



W. Kirby. Niagara

Reminiscences

— OF —

A Visit to Quebec.

JULY, 1839.

By Wm. Kirby.

1903

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Introductory Letter

Of Sir James M. LeMoine.

To the Editor of the Quebec Chronicle :

Dear Sir,—I have been charged—a pleasant function, by an esteemed old friend and colleague of the Royal Society of Canada—with that of offering for your columns an interesting narrative of his first visit to Quebec, sixty-four years ago.

If it should be necessary to dwell on the excellence of his famous romance, "The Golden Dog," the best Canadian historical novel yet produced, and of which eleven editions have been asked for, it may not be out of place to furnish some details of the literary career of this talented and versatile poet and novelist, now 85 years of age—conned chiefly from Mr. Morgan's useful work, "Canadian Men and Women of the Time."

"William Kirby, poet and novelist, born in Kingston upon Hull, 1817, is the representative of the old Yorkshire family of Kirby, of Kirby Wiske, a branch of which were Virginian loyalists, who returned to England at the American revolution. Coming to Canada in 1832, he received a portion of his education in Cincinnati, Ohio After a brief residence in Montreal, he removed to Niagara in 1839, where for many years he subsequently edited and published the Mail, newspaper. Appointed Collector of Customs at that place, July 1st, 1871, he retained that position up to his retirement from the public service in 1895.

Mr. Kirby's first published work was "The U. E. (1859)" an epic poem in Heroic stanzas, which is valuable as a series of pictures of loyalist personages and times. He published subsequently "The Golden Dog," a Legend of Quebec," 1887. It has been translated into French by L. P. Lemay and by L. H. Frechetts. "Memoirs of the Servos Family," (1884); "Canadian Idyls" (2nd edition, 1884); "Pontiac" (1887); "Annals of Niagara" (1896), and a large number of miscellaneous pieces. His chief work is undoubtedly "Le Chien d'Or." On the publication of this volume, Lord Tennyson wrote the author that few novels had given him more pleasure than it, and that he would like to write a poem on the subject. Mr. Kirby was one of those selected by the Marquis of Lorne to form the original 20 members of the English section of the Royal Society of Canada. He was some years president of the Niagara Historical Society, Niagara, Ont.

It was my privilege to be present at one of those delightful At Homes, which the Princess Louise usually gave each May annual meet-

ing, to the members of the Royal Society at Ottawa, when H. R. H. summoned an A. D. C. to invite Mr. Kirby to her side to convey to him, on behalf of her Royal mother, the pleasure Her Majesty had experienced on reading Mr. Kirby's "Chien d'Or."

J. M. LEMOINE.

A Reminiscence Of Two Days in Quebec, July, 1839.

By WM. KIRBY.

(Dedicated to Sir James M. LeMoine.)

It was in 1839, after seven years of schooling and work in the city of Cincinnati, Ohio, that I resolved to remove to Canada.

The twin rebellions of McKenzie in Upper Canada, and of Papineau in Lower Canada, had been suppressed, but the United States were seething with sympathy and help for the rebel cause. "Hunter's Lodges" were organized in the Northern and Western States and supplied with arms for the invasion of Canada, which took place at many points during that year.

British residents in the States were profoundly agitated by this state of things. War with England was fully expected, and many British born like myself came to a resolution to go to Canada and aid in the defence of the Provinces.

I had a tincture of U. E. Loyalist blood in my veins and the spirit of it in my heart—that quickened my resolve. My great-grandmother was a Virginian lady, who returned with her family to England, driven out by the revolution. I only know of her through tradition and have heard her described as a large comely dame sitting in her old age as became the wife of a tobacco planter of the James River, with a lighted pipe always ready beside her as she knitted and talked of people and events in the Old Dominion. She hated Washington, whom she had known for his disloyalty and animosity towards all who opposed the revolution, and "these were the best people in Virginia," she used to say. Her dislike was accentuated by the fact that Washington's family and hers had originally sprung from neighboring districts in Yorkshire and Durham.

Two young friends of my own age, about 21, agreed to join me and to start for Canada on a day fixed, but as it happened, one of them, John Sinclair, fell sick of a fever, and the other, Fred Winter, was not able for family reasons to leave on the day appointed. I record the names of these two loyal young Englishmen. They died over forty years ago.

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So bidding adieu to my family and friends, I started alone by way of the Ohio river and canal to Cleveland, thence by Lake Erie to Niagara Falls. I was full a week on the journey.

