

SIR DAVID KIRKE,

FIRST CONQUEROR OF CANADA AND GOVERNOR OF NEWFOUNDLAND.

(By Our Newfoundland Correspondent.)

The general impression regarding Newfoundland is, that there is nothing to interest the world, either in its present condition or its past history. It is not suspected that a poor colony of fishermen, clinging to the grim rocks on which the wild waves of the Atlantic are ever beating, outside the pale of civilization, and having no share in those great events that stir the pulses of the world and form its history, could have produced any great men, or have been associated, in any way, with those who have moulded the ages and left "their footprints on the sands of time." It is true regarding England that—

"Half its soil has walked the rest
In poets, heroes, martyrs, sages."

But what glory, it may be asked, has blended with the dust of this poor isle, or what noble or heroic men have made it the scene of their labours? Brief, uninteresting and barren must be, it is supposed, the annals of a few thousand toilers of the sea, and very flat and homely the story of their fortunes. All this, I humbly submit, is a misapprehension. Human nature is the same everywhere, and human toil and endeavour substantially the same in the first and nineteenth century—

"From regions where Peruvian billows roar,
To the bleak coast of savage Labrador"

The same passions and emotions, the same hopes and fears have been bounding and billowing here, beneath the rough jacket of the fisherman as under the gaudy attire of wealth in "the marble courts of kings." Here has been substantially the same struggle between good and evil as elsewhere—the same commingling of human nobleness and baseness which, when transacted on wider spheres, history gathers into her golden urn and preserves for evermore as part of the precious records of the race. Even in the humble hut of the fisherman, traits of human heroism, pathos, tenderness and unselfish love have been exhibited, such as have furnished themes for the noblest poems, in other lands, and would do so here, had we the poets to sing them and thus render their country famous. Who knew or cared anything about Scotland till Walter Scott lifted the veil and revealed her, not only to her own astonished and delighted inhabitants but to other nations who had hitherto despised or derided the "land of mountain and of flood." The future will, no doubt, produce a Walter Scott for Newfoundland, who will gather up its traditions and superstitions, its tales of peril, and heroic daring among its ice-laden seas, the oddities and humours of its fisher-folk, the tragedy and comedy of human existence as here developed, and perhaps weave them into such charming romances, poems and dramas as shall win the ear of the world. Is such a thing less possible here than among the rude Highlanders of Scotland who have yielded so much poetry and humour to our modern literature? Take the City of St. John's—I venture to say were its history truthfully and vividly written, from the time when the first rude pioneer entered the "Narrows" and startled the Red Indian as he speared the cod-fish over the rocks, through the vicissitudes of its fortune to the present hour, a tale would be told more thrilling than any creation of fancy.

In these humble sketches in the columns of the *Canadian Illustrated News*, I am trying to show that, in the olden time, some of England's best and bravest men made Newfoundland the scene of their labours, hoped great things of it, and attempted great things in connection with it, as a new home for Englishmen. The names of Cabot, Sir Humphrey Gilbert and his half-brother Sir Walter Raleigh, Lord Baltimore and Capt. Whitbourne, have already passed in review before us. I come now to the honoured name of Sir David Kirke, of whom hardly anything is known in connection with Newfoundland. He is scarcely named in any history of the country. Sir Richard Bonnycastle, in his historical sketch, passes him over almost in silence. He is barely named in Pedley's "History of Newfoundland," as having introduced a body of settlers, "with the sanction of Parliament"—the latter part of the statement being incorrect; and the author does not seem to have been aware that for twenty years he was Governor of the colony with plenary powers during that long period. Yet it is true that this brave man, who first conquered Canada and Nova Scotia, and wrested it from the grasp of France, laboured heroically to plant a colony here, and may be truly said to have laid the foundation of whatever prosperity has fallen to the lot of Newfoundland. To none of her early rulers is she more deeply indebted than to Sir David Kirke, though perhaps not one in a thousand here has ever heard his name.

