

Lost Treasures of Canada

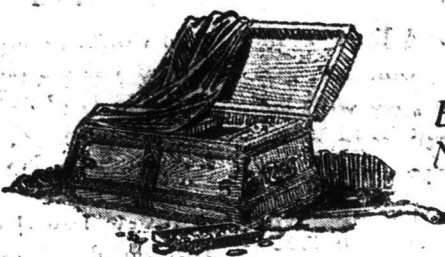
THERE are few of us but are willing to find a goodly pile of buried gold and jewels. The old familiar stories of Captain Kidd's buried treasures and other pirate caches, the lost hoards of the Incas of Peru and of the Aztecs in Mexico, the millions of Cocos Island, the long hidden valuables of the last of the great emperors of the Mongols, and many a tale of richly freighted Spanish galleons, have become classics. Canada, though comparatively young among the nations, has her genuine stories of buried treasures, that stir the imagination and draw heightened interest. Of them all, those concerned with the "Primrose," privateer, with the Rock of Percé, and Montcalm's treasury, are matters of historic fact.

Few Frenchmen during the reign of Louis XVI made a greater use of privateering to get wealth than Duplex, the governor of Pondicherry. Availing himself of his authority, he issued papers to a large number of ships to prey on British commerce. In a few years they returned him so great an amount of treasure that he feared to send more of it direct to France lest Louis laid hands upon it in his anger, for the Governor's privateers had captured and looted vessels other than these of the enemy. He bethought himself, therefore, of Canada. Here he had a younger brother in an official position in Quebec, who could hold the ill-gotten gains till the Governor of Pondicherry had resigned, and, returning to France a poor but "honest" man, could emigrate to Canada to find his fortune, as Frenchmen did in those days. It was a country believed in France to be a place where any man not a fool might become rich speedily. Duplex realized that if he spent six months there no suspicions would be aroused by his riches on his return to France.

He carefully fitted out one of his largest privateers, the "Primrose," said to have been captured from the British merchants, and sent her with a cargo of merchandise, in which was concealed a great part of his treasure, to the far distant port of Quebec. She made the Gulf of St. Lawrence safely in 1759, and her captain was told by the fishermen of the fall of Quebec one month previously, and of the neighborhood of British men-of-war. He was short of stores and water, so, having taken on board a fisherman-pilot, he stood away for the Bay of Islands at the mouth of the St. Lawrence, where he trusted to get the necessities from the French settlers.

During the evening a heavy gale came down, and drove the ship on the reefs inside the bay. Here she sank in comparatively shallow soundings, and three survivors managed to reach the shore. To-day, two old wrecks are known to be there, and are marked on the charts. One of them is the "Primrose," with her great store of Duplex's gold and silver, precious stones, and other valuables. The fishermen of the Bay of Islands have their traditions about the "Primrose." With modern

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diving methods, there can be but little trouble in salving this wreck of 150 years ago or so.

The Quebecois needs not go to the coast to look for hidden treasures. Many million dollars' worth is buried at hand by the plains of Abraham in old Quebec. Regarding it, there is no doubt whatever. It is a matter of historic fact.

Before the attack on Quebec in 1759 the seigneurs sent up to the citadel, which was supposed to be impregnable, their family jewels, heirlooms and other valuables, together with great sums of money in louis-d'ors, gold doubloons, and other coins; and these were put in the strong-rooms of the military treasury with, as well, a large sum newly arrived from France. When an attack on the citadel became certain, Montcalm directed the treasures to be bound up in skins, placed in barrels and boxes, and taken in boats up the St. Charles river near by, and buried until the danger was past. That this was done is proved by the fact the strong-rooms of the citadel were empty when Quebec was captured. Much cogitation ensued over this; but all traces of the removal were lost.

Now, in the spring of 1908 the proprietor of an eighteenth century chateau not far from Quebec took it into his head to rebuild an old-fashioned fireplace in the house. Behind the back of the fireplace a small cavity was discovered, and in it a little silver-bound box of eighteenth century make. On it having been opened, a small parchment,

tradition of the removal of Montcalm's treasury, took counsel of his priest. Next day the two went to work, as the parchment directed, at the "little bay on River Saint Charles." After much trouble in agreeing on the likely spot, "ten feet up the east bank," and in the measurements, "five feet deep in the earth," they commenced to dig. Some feet from the surface, they came upon the items enumerated in the parchment, "plaster, burnt wood," and found there the "plate and ingot of silver, and the skull of a sheep." "Beneath is the secret of a great treasure," ended the parchment's information, and there, beneath, lay a little, rusty, iron-bound box. They burst it open.

