

Hochelaga : A New World

Hochelaga : or, England in the new world

Edited by Eliot Warburton

1846

THE VOYAGE.

CIVILIZATION in its progress has ever followed the direction of light ; it arose far Eastward ; gradually it shone over Greece, then Rome ; it culminates over Western Europe ; and, even now, its morning light is upon America, while the world it first enlightened is sinking into darkness.

There seems to have been always an instinct in the minds of imaginative men, that far away in the West there existed a great continent ; a New World, ready to receive the overflow of the burden of humanity that pressed upon the Old. “ Atlantis ” long ago expressed a consciousness of such a want, and a belief that it would be supplied. Strange to say, this prophetic feeling was responded to by the inhabitants of those unknown regions : among the wild and stern Mic-Macs of the North, and the refined and gentle Yncas of the South, a presentiment of their coming fate was felt. They believed that a powerful race of men were to come “ from the rising sun,” to conquer their nations and possess their lands.

The theories of old Greece and Roman Spain became legends ; legends became tradition ; tradition became faith, and Columbus assumed his mission in him the old “ Westering ” instinct amounted to an inspiration ; he burst his way through the Known to the Unknown ; he revealed to us a world rich in all that we required, a world abounding in capabilities, deficient only in mankind.

Then the necessity of the Old World found relief ; Europe rushed forth to colonize—each nation according to its character—leaving for ever the stamp of that character impressed upon its colony. Spaniards, led to the New World by the lust of gold, soon sacrificed *their* America to slavery. Englishmen led thither by the love of liberty, consecrated *their* new soil to Freedom. ENGLAND IN THE NEW WORLD was England still ; striving, earnest, honest, and successful. A mistake in policy changed Englishmen into Yankees, but British blood, and, for the most part, British principles, remained.

These we bequeathed to our revolted colony -. retiring Northward, we were content to rest our Western Empire on the banks of the St. Lawrence, in the modern Canada,—the ancient HOCHELAGA.

It is not only where our banners wave, where our laws protect, where our national faith assures, that we are to look for “ England in the New World.” In the minds of our brethren of the United States, in their institutions, in their actions, in their motives—there—everywhere that our language is spoken—we can trace our own.

And such is the object of this work : its Author speaks of Canada with almost affection—of the United States with cordiality—but his chief interest throughout, is the relation that these countries bear to his own ; the influence that the latter exercises upon them.

About the middle of July 1844, I found myself suddenly obliged to embark from Chatham, for Canada, on board an uncomfortable ship, a very unwilling passenger. In a middle-aged man, of quiet bachelor habits, such a voyage to a strange country, at a few hours' notice, was a most disagreeable necessity. I soon, however, made up my mind and my packages, and, before the afternoon was much advanced, started from London.

It was dark when I arrived at Chatham, and went on board ; there was a whistling wind and a drizzling rain ; the decks between the heaps of luggage and merchandize, were wet, dirty, and slippery ; and reflected dismally the light of the consumptive-looking lamps, carried about by the condemned spirits of this floating purgatory. There was evidently a great number of passengers on board, of all sorts and conditions of men and women. Perched on a pile of baggage, were a number of soldiers, going out with their wives, hard-favoured, and poorly and insufficiently clad, to join their regiments in Canada : despite, however, the coarse and travel-worn dress and rude appearance of the poor women, I saw in them during the voyage many traits of good and tender feeling ; the most anxious care of their little ones, whom they were rearing so fondly to their doom of poverty and toil ; their kindness to each other, and the sharing of their scanty covering and scantier meals : the wretched can feel for the wretched, the poor are rich in the heart to give.

My cabin had lately been repaired, and looked very miserable ; the seams of the deck were filled with new pitch, which stuck pertinaciously to my boots. The den had evidently just been washed, and was still damp enough to charm a hydropathist ; the port-hole window was open to air it. Threats, bribes, and entreaties, in course of time procured me the necessary portions of my luggage ; soon after, half undressed, and wholly wretched, I crept into my berth : here, being too wise to remain awake under such very unpleasant circumstances, I adopted the alternative in a very few minutes.

The crowing of an early-rising cock awoke me next morning. From that time there was no hope of sleep ; it seemed the signal to let Bedlam loose : every conceivable description of clatter followed ; scouring decks, lugging boxes, rattling chains, sailors swearing, and soldiers quarrelling.

It was scarcely dawn when I looked out of my little window ; through the grey twilight the shadowy forms of steeples and houses by degrees became distinct and solid. The sun, not to take us by surprise with his pleasant visit, reddened up the gilt weathercock of the church spire, then reflected himself back cheerfully from the windows, and, at length, with lavish hand, spread bright young morning over the country around. In a little time, a soft breeze earned away the early mist in the direction we had to travel.

