

THE ACADIANS

BY RENÉ BAZIN

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THE French have allowed it to be said, and some of them have naïvely repeated it, that they are not colonizers, although proofs to the contrary abound both in the past and in the present. They have not known how to keep their colonies, that is very true. They have been neither prompt nor brutal enough when a rival nation sent a fleet on a visit to our colonial establishments, where, under diverse pretexts, it seized a stronghold, captured a company of fishing boats, or destroyed any crops which it considered impudent for anybody except the English to raise. But there can be no doubt that our sailor folk had a genius for discovery, a talent for choosing routes, and a happy way of being the first to come upon an island or a continent, which they and their wives hastened to settle; and that they adapted themselves to thirty-six varieties of climate, making out of some savage country a miniature France, peasantlike, joyous and free-hearted. The English, who are connoisseurs in such matters, have acknowledged and proved this in many ways that were hardly commendable, especially as applied to Acadia and the Acadians.

I fear you may not remember just where Acadia is situated. You have read *Évangéline*, but perhaps you would not know what steamer to take if you wanted to visit your sister at Grand Pré. Well, if you will conjure up a picture of the great St. Lawrence River, which spreads out in a vast curve, enveloping with its mighty waters the isle of Anticosti and, farther

away, Newfoundland, you will realize that this horn of plenty is very solidly constructed. The right side for some distance and the extremity of this region belong to Canada, the rest being American. Roughly, this right side is made up of the Canadian Maritime Provinces, consisting of Prince Edward's Island, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick, to which the name 'Acadia' was applied, a word probably of Algonquin origin, meaning 'fertile place.'

About the middle of the sixteenth century the Bretons and the Basques wanted to found a priory there after their own fashion. They felt themselves quite at home there, since they discovered the country — so much so, indeed, that, toward the end of the century, they dislodged from the island of Ramée an English Commodore, Charles Leigh, which they had a perfect right to do. Later, on April 7, 1604, having obtained a charter from Henry IV, the Sieur de Monts, Champlain, geographer to the King, and the Sieur de Pontreincourt, together with one hundred and twenty others, set sail from Havre-de-Grâce in two ships and two smaller craft, to colonize the land of Acadia, 'all desiring to participate in the glory of so good and great an enterprise.'

At first our compatriots established themselves too far to the north, so that, as the winter which followed proved uncommonly severe, they found themselves reduced by sickness and death to forty-five souls by the time

the snows melted. In the spring of 1606 the survivors proceeded farther south, and, having found an anchorage 'eight leagues in circumference' near a body of water which they called French Bay, as well as surrounding forests of oak, ash, and other trees, they named it, 'on account of its beauty, Port Royal.'

The Sieur de Pontrincourt, an excellent man rich in children but poor in this world's goods, returned to France in the Jonas to see the King of France, who graciously confirmed his powers and his rights in the new country of 'maintaining the Christian and French authority.' Pontrincourt got together a fine group of future colonists willing to embark with him, including carpenters, joiners, masons, locksmiths, and especially laborers. He took with him also Queen Marie de Medici's apothecary, Louis Hébert, who sold his house in Paris in order to take part in the bold adventure; and still another, an advocate of Parliament, Marc Lescarbot, a learned man who read Greek and Hebrew, wrote rhymed verse, loved to sing in the wilderness, and wrote the *History of New France*. I fancy that when the vinedressers and the eartars of Touraine, accustomed to the ways of travel, watched Lescarbot taking notes on the bridge during the ocean voyage, they placidly explained the matter to their more travel-weary companions from Armorique and Poitou, 'He's a bard whom Messire de Pontrincourt is taking along with us in order to brighten up the long evenings.'

The day after the landing in America, July 28, 1606, Pontrincourt assembled his company and showed them over the country round Port Royal, which was a nearly continuous stretch of meadowlands for some twenty-one leagues; and as soon as a plough could be landed, tillage began. A fortnight later the Acadian soil had been sown with our good French grain, 'both wheat

and rye,' and with our beans, and our hemp, and our barley. Wonder and rejoicing; and our grain came up and waxed luxuriously, to such a height indeed, as Lescarbot said, that 'the tallest man could not see over it, and we feared that its height might interfere with its harvesting.'

Meanwhile the savages appeared from the forest and made signs of friendship. They were well received and soon fell into accord with the French, to whom they brought fresh fish and venison as well as the pelts of the bear and the fox. Soon the colonists placed in their records the note, 'These people love the French' — and they were by no means wrong.

