

# EMILY POYNTON WEAVER

OLD QUEBEC, THE CITY  
OF CHAMPLAIN

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**Old Quebec, the city of Champlain**

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## **Old Quebec, the city of Champlain**

### **FOREWORD**

THIS little book aspires, neither to the utility of a guide-book, nor to the dignity of a history. It is designed rather as a reminder of the great events which have given to the old city of Quebec a world-wide fame; and with this object in view, many of the illustrations have been copied from old prints and drawings. With the exception of a photograph of his painting of Wolfe, kindly lent by J. W. L. Forster, Esq., and the two photographs on page 57, taken by James Ritchie, Esq., of Quebec, the remainder of the illustrations are largely the result of a pleasant summer in that quaintest part of the Dominion—once the heart of “New France”—where picturesque old-world customs still linger amongst the modern fashions of this practical century.

## I. The Founder of Quebec

THE figure of the founder of Quebec rises in history, strong and effective, above an ever-changing environment of turmoil and unrest and strife, as to-day his great statue stands in motionless dignity above the shifting crowds of pleasure-seekers and tourists who flit about “the Terrace” at Quebec.

Take him when you will; tossing in a cockleshell on the mountainous rollers of the Atlantic; testing the soil of some newly discovered region with his grain and garden-seeds; taking careful inventory of the products of woods and earth and waters; training his refractory red allies to some method in their military madness; fighting the loathsome death-dealing scurvy; surrounded by disheartened or treacherous followers; even cheated and befooled by a frivolous notoriety-hunter—Samuel de Champlain shows himself ever calm, cheerful, heroic—a man of rare sincerity and singleness of purpose.

Not much is known of the ancestry of this truly noble Frenchman, beyond the names of his father and mother—Antoine Champlain and Marguerite Le Roy. Yet we can guess that from his paternal ancestry at least he inherited a good portion of courage and simplicity, for Antoine and his brother, the more notable “Provençal Captain,” belonged to the race of sea-faring men, who always and everywhere seem to be plain, bold, simple folk. The circumstances of his early life, moreover, tended to form the character of the future founder of New France on firm, strong lines.

Samuel de Champlain was born in 1570, or possibly a year or two earlier, at Brouage, then a busy little seaport on the Bay of Biscay—now a mouldering hamlet, nearly two miles inland, for the ocean has retreated, and the business of the place has ebbed away with the receding tides. A monument, neither very ancient nor very imposing, has been erected near the little church, to keep green in his birth-place the memory of the founder of Quebec; but, according to the account of a recent visitor, the tumble-down cottages, sleepy street, and crumbling old walls can give no idea of what Brouage was in its palmy days. “The best seaport in France,” wrote one enthusiast, about the time Champlain was born. “Here you hear every known language spoken!” said another, thirty years later; and the lad drank in from the talk of these sailors of many tongues and nations that love of “navigation,” which, he says, “has powerfully attracted me ever since my boyhood, and has led me on to expose myself almost all my life to the impetuous buffetings of the sea.”

In spite of this love of things nautical, in spite of the example of the sea-captains who frequented his home, Samuel de Champlain was to gain experience of the ways both of camps and courts before he took up his real life-work as explorer and colonist. He was born in a time of conflict. In his youth Spain and England were at death-grips for the dominion of the seas; and his own country was torn by religious wars. During his boyhood, indeed, his own little town was twice taken in the struggle between Huguenots and Catholics; and, when he reached manhood, Champlain (though a Catholic) enlisted under the banner of the (then) Protestant king, Henry of Navarre. It is probable that he fought in the battles of Arques and Ivry; it is certain, at any rate, that he served his king well, and won the favor of his superiors, perhaps even of the monarch himself.

After the young man had led a soldier’s life for some nine years, the war ended with the triumph of Henry, and Champlain turned once more to the sea. But he did not follow in his father’s footsteps and take command of a fishing-boat or a coasting vessel. The “Provençal Captain” had been engaged to act as pilot-general for the transports bearing home some Spanish troops from France, and his nephew went with him to Cadiz, thus, for the first time, visiting a foreign city. Things so fell out, however, that he saw many other strange places before returning to his native land. The “St. Julian,” on which he had embarked, being “a strong vessel and a good sailer,” of no less than five hundred tons’ burden, was chosen to make one of a flotilla destined for the West Indies, but the “Provençal

Captain” was engaged with other matters, and Samuel de Champlain was therefore invited to take command of the ship.

Thus it happened that in January, 1599, Champlain set forth into that wonderful New World, of which he had heard so much, upon which he was to set so deep a mark. On this first voyage, however, he did not reach the scene of his labors in the forest-covered north. He sailed amongst the West Indian Islands; he visited Mexico; he made friends with savage chiefs; he wrote vivid descriptions of people, places and customs; he drew pictures of beasts, birds and reptiles in a fashion which (witness his “two-legged chameleon”) must have been the wonder and despair of many a succeeding naturalist.

Returning home at length with this richly illustrated journal in his hand, Champlain went to court, became a pensioner of the king, and probably “a lion” in the brilliant society of the French capital. The life was not to his taste, but from the court a way opened for his return to his beloved wildernesses. An old general of his, De Chastes, dreaming of the founding of a New France in North America, turned to the enthusiastic explorer to translate dreams into facts; and early in 1603 Champlain was sent with Pont Gravé, a rugged old sea-captain of Jacques Cartier’s home-port, St. Malo, to take up again Cartier’s task and explore the St. Lawrence. The pair went as far as Hochelaga, or “Mont Royale,” and tried in vain to force a way up the rapids. Champlain then sailed for home full of enthusiasm for the planting of a colony on the great river. But—“l’homme propose et Dieu dispose.” Aymar de Chastes was dead, and though the enterprise soon found a new patron in the Sieur de Monts, that nobleman desired to make the experimental settlement, not on the “Great River of Hochelaga,” but on the Acadian coast.