The main cabin was in the same damp uncomfortable state as our sleeping apartments ; in the comers, boxes and baskets containing our sea stock were heaped up in such height and breadth as to make the strait between them and the table so narrow that there was barely room for me to squeeze my portly person through. An irregular sort of breakfast was on the table ; round it were seated the greater number of the cabin passengers ; all, evidently, between the mouthfuls of toast and butter, examining each other with great attention, and setting down in their minds the result of their scrutiny, in prejudices for and against their neighbours.

There was a tall, thin, good-looking clergyman, who, having been ordained in England, was going to enter on his duties in Canada ; and a very shrewd-faced Irish attorney, for Newfoundland, where we were to touch on the way : this part of the cargo was, however, neutralised by an honest, open-hearted merchant and his good-humoured wife, from the same country, and with the same destination. Two gentlemen for Quebec ; for Montreal, a Jew,

whose face was like the reflection of a handsome countenance in a convex mirror ; a thoughtful-looking, well-bred captain ; a rattling, mischievous youth, his lieutenant ; a quiet, handsome young ensign ; and a Scotch doctor, belonging to the detachment of soldiers ; these, with a middle aged widow and her only child, a sickly boy of ten or twelve years of age, both in deepest mourning, formed the remainder of the party. The story of this family was a sad one. The lady was a Canadian who had married a civil officer in her own country : after some years, he was unfortunately promoted to a valuable appointment in China ; set out immediately for the place of his new employment, and, on his arrival, wrote for his wife and child. They sailed, full of hope and happiness, thinking nothing of their voyage half round the world, for the sake of the fond and anxious one who awaited them at its end. Nearly six months passed before their arrival. The march of the deadly pestilence was not so slow : they found but a new-made grave where they had expected a happy home ; so the widow and orphan turned wearily to seek again the land of their birth, thousands of miles away.

This pale boy was all in all to her. Hers was a love of faith and hope ; she never doubted that in fulness of time he would grow to be great and good, and pay her back the debt of tenderness and care. She was the only person who did not see that the shadow of death was upon him.

I speedily became acquainted with every body on board. Perhaps it was owing to my sleek and comfortable appearance that they concluded I was the fittest person to undertake the caterer's department for the cabin ; it turned out that I had one qualification for the duty in which all the rest were deficient—that of being weak enough to undertake it. Every one knows the weight of obloquy that falls upon the man in office, when there is no fat on the sirloin, or the legs of the fowl have the flavour and consistency of guitar strings. It is impossible to divest people of the idea that, by some inexplicable ingenuity, and for some inscrutable object of his own, he has purposely caused these imperfections.

My prime minister was a black cook ; my kingdom, animal and vegetable ; my subjects three or four gaunt sheep in the launch, and, under the forecastle, a couple of pigs, whose appearance and habits of living justified our Israelitish friend's anxiety that there should be more solidity than usual in the side dishes when a chine of pork was at the head of the table.

On the poop were several rows of coops, a sort of charitable institution for superannuated geese and ducks ; and, in the list of sea stock furnished by the eminent outfitter at the west-end, was the item, six dozen chickens. These were represented by a grave assemblage of patriarchal cocks and venerable hens ; among the former I speedily recognized, by his voice, the bird whose morning note, like fire to a train, had set going the din so fatal to my slumbers. I promptly ordered his execution ; he, however, amply revenged himself on those who tried to eat him the next day.

While I was thus entering on my official duties, the crew were not neglectful of their part of the business. The sails were shaken out, the anchor weighed, and the voyage commenced by running foul of a merchant ship moored a little ahead of us. On this occasion I made a philological observation, which subsequent experience has only tended to strengthen—that the language used by sailors, under difficulties, is more remarkable for terseness and vigour than for elegance or propriety.

With a fair and gentle breeze we floated lazily down the river ; our principal objects of interest being the splendid ships of war, now lying dismasted and harmless, but ready, when the Lords of the Admiralty play their Frankenstein and breathe on them the breath of life, for any mission of destruction.

We pass Sheerness, roll in the Downs, enter the Channel, think and say every thing that people usually think and say on leaving England, and go to bed.

The description of one day in the voyage suits for all. At seven-o'clock breakfast opened the proceedings ; at eight, a very small trumpeter sounded for the soldiers' parade : a couple of hours' vigorous walking on the deck preceded luncheon ; then, as twelve approached, we all assembled on the poop, while the master took his observations ; then, great coats and cloaks turned the coops into sofas, and reading and sunshine kept us quiet till three, when dinner—the hour of my trial, and the delight of grumblers—interrupted our literary pursuits. We established a community of books ; and, before the voyage was half over, Robinson Crusoe and Paul and Virginia were as much thumbed as if they had been fashionable novels in a circulating library.

The next re-union was of a select few on the fore-castle, with cigars and pipes ; a chat with the sailors, and a sharp look out for porpoise, whale, or strange ship, or any other monster of the deep. In the latter character, our friend, the noisy lieutenant, used always to appear at this period of the day. He had a strong nautical inclination, and indulged it by arraying himself in a suit of sailor's garments, which would have been invaluable to Mr. T. p. Cooke : a red flannel shirt, trousers and jacket of blue pilot cloth, an oilskin hat, with a clay pipe stuck in the band : nor was a clasp knife tied round his waist with a lanyard, forgotten, to complete his costume. Some of the others played at shuffleboard, fenced, wrestled, or exercised themselves laboriously on gymnastic poles.

