EVANGELINE

THE PLACE, THE STORY AND THE POEM

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Noah Porter

EVANGELINE

THE PLACE, THE STORY AND THE POEM

BY

PROF. NOAH PORTER

WITH NINETEEN ORIGINAL ILLUSTRATIONS BY

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List of Illustrations.

"... a cumbrous boat, that was rowed by Acadian boatmen."

"Then in his place, at the prow of the boat, rose one of the oarsmen."

"Mounted upon his horse, with Spanish saddle and stirrups,
Sat a herdsman, arrayed in gaiters and doublet of deerskin."

"Meanwhile, apart, at the head of the hall, the priest and the herdsman
Sat, conversing together of past and present and future."

"Over her head the stars, the thoughts of God in the heavens."

"[illegible] she [illegible] with his [illegible] and waving [illegible] came through the forest."

"Then in the [illegible] weather the maize was husked, and the maiden
[illegible], for that betokened a lover."

"Thus many years she lived [illegible] Sister of Mercy; frequenting
[illegible] lanes of the city."

"[illegible] Evangeline knelt [illegible]
[illegible] conscious form."

EVANGELINE;

THE PLACE, THE STORY, AND THE POEM.

IF the many summer excursions which are within easy reach of a resident of the Atlantic coast of the United States, one of the most attractive is a trip to the Bay of Fundy. If you leave Portland, Maine, at evening by a quickly running steamer for St. John, New Brunswick, you will find yourself in the morning skirting the rock-bound and indented coast of Maine on the left, with the fog-beset and mysterious island of Grand Menan shutting you off from the ocean on the right. As you sail onward, the weird and wild-looking "Quoddy Head" will soon present itself, often looking out upon you suddenly from the half-lifted fog. As you are driven through the sharply turning and ominously narrow channel which it seems to guard, the fog bell, which tolls as you pass, seems to be ever giving forth mingled sounds of warning against possible shipwreck and notes of wailing over the unhappy victims of the unrelenting sea. The excitement increases, if you are a stranger, as you near Eastport, giving evidence, as it does in its lofty wharves and its long reaches of ooze and sand, that you are coming into the region of those tides of thirty or forty feet which you will have read of with wonder in your boyhood. Moving forward you observe the wild but attractive shores of the island of *Campobello*, rightly named. As you emerge into the Great Bay beyond, you will, in all probability, feel your way through a blinding fog, which as it suddenly lifts or

mysteriously disappears, will reveal the city of St. John to your curious and excited vision. As you land, you find yourself in a busy town, which at every turn and from every object suggests the remembrance of a seafaring town in Scotland or the north of England. Here again you are reminded of the mystery of the tides and their magic working, while you watch the noble river at its mouth as it alternately empties itself into the harbor by a descending ripple, which becomes almost a plunge as it fails to overtake the rapidly withdrawing tide, and subsequently reverses the process when the returning flood comes in with a rush.

Before you leave the city, you will probably have been tempted to make a trip by the river St. John to Fredericton, the capital of the province, where you will find one of the most finished and architecturally tasteful Protestant churches on the continent, largely the gift of English friends. The scenery along this river can be no more forgotten than that of the Hudson, with which it well deserves to be compared. You will find upon its banks, in the name of at least one of its thriving towns, a reminder that portions of this attractive country were allotted to royal refugees from Connecticut during or at the end of the war for independence. But whether or not you make this excursion, you will not fail, if you are wise, to make a visit to Moncton, on the Great Bend of the river Petitcodiac, that you may see with your own eyes the tide rise and fall seventy feet, filling and emptying alternately an estuary of some two and a half miles broad. At the extreme ebb you see nothing but a broad expanse of ooze and slime, over the surface of which is slipping the last drainage of what was an enormous river, but which is now reduced to a winding ditch some ten or twenty feet in width, by which it seems to be completely emptied. You are bidden to look northward, with expectant eyes, to a turn in the banks, that you may catch the first sight of the foaming *avant-courriers* of the swelling and resistless flood, which will soon break upon your view. Sometimes the foremost wave is six or eight feet in height, sometimes only two or three, according to the wind and currents upon the Great Bay behind the hills, which alternately rises and falls with its daily and nightly swell. As the first wave comes into view, it is followed immediately by another, and this by another, till long before the foremost has come over against you, the channel, so far as you can discern, is filled with these foaming steeds chasing one another with restless and resistless fury. As soon as the bottom of the channel is covered it seems to fill with increasing rapidity, and at times to rise at the rate

