

BANISHMENT ^{5.00}
and
REMOVAL OF THE ACADIANS
by
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The EDITH *and* LORNE PIERCE
COLLECTION *of* CANADIANA



Queen's University at Kingston

BANISHMENT

— AND —

REMOVAL OF THE ACADIANS

Difficulties between France and England, consequences of court-intrigues had, in 1740, kindled an heedless war terminated with no less levity by the treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle. The redaction of the treaty exhibited, on the part of the french ministers, such a neglect and unpardonnable ignorance that a new war began very soon after on the borders of Acadia. The governor of Canada placed garrison along the frontiers and the peace heretofore enjoyed by the Acadians ceased to exist.

In 1755, the envy which the prosperity and rich soil of the colony had excited among the militia of New-England brought on this infamous and cruel spoliation, an eternal stain on the name and honour of England, unfortunately not without more than one parallel in the history of the

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nation. This iniquitous decision was carefully concealed from the Acadians, not to provoke a suspicion that might have proved dangerous. A proclamation was issued calling on the people to assemble on the 5th of September, 1755, in their different parishes to hear an important communication from the governor. This deceit was not everywhere successful. At Bon-Bassin, part of what had remained of the french Acadian population took at once to the woods. The people of Annapolis, accustomed of old to seek, into forests, a refuge against war cruelties, did not wait for the completion of this horrible catastroph ; a certain number of them only fell into the hands of their foes.

But in the district of mines, the wealthiest of Acadia, good care had been taken to secure the success of the plot. This population, peaceful, industrious and not so suspicious perhaps, responded in a body to the call of the governor and being secretly surrounded by soldiery, they were told they were prisoners of war, and their lands, tenements and household goods forfeited to the crown and, that on the 10th of September, they were to embark for the british colonies.

This awful communication, like a thunderbolt stunned the wretched families. Without arms, surrounded by soldiers, crushed beneath calamity,

the Acadians had to bow to the atrocious law of a triumphant foe; and on the 10th of september, took place the mournful expatriation.

The 10th of september had been fixed upon as the day of departure; a man of war waited for them. At day break, the drums were resounding in the villages, and at eight o'clock the sad ringing of the church bells told the desolate frenchmen that the time had come to leave for ever their native land. Soldiers entered houses, and turned away men, women and children into the market place. Till then each family had remained together, and a silent sadness had prevailed; but when the drums beat to embark; when the time had come to leave the native home for ever, to part with mother, relations, friends, without any hope of seeing them again, to follow strangers that enmity, language, habits and especially religion had made antipathic, crushed beneath the weight of their misery, the exils melted into tears and rushed into each others arms in a long and last embrace. The drum was resounding incessantly and the crowd was pushed on towards the ships anchored in the river. Two hundred and sixty young men were ordered to embark on board the first vessel: This, they refused to do, declaring they would not leave their parents but were ready to embark with their families. Their request was immediately rejected. The troops fixed bayonets

and advanced towards them. Those who tried to resist were wounded and they had all to submit to this horrible tyranny. From the church to the shore, the road was crowded with children and women, who, on their knees, greeted them as they passed with their tears and their blessings, bidding a sad adieu to husband or son, extending to them a trembling hand, they some times could press in theirs, but which a brutal soldier compelled soon to release. The young men were followed by the seniors, who passed through the same scene of sorrow and distress. In this manner, was the whole male population put on board of five transports stationed in the river, each vessel being guarded by six officers and eighty privates. As soon as other vessels arrived, the wives and children were put aboard, and when at sea, the soldiers used to sing, unmindful of such a dreary misfortune. The tears of these poor wretched people excited their cruelty and even they had a good deal to suffer from the officers.

Revenge, mean cruelty, implacable cupidity, every contemptible passion concurs in this odious removal to increase its infamy and brand it as one of the most shameful pages of English history.

During several consecutive evenings, the cattle used to congregate round the smoking ruins as expecting the return of their owners, while the

faithful watch dogs were howling on the deserted hearths.

According to the *Revue des Deux Mondes* of 1831, the number of prisoners thus removed in the district of mines amounted to 4,000, and it may be said that the whole french population had been banished, as nobody or very nearly so could not escape.

The following statement may give an idea of the wealth of that country. Four thousand houses were burned, and five thousand stables; twelve thousand oxen, three thousand cows, five thousand calves, six thousand horses, twelve thousand sheep and eight hundred pigs were taken possession of.

The American colonists who had since long time, provoked the measures, had the land granted them, and of course the numerous herds were not without any profit to some one; so, nothing had been neglected to succeed in that canton, the wealthiest of all.

How did these poor people live in the forests and wilderness? through what succession of dangers and sufferings have they passed, in presence of speculators among whom their lands were divided? We do not know; But we are aware of their enduring hunger and cold and defending their lives against wild beasts.

We find a small parish of acadian origin, growing on the ruins of their country, in the middle of the British invaders. The population remains yet french acadians and catholics as an unconquerable protest of justice. The inhabitants, escaping from british persecution, took refuge in the woods and later emigrated into several localities on the St Lawrence Gulf.

