

*- May 1883 -*

THE BARON DE ST. CASTIN

Among the numerous titled European adventurers who, during the two centuries immediately succeeding the discovery of America by Columbus, impressed their names or personality upon the scattered settlements of the New World, was Jean Vincent, Baron of St. Castin. The family seat of this nobleman was near the town of Oléron, District of Béarn, in the lower Pyrenees. While yet a very young man, St. Castin had joined the regiment Carignan Salières, a famous corps which took part in the war of the Fronde, and was afterward incorporated into the military contingent furnished by Louis XIV. to Leopold, Emperor of Germany, in his campaign against the Turks, who, having overrun Transylvania, threatened to carry fire and the sword into the valley of the Rhine. In 1665, the Carignans were transferred to Canada, where the warlike Iroquois were proposing the extermination of the feeble French colony on the St. Lawrence. The gallant gentlemen who composed the staff of the Carignans must have been struck with the sharp contrast betwixt their old battle-fields and the new. They were marched into what was then a howling wilderness, and were sent to fight a foe not more merciless than the unspeakable Turk, but more alert, elusive and difficult to draw into pitched battle.

When peace with the Iroquois was finally established, the dusky savages reduced to submission, and the regiment had been disbanded, the condition of the officers and gentlemen attached to the expedition became somewhat mortifying and uncomfortable. They were accustomed to feats of arms, military adventure and the chase. They were left in a foreign and barbarous land, without occupation, and without any means being offered for their speedy return homeward. Did they would not, and to beg they were ashamed. They spent their time in hunting and fishing, and their children, born of Indian mothers, were brought up in idleness and ignorance. The scanty chronicles of the time furnish a deplorable picture of these wasted fragments of a high European civilization grafted on pagan stock in the wilds of the New World.

St. Castin, however, was too romantic and too adventurous to bury himself in one of the remote seigniories of Canada, and he soon made his way to the French settlements on Penobscot Bay, establishing himself on that promontory at the confluence of the Biguyduce and Penobscot Rivers which now bears his name. It is not certain how St. Castin was led to

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select this beautiful and strategically important point as the site of his fort and trading post. But it is likely that Madockawando, the sagacious and powerful chief of the Tarratines, who occupied the country lying at the mouth of the Penobscot, had inflamed the imagination of the Baron with accounts of the beauty and fortunate situation of the region with which he was to become so closely identified in later years. Madockawando was a frequent visitor to Quebec, and he was a firm friend of the French. Possibly St. Castin finally accompanied him to the peninsula of Pentagoet, now known as Castine, Maine.

For years there had been strife between the French and the English for possession of the strip of territory lying betwixt the St. Croix and the Kennebec. As early as 1556 the French had established a fishing and trading station at Pentagoet, but it was not until 1613 that they attempted any fortification of the post. The waters of the bay swarmed with cod, haddock, hake and smaller fish, and the Penobscot and Biguyduce yielded vast quantities of salmon. Forests and streams abounded with beaver and other fur-bearing animals, and in the chronicles of the time we meet so often with accounts of stores of beaver-skins, that we may well imagine that these peltries constituted the chief wealth, if not the circulating medium, of the country.

To obtain exclusive right to reap the rich harvest of sea and land, almost unceasing war was waged along these coasts for nearly three centuries. As the noble Penobscot River afforded a ready means of communication with Canada, then rising into importance as a colonial station, the French clung to their possession of the mouth of that stream with great pertinacity. All of the region watered by the Penobscot and Kennebec, and as far eastward as the St. Croix, was inhabited by an aboriginal people known as the Etchemins. A subdivision of the race originally held possession of the mouth of the river and was called the Tarratine tribe. Unlike the English, who were forever in trouble with the Indians, the French contrived to keep on terms of tolerable friendliness with the original owners of the soil.

Captain Argall, of Virginia, visited Pentagoet very soon after the French had intrenched themselves there, and later the illustrious Captain John Smith, while on one of his exploring expeditions, cast anchor in its beautiful harbor. After repeated warnings, it would appear, the French, who were feebly prepared for an armed attack, abandoned the peninsula, and it was occupied by the English; Isaac Allerton, of the Plymouth colony, setting up a trading post there in 1626. The Plymouth men were driven out by the French, who returned in considerable force in 1632.