It is soon time for tea, the widow doing the honours ; after that, the hot water and lemons, with little bright glass bottles, and a snappish argument between the Irish attorney and the Montreal Jew ; a quiet talk with the clergyman and the captain, a rubber of whist, a chess-board, and words of courtesy and kindness to the widow.

Sometimes, when the evening was very fine, we went on deck, and listened to wonderful narratives of the soldiers and sailors, and quaint ditties with overgrown choruses. One of the topmen had a splendid voice ; he was the *beau ideal* of an English seaman—active, good-tempered, handsome, and full of fun—a favourite with all.

There was among the passengers a family of three brothers and a sister, from the north of Ireland, about to settle in Canada ; they were hardy, serious, respectable people, having some little capital in money and goods, and their own strong arms and honest hearts, to depend upon ; the class of people of all others the most useful in a colony. They, too, used to sing for us at times ; they knew but one kind of music, and that best suited to their powerful, but harsh and untrained voices. Many a cunning stage arrangement might have failed to give the deep effect which lay in their solemn, stern, Presbyterian hymns.

Later in the evening there came another pipe, seasoned with discussion on what passed for events in the day, a little moralizing, and always a rigid examination of the conduct of that constant offender, the weather ; and then we slept.

One night, when we were off the coast of Ireland, the wind freshened up, and the clouds thickened ominously. The next morning dawned upon a gale of wind ; the sea had risen a good deal, and the ship rolled sufficiently to account for a very small party at breakfast. The storm was against us, blowing with increasing violence that day and night, and the next day. Nearly all the passengers were sick, and the sailors were doing their work in a quiet, steady way, that shewed they were in earnest.

At about five in the afternoon, the clouds seemed to have been all blown up together into one dense mass of dark and threatening gloom, and, as if for miles round the wind had focussed to one spot, it burst upon the ship. The masts bent slowly down as she rose upon the wave, and the spray foamed up among the spars. They must shorten sail ; it seems madness to ascend the straining ropes, but no one hesitates ; there is a moment's lull in the trough of the sea : some of the sailors are up already ; our favourite, the topman, is first, busy with the reef of the maintopsail. The ship rises on the swell, and the storm roars again through the shrouds : the sheets snap like a thread ; light as a cloud the canvass flies to leeward ; a man is entangled in its ropes, borne away upon the wind ; the mist closes over him—he is seen no more.

The tempest soon afterwards subsided, without further mischief. When the weather cleared, we found ourselves close to the headland we had seen two days before ; we had been travelling backwards and forwards, ten miles an hour, ever since. At the climax of the gale the noise had been so great, that many of those in their berths below thought we were assuredly lost. This conviction had very different effects upon different individuals : some pulled the bed-clothes over their heads, and lay in shivering inactivity ; others were so dreadfully ill, that death itself scarcely appeared a change for the worse. Not so our nautically-inclined lieutenant ; he could no longer remain in doubt ; so, determined to know the worst, he emerged from the hatchway in full pirate costume, as he had lain down at the beginning of the storm. Sprawling on the deck, he looked out upon the sea : just at this moment a gigantic green wave, with a crest of foam, stood right over the ship ; with a shout of terror, and an expression of face in which fright had overcome starvation and sea-sickness, he rushed across the deck, grasping at the stanchion under the poop as the first support he could lay hold of, and twining his arms and legs round it with a force no persuasions could relax ; there he remained for two hours, a figure of fun never to be forgotten. The ship was soon put to rights, not having sustained any serious injury, and we went our way.

A whale was always an object of sufficient interest to collect us upon deck, and unmask a battery of telescopes. Our nearest view of one was under circumstances as advantageous to us as disagreeable to himself. The ship was going through the water about four knots an hour when the monster overtook us : as we were travelling in the same direction, there was ample opportunity for observing the state of his affairs. He was attacked by three threshers, (formidable-looking fellows, about eight feet long,) and had evidently much the worst of it, though he flourished his tail tremendously, flogging his track into a bloody foam. His enemies were most systematic in their attack ; each in his turn threw himself out of the water, and fell with full weight on the whale's head ; thus, while it was above the surface, keeping up a continual hammering thereon. It is said, but I am not pledged to the fact, that a sword-fish is always in league with these pursuers, poking the whale underneath with his sword, when sinking to avoid his allies ; so that the poor victim is much in the situation of a member of the Church of England of the present day—as he swims in the sea of controversy, a blow from the Evangelical pulpit strikes him down, and a thrust from the “ Tracts for the Times” drives him up again ; the only difference is, that amongst *his* assailants there is no bond of unity.

