



HISTORIC CANADA. V.—ILE-AUX-NOIX.
OLD RUINS ON THE ISLAND.

HISTORIC CANADA, V.

Ile-aux-Noix.*

PART I.—UNDER THE FRENCH.

This island, situated, as most of the Quebec readers of THE ILLUSTRATED are aware, in the Richelieu, ten or twelve miles north of the outlet of Lake Champlain, has figured frequently and prominently in the history of our country.

That it owes its importance to its position requires but a moment's reflection. Looking back to the good old days when our only (real) roads were our lakes and rivers, and when almost any spring-time might be expected to bring an incursion of invaders or witness an attempt to return the compliment, one sees that such a spot, defending the whole course of the Richelieu below and commanding the outlet of 125 miles of lake navigation southward, could not fail to be of great importance to the combatants on both sides.

So long, indeed, as the only invasions to be apprehended were by the uncivilized Indians, the island was not regarded as of great importance, because the great highway of the Richelieu was well guarded by the forts further north, erected by the officers of the Carrignan-Salieres regiment, Ste. Therese, three miles from St. Johns and Chambly in 1665.

Then as French explorers and adventurers extended French influence south and west they quickly grasped the whole country draining into Lake Champlain and Lake George (St. Sacrement), pushing forward with eager strides to meet and check the advance of British influence and British troops from the Hudson.

Hence we find that as late as 1757, when the last great struggle between England and France for the possession of America had been in progress for at least two years, there were no defensive works between Fort St. John and Fort Saint Frederic (Crown Point). This appears from the journal of de Levis, as well as that of Desandrouins.† In April, 1759, the latter officer was again dispatched to Fort Carillon (Ticonderoga) with instructions to examine the defences (actual and possible) of the route.

He describes Ile-aux-Noix as a fine island, well wooded, 1,700 yards long, and 386 wide, with a large part of its shores under water, owing to the spring floods; but it is quite evident from his report that it was still undefended.

De Levis mentions (May, 1759) the arrival of news from France of the great preparations which were being made by the British for the conquest of Canada, while France seemed to promise her sons but small assistance and cold comfort in the impending struggle; but, like a true soldier, he turns to his duties only the more energetically, and urges the immediate fortification of Ile-aux-Noix, the importance of which in the defence of Montreal he points out more

than once.

It is impossible to follow the course of events of this year and the next, which brought Ile-aux-Noix into prominence. The fortunes of war inclined now to one side and now to the other, but at length the French commander at Carillon, Gen. Bourlamaque, came to the conclusion that that post could no longer be held against the British army under Amherst, who was said to have 15,000 men, though de Levis' estimate is 10,000, while Bourlamaque had 2,500 regulars and probably 1,000 more, very irregulars—Indians, militia and workmen. It is interesting to note *en passant* that Parkman gives credit to a Canadian (M. de Lotbiniere) for the construction of Fort Carillon, while the French authorities, Montcalm, Dessandrouins and others, seem rather inclined to ignore habitually the services of the colonists.

Carillon, which had cost immense sums and years of labour, was blown up June 27th, 1759, just about the time the British fleet and army arrive before Quebec.

Fort Frederic (Crown Point) was then occupied for a short time, evacuated and blown up, and the French army "arrives on the second of August in sight of Ile-aux-Noix" which Desandrouins had examined four months before. "He was immediately set on shore with the workmen and while the army remained on board ship he went to prepare a camp on the island, the upper end of which he found already well fortified. The army landed next day "in a pelting rain. There it must halt and face the enemy "and die, if need be." The day after the disembarkation "the whole force was set to work on the entrenchments.

"During this time the English, who had followed us step "by step, had occupied St. Frederic after Carillon. Masters of Lake Champlain, they covered it with their "vessels."

"Nevertheless, they did not dare this year to attack "Bourlamaque, at bay like a wild boar on his island. "Resistance might be long; hardly two months intervened "between them and winter, and soon the ice would render "the lake impracticable. For these reasons General Ham- "merst (sic), with 15,000 men under his orders, abandoned "the pursuit of 2,500 French‡ commanded by the intrepid "Bourlamaque. However, we had lost Lake Champlain, "and Ile-aux-Noix remained the only barrier on that side "to hinder the English from marching on Montreal."

About a month after the landing of Bourlamaque's force de Levis visited the island and inspected the works, which he found had been well advanced "through the diligence of M. Bourlamaque." Meanwhile, though Quebec and, with her, Montcalm had fallen, the French troops still held out, and de Levis set to work to retrieve, if possible, his countrymen's disasters. Bourlamaque was called with a large part of his force to headquarters to undertake more important work, being succeeded in the command of Ile-

aux-Noix by de Bougainville in the following spring, being accompanied by M. de Lotbiniere, the Canadian engineer. The garrison by this time had been very much reduced, numbering only 450 men.

"Towards the end of June, Sieur de Bougainville having "knowledge that the English vessels had appeared on Lake "Champlain, thought it necessary to reinforce this post, "where he had only 450 men."—(Journal of de Levis.)

They sent him the 2nd Battalion of the Berry regiment and 250 militia; de Levis also went out to visit and inspect. A few weeks later another battalion, that of Guyenne, was also sent to the island fortress. But the end of the struggle was now nigh at hand. De Levis and Bourlamaque had all they could do to follow Murray and the fleet, skirmishing on his flanks "like wasps about the quarters of a bull," as the Abbé Gabriel put it. Amherst was threatening Fort Levis at the rapids, and on the 14th of August the British troops under Haviland, numbering 3,400 men all told, "made a descent to the south of the "river, half a league above Ile-aux-Noix, and tried to "open a road to communicate with the Riviere du Sud, "and by this portage to get above (below?) the island. "They (the French) anchored vessels to defend the mouth "of this river; they reinforced the corps which were to "defend the island, which had been placed in the best possible defence."

On August the 23rd the British opened fire on the entrenchments.

Under date of August 25th, de Levis writes: "This "morning the English, having in the night brought up some "guns opposite the French vessels, which were anchored "too near the shore at the mouth of the Riviere du Sud, "opened fire on them with such effect that, the captain of "one being killed and part of the crew killed or wounded, the rest threw themselves into the water to escape. "The cable of one was cut and it was driven on shore. "The English seized it and, putting out, attacked and captured the other vessels." The little fleet being thus lost, de Bougainville, who had been ordered to hold out as long as possible without being cut off, concluded that his flank was about to be turned, and evacuated the island during the night of the 27th, leaving behind him only the disabled and fifty able-bodied men, who were ordered to surrender on the morrow.

So fell Ile-aux-Noix, and shortly afterwards Montreal and New France.

In these notes I have followed de Levis principally as being likely to have been the most accurate, for all the accounts do not agree as to the details.

After the treaty of Paris, 1763, there seemed to be no further need of fortifications; all America was under the Union Jack, and the works at Ile-aux-Noix dropped speedily into ruins. Peace, at length, settled down on all the land. But for how long?

*So named from the walnut and hazel, with which the island formerly abounded.

†Captain of Engineers attached to Montcalm's staff, afterwards Marechal du Camp and Chevalier of St. Louis.

‡As already noted these figures were not altogether correct.