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During the following year, the English again came back, and were again expelled by orders of Razallai, then Governor of Acadie, in 1635. When Razallai died, which was very soon after the second expulsion of the English from Penobscot, the command of Acadie was left to his two lieutenants, d'Aulney and De la Tour. Very speedily there arose a contest between these soldiers for the possession of portions of the country which both coveted and each claimed, to the exclusion of the other. Pentagoet was the chief bone of contention, as it commanded the entrance to the Penobscot and the Biguyduce, its peninsula being the dividing wedge between which the two rivers flowed. D'Aulney was a Catholic and De la Tour was a Huguenot, and in the long and bitter contest which raged between the twain, De la Tour naturally received the active and useful sympathy of the men of Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay. The romantic and exciting adventures that marked the progress and vicissitudes of the conflict that agitated the entire coast from Plymouth to Newfoundland, have no place in this sketch. D'Aulney finally established himself at Pentagoet, where he built the fortification, now found in ruins, at Castine, and known as the Old French Fort.

Once more, in 1654, the English took possession of the peninsula, under orders from Cromwell, then Lord Protector. But by the treaty of Breda, in 1667, the much-disputed territory so long fought over was ceded to the French; and, in 1667, Chevalier Grandfontaine, as instructed by Colbert, Minister of Finance, took possession of Pentagoet, with strict orders to hold it at all hazards against the English.

About this time came the Baron de St. Castin from Quebec. He is represented as a man of admirable abilities, a devout Catholic, of fascinating and courtly manners, daring, adventurous, and full of devices and ingenious expedients. Whittier, in his poem of "Mogg Megone," describes St. Castin as one upon whose face "passion and sin have left their trace." But it is likely that the baron, then in middle life, was neither old and wrinkled nor sin-scarred, as the poet has drawn his picture. But, following the example of his companions in arms, of the Regiment Carignan Salières, St. Castin espoused an Indian wife, his baroness being Mathilde, daughter of his powerful friend, Madockawando. This was undoubtedly the baptismal name of the Indian princess, as she is sometimes called. The Capuchins had founded a mission at Pentagoet early in the seventeenth century. One of the relics of their occupation is a copper plate, found near the site of the fort, bearing a Latin inscription, which is thus translated: "1648, January 8. I, Friar Leo, of Paris, laid this foundation in honor of Our Lady of Holy Hope."

Longfellow, in his poem of "The Baron of St. Castine," describes the home-coming of the young baron and his dusky bride, to their chateau in the Pyrenees, and the subsequent wedding of the pair, after the village curé has discovered, to his horror, that the gay baron had wedded his Indian wife, "as the Indians wed," and had "bought her for a knife and gun." This is a free exercise of the poet's license. It is unlikely that St. Castin, who is shown to have been a zealous churchman, and whose children were subsequently recognized by civil and ecclesiastical authorities, had failed to observe all the rites and ceremonies concerning the sacrament of marriage laid down by the Latin Church. Equally baseless are the local traditions of the numerousness of the Indian wives of the worthy baron. Before the unearthing and publication of authentic historical records, it was currently believed that St. Castin had forty wives. The roundness and fullness of this number has a suspicious look, and there is no record whatever of more than two wives, both of whom were of Indian blood. It is likely that the second wife, named Marie Pidiaskie, was the legitimate successor of Mathilde, who had probably departed this life when the second marriage took place.

According to records now accessible in Nova Scotia, the Castin family was registered as that of "The Sieur Jean Vincent, Baron de St. Castin, and of Dame Mathilde, of the Parish of Sainte Famille, at Pentagoet." The baron had two sons by Mathilde, the eldest being Anselm, who inherited his father's title and estates, and the younger was Joseph Dabadis. Marie bore the baron at least two daughters, one of whom, Anastasie, married Alexander Le Borgne, and the other, Therese, married no less a person than Chevalier Phillippe de Pomboncoup, a grandson of De la Tour, and the widow of his ancient enemy, d'Aulney, whom De la Tour espoused after the war between the two had ended by the death of d'Aulney. It is likely that the ancient venerable scandal concerning the polygamous propensities of the Baron de St. Castin arose from a slanderous attack made upon him by Perrot, Governor of Acadie. Perrot had quarreled with nearly everybody with whom he had official relations. Having fought a duel with one of his lieutenants, while Governor of Montreal, and having insulted Frontenac, then Governor of Canada, Perrot was sent to govern Acadie. He attempted to dispossess St. Castin, whom he found in full control at Pentagoet, beloved and worshiped by the Tarratines, and driving a very profitable trade. Monsieur Perrot reported to the French court that St. Castin was an immoral and seditious person, and that he should be recalled to give account of his doings. The baron replied that this was a persecution "on account of little follies with women."