A few years after the death of Lord Baltimore, Sir David Kirke arrived in Newfoundland, in the good ship "Abigail," bringing with him one hundred men as the nucleus of a colony. He landed in the spring of 1633, and at once took up his abode in Ferryland, in the house built there by Lord Baltimore. In those days, sovereigns were wonderfully free and easy in assigning to their favourite subjects unlimited rights over vast territories, unmeasured, save in the imagination of those whose liberality was so boundless. Sir David Kirke came to Newfoundland armed with the powers of a Count Palatine over the island, having obtained from Charles First a grant of the whole. In this patent there was neither restriction nor reservation; everything and every right were made over to Sir David as absolute possessor. The royal grantor knew very little of the value of his gift; but Sir David Kirke, who had for years been sailing in the neighbouring seas, trading, and fighting the French, was familiar with much of that region now known as the Dominion of Canada, and quite aware of its vast natural resources and military importance. In particular, he had formed a high idea of the value of Newfoundland, chiefly from the rich sea-harvest which awaited the ingathering around its shores. Accordingly, he came to Newfoundland, determined to make it his home, and to establish there a colony of Englishmen. Before leaving his native land, he formed a company to carry on fishing operations in his newly acquired territory, in which several of the most patriotic and public-spirited noblemen of the day, such as the Earl of Holland and the Marquis of Hamilton, took a part, and aided him with money.

The previous career of Sir David Kirke proved him to be a man of courage and energy, as well as of superior practical talent. He had already done a stroke of work for England

in capturing the stronghold of Quebec, and gaining possession of Canada, which was destined to have far-reaching consequences, and to lead ultimately to the establishment of British power on the banks of the St. Lawrence. Descended from an old family of Anglo-Danish free-holders in the county of Derby, he had the blood of the ancient, fighting sea-rovers in his veins. His father, Gervase Kirke, had settled in London, and by his superior business talents, had risen to the position of a wealthy and influential merchant. In those days the passion for maritime discovery and commercial enterprise fired the hearts of Englishmen. Although the discovery of North America was made by Cabot in 1497, yet it was not till the latter half of the 16th century, or more than seventy years afterwards, that any attempt was made by Englishmen to turn it to account. At length the news of the rich harvest Spain was reaping in America began to spread, and all England awoke to a perception of the importance of the prize that lay within their reach. During Elizabeth's reign the spirit of commercial enterprise, and the passion for maritime adventure and discovery pervaded all classes. Trading companies were organized, expeditions planned, and projects of "plantations" in distant lands were eagerly discussed. The nobility and gentry took an active part in these enterprises, not regarding trade as disreputable, and risked vast sums of money in all kinds of commercial adventures. The younger sons of the county gentry flocked to London, and many a rich and noble family was founded then by these traders who had gentle blood in their veins. The father of Sir David Kirke belonged to this class; and with Sir William Alexander and others, formed a Company in 1627, to trade with Canada and establish a settlement there. His ships were engaged in the fish and fur trade of America; and his eldest son, David, born in 1597, had made several voyages at an early age in his father's vessels.

Led by the brave Jacques Cartier, the French early planted themselves in Canada, and under De Monts and Potrinourt, secured possession of Acadia, and established settlements at Port Royal and elsewhere. The distinguished French navigator, Champlain, explored the St. Lawrence and Ottawa, and built a fort on a commanding promontory on the former river, which he named Quebec. Flushed with the success of their colonizing plans, the French, in 1627, formed the "Company of New France," to which a Royal Charter granted the whole of North America. Immense enthusiasm was awakened in France; twenty ships were fitted out, the decks of which were crowded with emigrants, to convey food, building materials, guns and ammunition to the new settlements. All looked hopeful, and the French seemed in a fair way of securing an impregnable position in Canada.

At this critical moment war broke out between England and France, and the opportunity seemed favourable for crushing the infant French settlements in America. Without delay a small but well-equipped armament, consisting of three ships, was despatched under the command of Captain Kirke. The result is well known. At Gaspé, Kirke fell in with the French squadron already referred to, under De Roquemont, consisting of twenty ships on their way to Quebec. He attacked and captured the whole fleet; set fire to ten of the smaller vessels, and having filled the remainder with the most valuable stores, he sent them to Newfoundland. In a second expedition he made a clean sweep of the French settlements in Canada and Nova Scotia; Champlain surrendered to him the strong fortress of Quebec, and the whole of these vast possessions were thus, by the bravery and skill of Captain Kirke, annexed to the British Crown. But the imbecility of Charles I. rendered these advantages of no avail. He hastily concluded a peace with France, and anxious to secure his wife's dowry and keep on good terms with the French king, he agreed to surrender the whole conquest won by Kirke. The French were re-instated in all their Canadian possessions, Quebec included; and at an immense expense of blood and treasure, England had to reconquer Canada a century later. Kirke got no remuneration for his losses except the barren honour of knighthood.

