

THE BEGINNINGS OF CANADIAN LITERATURE.

THE DISCOVERERS, EARLY MISSIONARIES, AND EXPLORERS.

To most English readers of our native literature the work of the French discoverers and explorers of Canada, of the Jesuit and Récollet missionaries, and of the later French-Canadian writers, must, in large measure, be a sealed book. This must be matter for regret, as much of it is of the highest order of interest, while its later portions are almost unsurpassed in literary attractiveness. Fortunately, and to a remarkable extent, Francis Parkman, the American historian, has made the French period of Canadian history a special field of work; and in his series of brilliant narratives of "France in the New World," the English reader of early Canadian annals has a record of the epoch so scholarly and fascinating that he can have little occasion to regret his inability to peruse any portion of the literature of French-Canada which has not yet been translated into the English tongue. We can note this only in passing, and add that any Canadian who is unfamiliar with the works of Mr. Parkman has little idea of the elements of romance that enter into the annals, ecclesiastical and civil, of Canada; nor can he be said to have really tasted of the charm of history, when it is narrated by a graphic and picturesque, as well as by a trustworthy and painstaking, writer.

Canadian literature can hardly be said to begin prior to the founding of the Catholic missions in Canada in the days of Champlain. From this period both the civil and the ecclesiastical history of the country dates. Previous to that time, however, under the impulse given to the search for a shorter western passage to India in the reign of the French monarch, Francis I., several notable voyages to the New World were undertaken, and some account of these ought here to be given; but this, we regret, our limited space forbids. We can permit ourselves but the barest reference to the voyages of Jacques Cartier, undertaken between the years 1534 and 1552, and refer those who feel an interest in the subject of early exploration to the valuable publications of the Hakluyt Society, and particularly to Volume IV. of Justin Winsor's *Narrative and Critical History of America*—a work which is now being sumptuously issued in Boston, and this special volume of which deals exhaustively with *French Exploration and Settlement in North America*. In this volume will be found a number of critical essays of the highest interest on the discoverers and founders of Canada, and on the relations of the Catholic Church with the Indians. Jacques Cartier made at least three voyages to Canada, in the first of which (A.D. 1534) he took possession of the country for the French King. In the following year he again left the port of St. Malo for the New World, the object of his enterprise, according to the terms of his commission, being discovery, settlement, and the conversion of the native tribes. In this voyage he disclosed to the ken of the Old World our noble St. Lawrence, and proceeding up its waters, reached Stadacona (Quebec) and Hochelaga (Montreal). A third voyage, in connection with the Sieur de Roberval, a Picardy gentleman, was undertaken in 1540, with the design of planting a colony in Acadia; but this expedition, like those that preceded it, was barren of practical results, save that it gave to literature the earliest authentic record of discovery in the region now embraced in the wide domain of Canada. The narrative of Cartier's first voyage was issued, in French, from the press of Ramusio, at Venice, in 1536. In 1580 an English translation appeared, which was adopted by Hakluyt, and printed in his *Navigations* in the year 1600. The account of his second voyage came out in Paris in 1545; but of his third expedition, in concert with Roberval, we have only a fragment preserved by Hakluyt, which brings the narrative down to 1541. In 1598 another account of Cartier's first voyage, in French, appeared at Rouen, and was reprinted at Quebec, in *Voyages de Découverte au Canada, 1534-1552*, issued in 1843, under the direction of the Quebec Literary and Historical Society. Beyond the discovery of the country, and the intermittent trade in fish and fur which it opened up, France profited little from Cartier's voyages. Nor is there much in his narratives as a contribution to literature, save numberless curiosity-exciting facts, told to his St. Malo townsmen with the truth and directness of a simple-minded but courageous sailor.

He told them of the Algonquin braves—the hunters of the wild,
Of how the Indian mother in the forest rocks her child;
Of how, poor souls, they fancy in every living thing
A spirit good or evil, that claims their worshipping;
Of how they brought their sick and maimed for him to breathe upon,
And of the wonders wrought for them through the Gospel of St. John.

He told them of the river whose mighty current gave
Its freshness for a hundred leagues to Ocean's briny wave;
He told them of the glorious scene presented to his sight,
What time he reared the cross and crown on Hochelaga's height;
And of the fortress cliff that keeps of Canada the key,
And they welcomed back Jacques Cartier from his perils o'er the sea.*

With the coming of Champlain the day dawned upon French colonisation and missionary enterprise. Within the space of a generation (1603-1635) Champlain's eager, ardent mind, his intense religious zeal, and his restless spirit of discovery, made Canada, till now a veritable *terra incognita*, known to the outer world; while he gave to the colony he planted and fostered his earnest, watchful care and the benefit of his every thought. With him came the Sieur de Monts, a Huguenot who had rendered services to Henry IV. during the wars of the League, and for which he was rewarded by grants of land in Acadia, with the title of Lieutenant-General. At the same period there also came to Acadia, Pontgravé, a merchant of St. Malo, and with him Poutrincourt, a French nobleman, who wished to escape from the turbulent politics of Europe, and settle in a land unvexed

by religious strife. Champlain eagerly entered upon his explorations, first on the scene of the Acadian colony, then on the St. Lawrence and its tributaries, in the ascent of one of which he discovered the lake which bears his name. Afterwards he ascended the Ottawa and crossed to the country of the Hurons, and, with the latter as allies, made his disastrous raid into the lair of the Iroquois, and brought upon the ill-starred colony which he founded at Quebec the sleepless hate of that powerful Confederacy.

