

THE VARSITY

A Weekly Journal of Literature, University Thought and Events.

VOL. XIX.

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO, FEBRUARY 14, 1900.

No. 15

NOVA SCOTIA BEFORE THE EXPULSION OF THE ACADIANS.

Nova Scotia was known to the French during the 16th century chiefly on account of its fisheries. The first settlement took place in 1603, when Port Royal was founded, and for the next century and a half the French gradually increased their settlements in Acadia, which included a part of Quebec and of Maine, as well as the three maritime provinces of Canada. In 1613 the whole of Acadia with the exception of Isle Royal and St. John's Island, the present Cape Breton and Prince Edward's Islands, was ceded to England. This cession was not followed by any determined effort on the part of England to colonize the country, which continued to be French in all but name until the founding of Halifax in 1749 established England's military authority on a firmer basis. Yet it was not until the expulsion of the Acadians in 1755 and the final fall of Louisburg in 1758, that English rule was firmly established.

The English have often been reproached for the expulsion of the Acadians, but they undoubtedly had very good cause for some such measure, as an examination of the relations between the two races in the province will show.

In the first place it must be remembered that the French in Acadia enjoyed the free exercise of their religion, and the peaceful possession of their lands on one condition, namely, that they should take the oath of allegiance to England within one year after the treaty of Utrecht, and this condition they never satisfactorily fulfilled. The French, moreover, made the very untenable claim that in ceding Acadia they had given up only the peninsula of Nova Scotia. This claim the Governor at Quebec, De la Galissonnière, proceeded to assert. With characteristic shrewdness he planned to consolidate New France from the St. Lawrence to the Bay of Fundy. To effect this he proposed to place armed forces on the frontier line between the present provinces of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, and to build a line of forts from the St. John river to Bay Verte, thus commanding the north shore of the Bay of Fundy and the Isthmus of Chignecto. Then all the Acadians in the peninsula were to be moved north of this fortified line. France owned Prince Edward Island and Cape Breton, and so the consummation of this plan would have so isolated Nova Scotia and Newfoundland, as to render them almost useless to England.

The French missionaries, notably La Lautre, together with the French forces, were entrusted with the task of removing the Acadians to the new homes which De la Galissonnière had allotted them. Many villages near the border were depopulated in this way, and young men, who were attracted by offers of military service, left their homes; but the main body of the Acadians who were comfortably settled in the Annapolis valley, and near the Basin of Minas, were very reluctant to move. De la Galissonnière was recalled in 1749, before his plan was completely carried out.

The attitude of the Acadians to the English was generally hostile. They declared themselves neutral, but they were not. The Acadians had easy communication with

Louisburg, which was incomparably stronger than any English fortress, even after Halifax was founded. And while the French held Louisburg they felt comparatively safe in defying the English.

The French also exercised an evil influence over the Indians. Surveyor Morris, writing in 1750 to Governor Shirley, of Massachusetts, who was then leaving for England, asks him to put Nova Scotia's case before the English authorities, and says, "the settlement of the French on the north shore is at present the cause of the war with the Indians, and will, if permitted to continue there, build and fortify there, be finally the ruin of this colony, and be a means of forcing it out of the hands of the English and fixing it in the hands of the French." He claims that the Indians were peaceable before the arrival of La Lautre, who incited to hostilities even those tribes which had acknowledged allegiance to England. The Indians, he says, were supplied by the French with arms and provisions in their raids on the English settlers, and 100 Hurons were sent from Quebec to act as scouts and rangers. Morris considers stern measures necessary. He says that the French are "at all adventures to be rooted out, and the most effective way is to destroy all these settlements by burning down all the houses, cutting the dykes and destroying all the grain now growing." He suggests the sending of several Highland regiments to drive out the French and then settle in the province.

If we compare the relative strength of the English and the French with their Indian allies we can see how the latter were a constant menace. Different authorities disagree concerning the number of Acadians, but Bourinot says there were 10,000 in the Annapolis Valley alone, while the fighting force at Chignecto was 1,500 strong. If those in the Annapolis Valley had been induced to move, the French could have concentrated 3,000 fighting men north of the Chignecto, and their forces were in constant communication with Louisburg. Opposed to these were three English regiments which were so much under strength as not to total 1,000 men, and three independent companies; and these forces were necessarily so scattered as to be almost ineffective. The Acadians were good seamen and forest rangers, and so their forces were at all seasons very mobile. Morris in his letter to Shirley says that the design of the French was to gain possession of the country for which they were fortifying in Chignecto Basin, "which will command the communication between our troops at Chignecto, and other parts of the province, and may thereby prevent supplies being carried to them, for our vessels bound there must pass within musket shot of their present lodgment, which has hitherto subjected the garrison to great inconvenience." He also points out that by fortifying St. John they could control the commerce of the Bay of Fundy; and that they practically kept the English troops at Chignecto prisoners. Moreover the French were extending Westward into the State of Maine. It was easy for them to do this, as the Indians, instead of harassing, helped them.

The increasing French power did more than affect Nova Scotia. Morris shows how they could attack the province from the north, and from Prince Edward Island and Cape Breton, before the English knew of it, and that