Champlain and his comrades loyally did their utmost to make a success of each of the unfortunate Acadian settlements in turn, but the leaders’ lack of experience and the intrigues of their enemies in France brought the colony to ruin. In this hard school, however, Champlain was learning invaluable lessons in the art of colonization. At times, perhaps, he thought his added wisdom dearly bought by the miseries of desolate St. Croix, but surely his memory of Port Royal must have been shot through with many a bright thread; and often, in after years, his eyes must have danced with laughter when he recalled the oddities of the sagamore, Membertou, the gay whimsicalities of some of his associate gentlemen-pioneers, and the joyous feasts and good fellowship of his own famous “Ordre de Bon Temps.”

## II. The Founding of the City

NEARLY five years had passed since Champlain's former visit to the St. Lawrence, when, on the third day of July, 1608, he again landed beneath the Rock of Quebec. He was now in the prime of life: strong, resourceful, energetic; and this was the great moment in his history, to which all his previous experiences had been a lead up to, from which his future life would date itself.

He had come simply, unostentatiously (half-unconscious of the significance of what he was doing, yet full of a steadfast purpose which lent dignity to the trivial details and humble beginnings of that day) to lay the foundation of Quebec, of New France, of the Dominion of Canada! He was inspired by patriotism, loyalty, devotion to the Cross, and an eager thirst for knowledge; and in his heart there was no room for that cursed love of gain which has sullied the glory of so many daring explorers of this western continent.

This time Champlain had come to Quebec to stay, and though his first "habitation" has long vanished from sight, the city then begun has had the quality of permanence. The Rock seemed a fortress ready made; but Champlain set up his log dwellings and store-houses nearly on the spot which is now the Market-place of the Lower Town. The ground covered to-day with tortuous streets of quaint-roofed houses was then thick with "nut-trees," and the little company of thirty men (there were others left trading at Tadousac) had much ado to clear the soil. Some wearied of their toil, and planned to end it by the treacherous murder of their leader; but the plot was betrayed, and Champlain and his little colony were saved from the destruction threatening both alike.

That busy summer ended, Pont Gravé sailed away, leaving Champlain and twenty-eight men to make good during the winter their bold invasion of the wilderness. They stood on the defensive; but the neighboring Indians proved friendly, and no human enemy came near their "habitation." Yet the foundations of New France (as it seems of every colony) were laid in woe and anguish. The winter had hardly begun in earnest when the horrible scurvy appeared amongst them, and before spring twenty of the company lay cold and silent beneath the snow. Of the remaining eight, four had been at death's door, but Champlain himself was still full of health and life and courage.

Once, when on an excursion up the St. Charles, he had chanced upon a tumble-down stone chimney, a few rusted cannon-balls, and some other relics which convinced him that he stood upon the spot where Jacques Cartier had wintered seventy-three years before. A less resolute man might have found the discovery disheartening; but Champlain had no thought of retreat.

Often during that melancholy winter he questioned the Algonquins, who had camped beside the little fort, as to what lay in the unknown regions beyond; and, listening to their talk of rivers, lakes and boundless forests, he grew more and more eager to plunge into the wilderness. But always the Indians added tragic stories of a foe infesting the woodland paths and lying ambushed beside the streams; and so Champlain, moved partly perhaps by chivalrous pity for their terror, and trusting in the superior military skill and excellent weapons of his own people, promised to take the field during the coming spring against the ubiquitous and blood-thirsty Iroquois.

Some writers regard this promise as the grand mistake of Champlain's policy. Possibly, however, the struggle was inevitable. At any rate, the first anniversary of the founding of Quebec had hardly passed, when was inaugurated the fearful blood-feud between the French and the Iroquois that for the greater part of a century brought out the best and the worst of New France—courage, steadfastness, unselfish heroism on the one hand, and, on the other, dare-devil recklessness and pitiless brutality.

Blamable or unblamable, Champlain and two of his followers, clad in "helmet, breastplate, and greaves," and carrying ponderous arquebuses, joined a host of painted warriors, and caused for once a horrible panic in the ranks of the Iroquois. What brave could stand against an adversary who had the thunder and lightning at his command? But the Iroquois were no cowards. Their panic passed

with the novelty of the French mode of fighting; but their thirst for vengeance long outlived him who had awakened it, and again and again it threatened the very existence of New France.

Clearly, however, it was not the fault of Champlain that the colony remained so perilously feeble. He was as truly the servant as the governor of his settlement, and for nearly thirty years his voyages and journeys and battles, his struggles with mercenary traders and heedless officials, had little intermission. He was, moreover, a homeless man; for, though he married in 1610, his wife was a child of twelve, and he did not bring her out to his ruinous “habitation” for ten long years.

Immediately after his return with her, he began to build on the edge of the cliff, where now stands the Chateau Frontenac, a fort which, altered or rebuilt by his successors, was afterwards known as the Chateau St. Louis. Beneath the planks of Dufferin Terrace its cellars still remain. The main building was destroyed by fire in 1834; but a wing added by General Haldimand in 1784 was only demolished in 1891 to make way for the luxurious Chateau Frontenac hotel. This often shelters ten times the number of people which made up the population of New France when Champlain began the building of his “chateau.”

At that date six white children represented young Canada, and Madame de Champlain had scarcely any companions of her own sex save her three serving-women. She had no lack of occupation, however, for she devoted much of her time to teaching the Indians.

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