They merited well of France, these protégés of Henry IV. Industrious, inventive, a little too trustful, ready for any journey but more given to the home and the farm, overjoyed to see their bins in America filled with good Norman grain, they united in winter-time to keep themselves warm and pass the time together. For fear that melancholy might seize upon one or more of them, they sang songs and passed the cup of joy. Champlain, half in jest, knowing them to be enamored of social distinctions and avid of decorations, established for them the 'Order of *Bon Temps*.'

When the snows had melted, they searched beyond the forests for other lands capable of being sown to wheat, where families could build log houses and settle down. In time these settlements grew into villages. And what names they chose for them, all full of the essence of their soul: Beauséjour, Bel-air, Joli-Cœur, Cocogne, Tintamare, Paradis! And beside every cabin, you may believe, there was a fenced and well-planted garden.

Unfortunately, the English had established themselves at several points on the continent. Oh, nowhere near

Port Royal. At a distance which discouraged making useless visits, a very strong reason for making hostile ones. At that period, it seems, the English could not bear to see France grow greater, or in fact grow at all. In the month of July, 1613, a Welsh adventurer by the name of Argall, having heard of the existence of a French outpost in Acadia through the Indians, set out from Virginia and appeared before Port Royal in an armed sloop of fourteen guns, where he demolished, robbed, and massacred to his heart's content. A few colonists were left, scattered in the wilderness and at the mercy of the elements. And yet the mother country failed to support in any way a cause which, after all, was her own. Was it her fault? If we understood history better, we should perhaps better appreciate the reasons; but, as it is, we find ourselves too often confined to a mere expression of regret.

In order that the affront should be avenged, it was necessary for Richelieu to understand the matter and act. After beating the English at Rochelle, we exacted the restitution of ravaged Port Royal. A frigate, the *Espérance en Dieu*, left Auray during the summer of 1632 for Canada. Lord Sterling delivered the fort to Admiral de Razilly, and the English colonists departed, with the exception of a few who preferred to cast their lot among the French, and who eventually became heads of Acadian families.

All this I read, with innumerable details, in the great history of Acadia which Professor Émile Lauvrière of the Lycée Louis le Grand has written in two volumes, entitled *The Tragedy of a People*. It is indeed a tragedy — Henry d'Arles, a Canadian, had already made use of this epithet to describe this event. Up till the year 1707 no fewer than ten attacks were made upon our Acadian colonies by the English, as

well in time of peace as in war. Our poor compatriots did their best to hold fast. They were Christians, sturdy men and vigorous women. In spite of the killings the birth-rate was so high that, of those originally brought over by Pontrincourt, there were some hundred families more or less: Thibaut, Poirier, Carmier, Lejeune, Lablanc, Roy, Belliveau, Robichoux, Landry, and so forth. The English and Scotch who settled various sites on the American coast increased much less rapidly. Governor Warren therefore wrote to the Duke of Newcastle in 1745 that 'it would be wise to deport the Acadians living at Annapolis (English name for Port Royal).'

The worst of it was that the suggestion was carried out. They waited fifteen years to let the scheme ripen, the while denying it. The Treaty of Utrecht, of April 11, 1713, had ceded Acadia to Great Britain, mistress of the sea and the land.

There were several false starts, but at last, on June 28, 1755, Governor Lawrence gave the order to deport from their homes all the French Acadians, after getting from them 'all the revenue possible.' It was decided to distribute among British soldiers and other colonists the lands taken from the peasants of France, putting Protestants in the place of Catholics. On July 28 eighty Acadian delegates, convoked at Halifax under the pretext of explanations due the English Commissioners, were held as prisoners. In the villages the English soldiers arrived singing as they marched, and explaining that they had come for a little fishing. Distributed by twos and threes in the families of the colonists, they rose at a given hour of the night and secured the arms of their unsuspecting hosts. In the month of August the order was given to destroy the houses of the Acadians, and to place the men as

prisoners on board the ships, sloops, and schooners which were ordered off-shore in readiness. Some fled into the woods as their homes went up in flames. The greater part, under arrest, marched to the ships between armed guards. They prayed to God; they sang their psalms; and as they passed along, the women and children knelt in tears.

Thousands of Acadians were in this manner 'taken care of.' The turn of the women and children came soon afterward, in the spring of 1756. Placards were posted on the walls announcing that '20,000 British families could be easily accommodated in the districts of Chignétou, Cobequid, Minas, Piguit, and Annapolis,' and that new colonists would be exempted from taxation for ten years. They were also promised harvest seed, arms, and liberty of conscience, provided they were not Catholics.

