

LAWRENCE BURPEE

BY CANADIAN
STREAMS

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By Canadian Streams

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THE RIVERS OF CANADA

Who that has travelled upon their far-spreading waters has not felt the compelling charm of the rivers of Canada? The matchless variety of their scenery, from the gentle grace of the Sissibou to the tempestuous grandeur of the Fraser; the romance that clings to their shores-legends and tales of Micmac and Iroquois, Cree, Blackfoot, and Chilcotin; stories of peaceful Acadian villages beside the Gaspereau, and fortified towns along the St. Lawrence; of warlike expeditions and missionary enterprises up the Richelieu and the Saguenay; of heroic exploits at the Long Sault and at Verchères; of memorable explorations in the north and the far west? How many of us realise the illimitable possibilities of these arteries of a nation, their vital importance as avenues of commerce and communication, the potential energy stored in their rushing waters? Do we even appreciate their actual extent, or thoroughly grasp the fact that this network of waterways covers half a continent, and reaches every corner of this vast Dominion?

Two hundred years ago little was known of these rivers outside the valley of the St. Lawrence. One hundred years later scores

of new waterways had been explored from source to outlet, some of them ranking among the great rivers of the earth. The Western Sea, that had lured the restless sons of New France toward the setting sun, that had furnished a dominating impulse to her explorers, from Jacques Cartier to La Vérendrye, was at last reached by Canadians of another race-and the road that they travelled was the water-road that connects three oceans. In their frail canoes these tireless pathfinders journeyed up the mighty St. Lawrence and its great tributary the Ottawa, through Lake Nipissing, and down the French river to Georgian Bay; they skirted the shores of the inland seas to the head of Lake Superior, and by way of numberless portages crossed the almost indistinguishable height of land to Rainy Lake and the beautiful Lake of the Woods. They descended the wild Winnipeg to Lake Winnipeg, paddled up the Saskatchewan to Cumberland House, turned north by way of Frog Portage to the Churchill, and ascended that waterway to its source, where they climbed over Meythe Portage-famous in the annals of exploration and the fur trade-to the Clearwater, a branch of the Athabaska, and so came to Fort Chipewyan, on Lake Athabaska. Descending Slave River for a few miles, they came to the mouth of Peace River, and after many days' weary paddling were in sight of the Rocky Mountains. Still ascending the same river, they traversed the mountains, and by other streams were borne down the western slope to the shores of the remote Pacific.

The world offers no parallel to this extraordinary water-road

from the Atlantic to the Pacific; nor is the tale all told. From that great central reservoir, that master-key to the whole system of water communications, the traveller might turn his canoe in any direction, and traverse the length and breadth of the continent to its most remote boundaries: east to the Atlantic, west to the Pacific, north to the Arctic or to Hudson Bay, and south to the Gulf of Mexico.

The story of Canadian rivers would fill several volumes if one attempted to do justice to such a broad and varied theme. One may only hope, in the few pages that follow, to give glimpses of the story; to suggest, however inadequately, the dramatic and romantic possibilities of the subject; to recall a few of the memories that cling to the rivers of Canada.

I

THE GREAT RIVER OF CANADA

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 over
sea.

McGEE.

If we abandon ourselves to pure conjecture, we may carry the history of the St. Lawrence back to the beginning of the sixteenth century, when daring Portuguese navigators sailed into these northern latitudes; or to the latter half of the fifteenth century, when the Basque fishermen are said to have brought their adventurous little craft into the Gulf of St. Lawrence; or, if you please, we may push the curtain back to the tenth century and add another variant to the many theories as to the course of the Northmen from Labrador to Nova Scotia. But while this would make a romantic story, it is not history. The Vikings of Northern Europe, and the Portuguese and Basques of Southern Europe,

may have sailed the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and *maybe* even have entered the estuary of the great river, but there is no evidence that they did, and we must surrender these picturesque myths if we are to build our story upon a tangible foundation.

With the advent of Jacques Cartier, the bluff and fearless mariner of St. Malo, we are upon the solid ground of history. There is nothing vague or uncertain about either the personality or achievements of this Breton captain. He tells his own story, in simple and convincing language. It does not require any peculiar gift of imagination to picture the scene that marks the beginnings of the history of the St. Lawrence. It was upon an autumn day, some three hundred and seventy-four years since. Jacques Cartier, with his little fleet, had searched up and down the coasts of the gulf for the elusive and much-desired passage to the South Seas, but the passage was not there. His Indian guides, Taïnoagny and Domagaya, had told him something of the mighty stream—the Great River of Canada—upon whose waters his ships were even now sailing. How almost incredible it must have seemed to him that this vast channel, twenty-five miles across from shore to shore, could be a river, and nothing more! What thoughts must have surged through his brain that here at last was the long-sought passage, the road to golden Cathay! Even when, as he sailed onward, it became certain that this was indeed a river, although a gigantic one, Jacques Cartier still had reason enough to follow its beckoning finger. The Indians said that to explore its upper waters he must take to his boats; but they told

him of three several native kingdoms that lay along its banks, and they assured him that its source was so remote that no man had ever journeyed so far. Moreover, it came from the south-west, and there lay, and at no impossible distance, as report had it, the Vermilion Sea. He might well hope to reach that sea by way of the River of Canada. In any event, he determined to try.