The box contained a very rough chart—the ink of it much faded—and information also written in French of the time of Montcalm. It read: "Across River Saint Charles to the wood near the small bay and peninsula. Twenty feet N.N.W. by N. toward the group of firs. Fifty feet as the sun sets. Five feet deep and set in plaster the great treasure of the Citadel. God save us all."

The two treasure-seekers pondered over the chart and directions for some days, then went to work. As, however, the land in question now belongs to the Catholic Church, they had to do it secretly, and in the dark. After much searching around and much calculation they began to dig. They dug in vain. For, though the documents are to be relied upon, that little peninsula of the Saint Charles has not remained the same throughout the one hundred and fifty odd years since the treasure was buried. There have been many a heavy flood and many a severe winter and many a gale. The group of firs is gone, and the setting of the sun in that



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age-stained and brittle with the heat of the fires, was found, on which, written in the unmistakable French script of Louis Sixteenth's time, were certain directions.

The habitant, who was aware of the

month so ominous to French sway in North America does not coincide with the setting of the sun in the present years. Nature, as in the case of the famous millions of Cocos Island, has meantime sealed up the exact spot of

the long concealed treasures of old Quebec. Yet—they are there.

As regards the great treasure-chests on the Rock of Percé, Nature is more likely to have laid them open to view, for exposure to the weather has most probably rotted them, and whitened the scattered bones of the skeletons of the two unfortunate prisoners. Full of wild romance is the tale of "Devil Duval's" hoard on the summit of the Rock of Percé; and full of wild daring are the tales told of those who attempted afterward to climb up and recover his treasure. So many lives were lost that, close on the first of last century, an Act was passed in the Quebec legislature forbidding anyone to make the attempt without authorization from the Governor of the Province. To this day, the superstitious Percé fishermen, unchanged in a hundred and forty odd years, declare the fierce spirit of the seaman protects his own.

The Rock of Percé, named from the fishing hamlet at hand on the coast of the Gaspé Peninsula, is one of the natural wonders of the North American Continent. Some terrific convulsion tore this rock from the near-by mountain many thousands of years ago, and left it standing some 500 feet high, with a flattish top, and beetling, unscalable sides. Once it was pierced by two caverns at its sea-foot, through either of which a boat could sail, but one of them has collapsed leaving only the greater, through which the sea thunders and boils in stormy weather.

Captain Duval was a French privateer, who after the Peace of Paris, February, 1763, became a most daring pirate, on whose head the British authorities put a tall price. He, however, through his protection of and generosity to the French fishermen and settlers on the Atlantic seaboard, was kept well aware of the movements of the British against him. At last he was hard pressed, and likely to be captured; and having in his service a Micmac Indian, who was devoted to him and aware of a secret trail to the summit of the supposed inaccessible Rock of Percé, Duval collected all his caches of treasure, and set sail for Percé. The Micmac is said to have wormed his way to the top of the Rock by means of an opening from the greater of the caverns. On arriving at the summit, one side of which falls sloping, he threw down a thin line which he had carried, and with it hauled up a block and fall. Two prisoners were pulled up by him, and then came the captain himself. Boats containing the treasure in chests stood by below.

Tradition runs on that they were a day and a moonlight night getting it all up. Then the Indian came down, and Duval himself was lowered away. His sword was all blood. With muskets he himself and his few trusted seamen shot at the tackle till it was cut through too high up the rock for anyone to reach. Then Captain Duval pulled for the ship and sailed away. He never returned, nor any of his trusted men. Either the hurricane that burst down that same night sent his vessel to the bottom, or she was sunk by the British men-of-war looking for her.

For a couple of generations the winds battered and the rains rotted the stout hemp ropes on the side of the Rock till at last they disappeared. Though there are fishermen in Percé whose grandfathers could recollect seeing these evidences of Duval's visit. None but the seabirds that nest on the Rock know what happened to the two English prisoners and the chests of treasure left on the bleak summit. But—some daring airman will some day find his fortune lying waiting for him there.