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Nothing ever came of Perrot's assault, unless it brought a cloud over the good name of the baron.

After various vicissitudes, and not until his rights had been disputed by and defended against Dutch buccaneers, English adventurers, and French interlopers, St. Castin firmly established himself at Pentagoet, his fort and trading-post being that which had originally been built by d'Aulney, and the ruins of which exist to this day.

The fort included barracks, storehouse, a small chapel, a guard-house, magazines, and suitable dwellings. It was inclosed by a stockade of huge oaken palisades, the stumps of which, like the roots of ancient molars, are occasionally extracted from the sandy ooze of the shore in which they have been embedded for more than two centuries. Here St. Castin held almost royal court, deified by the savages and surrounded by such luxuries as could be brought from afar by infrequent traders.

The peninsula of Pentagoet, now Castine, was well wooded, and its south-eastern slopes fall gently downward to the silvery tide of the Biguyduce. The crest of the peninsula overlooks the mouth of the Penobscot, which rolls to the west of Castine. The natural conformation of the sunny declivities on which St. Castin's fort was built was favorable for defense from every point, and from his stockaded post he commanded a view of one of the most charming sheets of water in the world. Behind the fort, the land rose gently, dimpling with innumerable hollows, to the ridge from which one gazes on the broad debouchement of the Penobscot. In front of the fort, looking across the Biguyduce, the eye rested on the spruce-covered hills of what is now Brooksville, the dome-shaped summit of Blue Hill, and the far-off and heroic outlines of the peaks of Mount Desert. Here, in the midst of an orchard of apple-trees, and scattering his herds over the grassy slopes around the little fort, the wanderer from the Pyrenees must have sat him down with a sigh of satisfaction. It seemed as if he had finally acquired the right to rest and peace in the security of his home amidst the gentle savages whose love he had gained by subtlety and wise patience. But new troubles came.

Col. Thomas Dongan, Governor of New York, under appointment from the Duke of York, exercised jurisdiction over the Maine possessions of the duke, whatever they might be. Dongan set up, in behalf of his royal master, a claim to a portion of Acadie, including Pentagoet, in 1684. He wrote to St. Castin notifying him that the French must vacate all that part of Maine betwixt the Kennebec and the St. Croix. St. Castin paid very little attention to this mandate; and, two years afterward, Dongan sent fifty men to take possession of Pentagoet, having first seized a cargo

of French wines at Pentagoet, on the pretense that they were contraband goods. Remonstrances were addressed to the English Court by Barillon, the French Ambassador, and their release was ordered. This affair was used by Perrot to discredit the management of St. Castin, who retorted that he—St. Castin—was only a private citizen of Pentagoet, and not in authority. This was probably strictly true, as the baron, by this time, had acquired by wisdom and firmness full sway as suzerain in his own right. He was now a sachem of the Tarratines, and it would have been difficult, if not impossible, for any stranger to dislodge him from his stronghold and from his place in the affections of the Indians.

After the disappearance of Perrot, another enemy appeared on the scene at Pentagoet. James II. had been proclaimed king, in Boston, in April, 1685, and very soon after Sir Edmund Andros appeared in that city with a commission signed by the King. The Papist monarch was cordially hated by the Puritans, and the new governor of New England fully shared with his master the ill-will of the people whom he had been sent to govern. Early in the course of his administration, Governor Andros set out on an exploring expedition to the coast of Maine, intent on subjugating to the English crown any foreigners and strangers who might have settled within his majesty's dominions. Especially was Sir Edmund curious to see the French nobleman, the Baron de St. Castin, who, it was reported, kept an Indian harem, had a trading-post, and sold arms to the Tarratines in times of war, and did "not like to be under the French Government, and desired to live indifferent."