A week later the ships were anchored off an island, which Cartier named the Isle of Bacchus, because of the abundance of grapes found upon its shores. Before him rose the forest-clad heights of Cape Diamond, destined to become the key to a Colonial empire, the battling-ground of three great nations, the site of the most picturesque and most romantic city of America. Even at this time the place was of some importance, for here stood the native town of Stadacona, the seat of Donnacona, "Lord of Canada."

While the ships rode at anchor, Donnacona came down the river with twelve canoes and a number of his people. His welcoming harangue astonished Cartier, as much by its inordinate length as by the extraordinary animation with which it was delivered. The explorer wasted no time, however, in ceremonies. The season was drawing on, and much remained to be accomplished. Finding safe quarters for two of his vessels in the St. Charles River he continued his voyage in the third, in spite of the opposition of Donnacona and his people, who with true native jealousy would have prevented his further progress. The ship had to be left behind at the mouth of the Richelieu, but with

two boats, manned by some of his sailors, Cartier pushed on to the third native kingdom, Hochelaga, which he reached about the beginning of October. His reception here was embarrassing in its enthusiasm, for the people of Hochelaga testified their faith in the godlike character of their visitor by bringing the sick and the maimed to him to be healed by his touch.

Climbing the mountain behind the Indian town-which still bears the name he then gave it of Mont Royal-Cartier eagerly scanned the country to the westward. He could trace the St. Lawrence on one side, and on the other saw for the first time its great tributary the Ottawa. The way was still open, but rapids barred the further progress of his boats. It was too late to do anything more this season, and, taking leave of the friendly people of Hochelaga, he returned down the river to Stadacona, where in his absence his men had built a substantial fort for the winter. With all their preparations, however, a wretched winter was passed. The Indians, at first friendly, became distrustful under the treacherous influence of Domagaya and Taignoagny, and kept Cartier and his men constantly on guard against a possible attack. Added to this, the little garrison had to endure the horrors of scurvy. When in the following May Cartier made ready to sail back to France, he found it necessary to abandon one of his ships and distribute the men between the other two vessels. As some satisfaction for the annoyance he had suffered at the hands of the Indians, Cartier succeeded in carrying away to France not only the troublesome Taignoagny and several of

his companions, but also the chief, Donnacona.

Cartier sailed for Canada once more in 1541, but only fragmentary accounts are available of this voyage. The honest captain of St. Malo never succeeded in finding the Vermilion Sea, but he had accomplished what was of more importance to future generations-the discovery and exploration of the noblest of Canadian rivers. No one who came after him could add anything material to this momentous achievement.

For more than half a century after Cartier's final return to France, the St. Lawrence was practically abandoned to its native tribes. In 1608, however, another famous son of Old France sailed up the St. Lawrence and landed with his men at the foot of the same towering rock upon which the Indian town of Stadacona had formerly stood. Nothing now remained of Donnacona's capital, or of the tribe that once occupied the district. The Iroquois, who in Cartier's day dwelt along the borders of the St. Lawrence from Stadacona to Hochelaga, had for some unaccountable reason abandoned this part of the country, and were now settled between Lake Champlain and Lake Ontario. Champlain and those who came after him were to find a very different welcome from the descendants of the Indians who had welcomed Jacques Cartier to Stadacona and Hochelaga.

Somewhere near the market-place of the Lower Town, Champlain's men fell to work to lay the foundations of Quebec. One may get some idea of the appearance of the group of

buildings, Champlain's *Abitation*, from his own rough sketch in the *Voyages*. "My first care," he says, "was to build a house within which to store our provisions. This was promptly and competently done through the activity of my men, and under my own supervision. Near by is the St. Croix River, where of yore Cartier spent a winter. While carpenters toiled and other mechanics were at work on the house, the others were busy making a clearance about our future abode; for as the land seemed fertile, I was anxious to plant a garden and determine whether wheat and other cereals could not be grown to advantage."

All Champlain's men were not, however, so innocently engaged. There was a traitor in the camp. The story is told by Champlain himself, and by the historian Lescarbot. It has been re-told, in his characteristically simple and graphic manner, by Francis Parkman.

"Champlain was one morning directing his labourers when Têtu, his pilot, approached him with an anxious countenance, and muttered a request to speak with him in private. Champlain assenting, they withdrew to the neighbouring woods, when the pilot disburdened himself of his secret. One Antoine Natel, a locksmith, smitten by conscience or fear, had revealed to him a conspiracy to murder his commander and deliver Quebec into the hands of the Basques and Spaniards then at Tadoussac. Another locksmith, named Duval, was author of the plot, and, with the aid of three accomplices, had befooled or frightened nearly all the

company into taking part in it. Each was assured that he should make his fortune, and all were mutually pledged to poniard the first betrayer of the secret. The critical point of their enterprise was the killing of Champlain. Some were for strangling him, some for raising a false alarm in the night and shooting him as he came out from his quarters.