Some odd instances of squabbles between the mule men and boatmen and the bad diet for all, reminded me of Horace's memorable trip from Rome to Brundisium, on a boat drawn by mules along the fetid canal of the Pomptinian marshes. A long western rifle and a trunk filled with classical books and a wardrobe composed my baggage. It was with a loyal heart and glad that I set foot in dear old Upper Canada, being the last, almost, I fancy, of the U. E. Loyalists who came in.

At first sight of the Canadian shore I saw the Union Jack flying, and the pickets of the red coated militia along the river bank on the watch for marauders from the other side. I recognized my own country's symbol, and hailed it as the true flag of Freedom, Justice and Christian Civilization.

It was with a glad heart that I set foot in Upper Canada. I landed at Chippawa, the first thing that met my eyes was the ruins of the large Episcopal Church that had recently been burnt down by midnight incendiaries in the lawless war they made upon Canada.

I stayed at Slater's Hotel. Two ladies in deepest mourning sat opposite me at the supper table. They were the widow and daughter of Captain Usher, who had lately been murdered, shot through the window of his house near Chippawa by "sympathizers" from the opposite shore.

I saw Navy Island—the theatre of Mackenzie's grotesque republic of six hundred acres in extent, and of three weeks' duration. The Island was thickly wooded and its defences of brushwood still remained, a monument of its silly ruler and of the mad project he had undertaken to carry out.

Next day after viewing the Falls, which presented a wild primitive appearance at that time, I went on to Queenston. Passing through the village of Stamford, I saw the blackened ruins of Danby House, the late residence of Dr. Mewburn, which had been burned also by midnight incendiaries.

I stopped to view the splendid column erected on Queenston Heights by the people of Upper Canada, in memory of General Brock and his Aide de Camp, Col. McDonell, who fell on the field of battle and were buried there. Their names are forever enshrined in the hearts of Canadians. That monument was blown up and destroyed a few months after my visit by another incendiary and sympathizers with the rebel cause. Scenes like these were enacted along the Frontier of Canada from Windsor to the Eastern townships.

I stopped a day at the town of Niagara, quite unconscious of the fact that my future wife was living near the town, and not in the least did I think that here was to be my home for the rest of my life.

Niagara was a busy flourishing place in those days. It was the capital of the whole Niagara District and the emporium of trade for all the Province west of Hamilton, and the head quarters of the regular troops of whom a regiment was stationed there and a large force of incorporated Militia at that time.

I went on the steamer Transit across Lake Ontario to Toronto. I noticed that it and all other Canadian steamers were armed. Racks of pikes and muskets were standing on the deck, ready to repel attacks from the "sympathizers" on the American side.

I stayed for a few days in Toronto. The 93rd Regt. of Highlanders were in garrison there. I went out to Gallows Hill, the scene of McKenzie's rout and flight, and saw the spot where the loyal Col. Moodie was shot from Montgomery's Tavern by a rebel bullet, as he was riding past the house on his way to Toronto. This was the first blood shed in the short futile rebellion of Wm. Lyon McKenzie and which drew upon it the swift destruction that followed.

In the latter part of July I resolved to go down to Quebec. I went on a steamer down the lake and river to Montreal, passing through the Thousand Islands which were at that time quite uninhabited and their wild beauty untouched by the hand of man. An armed vessel lay in one of the bays commanded by Capt. Drew, the same who had taken and destroyed the Steamer Caroline used by McKenzie at Navy Island. The "sympathizers" had recently taken and burnt the large Canadian steamer Sir Robert Peel at the Thousand Islands, and Capt. Drew was sent there to prevent further similar outrages by the gang under the notorious Bill Johnson.

I looked with interest at the windmill near Prescott and the blackened ruins of the houses where Van Schoultz and his army of invaders had a few months before been defeated, and taken prisoners, some of whom, with their chief, were afterwards executed at Kingston as pirates.

I stayed at Montreal for a short time, where I formed acquaintance with an English gentleman, intelligent and sympathetic with my ideas. He agreed to accompany me to Quebec. About the last of July we boarded the new steamer Lady Colborne. It was her first voyage. Sir John Colborne, the Governor, and his staff, were on board. I looked admiringly at the brave old warrior, who, at the head of his regiment outflanked the Imperial Guard of Napoleon in their last grand charge upon the British line at Waterloo, and put them to flight, helping to decide that great battle.

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We had a rather long passage down the St. Lawrence by the steamer running on to a raft in the dark night. Not much damage was done, but much blue swearing and delay occurred before the Lady Colborne got again under way. We arrived at Quebec very late; after eleven o'clock at night. The steamer had not been expected at that hour. The telegraph did not exist in those days to send word of her coming. The night was very dark, no lights were on the streets, and no hacks or caleches were in waiting to forward travellers to their destination.

