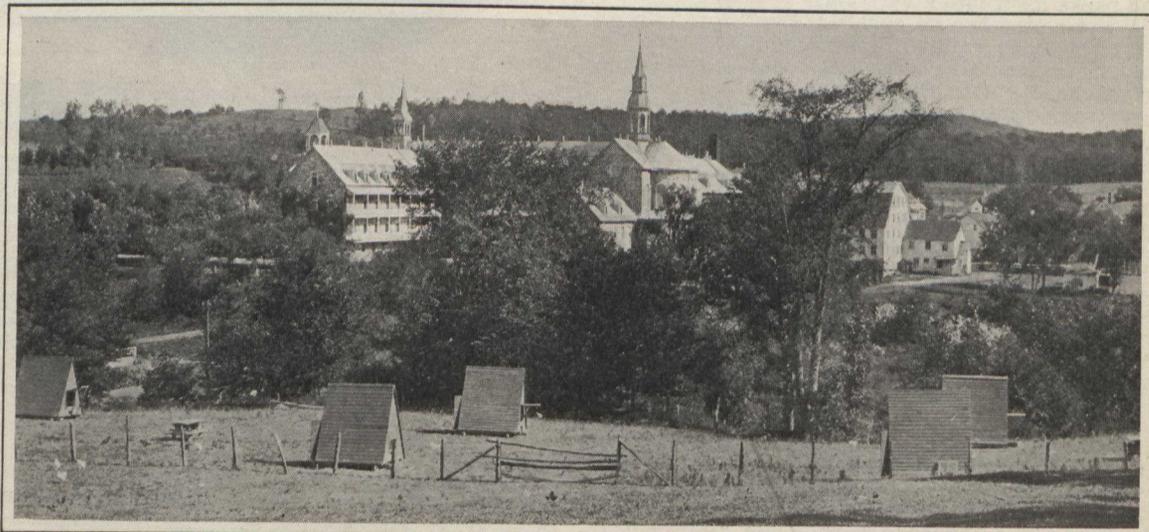
MY bold friend had started out in a determined frame of mind, and, amongst other things, a shirt of virgin whiteness, his coat and knapsack having also been driven over. I feared for his safety in that tremendous storm, but he found refuge in a farm-house of seigniorial appearance and conversed on certain scholarly matters with a courteous Frenchman of Scotch name and courtly dignity until the storm was over.

We had again come to the river, now a noble, broad stream. From a bridge here there is a view for all the world like a bit of the English Thames.

Next morning it was on to Oka. A fine road, now at the water's edge and now between fields littered with countless boulders and fences. At St. Placide we met the only discourteous Frenchman on the trip—the hotel keeper, whom we reduced to servility



Some of the Ayrshire and French-Canadian cattle, from which the Monks at Oka make the celebrated Oka cheese.



General view of the most remarkable Monastery in Canada, built by the Trappists, at Oka, near the Lake of Two Mountains, in the Province of Quebec.

D. du Lac. La Trappe, Qué.
Inhumation d'un Religieux.



Nowhere else in Canada could be found such an impressive country funeral as this inhumation of one of the Monks at Oka.

by flashing before him a carefully "stuffed" role of bills. We spent an hour waiting on St. Placide's stone pier, which was to take us farther down the river. We had the company of a habitant bridal party. The sprightliness of the lady's remarks cost my friend many blushes and me some regrets for an incomplete education. The boat bore us down the river past village after village, each with its church spire, and on into the Lake of Two Mountains, where we drew up at the Oka wharf.

Every street in Oka is interesting, but the monastery is five miles beyond and the day was getting on, so we were driven over in a shaky vehicle as novel to our eyes as the youthful driver was taciturn. The road ran straight back into the hills through several fine dairy farms, the excellent management of which is said to be due to the splendid example of the Trappist monks. Later the road entered a gate and dropped precipitously into a ravine, giving us a fine view of the monastery at its base. It was a large building of grey stone, looking like so many hundred other religious buildings to be found throughout Quebec. We passed through a pretty garden and drew up at the gate, beyond which few men and no women may pass.

THE monks at Oka are of the Cistercian or Trappist order. The fathers wear white and the brothers brown. Nearly all of them are French, although a few are said to be English. We were met at the wicket by a father who received in silence our query as to whether we might stay the night and then disappeared. One after the other, several monks of varying dignity came to ask us questions, and then we learned that if we might stay it would be a great favour, as the practice of receiving guests had been discontinued as the result of an order from the chief monastery in France. Our having walked had some weight, a pilgrimage, one of the monks called it, and we became, probably, the last guests to be so entertained. The guest-master, one of the fathers, then conducted us to our rooms. The interior of the building was like that of most public buildings—bare walls, high ceilings, hard-wood floors and all spotlessly clean. In ten minutes the bell rang for our supper, and we went down to find the guest-master waiting to help us to a meal the aroma of which would sharpen the duldest appetite. That done with, we had fifteen minutes' wait until even-song in the chapel. When the bell rang we found our way up several flights of stairs and through a low doorway into a little gallery, and before us lay our first real view of the monastic life.

Imagine a long, narrow chapel finished in grey,

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