After some years spent fruitlessly in endeavouring to have his grievances redressed, Sir David Kirke grew weary of inactivity, and finding that Lord Baltimore had abandoned Newfoundland, he asked for and obtained from the king a grant of the whole. Thus it is that, after the disappointments of his chequered career, we find him settled at Ferryland in the spring of 1633, virtually king of the island, in virtue of the extensive rights conferred by his grant. His efforts were mainly directed to the development of the fisheries, as he felt convinced that on the bleak and barren portion of the island where he had settled, agriculture could not be prosecuted successfully. Both to British and foreign fishermen he offered every facility for prosecuting their calling by protecting them from pirates, erecting stages for the purpose of drying their fish, and building houses for their shelter during their sojourn. In order to remove injurious impressions from the minds of his countrymen which might operate against the settlement of the island, he published a long and highly interesting account of the country. So well did he manage matters, and such confidence did his government inspire, that before the year 1650, more than three hundred and fifty families had settled in different parts of the island; and had it not been for the narrow, selfish policy afterwards adopted, of prohibiting settlement and endeavouring to drive away settlers, so as to make the country a mere fishing station, the colony would have kept abreast of the sister provinces, and its resources would not be in the undeveloped state in which we find them to-day.

Sir David continued to rule his principality wisely and justly, and under his guidance its prosperity was very decided. Soon, however, the civil war broke out in England; and during the great conflict neither King nor Parliament could give any attention to Newfoundland. Kirke was a staunch loyalist, and during the whole stormy period he considered himself as holding Newfoundland for the King, and kept the Royal standard flying on his fort at Ferryland. His two younger brothers were officers in the King's army, and one of them was knighted for his bravery. When the cause of Charles became hopeless, Sir David wrote offering His Majesty a safe asylum in Newfoundland; but the imprisonment and death of the King frustrated these good intentions. When the Commonwealth obtained supreme power his estates in Newfoundland were all confiscated, and a warrant was issued to Captain Thomas Thoroughgood, commander of the "Crescent," to sail to Newfoundland and bring Sir David Kirke to England to answer the charges made against him. The final decision of his judges was "that he had no authority in Newfoundland under the grant of Charles Stuart; that

all forts, houses, stages and other appurtenances relating to the fishing trade, and established on the island by Kirke and his fellow-adventurers, should be forfeited to the Government as the property of delinquents; that Kirke's own private effects should be secured to him, and he be at liberty to send over his wife and servants to take care of his estate." These were the hard terms meted out to the gallant sailor who had fought so bravely for his country.

He was not the man, however, to sit down hopeless under his troubles. What justice could not accomplish for his case, interest secured. He obtained the powerful aid of Claypole, Cromwell's son-in-law, "by making him a present of a large estate in Newfoundland, and promising him a share of the fishery duties." Little "jobs" of this kind were just as rife under the Commonwealth as under the Monarchy, and "lobbying" was practised then under the very nose of the stern Lord Protector. By Colonel Claypole's assistance Kirke obtained the removal of the sequestration upon his property. With the exception of the ordinance and forts all was restored to him; and once more he returned to the island he loved so well to spend the remainder of his days in peace in his house at Ferryland.

But the great sequestrator, Death, was at hand with his resistless claim. Sir David Kirke had been blessed with a most affectionate, devoted wife, and fair daughters and brave sons graced his house at Ferryland. By these he had been cheered and sustained through all the cloud and sunshine of his career; and in the bosom of his family, it might have been hoped, he would spend a tranquil old age. It was not, however, so to be. Two years after his return to Newfoundland he died suddenly in the winter of 1655-6, being only 58 years of age. His dust found a resting-place at Ferryland, near the remains of his predecessor, Lord Baltimore.

