

THE CITY OF MONTREAL

ITS RISE FROM BARBARISM TO CIVILISATION AND WEALTH

An Address delivered by Mr. R. Wilson-Smith before St. George's Young Men's Association, May 9th, 1911.

One of the marvels of history is the outburst of a spirit of maritime adventure during the 15th and 16th centuries. In the ten years from 1492 to 1502 the East and West Indies, the American Continent, Newfoundland, the Cape of Good Hope, Brazil, the St. Lawrence, St. Helena, Ceylon and other Eastern Lands were first discovered.

In the year 1534, Jacques Cartier discovered the Eastern Coast of Canada, and on October 2nd, 1535, he landed at Hochelaga, where now stands Montreal, the name which he gave to the mountain being Mont Royal. It is perhaps interesting to note that the year Canada was discovered was the same year in which the Papal Supremacy was destroyed in England. This event had a most important bearing on the history of Canada, as from it arose much of the trouble between France and England, which ended in the conquest of Canada by the military genius of Wolfe and the bravery of his troops in 1759.

The history of Montreal may be divided into three main periods:—

- 1st. The Indian occupation.
- 2nd. The French regime.
- 3rd. The British period.

Montreal was an important commercial centre—as times then were—when first visited by Jacques Cartier. The earliest historians say: "Hochelaga was then the capital of a great extent of country." The implements in use prove that the Indians got supplies of copper from the Lake Superior region, which they brought down by much the same route as vessels follow now in bringing grain from the North-west to this port, but more nearly parallel to the Canadian Pacific Railway.

At the identical spot where those vast ocean steamers are now moored, hundreds of canoes were lashed to the shore in Jacques Cartier's day, laden with furs and other products. As late as 1722 we have descriptions of an annual trade fair at Montreal, carried on by the Indians, who every year brought some two hundred canoes with goods for exchange. The scenes at such fairs are terrible to think of, as the favourite diversion was fighting with tomahawks and other deadly weapons. They are a grim reminder of Donnybrook fair.

Time prevents me from entering into details of Indian life and history, when Montreal was literally in the power of savages, as the early settlers learned to their cost. On one occasion 1,000 Iroquois swept down on Montreal Island and committed fearful slaughter and destruction. The settlers were constantly in terror lest, when off their guard, their skulls should be split by an Indian hatchet. The brave noble heroines who were conducting the Hospital, the original of the Hotel-

Dieu, were at times driven out of the garden by an Indian who was after their scalps. Savages prowled around under the hospital windows, often fighting in sight of the nuns.

Through all the terrible years when this Island was being constantly ravaged by savages, the French Government left Montreal practically without any protection or means for the preservation of order. It was not until 1642 that Montreal was formally recognized as a City under the name of "Ville Marie," Monsieur De Maisonneuve in that year, coming out to establish some form of local Government. Under his command a small force was organized, but little more was effected than to save the colonists from utter destruction. For years at this period bloodshed and havoc extended all the way down from Montreal to Quebec and up the Ottawa.

In 1663 Canada, as then known, was made a Crown Colony of France, and Montreal, for the first time, had the benefit of a Court for the administration of justice, and the general regulation of its affairs. Furs were the only exports and skins the only currency. In 1669 French coins were brought to Montreal in order to facilitate exchange of goods.

In 1717 the French King graciously gave the traders in Montreal his permission to meet together—a step which was the forerunner of the present Chambre de Commerce and Board of Trade. Timber and wheat now began to be exported. In spite of local authorities, whose forces were totally inadequate, there were hundreds of armed savages in attendance at the annual fair, who came down the Ottawa, the Richelieu, and the St. Lawrence, in canoes. As brandy was obtainable, the scenes of drunkenness and slaughter every year were appalling.

Time forbids further reference to this closing period of the French regime in this City, which, though marked by deeds of heroism not excelled in history, and by the devotion of Christian Missionaries of unparalleled bravery, was one long story of neglect and commercial oppression by the rulers of France. They never realized the possibilities of Canada; it was only "a few acres of snow" as one King said. Consequently no great efforts were made to enlarge the population by immigration, nor to protect the settlers from Indians, nor to establish local forms of Civic Government, nor to develop the commerce of the country.

On several occasions English seamen seized important places in Canada, and for some scores of years threatened to wrest them from France. The French military force stationed here was not adequate to keep the country from being seized by England.