Moving in great state to the eastward in the frigate "Rose," Andros sent word to St. Castin that he was coming; whereupon the baron shut up his establishment, and, taking his family and servants with him, sought safety in discreet concealment in the woods. The governor was greatly disappointed on arriving, to find the place deserted; but, accompanied by his staff and the gentlemen of his party, he made an inspection of the premises, a description of which has been preserved, and carried off to the frigate all the goods stored in the fort. This was done by way of "condemnation of trading," according to the governor's statement. Sir Edmund also left word with the baron's father-in-law, Madockawando, that if St. Castin would acknowledge allegiance to King James and demand his goods at Pemaquid, now Kittery, Maine, he might have them restored to him. It does not appear that the high-spirited baron ever did anything of the kind. But this outrage was bitterly resented by St. Castin and his Indian allies, and, in course of time, it was dearly paid for by the English settlers. As the French and English were at peace, the expedition of Andros

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was denounced in Massachusetts as a wanton piece of mischief. Increase Mather, who was foremost in furious and wordy attacks upon Andros and his followers, asserted in one of his tracts that these men were "a crew that began to teach New England to drab, drink, blaspheme, curse and damn." And, referring to the expedition of the "Rose," he asks, "what good did that frigate do New England? unless this were so that it fetched home the plunder of Castaine, upon which began the bloody warr."

This, however, was some time later, but Mather's reference to the Castin affair shows that he understood the events that eventually cost the colony much blood. During the summer following the expedition there were constant reprisals betwixt the Indians and the English along the line that now separates the coast of Maine from that of New Hampshire and Massachusetts. It is not certain, nor indeed likely, that St. Castin had any hand in the outrages committed by the Indians. But, according to the local historians of the time, the unlucky foray of Andros was the cause of most of the turmoil that ensued. In one of the "Andros tracts," it is set down that the destruction of New Dartmouth was supposed to have been done by the Indians "in revenge of Sir Edmund Andros's seizing Casteen's house, and taking thence all his arms and merchandise and household goods, in time of profound peace; the said Casteen having married an Indian sachim's daughter, and so the Indians were allyed to his interests."

War began in earnest in 1689, James II. having fled to France, and England and France having begun hostilities. Frontenac, who was now, for a second time, Governor-General of Canada, organized three expeditions of French and Indians, in 1690. One of these accomplished the massacre of Schenectady; the second a raid on Salmon Falls, New Hampshire, and the third made a descent upon Falmouth, now Portland. This last-named expedition was composed of regular soldiers from Acadie, with Abenakis, and Canadians. A part of the contingent was furnished by St. Castin and Madockawando, both of whom accompanied the forces. Portneuf was commander of the expedition, and to his account must be charged the butchery that followed the surrender of the fort, known as Fort Royal, near what is now known as the foot of India Street, Portland. Attempts have been made to fasten the responsibility for this deed of blood upon St. Castin. He took the part of his country in the fight, as was natural, but he held only a subordinate place in the command which reduced Fort Royal.

During the next few years, killing and capturing prisoners formed the only active industry of the coast of New England, the country along the

old debatable ground being the scene of constant skirmishes. In one exchange of prisoners, according to a French account, St. Castin "took charge of the business alone in the name of the Count de Frontenac." After a naval battle off Mt. Desert, in which he captured an English twenty-four gun ship, the French Admiral, d'Iberville, went to Pentagoet, by appointment, where he was joined by two hundred and fifty Tarratines commanded by St. Castin. After distributing presents sent by Frontenac, to the value of four thousand livres, and holding a grand feast, d'Iberville set sail for Fort William Henry, at Pemaquid, commanded by Captain Pasco Chubb, the purpose being to revenge the death of three chiefs, slain by Chubb while under a flag of truce. This expedition was successful. The fort, which cost nearly twenty thousand pounds, and which was defended with fifteen heavy cannon, fell into the hands of the besiegers, after two days' fighting. The fort was dismantled and then ceased to be the standing menace to the French on the Penobscot which it so long had been.

This was the last exploit in which St. Castin assisted. Peace soon after returned to the distracted country, and in 1693 the baron and his family gave in their allegiance to the English Government, now in possession of Pentagoet and the adjacent coast. In 1701, St. Castin went to France, taking with him, according to the chronicle of the time, "two or three thousand crowns in good dry gold." He had, in the meantime, fallen heir to an estate of five thousand pounds a year. This estate, for some reason, he never secured, as we hear of his son Anselm being kept out of it, long afterward, by the Lieutenant-General of Oléron, who is described as "the first chicanier of Europe," and who managed to keep and hold the estate while the Castin family were carrying on their adventures among the savages of the New World.