My friend and I had been advised in Montreal to go to Page's Hotel on the Esplanade. We did not know the way to Page's, but got a vague direction on the wharf, and started to find it as best we could. We trudged up Mountain Hill and came to Prescott Gate, where a guard of soldiers was stationed. They allowed us to pass without difficulty, but we were soon hopelessly lost in the dark streets beyond. We met a young man, a real gentleman, such as we found many in Quebec at that time. We told him our dilemma, and asked the way to Page's, and he courteously offered to pilot our way thither. He led us to the door of the hotel, and bidding us a kindly good night, left us. I never met him again, but I have retained a warm corner in my heart for that polite young gentleman ever since.

We entered the hotel and asked for lodgings and supper, but to our great disappointment were told that the house was full, and they could not take us in. They directed us, however, to go to the Albion Hotel on Palace Street, where we might find accomodation.

In not the best of humors we again traversed the dark streets, but found our way at last to the Albion* Hotel, about midnight. We were well received there, however. They prepared for us a good supper and we went comfortably to bed to sleep the sleep of care-free young fellows, tired, but not hungry.

Next morning we woke at the reveille of gun fire and of drums and bugles from the Citadel and Jesuits' Barracks, and got up to admire and sniff the bright sky and balmy breeze of a Quebec summer morning. We enjoyed the good breakfast they gave us at the Albion, after we had run down to Hope Gate and the Ramparts to see the glorious spectacle of the river and the distant mountain scenery of the incomparable city of Quebec.

In the forenoon we were called upon by a couple of gentlemen of prominence in the city, who had heard of our being at the Al-

*The old Albion Hotel, for years the leading hostelry of Quebec, under the management of Mr. Lazare Trudelle, became the Victoria, and was destroyed by fire December 14, 1902.

bion. It seems to have been a fine old custom for gentlemen of Quebec, out of a pure spirit of courtesy, to call on strangers at an hotel and show them such civilities as were in their power. The two gentlemen who called on us were the Hon. John Neilson* and Mr. Richardson, of St. Roch's. We were most agreeably received by them. I have never forgotten their pleasant manner and conversation. They were both elderly men in comparison with us, but that seemed to make no difference. They talked to us with the experience of age and the kindness of true gentlemen. The Hon. Mr. Neilson in the afternoon conducted us on a tour round the walls of the city, pointing out the places of historical interest, and explaining the great events that had been connected with them. One remark of his sticks in my memory, he said: "Quebec is impregnable. No hostile army could lie before it in winter, and no power on earth could keep the British fleet out of the St. Lawrence in summer." We had a delightful day of it, our first one in Quebec.

Next day my friend and I visited the Plains of Abraham, where we gazed with sympathy at the rude stone obelisk graven with the ever momentous words: "Here died Wolfe, Victorious." We drank of the spring of water which had cooled his dying lips. We drank it like sacramental wine to his glorious and immortal memory. We visited the Cathedrals, English and French, and on Buade Street gazed up wonderingly at the tablet of the Chien d'Or on the facade of the old Philibert House. I asked, but found no one able to tell me its origin or meaning. The clever historian of Quebec, Sir James LeMoine, had not yet written the "Maple Leaves," nor opened those mines of golden romance, poetry and history for the use of future writers and the delectation of generations of readers in times to come. I did not think that day that I should ever help to solve the mystery of "The Golden Dog."

We visited the old market** opposite the French Cathedral and

* Hon. John Neilson, M. P. for the County of Quebec 1818—1834, born at Donald, Scotland 17th July, 1776, died at Dornald, Cape Rouge, 1st February, 1849. As editor of the Quebec Gazette for years he was styled the Nestor of the Canadian Press, Delegated by Parliament, on three occasions the bearer of Canadian grievances to the King and Imperial Parliament, he closed his long and honored career amidst general regret, and was interred in the burying ground which was given by himself to the Presbyterian Church, at Valcartier, a settlement sixteen miles from Quebec, in the prosperity and progress of which he had always taken a deep interest. John Richardson, a leading merchant of Quebec, owned mills in the suburb of St. Roch. Richardson Street was called after him. J. M. L.

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admired the busy scene. The habitant men and women, the former dressed in *etoffe du pays*, with blue or red toques on their heads, and colored sashes around their waists. The women in gay calicoes and wide straw hats, handsome, rosy and loquacious, presiding over the sale of their butter and eggs, fruit and vegetables. The boys of the Seminary dressed in blue coats edged with white cord, and wearing green sashes; soldiers in red coats mingled with priests in broad hats, black soutanes or gowns; nuns with their strange headgear, and the good wives of Quebec, busy doing their marketing. It was a gay and animated scene, which continued, I am told, until modern civic Vandals tore down the venerable Jesuits College and removed the market to another place.