In 1755, the french commanding officer stationed himself at Beausejour with a small garrison of one hundred and fifty men, watching the movements of the english, which took the fort by a surprise. The women and children were able to escape and hide away in the woods; the commander joined them soon after with a few armed men. When they saw the flames destroying their houses, the blood of the old Acadians swelled again their veins, and listening only to anger and despair, they left into the woods wives and children to throw themselves on a sudden on the enemies, who broken by this furious attack, returned to their ships, leaving behind forty-five of their comrades slain or maimed. After this dreadful slaughter, the french officer apportioned the best he could, the few remaining families, some went in the Isles of the Gulf, others began again along the shores to clear the woods; but the majority of those established on the shores had to take refuge in Canada.

In 1757, there were on the shores of the Gulf

of the St. Lawrence, very few families protected by their small number and by the remoteness of English settlements, and also by the usual poverty of an uninhabited country.

As to those of the river of Annapolis, they threw themselves in the woods at the first suspicion ; as they had for long time been accustomed to such tactic ; but this time, it was not a passing storm after which one could go back to his fields and raise up again one's wooden house. The English made them a lasting war. One portion of the people of Annapolis were obliged to take refuge, through forests and deserts, with the Savages and some Acadian fishermen scattered along the shores where, poor and unnoticed, they earned their lives. There, during several years, they succeeded in concealing their existence amid anxieties and privations, hiding carefully their small canoes, not daring to till the land, watching with apprehension any english sail, and dividing with their friends, the Indians, the supplies due to fishing and hunting.

The wood land remains yet, but to day under its shade lives a race differring in customs and language. It is only on the dreary and misty shores of the Atlantic that vegetate yet a few Acadian peasants whose fathers came back from exile to die in their native land. In the fisherman's cabin, the spinning wheel and the loom are yet in motion.

The young girls wear yet the norman bonnet and petticoat, they work at home and in the evening, near the fire, they repeat the history of the Gospel, while in its rocky caverns, the ocean roars and answers in a disconsolate tune to the groans of the forest.

Meanwhile, like all storms, the persecution subsided, and the Acadians made use of a kind of sufferance to establish themselves openly on the shores that had been their refuge. A few years after, they were joined in these solitary and wretched parts of the country by a small fraction of those transported by the english in 1755. Such is the origin of the Acadian population in Canada that has given its name to the parish called Acadia, in the county of St-John.

A memorial of the Bishop of Quebec, dated October, 30th 1757, let us know their number especially at Cape Sable where a Catholic Missionary comforted and sustained them against english persecutions, and that missionary had been called by them, offering to defray his expenses.

A certain number was yet scattered in different places living miserably in the remotest cantons.

In 1763, permission was granted to Acadians that had been transported into Massachusetts to establish themselves on the south-west shore of their old country near St-Mary's Bay.

The township of Clare, Digby county, was at the time a steepy spot, remote from all habitation and accessible only by sea. The Acadians who seem to possess as an essential characteristic, a constant energy, always ready to recommence to struggle and work again without loss of courage, were not long in being changed, when the said inheritance, granted them by the compassion of their oppressors came back into their hands. Industrious, hard-workers, sober, they soon cleared the land, built fishing boats and created in this deserted country a sufficient thrift. All the authors are in accordance in their testimony as to the preservation of the language, national character and vigilance to maintain old customs.

Mr. Halliburton, judge in Nova Scotia has written the following in 1829: while Germans have a tendency to disappear in the english population, the Acadians live together as much as possible; keeping their religion, language and peculiar customs. They never intermarry with their protestant neighbours. Among themselves, they speak but french.

SECOND PART.

France has been, till the middle of the last century one of the greatest colonial powers in the world. The moment seems propitious to present

to the public the researches we publish here. It is sad indeed in exhibiting the national character to call back the painful end of efforts which, at their beginning, raised so legitimate and bright hopes ; but we must overcome the natural repulsion generated by misfortune, and fix our minds on these sad recollections of the pass, to derive from our disasters, useful informations to guide and strengthen our conduct in the future. We know that it is not without concern for us to follow the french people, abandoned in our old possessions and to show what has become of their posterity, through the difficulties and trials of a foreign domination. France seems to have forgotten, that in the dark hours of her history, important populations of her own blood and in spite of misfortune, faithful to their origin, were forsaken by her. Who remembers *to day* Acadia, Canada, Louisiana or even Mauritius, though so recently lost ? Who has any recollection of places illustrated by so many heroic fights and the devoted patriotism of their inhabitants ? It is hard to awaken remembrances of our past glory and to point out that France has been the first to commence this wonderful development of civilisation in North America, while losing through her carelessness, the generous children she did not know how to defend.

Courageous colonists, who with energetic perse-

verance, have faced persecutions, seduction and abandon, you have kept everywhere, not only the tradition but also the religion, customs, language and love of your country. Has not the time arrived to depart from that selfish indifference with which we rewarded their affection? Those to whom the greatness and prospects of France are yet worthy of consideration will understand that to call attention on the national question is to mind the future eventually laid up for the french race.

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