It is said that, in a chase of this kind, the quarry never escapes : the fish in question were far too busy to attend to us ; they soon left us behind, and may, for all I know, be worrying each other still with true polemic pertinacity.

That night was unusually mild and clear ; and the young clergyman and I remained on deck long after the others had gone below ; our talk was grave, but cheerful. There is some-

thing in the view of the material heavens at such a time, which always elevates the tone of feeling, and speaks to the heart of its highest hopes, sending you to rest with holy, happy thoughts : so it was with us. A few minutes before we parted, the bright full moon passed from behind a cloud, and straightway, from us to the far-off horizon, spread a track of pure and tremulous light over the calm sea. “ This is not for us alone,” said my companion ; “ every waking wanderer over the great deep sees this path of glory too. So for each earnest heart upraised to heaven, a light from God himself beams upon the narrow way across the waste of life.”

The wind seemed to blow for ever from the west : the only variety in our voyage was from one tack to the other. But we had a good ship, she was well handled, and her master never threw away a chance ; so, in spite of all difficulties, we found ourselves within a short distance of land twenty-four days after sailing. It is almost unnecessary to add that there was a fog, and that so thick that we could scarcely see the bowsprit. An observation had, however, been taken at midday, and, having great confidence in the knowledge of our exact position, we kept boldly on, till we distinctly heard breakers in front of us ; by the time sail was shortened, we could hear this sound on either side. We were evidently in an indentation of the coast, quite near enough to the rocks to be unpleasant. Guns were fired for a pilot, and to give notice of our approach, and a report from the shore returned a ready answer. At the same time the fog began to rise, first showing the long line of surf on three sides of us, then the abrupt and rugged cliffs. At length, the great curtain folded itself up for another occasion, and the scene upon the stage was, NEWFOUNDLAND.

The mind must be either above or below the usual motive influences of humanity, which does not feel a deep and stirring interest in the first view of the New World : though it be but a dim, faint shadow of what Plato’s informant, or Prince Madoc, or Columbus, experienced, when the sight of these vast lands, and simple, yet mysterious people, rewarded their almost superhuman venture.

“ The splendour and the havoc of the East” are said to fill the mind of the beholder with sad and solemn meditation on the glories and wonders of countries, whose degradation of to-day seems but the deeper from the relics of their former greatness : the cities and temples, of an extent and magnificence ever since unrivalled, crumbled into shapeless ruin, leaving scarce a trace of what they were ; the sunny hills and pleasant valleys, exuberant with luxurious plenty, withered into deserts ; the land where the wise men dwelt, and mighty captains governed, ruled over by craven, sensual slaves ; the birthplace of an Eternal Hope, now but the grave of a departed glory. Over this page in the great chronicle of the world, is written the memory of the Past.

Then comes our Europe, with its very large towns, excellent gas-lamps, highly-efficient police, comfortable churches, with good stoves and ventilation ; with its express trains, and well-regulated post-office, improved steamboats, electric telegraphs, and electric agriculture, liberal education, and respectable governments. In all these we feel, and hear, and see, the reality of the Present.

Now we turn to the West. Over its boundless tracts of rich and virgin soil is spreading a branch of the most vigorous among the European families, bearing with them every means and appliance which the accumulated ingenuity of ages can supply, and working them with quenchless energy. Steamers thrust themselves up unknown rivers ; and lo ! with the rapidity of a scenic change, the primeval forest yields to the bustling settlement.

In the tangled wilderness, where they can scarcely struggle through, the surveyors trace out the lines of cities, which, to-morrow, are to play the part of the Babylon of yesterday, and the London of to-day. They grow great, rich, and intelligent, not with the slow and steady step of older nations, but with a hurried stride ; sometimes, perhaps, wandering a little from the straight path, but, guided by their destiny, still hastening on.

Imagination runs mad in picturing what they have yet to be. In their unacted history we read, plain as the hand-writing at Belshazzar's feast, the promise of the Future.

II.

Newfoundland—The St. Lawrence.

So excellent was the land-fall we had made, that, when the fog cleared away, we found the bowsprit of the vessel pointing directly into the harbour of St. John's. The entrance is about two hundred and fifty yards wide, and very difficult of access in bad weather, or with unfavourable winds : it is walled in by rugged cliffs and barren-looking hills. The defences are respectable, but not formidable, works :—one of them faces you as you approach, with watchful cannon pointing up the harbour. There is no bar or shoal, but some dangerous rocks embarrass the entrance ; within, there is safe and commodious anchorage for any amount of shipping.