The chronicling of these and other events occurring in New France during the early years of the seventeenth century, with some account of the labours of the Récollet and Jesuit missionaries, we happily owe to Champlain, the chief personage in the drama of the times, and to Marc Lescarbot, a lawyer and man of good parts, who was intimately associated with De Monts and Poutrincourt in the Acadian colony. The literary fruit of the period is embodied in Champlain's voluminous narratives, of which there are many editions in French, and at least one good edition in English; and in Lescarbot's *Histoire de la Nouvelle France*, the latter of which gives a vivid picture of life at Port Royal among the Canadian "Knights of the Round Table." The narrative of Champlain's first voyage, entitled, *Des Sauvages; ou, Voyage de Samuel Champlain, de Brouage*, appeared in Paris in 1604, the year after the expedition was undertaken. In 1613, a second volume, profusely illustrated, was issued in the French capital, embracing the events which had occurred from 1603 to that date. The volume is full of interesting matter concerning the native tribes, which were as yet uncontaminated by intercourse with the scum of French prisons and other hybrid classes sent out as colonists by order of the French Court. Replete with interest is it also in regard to the geography of the northern portions of the continent, particularly in the region of the Bay of Fundy, including the coast line of the Maritime Provinces and New England. A third volume was published in 1619, which was twice reissued in Champlain's lifetime, and, with some additions, it again appeared in 1632. Of his complete writings, a collected Canadian edition, in French, was published in Quebec, in 1870, in six volumes quarto, under the editorship of the accomplished Abbé Laverdière. This Canadian reprint is creditable to native scholarship, being carefully edited, with luminous notes from the original text in the Bibliothèque Impériale at Paris. To French-Canadian industry and research are we also indebted for many interesting monographs on the subject of Champlain and his administration, in the country he so faithfully served, and which has the honour of holding his dust. L'Abbé Ferland's *Histoire du Canada* contains an excellent summary of Champlain's labours; though, for English readers, Miles's *Canada under the French Régime*, Warburton's *Conquest of Canada*, and especially Parkman's *Pioneers of France in the New World*, should be consulted. The best English translation of Champlain's complete voyages, however, is that issued in three small quarto volumes, in 1878-82, for the Prince Society, of Boston, by Dr. C. Pomeroy Otis, with an elaborate memoir by the Rev. E. F. Slafter, M.A.

The limits of this brief sketch necessitate our dealing very briefly with the remainder of the French writers of this period. Contemporary with Champlain, and familiar with his work, are the two authors, Marc Lescarbot and Gabriel Sagard, who have made important contributions to the literature of the era. Lescarbot's work deals with the Nova Scotian colony under De Monts, and Sagard's with the tribe and country of the Hurons. Not much is known of Lescarbot, beyond the fact that he was born at Vervins about the year 1580, and was a lawyer, having an extensive practice in Paris, which he abandoned in 1604, to take part with De Monts, the Lieutenant-General of Acadia, and again with Poutrincourt, in 1606-7, in the French Colony on the St. Croix River, Bay of Fundy. Three important works of his are extant, the chief of which is an *Histoire de la Nouvelle France*, first published in Paris in 1609, and to which was appended a collection of verses, written also by Lescarbot, entitled *Les Muses de la Nouvelle France*. Charlevoix, a later high authority, speaks of Lescarbot's narrative as "sincere, well-informed, sensible, and impartial." The author was a man of much vivacity of manner, and has given us a delightful insight into the habits and mode of life of the short-lived Acadian colony. His verses, which were the first effort to woo the Muses in Canada, are bright and polished, and among them is a poem written to commemorate a battle between Membertou, a local Indian chief, and some neighbouring savages. Another of his productions is a work on the *Conversion of the Indians*, with an account of Poutrincourt's voyage to the country in 1610. Father Sagard's works also deal with missionary effort among the Indians. He was a member of the Récollet fraternity, of whose missions in the Huron country, from 1615 to 1629, he is partly the historian. His work, though diffuse, is rich in details of Indian life and customs: it is entitled *Le Grand Voyage du Pays des Hurons*, and has not been translated into English. It appeared in Paris first in 1632, and again, in an enlarged form, in 1636, and to both editions is appended a dictionary of the Huron language which Sagard prepared.

We now come to the most important work of the period, the account of the ecclesiastical history of Canada embraced in the famous *Jesuit Relations*, a work which has not been translated into English, but the good things in which have been extracted and elaborated by the historian Parkman. The full title of the work is *Relations des Jésuites contenant ce qui s'est passé de plus remarquable dans les Missions des Pères de la Compagnie de Jésus dans la Nouvelle France*. The edition of the *Relations* in current use in Canada is one in three portly volumes printed at Quebec in 1858 by order of the Government of the Province. The narratives, which are marked by much simplicity of style, extend from the year 1632, with a few prior fragments, to the year 1679; and in no other contemporary source can we look for so intimate a knowledge of the religious history of the period, full as it is of thrilling incidents and the record of a zeal and devotion unmatched in the annals of missionary enterprise. The field of

* From the ballad of *Jacques Cartier*, by Thomas D'Arcy McGee.