After his father's departure, Anselm, who is erroneously known in history as "Castine the Younger," became his legitimate successor at Pentagoet. He was commissioned as lieutenant in the French army, and, succeeding to his father's title on the death of the baron, he became a conspicuous person in his region of country, and participated in the defense of Port Royal, in 1707, war between England and France having again broken out. When the capitulation of Port Royal was resolved upon, Anselm de St. Castin, on behalf of the French, and Major Robert Livingston, of New York, on behalf of the English, were sent to Canada, by way of Pentagoet, to submit the terms to Vaudreuil, then Governor-General of New France, at Quebec. On the way, while being entertained at an Indian village, an angry savage who had sworn vengeance on all Englishmen, threw himself upon Livingston with intent to kill him. St. Castin,

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seizing with his powerful hand the uplifted tomahawk of the Indian, interposed at the peril of his life and saved his companion.

Anselm, who was made Lieutenant-General of Pentagoet, with a salary, was engaged in a variety of adventures, and, in the course of his career, was once kidnaped at Pentagoet by the English, carried off to Boston and lodged in jail, on the pretense that he conspired with the Indians. In such wholesome terror did the Massachusetts people hold the Castin family, however, that this act of violence was promptly disavowed by the Governor and General Court, and Anselm was set at liberty.

His brother, Joseph Dabadis, also had his troubles with the English, one Captain Pritchard, in an English vessel, having seized Joseph's bark, laden with beaver, and lying near Naskeag, now Sedgwick. The document penned by Joseph Dabadis de St. Castin, and presented to Lieutenant-Governor Dummer, of Massachusetts, in relation to this seizure, is mightily entertaining. Having recounted the story of the capture of his bark, on which, among other chattels, was an Englishman whom he had ransomed from the Indians, Joseph sums up his losses thus :

"For the vessel that costed me eighty French pistoles, for the Englishman ten pistoles ; fifty-one pounds of beaver that were in the vessel with twenty otters, three coats that have costed me together twenty pistoles ; fifty-six pounds of shot that cost me twenty pence per pound ; tow pounds of powder at four livres a pound ; twenty pounds of tobacco at twenty pence a pound ; a pair of scales eight livres ; tow cloth blankets each twenty-three livres ; tow bear skins eight livres apiece ; four skins of sea wolf eight livres for the four ; three axes fifteen livres for both ; two kettles thirty livres for both, and several other matters, which they would not grant me, so much as my cup. The retaken Englishman knoweth the truth of all this, his name is Samuell Trask of the town of Salem near to Marblehead.

I have the honor to be,

Sir,

Your most humble and most,

Obedient servant Joseph,

DABADIS DE ST. CASTIN."

A satisfactory settlement was probably made with Joseph, and, by a treaty subsequently concluded between the English and the Indians of Penobscot, and known as the Dummer treaty, peace was assured for some years thereafter. Peace, however, was precisely what the Jesuit Priests in New France did not want. These men were continually stirring up strife among the Indians, while the Castin family, emulating the example of their illustrious head, were favorable to any honorable conditions which should insure tranquillity. It was probably this divergence of policy on the part of the Castins and the Jesuits that prompted the artful and scandalous attacks of the latter upon the young Baron de Castin and his

brother. In a letter to Father la Chasse, Superior-general of the Jesuit missions, Father Lauverjait, then stationed at one of the tidewater villages on the Penobscot, gave this account of the sons of de St. Castin: "The elder (Anselm) who does not care to marry, and not satisfied with spreading corruption through the whole village, in addition to that, now makes a business of selling brandy openly, in company with his nephew, the son of M. de Belle Isle. They have been the means of one man being drowned already on account of it, and are like to be the destruction of many others. The younger of the Messrs. de St. Castin never comes into the village without getting drunk in public and putting the whole village in an uproar."

This was not a nice character to leave with the Castins, and, unfortunately, it is the last that we ever hear of these young slips of French and Indian nobility. The very name of the family has disappeared from the country in which they were once all-powerful, so far as living men are concerned. Very lately, from far-off Australia there came a message that a family bearing the name of Castine was in existence in that colony, and that the members of the family cherished a tradition that they were descendants of a warlike and noble Frenchman who had won honors in the settlement of the American Continent. Are these the children of St. Castin?

Occasionally, a relic of the occupancy of St. Castin, in the shape of a French gold piece, or a copper medal, is exhumed near his old fort. And, about forty years ago, a deposit of curious old silver coins, by some supposed to have been lost from St. Castin's stores when he fled from the imperious Andros, was found by a farmer while breaking up a patch of wild land, at some distance up the Biguyduce River. But the St. Castins, with all their pomp and stir, have vanished from the face of the earth, leaving almost no trace of the power with which they resisted, for more than twenty-five years, the invasions of adventurers and warlike agents of nearly every foreign nation represented in the settlement of the New World.

*Juan Brooks*

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