



A Lady of the Court of Francis I.



Halberdier of Francis I. Regime.



Lady of the Court of Henry IV.



Nobleman of Frontenac's Day.

## WOMEN OF OLD QUEBEC



Lady of the Court of Francis I.

THE Seventeenth Century was one of political stress in Europe. The Stuarts fought their long and losing battle in England and the Bourbon kings of France were sowing the wind, from which unfortunate Louis XVI. was to reap the whirlwind. In the early years of this troubled century, away across the Atlantic from Stuart and Bourbon new dominions were being built on the banks of great rivers. St. Lawrence, Mississippi and Hudson saw the birth of nations in the years following the discovery of "a new heavens and a new earth." The great Queen Elizabeth died just a year before the exploits of Champlain and De Monts in Acadia and King James was awaiting the long-anticipated version of the English Bible in the year that Champlain founded the city which is now the capital of a British province.

In those early days of Quebec, what part was played by the women of the colony, who came from the fertile and smiling land of France and made their homes among the savages of an unknown land? France was then the most civilised country in Europe, containing all that the Seventeenth Century knew of luxury and refinement. Quebec was but an ice-girt cliff in the eyes of these pioneer settlers whose vineyards must have looked green and purple, indeed, in the idealising haze of memory.

Foremost among the dames who cheered and strengthened the early colonists was Dame Hebert, who sailed with her husband from Honfleur, just nine years after Champlain had made the first permanent settlement in Quebec. The weary voyage lasted for three months, during which the voyagers encountered storms, fog and icebergs ere they reached the city of Quebec in the middle of June. Sieur Hebert was an apothecary by trade but, like all other settlers, he was obliged to turn farmer and, with commendable caution, he built his rude home and planted his primitive garden hard by the fort of the great explorer. In the year of their arrival the first marriage of the colony took place, that of their daughter, Anne Hebert, to Stephen Jonquest.

In 1627 Sieur Hebert died, leaving his indomitable wife to carry on the affairs of his homestead. Already she had proved herself a thrifty housewife, showing the proverbial French capacity for management and proving a very refuge for the suffering or lonely in those days of stress. Several Recollect friars had come to Canada with the early settlers and these preachers of a new faith to the Indians found a staunch helper and supporter in Dame Hebert.

In 1629, when famine and sickness had reduced the white residents of Quebec to terrible straits, three English ships under Kirke sailed up the river

and found that there was no fortress to offer resistance. Most of the French colonists were in such a condition of poverty and distress that they went willingly on board the ships, to be taken back to France; but the intrepid Dame Hebert was one of the few to remain in the ruined colony, to watch over her home and to continue ministration to the native converts. For three years, the flag of England was the symbol of European power at Quebec and then the Treaty of St. Germain gave the colony back to France. A ship was fitted out by the great Cardinal Richelieu and set out with two Jesuit priests among the fresh supply of settlers. As it

twenty years of age, she crossed the ocean to the New World, bringing with her three French maids. The consternation of these latter at the rude conditions they found in their western home may be readily imagined, and they were loud in lamentations for the comforts they had left behind them. Madame Helen was of much more exalted rank than any other member of the colony and must have faced her new existence with sinking heart. Paris of 1620 and Quebec of 1620 were centuries apart, but the beautiful French girl showed a serene courage in the midst of squalor and devoted herself to the Indian converts with an earnestness which won their profound veneration. But four years' residence in the rude settlement broke the health and spirits of the young wife who pleaded to return to her beautiful France. So, in 1624 Helen de Champlain said farewell to stern Quebec but an island near Montreal still keeps her name in remembrance. She became a *religieuse* and founded an Ursuline convent at Meaux where she died in 1654, being known in convent life as Helene de Saint-Augustin. To Champlain, his life of adventure seemed dearer than the happiness of the gentle girl whose heart was first won by his tales of the "dangers he had passed" but her memory is one of the fairest in the chronicles of Old Quebec.

The romance called *With Sword and Crucifix* describes fitly the methods frequently adopted by the early explorers. Champlain at an early date showed an eagerness for the Christianising of the Indian tribes and the pioneer work of the Jesuit missionaries forms one of the most heroic chapters in Canadian history. But the problem of educating the Indian girls pressed heavily on the church authorities of Quebec and an appeal was made to the gentlewomen of France for aid in this work. The call reached the heart of a woman whose ambition and philanthropy went beyond the borders of her native land and Madame de la Peltrie, a nobler "Joan of Arc," who heard voices calling her to a loftier mission than to lead a king to Rheims, resolved to sail across the seas as a missionary to the savage women. However, although Madame de la Peltrie was a wealthy widow, she was surrounded by relatives who interfered and tyrannised in every possible fashion. In her perplexity, the lady resorted to an expedient worthy of an advanced modern dramatist. She wrote to a distinguished and pious gentleman, Monsieur de Bernieres, proposing that he should ask her hand in marriage, merely that she might thus shake off her obnoxious friends and be free to sail on her mission. The gentleman, like a courteous son of France, placed his name at her disposal, the relatives retired in defeat and the victorious bride sailed from France, accompanied by a band of devoted women who were to found a school for Indian girls at Quebec, while Monsieur de Bernieres gravely wished their mission all success.

Madame de la Peltrie did not become a member of any religious order, although for more than thirty years she was associated with religious labours



Madame de Champlain.

There is no portrait extant of the wife of Champlain but this is the pageant figure.

approached the promontory, dear to Champlain, a flag was waved from the Hebert homestead and the worthy Dame herself welcomed her countrymen with tears of joy. Such was the record of a humble, pious and toiling life, one which seems in its simple yet stirring story, an epitome of pioneer virtues.

Entirely different was the career of Helen de Bouille, who, at the age of twelve, entered into contract of marriage with Samuel de Champlain, who forthwith received her dowry of forty-five thousand francs, which that masterful adventurer sadly needed for the support of his beloved colony. In the year 1620, when Madame de Champlain was over