We stood on the site of the old castle of St. Louis, and surveyed the miles of shipping that lined the foreshore of Quebec, the great rafts floating down the stream to load these ships with timber for England. Champlain street echoed with the cheery cries of the sailors, and the *yo heave ho!* of the raftsmen and longshoremen hoisting into the holds the treasures of pine and oak from the forests of Canada, which, with other Canadian products, enjoyed a tariff preference in England at that time, and which, we hope, will ere long be restored.

We paid a reverent visit to the monument erected on the terrace overlooking the river to the memory of Wolfe and Montcalm, and carefully and lovingly copied the noble inscription engraven upon it. We were refused entrance into the Citadel, not having an order or permit from the commandant. Particular vigilance was exercised there on account of the recent escape of General Thellar and Col. Dodge, American "sympathizers," who had been sent down from Upper Canada.

We looked with interest at a wooden statue of Wolfe in full uniform, painted in proper colors. It stood, I think, on the corner of Palace and John street. Where is it now? In short we saw as much of Quebec in two days as I think any two strangers ever did.

I was in love with the old capital, and I really think, being wholly heart free, that if a pair of bright eyes had happened to shine on me as those of Polly Simpson did on Capt. Nelson, of H.M. ship *Albermarle* when he visited Quebec in 1782 before his days of fame and glory, I might easily have been persuaded to stay there for ever.

But such was not my luck. We left next day and returned to Montreal, full of pleasant recollections of our two days' visit to Quebec.

I lounged about Montreal for about six weeks. The city was hot

with excitement over the trial of Captain Jalbert for the murder of Lieut. Weir of the 32nd, who had been cruelly killed by the rebels while a prisoner in their hands. I was present throughout the trial. Public feeling was at fever heat, and the result of the trial was waited for with the utmost eagerness by all parties. The jury, half French and half English, would not agree on a verdict. At 12 o'clock at night on the last day of the Assizes they filed into the court room, and the foreman announced that they could not agree; no verdict was possible in the case. The French part of the spectators loudly cheered and clapped their hands. The English immediately attacked them. An inkstand struck the foreman, a rebel sympathizer, on the head, and felled him to the floor. Then broke out such a row as I never saw before or since. The Judges precipitately fled from the Bench, the court room was emptied in ten minutes, and the angry English who had won in the struggle, placed the English jurymen in chairs, and carried them shoulder high through the city the rest of the night amid torches and cheering, until morning. May such scenes be never again witnessed.

I saw a good deal of Montreal, but could not let it win my love like Quebec. The spirit of the rebellion had struck deeper into the dual people of Montreal, and society was more decidedly split. I could hardly realize it. I heard much that offended me.

The 15th Regiment of foot was quartered at Montreal, and commanded by Lord Wellesly—a son of the Duke of Wellington. I stood one day among a crowd of spectators looking at a parade of the regiment on the Champ de Mars. I stood close to a couple of Frenchmen—not Canadians. One of them pointing at the Colonel, said to the other: "*C'est la le fils du bourreau!*" I caught his words and felt angry at the insult to the great Duke, who was my beau ideal of a modern soldier. I said to the man: "*Monsieur, vous n'osez pas dire cela en Anglais.*" He gave me a savage look, but made no reply, and moved off leaving me to digest what I had heard.

I had a pleasant time in Montreal, but Upper Canada pulled hard for my return thither, although I would have liked to return to Quebec about as well. Both were sweethearts and I found it hard to decide between them, as old John Bunyan says,

"So was I in a strait and could not see,
What was the best thing to be done by me."

To end my indecision I said: I will do as chance or Providence decides. I tossed up a coin, with heads I go to Upper Canada, with tails I return to Quebec,—and heads won. I was perfectly satisfied, and bidding my friends in Montreal good-bye, I returned to Upper Canada and cast anchor in Old Niagara, where I have lived content-

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edly and in sufficiency, and I trust in usefulness, until now, with good old age upon me, amid old scenes, old books, old friends, and looking not without hope more to the future than to the past and waiting like Simeon of old, for "the consolation of Israel," which means in its political sense the federation of the British Empire, the mightiest instrument for good, after God's word and ordinance that has ever been given to mankind.

Niagara, January 12th, 1903.

WM. KIRBY.

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