As for the unfortunate Acadians, they were carried off and distributed by groups throughout the thirteen English colonies. Stripped of all they possessed, they were turned loose in Connecticut, in Pennsylvania, in South Carolina, in the Guianas, in Santo Domingo, at Saint-Pierre and Miquelon, and some even at English ports, where they mostly died in misery. Children were often separated from their mothers and wives from their husbands. Remnants of these families were cast even as far as the shores of France herself, at Belle-Isle-en-Mer, at Saint-Malo, at Boulogne, at Havre, at Rochefort. All this violent dispersion was done planlessly, whenever there happened to be time, and was not fully accomplished until 1762. The victims called it, in their ancient peasant language, *le grand dérangement*.

But it fell out that love was stronger than hate. Cabins were rebuilt and babies were born in the valleys of the Acadian wilderness. The forgotten re-

turned. In 1771 the Government of Nova Scotia realized with astonishment that the Province contained 1249 Acadians, leaving out of the count the inhabitants of many small isolated settlements. In 1790 there were more than 8000 Acadians; in 1815 more than 25,000!

It seems marvelous that to-day, in the very districts in which they were so cruelly persecuted, their numbers reach 200,000. If one adds those of the same race in other points of Canada, in Newfoundland, in Louisiana, and in other American states, there must be half a million descendants, in ten generations, of the fifty French who emigrated to America in the time of King Henry IV. One never hears them spoken of except in pity. They are farmers, fishermen, servants, artisans. But these Normans, Tourangeaux, Rochebois, Basques, and Bretons have been victorious over fate and have left behind them their period of misfortune. They are Catholics in religion, industrious, hospitable, gay and independent in character.

If you have the good fortune to visit them in their homes you will hear the songs that were sung by the neighbors of Pierre de Ronsard; you will find a people living in quiet comfort, and, as always in their history, caring for the poor, and '*se les passants comme le pain bénit*.' Loyal subjects of a Government which tragically misunderstood them, they have but one desire: to remain Acadians, with the same Credo and the same language as their fathers. They need to be represented in public life by men of their own race, and, in order that these men may be equal to their positions, the Acadians demand their own schools and teachers who speak French.

M. Lauvrière, on the last page of his work, which is replete with sympathy for the Acadian people, quotes a few

really touching phrases from an appeal sent out by the Société de Saint-Thomas d'Aquin, founded in 1921, which has set itself the task of 'raising funds for the education of young Acadians of good parts in purely French colleges.'

How is it possible not to be moved with pride and yet, at the same time, with regret, and not to feel a keen desire to help those worthy people, when one reads the following sentences, so full of ambition, so straightforward and pure?

'We need well-educated men . . . who are capable of holding their own in legislatures, pleading before courts, leading our people, guiding their steps, organizing their energies. . . . With the moral and financial assistance of all our friends we hope soon to see graduat-

ing from colleges and universities many preachers, physicians, lawyers, and other learned men who shall march at our head in the defense of our race, our religion, and our rights.'

And again — 'This year there are three Acadians holding scholarships at the College of Saint-Joseph de Memramcouk, two at colleges in the Province of Quebec, and one at the Quebec Seminary. Let us fervently hope that the French-Acadian Committee will soon be able to choose from among these young people a scholar for France.'

A scholar for France! You who read these lines, if you ever meet this scholar, salute in him the sincerest homage to our country's spirit, the living testimony of the memory of three centuries, which neither distance nor misfortune nor calumny have been able to efface.

THE FIRST FOLIO, 1623-1923

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ANNIVERSARIES no doubt are heady wine. But even a sober judgment may find justification if it maintains that, taken for all in all, the First Folio is the *doyen* of the world's books. The claim does not rest upon its external beauty, for it is but a poor bit of printing, with decorations from worn woodcuts and a lamentable portrait; or upon its price in the market, for that is a fact of bibliopoly, not of literature; or upon its rarity, for at least a hundred and seventy-two copies exist out of an edition not likely to have exceeded a thousand.

But, after all, the primary function of a book is to make reading matter

available; and here are twenty plays by Shakespeare, never before printed, and rescued in the First Folio from the chances of edacious time, to be the perpetual entertainment, instruction, and consolation of mankind.

A salute is due, then, in setting out, to the makers of the book, to the stationers who printed and sold it, and to John Heminge and Henry Condell, of the King's Players, who furnished the manuscripts. Heminge and Condell are but shadowy personalities. They were vestrymen of St. Mary Aldermanbury, and Heminge is seen dimly through the records of his lawsuits as a hard man and at times barely honest.