In trying to describe St. John's, there is some difficulty in applying to it an adjective sufficiently distinctive and appropriate. We find other cities coupled with epithets, which at once give their predominant characteristic :—London the richest, Paris the gayest, St. Petersburg the coldest. In one respect the chief town of Newfoundland has, I believe, no rival : we may, therefore, call it the ' fishiest' of modern capitals. Round a great part of the harbour are sheds, acres in extent, roofed with cod split in half, laid on like slates, drying in the sun, or rather the air, for there is not much of the former to depend upon. Those ships, bearing nearly every flag in the world, are laden with cod ; those stout weatherly boats crowding up to the wharves, have just now returned from fishing for cod ; those few scant fields of cultivation, with lean crops coaxed out of the barren soil, are manured with cod ; those trim, snug-looking wooden houses, their handsome furniture, the piano, and the musical skill of the young lady who plays it, the satin gown of the mother, the gold chain of the father, are all paid for in cod ; the breezes from the shore, soft and warm on this bright August day, are rich, not with the odours of a thousand flowers, but of a thousand cod. Earth, sea, and air, are alike pervaded with this wonderful fish. There is only one place which appears to be kept sacred from its intrusion, and strange to say, that is the dinner table ; an observation made on its absence from that apparently appropriate position, excited as much astonishment, as if I had made a remark to a Northumberland squire that he had not a head-dish of Newcastle coals.

The town is irregular and dirty, built chiefly of wood ; the dampness of the climate rendering stone unsuitable. The heavy rains plough the streets into water courses. Thousands of lean dogs stalk about, quarrelling with each other for the offal of fish, which lies plentifully scattered in all directions : this is their recreation ; their business is to draw go-carts. There are also great numbers of cats, which, on account of the hostile relations existing between them and their canine neighbours, generally reside on the tops of the houses. A large fish-oil factory in the centre of the town, fills it with most obnoxious odours.

There are many neat and comfortable houses in the vicinity, where the air, though a little foggy, is fresh and healthful. There are two Church of England churches, one Wesleyan, and

one Roman Catholic chapel. A large Roman Catholic cathedral is also being built. The Churches of England and of Rome have each Bishops of Newfoundland.

The population of the island is one hundred thousand ; one half are Roman Catholics, principally of Irish descent, or emigrants ; the remainder of English race, and various creeds.

The trade of St. John's is very considerable ; they export fish and oil, and receive in return nearly all the luxuries and necessaries of life ; the annual exports and imports average more than a million and a half pounds sterling each in value, and are rapidly increasing. They get direct from Portugal, in exchange for their dried fish, port wine ; with due deference to our English wine merchants, the best I have ever met.

The seal fisheries employ, in the North Seas, numbers of active and experienced sailors from this port ; their life is one of almost incredible hardship and danger, and subjects them to great alternations of abundance and distress.

Snow usually falls in the beginning of December, and continues till the end of April ; but there are frequent thaws in the mean time. Through the winter there is a constant succession of storms, the lakes and many of the bays and rivers are frozen over, and all internal communication is by sleighs.

The colony is under the authority of a governor, who is assisted by a Legislative and Executive council of nine members. There is also a House of Representatives, elected by almost universal suffrage, consisting of fifteen delegates, not always selected for very high qualities. Indeed, some people are illiberal enough to imagine that the affairs of the country would not materially suffer if honourable members for such important constituencies as those of Kiddy Viddy Cove or Starvation Creek, were to direct their attention to cod-fishing instead of legislation.

The most thriving settlements besides the capital, are Carbonear, Harbour Grace, and Petit Harbour, all towns on the sea coast.

If St. John's be the fishiest, it is also one of the friendliest places in the world ; no cold, formal, letter-of-introduction dinners, but hearty, cordial, and agreeable hospitality. The society is, of course, very limited in extent, consisting of the clergy, the civil and military officers, and the principal merchants. Some of the latter have attained to considerable affluence, and are men whose kindness, intelligence, and practical views, render them agreeable and instructive associates. Among the younger members of their families, accomplishments and the graces of life receive due attention not a few of them have had European education. The re-unions of St. John's possess so much charm, that many officers of the army and navy who have participated in them, have also carried away living vouchers for their attractions.

We could scarce have left Newfoundland without having seen a specimen of the codfishing. One of our acquaintances kindly offered to drive us for the purpose to Portugal Cove, a distance of ten miles. The captain, the ensign, and myself, with our friend driving, formed the party. The conveyance was a light, spider-like, double-seated carriage, drawn by a wiry, strong, brown horse ; he had a splendid shoulder and arm, a ewe neck, a cunning back look, like a hare, and an uneasy tail ; just the sort of animal which instantly suggests running reins and kicking straps. He started at a fair trotting pace ; but our driver, by twisting the reins round each hand, and by setting his feet against the dash-board, shewed that he expected work. All went on very smoothly, however, till we got within a couple of miles of our journey's end, when, unfortunately, the conversation turned upon American travellers.

“ This horse is one,” said our friend, “ he can do the mile in two minutes and fifty seconds.”

“ Indeed,” said I. Now, “ Indeed,” must have been pronounced in some very expressive manner, and conveyed the extraordinary delusion that I wished to see it done, for our friend instantly made some sort of freemason sign, and away went the diabolical brute, up and down hill, in a sort of shambling, shuffling pace, at a rate which nearly took the breath out of my body. As soon as I could speak, I begged to assure his owner that I had not the least doubt of his powers, and implored of him to pull up. By the time I was informed that it was quite impossible, the animal stopped of his own accord at the inn at Portugal Cove.

