

OLD SOREL.

A Town of Historic Memories.

Its Past Enterprise—Its Commercial Activity—Beautiful Situation—The Islands of Sorel—Days of Yore Recalled—Its Regularity and Modern Appearance.

Forty-five miles below Montreal, on the south shore of the St. Lawrence, at the mouth of the Richelieu river, stands the old, but apparently modern, town of Sorel. The name of this place is derived from that of an early pioneer French explorer and leader of colonists, M. de Saurel. It is an interesting spot, especially from an historical point of view; it is equally so if we consider its situation, the magnificent scenery by which it is surrounded and the multitude of important events that are connected with its past. The Richelieu and Ontario Navigation Company's steamers plying between Montreal and Quebec have three principal stopping places, equally distant from each other. Sorel is forty-five miles from Montreal; Three Rivers is forty-five miles below Sorel; it is the same distance to Batican and then to Quebec. Consequently Sorel may be called one of the principal points of interest on the St. Lawrence.

It is a peculiar little town and contrasts greatly with the majority of Lower Canadian cities in the fact that it has been laid out with the regularity of Philadelphia, and is a very city of trees. In all directions, radiating from the beautiful Central park, or square, are broad, well-kept and maple-lined streets that are most attractive to the stranger. This phase of Sorel is due to the fact that the Royal Engineers drew the plans and that the foundations of the city were laid in the days when a British military post was there situated. Originally the place was known as Fort William Henry, and the relics of the old stronghold that remain consist in the buildings at the extreme end of the wharf. In the days of Champlain, later on during the old French regime, and still more modern times, when the American powers contended for possession of this colony; and again during the turbulent scenes of the rebellion of 1837-38, this place was a center of attraction and a post of great importance.

In order to enter the port of Sorel the steamer takes a wide sweep outward, so as to escape the shoals that extend from the great western headland; it then turns directly south and faces the mouth of the Richelieu. On landing, the first thing noticeable is the ship yard above the quay. Here are the headquarters of the Richelieu and Ontario Navigation Company's works. Not many years ago one of the principal industries of Sorel was the ship-building. Not only were many ocean-going vessels launched from this port, but in the winter time the steamers on the St. Lawrence were placed there for repairs. Consequently the hammer and axe of the ship carpenter made the echoes ring, and there was life and prosperity in and about the place. But of late years, since the railways have come and intersected the land, the lumber shipping has gradually taken another course, and the old activity at Sorel has somewhat died out. Still the historical memories cling to its site and there are a hundred and one other attractions for the traveller in the town.

One of the most interesting of sights is the great market—especially upon a Saturday. If a person could secure a quiet spot in some window and look out upon that very Babel of moving men and women, of vendors and purchasers, of excited carters and rushing horses, of voices in every imaginable key and sounds of every conceivable tone and nature, it would be worth the whole trip in itself. There you see a world that almost belongs to itself, and yet filled with all the passions, feelings, characteristics and qualities of the great world. To a certain extent Sorel is the only market for a very large section of surrounding country; it is too far from Montreal for the villagers and inhabitants of the neighboring district to send their produce—except in certain quantities by steamboat, and it is sufficient of

a commercial center to create an extensive trade for itself. Therefore is it that Sorel on market day presents a sight worth witnessing.

At almost all hours, and in every direction, steamboats, puffers and ferry-boats go forth from Sorel to the different villages on either bank of the St. Lawrence. It is only a short run over to historic old Berthier, or to Lanoraie, or to St. Ann. Then up the Richelieu is one of the most delightful trips in America. There amidst the picturesqueness and grandeur of nature are the famous scenes of St. Ours and St. Denis. But of the places, of Chambly, and of all the localities rendered sacred by the memories of half a century, we will speak some other time. For the present we are taking a hurried glance at Sorel.

THE PRINCIPAL INSTITUTIONS.