"Having heard the pilot's story, Champlain, remaining in the woods, desired his informant to find Antoine Natel, and bring him to the spot. Natel soon appeared, trembling with excitement and fear, and a close examination left no doubt of the truth of his statement. A small vessel, built by Pont-Gravé at Tadoussac, had lately arrived, and orders were now given that it should anchor close at hand. On board was a young man in whom confidence could be placed. Champlain sent him two bottles of wine, with a direction to tell the four ringleaders that they had been given him by his Basque friends at Tadoussac, and to invite them to share the good cheer. They came aboard in the evening, and were seized and secured. 'Voilà donc mes galants bien estonnez,' writes Champlain.

"It was ten o'clock, and most of the men on shore were asleep. They were wakened suddenly, and told of the discovery of the plot and the arrest of the ringleaders. Pardon was then promised them, and they were dismissed again to their beds, greatly relieved, for they had lived in trepidation, each fearing the other. Duval's body, swinging from a gibbet, gave wholesome warning to those he had seduced; and his head was displayed on

a pike, from the highest roof of the buildings, food for birds, and a lesson to sedition. His three accomplices were carried by Pont-Gravé to France, where they made their atonement in the galleys."

Of Champlain's later history, his expedition against the Iroquois, by way of the Richelieu River and the lake to which he gave his name, and his exploration of the Ottawa, something will be said in later chapters.

The next great event in the history of New France, after the founding of Quebec by Champlain, was the coming of the Jesuit missionaries; but though their headquarters were at Quebec, the field of their heroic labours was for the most part in what now constitute the Province of Ontario and the State of New York. Their story does not therefore touch directly upon the St. Lawrence, except in so far as that river was their road to and from the Iroquois towns and the country of the Hurons. Indeed, by the middle of the seventeenth century, the St. Lawrence had become the main thoroughfare of New France. A fort had been built at the mouth of the Richelieu, a small trading settlement existed at Three Rivers, and Maisonneuve had laid the foundations of Montreal. Between Quebec and these new centres of population there was more or less intercourse, and the river bore up and down the vessels of fur-trader and merchant, priest and soldier. The St. Lawrence was the highway of commerce, the path of the missionary, the road of war, and the one and only means of communication for the scattered colonists. Up stream came

warlike expeditions against the troublesome Iroquois; and down stream came the Iroquois themselves, with increasing insolence, until they finally carried their raids down to the very walls of Quebec. The St. Lawrence was not safe travelling in those days, for white men or red.

During one of these forays, the Iroquois had captured two settlers, one Godefroy and François Marguerie, an interpreter, both of Three Rivers. When some months later the war party returned to attack Three Rivers, they brought the Frenchmen with them, and sent Marguerie to the commander of the fort with disgraceful terms. Marguerie urged his people to reject the offer, and then, keeping his pledged word even to savages, returned to face almost certain torture. Fortunately, reinforcements arrived from Quebec in the nick of time, and the Iroquois, finding themselves at a disadvantage, consented to the ransom of their prisoners.

In this same year, 1641, a little fleet which had set forth from Rochelle some weeks before dropped anchor at Quebec, and from the ships landed Paul de Chomedey, Sieur de Maisonneuve, with a party of enthusiasts destined to found a religious settlement on the island of Montreal. They were coldly received by the Governor and people of Quebec, who were too weak themselves to care to see the tide of population diverted to a new settlement far up the river. Maisonneuve, however, turned a deaf ear to all their arguments. "I have not come here," he said, "to deliberate, but to act. It is my duty and my honour to

found a colony at Montreal; and I would go, if every tree were an Iroquois!"

In May of the following year the expedition set forth for Montreal. With Maisonneuve went two women, whose names were to be closely associated with the early history of Montreal—Jeanne Mance and Madame de la Peltrie. The Governor, Montmagny, making a virtue of necessity, also accompanied the expedition. A more willing companion was Father Vimont, Superior of the missions.

It was the seventeenth of the month when the odd little flotilla—a pinnace, a flat-bottomed craft driven by sails, and a couple of row-boats—approached their destination. The following day they landed at what was afterwards known as Point Callière. The scene is best described in the words of Parkman:

"Maisonneuve sprang ashore, and fell on his knees. His followers imitated his example; and all joined their voices in enthusiastic songs of thanksgiving. Tents, baggage, arms, and stores were landed. An altar was raised on a pleasant spot near at hand; and Mademoiselle Mance, with Madame de la Peltrie, aided by her servant, Charlotte Barré, decorated it with a taste which was the admiration of the beholders. Now all the company gathered before the shrine. Here stood Vimont, in the rich vestments of his office. Here were the two ladies with their servant; Montmagny, no very willing spectator; and Maisonneuve, a warlike figure, erect and tall, his men clustering around him—soldiers, sailors, artisans, and labourers—all alike

soldiers at need. They kneeled in reverent silence as the Host was raised aloft; and when the rite was over, the priest turned and addressed them: 'You are a grain of mustard-seed, that shall rise and grow till its branches overshadow the earth. You are few, but your work is the work of God. His smile is on you, and your children shall fill the land.'

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