This establishment is a small wooden building, prettily situated on the banks of a turbulent little stream, which gets up a waterfall in view of the windows. It is a favourite spot for passing the first part of the honeymoon ; and is, perhaps, judiciously chosen, for there is nothing whatever of luxury, convenience, or amusement, to divert the thoughts of the happy couple from each other.

A straggling village of log houses lies along the shore, with a boat pier of the same material ; a fleet of fishing-boats lay moored to it. We embarked in one, a rough, clumsy concern ; and, with a wild unshaven fellow to guide us, put to sea. The bay is about the size of that of Tenby ; a large flat island, with steep sides, protects the opening, looking as if it had been snapped off the mainland, and floated out to where it now stands ; like all the rest of the sea-board, it is covered with scrubby, stunted forest. At the eastern end of the island is a very curious rock, standing about two hundred yards clear of it, and of about the same height, looking, in the distance, like one of the round towers of Ireland. Our boatman, speaking in a Cork brogue, slightly overlaid with a Yankee twang, said that, “ No one, barring the birds, had ever got to the top of it.” The Captain gravely observed that, “ unless the inducements to get there were very much increased, probably none ever would.”

We soon arrived at our fishery, and cast our lines of strong cord, with a heavy leaden sink, and three or four hooks baited with slices of fish. In a minute or two there was a chorus of “ I’ve got him ;” and, as we pulled, the prizes plunged, dived, and twisted, filling the dark green water with pale, distorted ghosts of sea monsters, which, as they neared the surface and became exhausted, condensed into the sober realities of resigned and unresisting codfish. Our myrmidon immediately put an end to their sufferings, by striking them on the head with a short bludgeon he called “ the priest.” He then cut off a piece of the tail of one of them, to furnish fresh bait. By thus encouraging their cannibal propensities, we soon caught so many that we were heartily tired of the sport. To give us an idea of the innumerable multitudes of fish, the boatman cast a line, with a heavy weight at the end and half a dozen hooks attached, full length into the water, till it had nearly reached the bottom, and then jerked it along, pulling it towards him ; it seldom came up without a victim writhing on one of the barbs. Fully contented with this specimen of the truly national sport of Newfoundland, I reluctantly trusted myself to the mercy of the high trotting horse again, and he soon whirled us home.

The road was not without beauty, but of a sad and desolate character, which the few miserable patches of cultivation and the wretched log huts by the road side, did not tend to enliven. Windsor Lake, or, “ Twenty-mile pond,” as the people prefer calling it, is a large, picturesque sheet of water, with some pretty, lonely-looking islands ; but its shores are shapeless hills, and its forests stunt brushwood.

From the top of the last eminence before descending to St. John’s, the view is very

striking. The finely-situated town spread along the shore, the massive government-house in the foreground, relieved by cheerful ornamental villas round it, the roadstead filled with shipping and small boats, the old, barren coast beyond, softening down, to the right, into green fields and gardens ; while opposite, on the left, grim-looking Signal hill, with the union jack floating over the fog on the top, protects the entrance of the harbour. And far away, filling up the background of the picture, with its hard, dark line against the summer's sky, lies calm, deep, and treacherous—the great Atlantic.

In the spring of the year 1497, a small squadron of ships sailed from Bristol, in search of a passage to India by the north-west. Two men of Venetian origin, John Cabot and his son Sebastian, a youth of twenty years of age, undertook their guidance. After a toilsome voyage of many weeks, they entered a region of vast banks, fogs, and mists, but continued on with unshaken hardihood. About three o'clock on the morning of the 24th of June, they reached a land hitherto unnoted in any map or record ; sterile, and uncultivated, abounding in great white bears and elks. The discoverers called this country by a name signifying ' rich in fish,' from the numbers which swarmed in the rivers and along the sea coast. The inhabitants were wild and unfriendly, clothed with the skins of beasts, and painted with a reddish clay.

The Cabots returned to England that year, and it does not appear that any further notice was taken of this country, which the English called Newfoundland, till 1534 ; when the brave Jacques Cartier, with only sixty men, sailed from St. Malo in two small vessels, under the French flag, and nearly circumnavigated the island. He found it to be a great triangle, of irregular shape, and about nine hundred miles round, with deep indentures and numerous harbours, but with a soil everywhere unfruitful.

Two Englishmen, named Elliott and Thorn, traded there for some years under the protection of Henry VIII. , obtaining rich furs from the natives. At length these unhappy men, with a body of their dependents, made a settlement, and determined to remain there the winter. They knew not what they had to meet ; their provisions failed, none of them survived, and tradition says they ate each other.