The town is decidedly a Catholic one, and the leading institutions of the present belong to members or communities of the Church. The Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame have a magnificent convent which is one of their oldest missions. The building is an ornament to the place and its imposing proportions can readily be distinguished, even from a great distance on the river. There are two branches in the institution—one for boarding pupils and the other for the externs or day scholars. Wheresoever the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame have set up their tents, there piety and true education find an asylum. And the convent of Sorel is no exception to the rule. Side by side with this home of instruction and education is the hospital and home for the aged under the care of the Sisters of Charity or Grey Nuns. This also is a magnificent building and an establishment that would do honor to any town or country. Almost opposite these splendid buildings rises the Church with its twin-towers, a vast and beautifully decorated edifice. Apart from the religious and educational buildings, we find the Court House, Post Office, Fire Department and other public buildings, nearly all of which look upon the large square in the heart of the town. But it is foreign to our present purpose to enter into a detailed account of all the local establishments of Sorel. That portion of the town now totally given to commerce and business activity, was once the Fort—in the days of old—and its immediate dependencies. Even at the present the people of the surrounding country do not say: "we are going to town," they say: "we are going to the fort." Yet there is nothing left of that old military stronghold except the wooden shed that was once a provision-house for the soldiers and is to-day a store-house for the steamboat companies. Most of the interest that centers in Sorel may find its life in the immediate surroundings. Not far up the Richelieu, and within easy reach of the town, is the old Kent house, that which was built for a residence by the late Duke of Kent, and father of the present Queen of England. It stands there as it did in the time when Sorel was a military garrison, and when its barracks were inhabited by a section of the regular army. It looks out upon one of the most beautiful streams in Canada—a stream that rushes past scenes forever memorable in the story of our country, and that takes its rise away by the majestic lake to which still clings the name of the famed explorer and grand pioneer of civilization, Samuel de Champlain. In a few years hence there will be scarcely a relic of the historic days remaining in or around Sorel; but there is something that cannot change, that can never vanish, it is the magnificent scenery—the grandeur of primeval splendor that must for all time endure. Within a couple hours drive of the town, down along the shore of the broad St. Lawrence, the traveler come upon the enchanting Isles of Sorel.

CIVILIZATION LOST IN A WILDERNESS.

Whosoever desires to enjoy a few days in a Canadian forest, in a regular wilderness, and yet has not the leisure nor desire to travel for a week or more into the mountain fastnesses of the North, or out toward the great West, could not do better than take a Richelieu steamboat at Montreal and stopping off at Sorel, go to the Isles. You leave a busy, thriving, nineteenth century town, and as you spin along you behold the giant river, with the ocean vessels, barges, tugs and steamboats—evidences of a great advancing civilization—rolling on towards the sea. On all sides are the sounds and evidences of modern progress. Suddenly

—and before you have the time to feel the change or to believe in the transition—you are launched into a scene of enchantment and wildness that is beyond description. Dozens of islands, of all sizes and forms, seem to have been mysteriously dropped upon the bosom of the stream and to have transformed the whole nature of the great flood. Were it not that the road is in perfect order and bears the traces of considerable travel, you would think you had been translated to the days of old Sauvel, himself, or even to the days of Jacques Cartier. There is no evidence that civilization had ever trod those wilds; the marks of the white man are not to be found either on forest, hill or stream. It is a real plunge from the present into the past, and so sudden has been the leap that you almost feel breathless for the first moment. It would be impossible for us to draw a pen picture sufficiently truthful as to be even suggestive of the scene. We prefer to leave the tableau to the imagination of our readers; perhaps they may yet become curious to behold a primeval forest and to reach it after a few hours pleasant travel.

As we gazed upon the Isles of Sorel, for a first time, on a summer afternoon, when the sky was cloudless, the sun was refulgent, the air bracing and all nature alive with the thousand songsters chanting their melodies in the forest temple, we recalled those lines of Byron that, in presence of a similar yet otherwise glorious picture, he let fall from his immortal pen:

"The Isles of Greece! the Isles of Greece!
Where burning Sappho loved and sung;
Where grew the arts of war and peace;
Where Delos rose and Phobos sprung;
Eternal summer gild them yet,
But all, except that sun, has set!"

Here are the isles where roamed the untutored Indian, where savage warriors met in conflict, and savage lovers wooed and wed. The Indian is gone to the setting sun, the fire of his camp is extinguished, the wigwag has long since disappeared, the land has passed into many hands and the country has known many mutations since his day; but the same great river rolls ceaselessly seaward, the same islands dot the great bays, the same hills rise verdure and forest clad, the same species of wild animals range the valleys, the same solitude exists. You are actually within earshot of civilization and practically a hundred miles beyond its confines.

And the people you meet, the inhabitants of that unique section of country! They are of the old trapper and hunter race. To-day, even as a century ago, the only topic of conversation is the chase. What the pen is to the author, the sword to the warrior, the axe to the carpenter, the hammer to the smith, is the gun to the best ranger or forest guide of that locality. We are told that each nation, or class of men, has a peculiar term of friendly salutation, which gives an index of some of the customs or manners of the persons using it. The Englishman will ask, "How do you do?" Probably "doing well," or "doing ill," is his idea of happiness or of misery. The Frenchman will ask, "Comment vous portez vous?" The Chinaman will inquire, "How do you eat your rice?" Certain German races ask, "How is your stomach?" Each one seeks to know how his friend keeps up to what he considers a standard happiness. And the hunter from the Isles of Sorel will ask, "How is your gun, or your trap?" If these instruments, whereby a rude livelihood is gained, are in good order and of the best quality, it should follow—he supposes—that their possessor requires nothing more in life to make his contentment complete.

