

44 THE IRON MINES OF THE ST. MAURICE TERRITORY.

navigators arrived at its mouth, they found three large channels which were separated from each other by two extensive islands, and they naturally exclaimed, "Voilà trois rivières." From this circumstance, the Jesuit Fathers have informed us in their "Relations," did the post and river Trois Rivières take their name.

Thus we can truly say that Trois Rivières was one of the first permanent French settlements in La Nouvelle France, and it was destined for the next century to be the centre of many treaty operations between the Jesuits and French authorities on one side, and the Northern Indian tribes on the other.

We have ample proof in the pages of "Les Relations des Jesuites" of the disinterested exertion of the priests of the Order of Jesus, at the different posts on the main river St. Lawrence. Their mission was clearly of a spiritual nature, but the fruit of their activity and indomitable enterprise is to be found in the ample success of their expeditions of exploration. While pledged to propagate the tenets and religion of their order among the heathen Indians whom they were sent to convert, while endeavouring under the greatest dangers and difficulties, to correct the prejudices and errors under which the aboriginal tribes of Indians laboured through the influence of their medicine men; they seemed to keep in view as the beacon of their journeys, the discovery of navigable rivers, arable lands, available forests and productive mines. Their devotion to the propagation of Christianity can scarcely be considered greater than their desire to report to their superiors in La Belle France, the possession of lands, rivers and mines in La Nouvelle France, which could be turned to pecuniary advantage by the hordes of adventurous Frenchmen who then looked towards the continent of America as a land of wealth, flowing with milk and honey.

The extension of religious establishments in a country, at that time wild and comparatively uninhabited, tempted the devotees of the order of Jesuits to undergo unheard of sacrifices, and while all agree that the interests of Christianity and civilization have been forwarded by their courageous exertions; they are also considered by the historians of Canada as the most successful discoverers and explorers of our inland country. From Tadousac to Kebec, (then Stadacona) from that point to Trois Rivières, (then Métaberoutin) from thence to Lake Nipissing in the North West, from the mouth of the River Saguenay up to Lake St. John, and from all these points to Hudson's Bay, canoes containing Jesuit Fathers were annually piloted by the indulgent Indians, who