The most remarkable among the adventurers who visited these bleak shores, for many years afterwards, was Sir Humphry Gilbert. He took possession in the name of Queen Elizabeth, but was lost on his return to England : his good brave words in the storm, however, are left us still, " Courage, friends ! we are as near Heaven here as on the land."

From the beginning of the seventeenth century the French had a settlement at Placentia, on the south coast. In the year 1622, George Calvert landed from England, having with him seeds, grain, and cattle. His settlers were successful, and some of their descendants founded, in a commodious harbour, the capital, St. John's.

At the treaty of Utrecht, Louis XIV. of France gave up his claim to the island, which probably he did not care much about, as his subjects retained the right of fishing. It has ever since remained an English colony, and is at present garrisoned by a detachment of artillery and three companies of infantry. The barren soil and ungenial climate defy the skill and industry of the husbandman : wheat does not grow, the scanty crops of barley and oats rarely ripen ; from sheltered places near the towns a moderate supply of potatoes and garden vegetables, is forced from the unwilling earth. There are a few cattle, the grasses being plentiful and nutritious. All else, for the use of man, comes from over sea. During the six months summer, some of the lakes and bays are rich in short-lived beauty. Few have penetrated into the interior, for any distance ; the hills, as you advance, rise into mountains, the shrubs into trees : there is an idea that the centre of the island is a great valley, filled with

numerous lakes and impassable morasses ; none of the rivers are navigable far up the country, and there seems but little to tempt the explorer.

The natives met with in the first discovery were Esquimaux ; fierce men of stalwart frame and intractable disposition, their complexion was a dark red, they were bold hunters and fishers, and of great courage in battle. From the first, they and the white men were deadly foes. The Mic-Mac Indians of Nova Scotia, and these red men, carried on a war of extermination against each other for centuries ; each landing, with destructive swoop, on the other's coasts, scalping the men and carrying the women into slavery. The Esquimaux warriors were more frequently victorious, till, in an evil hour, they provoked the wrath of the pale-faces : the rifle and the bayonet soon broke their spirit ; abandoning the coasts and the hunting-grounds of their fathers, they fled into the dreary forests of the interior ; sometimes, in the long winter nights, they crept out from their wild fastnesses, and visited some lonely hamlet with a terrible vengeance. The settlers, in return, hunted them down like wolves, and, in the course of years, their life of misery reduced their numbers, and weakened their frames so much, that they never ventured to appear ; it was known that some few still lingered, but they were almost forgotten.

The winter of 1830 was unusually severe in this country, and prolonged beyond those of former years. Towards its close, a settler was hewing down trees at some distance from one of the remote villages, when two gaunt figures crept out from the neighbouring ' bush : ' with sad cries and imploring gestures, they tried to express their prayer for help ; the white man, terrified by their uncouth and haggard looks, seized his gun, which lay at hand, and shot the foremost ; the other tossed his lean arms wildly into the air—the woods rang with his despairing shrieks as he rushed away. Since then, none of the fallen race have been seen. The emaciated frame of the dead man shewed how dire had been their necessity. There is no doubt that the last of the Red-men perished in that bitter winter.

The blue Peter summoned us on board ; the wind had suddenly become favourable, leaving but little time for farewells ; but ours were not the less warm and grateful for their being hurriedly spoken. Hats and handkerchiefs waved from the shore—an answering cheer from the ships—and we are on our way again.

For the first day we kept within sight of land ; the character of the coast was everywhere the same—bluff headlands, deep bays, and monstrous hills covered with dwarf firs. On the fourth morning we passed close under the Bird islands ; strange, hermit rocks, not more than a few acres in extent, without a shred of vegetation, standing alone in the unfathomable waters, far out of sight of land. Millions of white sea fowl circle round them, screaming overhead, or diving and splashing in the water below.

One day more and we skirt the dangerous, desolate shores of Anticosti, rich in wrecks, accursed in human suffering. This hideous wilderness has been the grave of hundreds ; by the slowest and ghastliest of deaths they died—starvation. Washed ashore from maimed and sinking ships—saved to destruction, they drag their chilled and battered limbs up the rough rocks ; for a moment, warm with hope, they look around with eager, straining eyes, for aid and shelter—and there are none ; the failing sight darkens on hill and forest, forest and hill, and black despair. Hours and days waste out the lamp of life, until at length the withered skeletons have only strength to die. These terrible and frequent disasters have at length caused steps to be taken to prevent their recurrence ; there are now stations on the island, with stores of clothing and provisions, which have already preserved many lives. At Sable island, off Nova Scotia, the same system is adopted ; here are also a considerable number of

wild horses on the sandy hills, dwindled descendants of some ship-wrecked ancestors :—in cases of emergency these stock the larder.

It was quite a relief when we found ourselves clear of this dismal neighbourhood, as with fair wind and crowding sails we entered the waters of the ST. LAWRENCE. From the Point of Gaspè to the Labrador coast, is one hundred and twenty miles ; and, through this ample channel, half the fresh water of the world has its outlet to the sea, spreading back its blue winding path for more than two thousand miles, through still reach, foaming rapid, ocean, lake, and mighty cataract, to the trackless desert of the west.

