

The story of Canada is one of drama and high adventure, illuminated by scenes of great brilliance and sometimes of great terror—Brebeuf, the Jesuit martyr, dying for his faith in the fires of the chanting Iroquois; Acadians, driven from their green farmland into bitter exile; the voyageurs in their buckskin, breasting the rapids and lugging their crushing loads across rock and muskeg; Simpson, the fur explorer, landing at a remote trading post with all the splendour of an eastern potentate; Franklin, the Arctic explorer, perishing on a frozen island in the shadow of the Pole; the Mounted Police in their scarlet tunics, policing the plains; the Klondike stampeders, pouring down the Yukon in a crazy armada of homemade scows.

The story begins in legend, nearly a thousand years ago, with a storm at sea. A Viking ship blown wide of its course emerges from the mists of the Atlantic and sights new land. Word of a strange continent drifts with the winds and Leif Ericsson, a Norseman, becomes the first European visitor to North America. For three centuries Norse colonies exist on the mainland—exactly where has never been determined—only to disappear, leaving a legend of “Helluland”, the country of big flat stones, and “Vinland”, a more verdant region farther south.

Then, in the wake of Columbus, seeking the spices and gold of the Orient came John Cabot, a determined Genoese, sailing from Bristol in the year 1497. He sighted the harsh shoreline of Newfoundland, claimed it for England, and reported with glowing enthusiasm that “the sea is covered with fishes which were caught

not only with the net but with baskets”. Since that day these waters have seldom been empty of ships harvesting the rich cod banks of Newfoundland.

Now the drama of the struggle for the New World is about to begin, and the story that follows helps to explain why Canada is partly English-speaking and partly French-speaking to this day.

New France

The English occupied the Atlantic seaboard while the French settled along the great St. Lawrence and through this gateway laid claim to half the continent. Jacques Cartier, an adventurous Breton, was the first. In 1534 he established New France by planting a cross at Gaspé Harbour, and in later voyages he pressed on up the mysterious and beckoning river to the present site of Montreal.

The French quickly realized that a fortune in furs could be taken from the new land. The greatest explorer of all, Samuel de Champlain, founded the first permanent settlement in 1604 at Port Royal in what is now Nova Scotia. Four years later on a great cliff overlooking the St. Lawrence he founded Quebec, which became the stronghold of French influence and power in North America.

For a quarter of a century the indomitable Champlain roamed the hinterland, vainly seeking the elusive northwest passage which might lead him to the wealth of China; Lachine, just west of Montreal, perpetuates the memory of that wistful hope. The warlike and powerful Iroquois could not stop Champlain: he killed two of their chieftains in his first brush with



them. Then he pushed as far west as Lake Huron and established an alliance with the Iroquois' enemies, the Hurons.

Settlement slowly followed Champlain's explorations. Trois Rivières was founded in 1634, Montreal in 1642. Then terror struck and destruction followed.

This statue of Samuel de Champlain, the great explorer, overlooks the Ottawa River, historic waterway up which he travelled when he discovered Lake Nipissing in 1615