After the Restoration the sons of Sir David Kirke received the most shameful injustice at the hands of Charles II., to whose father he had been so staunch and true. Sir Lewis Kirke, the uncle of these young men, presented a petition to the King, in which he recited his own services in the civil war and those of his brother, and prayed that the original grant of Charles I. to Sir David Kirke might be confirmed to his sons. Meantime, however, Cecil, Lord Baltimore, put in a claim to Newfoundland under the grant made to his father by James I. Although the Baltimores had voluntarily abandoned the country thirty years before, and obtained Maryland instead of it, and in consequence the island had been transferred to Kirke, yet the King in Council now issued a warrant to the widow and sons of Sir David Kirke to deliver up all their property in Newfoundland to Lord Baltimore, and the family, thus ruined, were left to shift for themselves without any compensation. Ingratitude could go no farther than this.

Newfoundland prospered under Sir David Kirke's administration, and soon after his death began to feel the want of his vigorous hand in guiding its affairs. In addition to the vast number of fishermen who frequented its shores in summer, there were now about 1,700 industrious settlers. These petitioned the Lords of Trade and Plantation for a local governor and magistrates, but the merchants and shipowners of Bristol and London, who were interested in the fisheries and trade, opposed this reasonable request, which was in consequence refused. Ten years later Sir Josiah Child published a pamphlet in which he attempted to prove that the shore fishery, carried on by the residents in boats, was ruining the cod fishery carried on from England, and urged that if the population were allowed to multiply, Newfoundland would cease to be a nursery for seamen. Induced by these representations the Lords of Trade and Plantation issued an order that the whole colony should be rooted out, and the land reduced to a desert. The houses were ordered to be burned and the settlers driven out. Fortunately the execution of this inhuman order was intrusted to Sir John Berry who, while he carried out his instructions, remonstrated warmly against their severity, and after a time the order was annulled. Still all vessels were forbidden to take emigrants to Newfoundland, and settlement was prohibited, only a thousand persons being permitted to remain to look after boats, stages, &c. It was not till 1728 that this wretched policy was finally closed, and a governor at length appointed.

Those who are desirous of making themselves more fully acquainted with the remarkable career of Sir David Kirke, I beg to refer to an interesting volume lately published, entitled *The First English Conquest of Canada*, by H. Kirke. To it I am mainly indebted for the facts embodied in the foregoing paper. This slight sketch proves, at all events, that Newfoundland may properly enroll the name of Sir David Kirke in the list of her worthies whose memory she is bound to cherish.

MR. SPROUTS, HIS OPINIONS.

A few weeks ago I was pensively strolling along St. James Street, watching the construction of the new pavement in which so many of our citizens seem to take such unflagging interest, and inhaling the balmy odours of the coal tar with which that thoroughfare has been so long impregnated, when I encountered a small gentleman attired in a very voluminous and shaggy coat, with his head surmounted by a white hat with a black band—a style of head dress popularly known in England as "butchers' mourning."

To my surprise this individual rushed forward, grasped me by the hand with great effusion, and cried in accents that seemed familiar to me, "Wat! old feller, I'm werry glad to see you. How are you?"

Although I fancied his voice and manner were familiar to me, I could not at first recall him to my recollection, and he, seeing my perplexity, exclaimed, "Why, don't yer recollect me? Why, I'm 'Sprouts' as you knowed in London."

I then at once recognized my old acquaintance, Mr. Joseph Sprouts, whose published opinions on "Men and Manners" made some sensation in the old country several years ago. Mr. Sprouts had been a peripatetic vendor of vegetables, in other words a *cave-monger*, but his successful literary venture had brought him into notoriety, and I had the honour of being introduced to him at the Lord Mayor's dinner.

After greeting him with sufficient cordiality, I enquired with some curiosity as to what had brought him to this side of the Atlantic.

"Why," he replied, "the fact is me and 'Betsy' has had a fortune left us, and as I wanted to go into public life, and heard as how the Canada is werry sensible to merit, especially when it's got money to back it up, we thought as how we'd come and try how we liked Montreal."