

chiefs, hosiery, laces, mouselins, etc. In the groceries it was the same—the most delicate of foods in tins from the best French companies. In the cafes the commonest and the finest of pure liquors. But since the war all this is changed. The shops look bare on entering and you may enquire for many different articles in succession and receive the same negative answer—courteous and sorrowful from the little maid who, through her tears, lays her poverty of stock to “la guerre, madame, la guerre.”

Why does she cry? For the brother or cousin or fiancée among the fighters “somewhere in France,” if he be still alive, which in many cases he is not.

France has conscription. Four hundred St. Pierre young men fell into line for France when the war was but a few months old. No wonder the women weep! Though a smile lights up the tearful faces with a wonderful glow of pride and patriotism as the little women tell of bravery on the field, of wounds bravely borne, of death, even! But the



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women of St. Pierre do not waste life in idle tears, though in these islands, as elsewhere, the women are the ones wounded in heart and life and enduring agony that can never heal, however the strife ends.

No “bankers” or steam trawlers operating on “The Banks” now make St. Pierre “the home port,” as in days of old, and the dories are operated by old men and boys. When these come in with the day’s catch the women go down to the beach to meet the toilers with their harvest from the sea. To handle codfish is no little thing for a man, but if you could see these French women, with their strong, wholesome faces and their capable minds lending a hand at the fish, working at the splitting tables on the beaches at Savoyard and Ile de Chiens, washing it in the great tubs, spreading it to dry on the stones and even loading it into the small schooners standing ready to dodge all the dangers of the Atlantic, barred zones or what not, in order that Frenchmen and French soldiers may be fed, you would think you had stepped into the most heroic era of Greek Art. As, indeed, in one sense you have, since the highest art is merely a presentation of strong and simple types.

Even in the handling of fish these women show their European ideas and training. They know that even in fish and its curing there is a certain standard to live up to. Take, for example, capelin. In Newfoundland the curing of capelin always reminds me of the parable of “the sower, who went forth to sow,” in every detail. Some fall in heaps, others fall a single fish at a time on stones along the beach, much of the fish rots in heaps, much is never picked up;



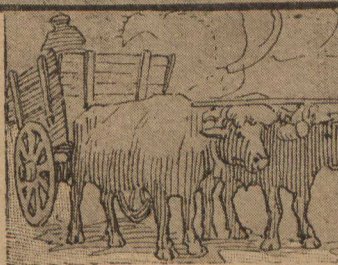
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chickens scratch sand and small stones into it, a hungry dog walking that way helps himself. In St. Pierre capelin is laid singly on wire frames tipped toward the sun; each fish is carefully straightened as it dries, while in Newfoundland a dried capelin would be a fair example of the Geom. crooked line, no part of which is straight.

When old, many a thrifty woman in St. Pierre gets employment at beheading capelin and laying them in neat layers ready for the packers. At Paris restaurants, before the war, the St. Pierre capelin brought the high price of one sou each, since, of



The Quay de la Ronciere at St. Pierre.



course, this market has been very much upset both in supply and demand. But the care employed in salting and drying the little fish by the women of St. Pierre is in every particular as scrupulous as though the most fastidious epicure in Paris were to eat of their island product.

Of course it undoubtedly helps in the fish-trade that the women of St. Pierre are themselves such wonderful cooks. Madame Coste, who keeps The boarding house of St. Pierre, is known even in Paris for her cooking. To eat of her “salad” is to taste

a dish fit for “the immortal gods,” as Epicurus himself must have declared. Being such cooks, they know it means everything to have a meat or a fish properly prepared from the beginning. How can a crooked, half-cured, unevenly-salted capelin make a dainty appearance at a table or tempt an appetite more than half dissuaded by the fish’s very unattractiveness?

Their way of taking the war is even more typical—the women wear black or very dull coloured dresses. They go to “mass” every morning, the whole population had no heart to celebrate the National fete day when it came, so there were no demonstrations except the usual “mass” in the beautiful church, whose altar fittings came from Paris and whose stained glass windows are a succession of Biblical scenes, rendered in most artistic colour schemes with the sea running as a motif throughout. Little boats under full sail are suspended from the roof of this “Palais de Dieu” by the sea—the gifts of sailors and fishermen, to show gratitude for miraculous preservation during some ship-wreck or great gale. One sits in the church and wonders if one or two of the men won’t come back when the war is over to add their token—a bullet or a broken sword, perhaps, to the “boats” that seem so much in keeping with the island life?

The landmarks of St. Pierre that stand out above all others to the visitor entering St. Pierre harbour are, a curious figure of the Virgin set in the high granite cliffs to the right, and straight ahead on the highest hills at the back of the town, on the landward side, in the most prominent place, a large crucifix uplifted stands silhouetted against the blue of summer skies or above the drifted banks of winter snows.

If, in the scheme of things, Canada gets St. Pierre, she may take from her all her native French life, all her trade with France, her stock of Paris goods, her French food, her French Cognac and other liquors, including vin ordinaire, which the people drink in place of water; all that foreign life, in fact, which is now the island’s chief charm, all that goes to make her French and foreign and different—she will put in its place Canadian life and Government and taxes.

Canada will reap the harvest of fish from the St. Pierre fisheries, but will she give the fisherman a bounty on each quintal, as does France?

But Canada replies, “We will give them our grain to feed an almost starving people,” all of which is very true, but it is equally true that the native French, of all people, “do not live by bread alone.”

As for Canada herself, it would seem fitting that the cross-crowned hills of St. Pierre should form the ramparts to the Atlantic surge and the eastern boundary of our far-flung territory that bids fair in the near future to have “Dominion” over land and—sea.

Whatever is done or not done in regard to making these French islands a part of Canada, we cannot avoid taking more personal interest in them than in other more remote islands of the Empire. St. Pierre and Miquelon are bits of Brittany next door.



After Matins in the little cathedral church at St. Pierre.