It is no exaggeration to say that this is a real hunter's or fisherman's paradise, and that the world may rush along as it pleases. Yet the one who has left it to enjoy a good holiday amongst the islands and over the main land adjoining, need care little how it moves. There is a special delight in feeling that you are as free as the air, and that nature—in all her grandeur and beauty—is at your service. People will go across oceans and continents to seek new scenes and adventure, and yet they seem oblivious of the fact that, within easy reach of them, in their own country, they possess to far greater extent than they could secure elsewhere all the elements of change and excitement that go to furnish subject-matter for subsequent fireside stories.

In one of his admirable essays, Thomas Davis, the famous editor of *The Nation*, gives vent to a very natural feeling in

the following manner: "We no more see why Irish people should not visit the Continent, than why Germans or Frenchmen ought not to visit Ireland; but there is a difference between them. A German rarely comes here who has not trampled the heath of Tyrol, studied the museums of Dresden and the frescoes of Munich, and shouted defiance on the banks of the Rhine; and what Frenchman who has not seen the vineyards of Provence and the Bocages of Brittany, and the snows of Jura and the Pyrenees, ever drove on an Irish jingle?" Well might we apply the ideas herein expressed to Canada and America. Says Davis: "Do not fancy that absolute size makes mountain grandeur, or romance, to a mind full of passion and love of strength (and with such only do the mountain spirits walk) the passes of Glenmalur and Barneamure are deep as Chamouni, and Carn Tual and Slieve Donard are as near the lightning as Mount Blanc."

Why should Canadians or Americans spend valuable days of vacation on railways or on ocean steamers, running off to seek variety, scenery, health, recreation and glorious enjoyment when, within a short distance—for Canadians, here at home, for Americans, just across the lines—they have the matchless highway of the St. Lawrence? Here they possess the most majestic stream in the world, navigable for a greater distance than any other river, supplied with a service that is not to be surpassed in either the Old or New Worlds, passing through regions alive with historic incident, and above all affording opportunities of enjoyment, combined with comfort, so varied and so attractive that volumes would not suffice to detail them all. And yet to many thousands this section of America is unknown. How few, even amongst our own people of other provinces, know anything about the Richelieu and the Isles of Sorel? And yet these same people will claim to have learned all about Canada. They may have crossed our continent in a railway car and have seen the great prairies and stupendous glories of the Rockies; still they are not even familiar with the wonders that nature has lavishly flung at their very doors. We trust that the day is not distant when every town, village and hamlet, as well as every spot of historic interest or of superb beauty along our great river will be known to the world. But we also hope that the day is far distant when the hand of civilization or the rush of the world's improvement will cause the primeval wilderness to disappear from the Isles of Sorel. It seems to us to be now a real historic relic—and one that it would be sacrilege to destroy; it carries us back to a greater distance in our past than even do the walls of Quebec or the ancient shrines of Three Rivers. They can only transport us to a period when the early explorer, colonist, or pioneer soldier laid the foundations of our civilization, while the Isles of Sorel and their surroundings of to-day bring us in contact with the pre-historic period when the "stoic of the woods," the child of nature, was "monarch of all he surveyed" on this continent!

EDITOR TRUE WITNESS.

SEND TO-DAY.

Ladies and Gentlemen, be alive to your own interests. There has recently been discovered and is now for sale by the undersigned, a truly wonderful "Hair Grower" and "Complexion Whitening." This "Hair Grower" will actually grow hair on a bald head in six weeks. A gentleman who has no beard can have a thrifty growth in six weeks by the use of this wonderful "Hair Grower." It will also prevent the hair from falling. By the use of this remedy boys raise an elegant mustache in six weeks. Ladies if you want a surprising head of hair have it immediately by the use of this "Hair Grower." I also sell a "Complexion Whitening" that will in one month's time make you as clear and white as the skin can be made. We never knew a lady or gentleman to use two bottles of this Whitening for they all say that before they finished the second bottle they were as white as they would like to be. After the use of this whitening, the skin will forever retain its color. It also removes freckles, etc., etc. The "Hair Grower" is 50 cents per box and the "Face Whitening" 50 cents per bottle. Either of these remedies will be sent by mail, postage paid, to any address on receipt of price. Address all orders to,

B. BYAN,

22 SHERWOOD STREET, Ottawa, Ont.

P. S.—We take P. O. stamps same as cash but parties ordering by mail confer a favour by ordering \$1.00 worth, as it will require this amount of the solution to accomplish either purposes, then it will save us the rash of P. O. stamps.

Lady of the House—"Why in the world don't you take a bath, man? Cleanliness is next to godliness, you know."

Ragged William—"I cultivate no second class virtue, madam."—*Tv Bits*.