We are near the left bank ; there is no trace of man's hand ; such as God made it, there it is. From the pebbly shore to the craggy mountain top—east and west—countless miles away to the frozen north, where everlasting winter chains the sap of life—one dark forest, lone and silent from all time.

For two days more there was nothing to attract the attention but the shoals of white porpoises : we were welcomed by several ; they rolled and frolicked round the ship, rushing along very fast, stopping to look at us, passing and repassing for half an hour at a time, then going off to pay their compliments to some other strangers. The pilot came quietly on board during the night, and seemed as much at home the next day as if he had been one of the crew.

By degrees the great river narrowed to twenty miles, and we could see the shore on both sides, with the row of white specks of houses all along the water's edge, which at length seemed to close into a continuous street. Every here and there was a church, with clusters of dwellings round it, and little silver streams, wandering through narrow strips of clearing, behind them. We got very near the shore once ; there was but little wind ; we fancied it bore us the smell of new-mown hay, and the widow thought she heard church bells ; but the ripple of the water, gentle as it was, treated the tender voice too roughly, and it could not reach us. Several ships were in sight ; some travelling our road, wayworn and weary ; others standing boldly out to meet the waves and storms we had just passed through. Rows of little many-coloured flags ran up to their mizen peaks, fluttered out what they had to say, and came down again when they had got their answer.

The nights were very cold ; but, had they been far more so, we must have lingered on deck to see the Northern Lights. They had it all to themselves, not a cloud to stop their running wild over the sky. Starting from behind the mountains, they raced up through the blue fields of heaven, and vanished : again they reappeared, where we least expected them ; spreading over all space one moment, shrinking into a shivering streak the next, quicker than the tardy eye could trace.

There is a dark shade for many miles, below where the Saguenay pours its gloomy flood into the pure waters of the St. Lawrence. Two degrees to the westward lies a circular sheet of water called Lake St. John, forty miles wide, fed by numerous small rivers. Here is the birth-place of the great tributary ; its separate existence ends at Tadousac. Its course lies from west to east, half-way through a rich country, with a comparatively mild climate, where only a few wandering Indians hunt and fish, exchanging their furs with English traders at Chicoutimi : here this rude commerce has grouped together a number of houses, round a church built by the Jesuits two centuries ago. Great Bay is twelve miles lower down ; thence to the river's mouth the cliffs rise straight out of the water, sometimes to a thousand feet in height, in some places two or three miles apart. There is a great depth between, far greater than that of the

St. Lawrence at the confluence, and large ships can go up so far. About three thousand white people are scattered about these districts ; they have sawmills, and ply their laborious industry in the bush, felling the tall pine-trees.

Off the entrance to the gloomy Saguenay, lies Red Island. The shore is rocky and perilous ; as we passed, the morning sun shone brightly upon it and the still waters ; but when the November mists hang round, and the north-east wind sweeps up the river, many a brave ship ends her voyage there. To the south-east is seen a gentler sister—the Green Isle.

It would be wearisome to tell of all the woody solitudes that deck the bosom of the St. Lawrence, or of the white, cheerful settlements along its banks, some of them growing up to towns as we advance ; their back-ground swelling into mountains. It is a scene of wonderful beauty, often heightened by one of the strangest, loveliest freaks of lavish nature. The mirage lifts up little rocky tufted islands, into the air, and ships, with their taper masts turned downwards, glide past them ; the tops of high and distant hills sink down to the water's edge, and long streets of trim, demure-looking houses, rest their foundations in the sky.

We are now at Grosse Isle ; [1] the pilot points out the quarantine station, the church, the hospital, and, in the distance, the fair and fertile island of Orleans. Bold Cape Tourment is at length past ; it has wearied our sight for two days, like a long straight road. It grows very dark, and the evening air is keen ; we must go below.

About midnight I awoke. There was the splash, and heavy rattling sound of the falling anchor ; the ship swung slowly round with the tide, and was still ; we had reached Quebec.

I looked out of the window of my cabin ; we lay in deep shade, under a high headland which shut out half the sky. There were still a few scattered lights, far and wide over the steep shore, and among the numerous shipping around us.

Our voyage was rather a tedious one ; without doubt you think so too.

[1] The conversion of this island into a quarantine station, and the excellent arrangements made there for receiving and refreshing the emigrants, are among the many benefits conferred on Canada by Lord Aylmer during his administration there.

Hochelaga : or, England in the new world (1846)

Author : Warburton, George, 1816-1857 ; Warburton, Eliot, 1810-1852

Volume : 1

Publisher : London : Henry Colburn

Language : English

Digitizing sponsor : Internet Archive

Book contributor : University of California Libraries

Collection : cdl; americana

Source : Internet Archive

<http://archive.org/details/hochelagaengland01warb>

Edited and uploaded to www.augty.org

February 18 2013