of fifteen feet in as many minutes. It is only as you follow this estuary downward toward the bay, and watch these tides, that you can understand their relation to the fertile meadows which have been formed along the inlets by the aid of skillful dyking; presenting as they do a singular and striking contrast to scenery which is generally rocky and inhospitable. As you view these expanses, and then follow them into the narrow valleys into which they withdraw you, you fancy that the early French discoverers gave to the entire region the name of Acadia, after the Arcadia of Grecian loveliness. And yet lovely as these savannas and valleys are, the enormous tides and inhospitable shores justify the appellation of Nova Scotia or New Scotland as even more appropriate, and seem to have destined it for the occupation and control of a hardier race.

Having visited St. John and the Great Bend, you will take the steamer for Nova Scotia—either for Windsor at its north-eastern extremity, or for Digby, directly opposite St. John—leaving your port in either case according to the tide, for reasons which will presently appear. The traveler in this country will more than once be reminded most emphatically that time and tide wait for no man. Should the hour for sailing be favorable, on going upon deck at sunrise, you will find yourself on the north-eastern side of the great bay, beneath a long ridge of trap rock, not unlike in appearance to the Palisades on the Hudson, although more elevated, and terminating abruptly in Cape Blomidon, some 1,500 feet in height. The whole range attracts the attention by its regularity, its boldness, and its elevation, being apparently set as a barrier against the mighty swell of the bay. This is specially true of Cape Blomidon, around whose base, and that of the lofty shores opposite, you sweep near enough to distinguish the enormous masses of rock which lie at the feet of both, which are anon submerged by the roaring flood and anon exposed, as with angry reluctance its waves slowly and unwillingly subside. This ridge is geologically specially interesting. It was in the fossils and minerals in this region that one of the most remarkable discoveries of modern Paleontology was made by a youthful zealot, whose ardor was in this way directed and fixed in a career of discovery and research which has since made him eminent in the realm of science. This ridge is to us especially interesting because behind and along it stretches the valley which still retains the name of Acadia, and which extends for sixty to eighty miles from the Bay of Minas on the north to the Bay of Annapolis on the south. This valley is thus

bounded on the west by the trap ridge which is a barrier against the sea, and rises gradually toward the east into the sharp and unproductive rocks of the peninsula. It consists of two valleys, rather than one, and is watered by the two rivers and their tributaries running respectively to the north-east and south-west; the Gaspereaux emptying into the Bay of Minas, and the Annapolis emptying into the Bay of Annapolis. Each of these valleys expands into the wide meadows which for ages have been deposited by the tides, and secured by the patient toil of generations. These are bordered by pretty and varied slopes, in which the dark and pointed spruce is abundant, forming striking contrasts with the deciduous forest trees, which are not entirely absent. In the beautiful and varied landscapes which delight the traveler, the spreading meadows, brown and green with their abundant hay and oat crops, are conspicuously prominent. Now and then he will discern an extensive field giving promise of a rich harvest of the esculent which is here so excellent and so rewarding, and was formerly esteemed as the pride of this region. The elm, as we should expect, lifts its stately and graceful top now and then along these rich alluvials. Here and there a pair of poplars remind us that long ago saplings were brought from sunny France, and very often a gnarled moss-grown willow carries us back to a century and a half ago, when a twig was carefully planted on the rude homestead of a homesick settler, which he had months before cut from an old and well remembered tree on the coast of Brittany.

It is well known that this fertile and sheltered valley, together with the spreading meadows which are stretched along its openings, first received the name Acadia, which was subsequently restored to its original possessor. It is as important to remember that in the earliest times Acadia not only designated the entire peninsula now known as Nova Scotia, but was also applied to the eastern portion of the present province of New Brunswick and the adjacent beautiful islands in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The more fertile portions of this region were settled in the early part of the seventeenth century by a very few colonists from France, to whom they became doubly attractive from the nearness of the overflowing fishing grounds which so early and so long made the coast, the harbors, and the adjacent provinces the coveted prizes of many a desperate adventure and hard fought and bloody contest. As the New England colonies were gradually settled, and became the

home of a population which rejoiced in fisheries and commerce, the mastery of these fishing grounds and the country adjoining stimulated the English to a constant and jealous rivalry, which was intensified by manifold antagonisms of race and religion. Hence these lands of beauty and of promise became a dark and bloody ground, and the shores and gulfs which now teem with joyous life were often the scenes of violence and terror, if not of piracy and outrage. These controversies were intensified during the first half of the past century, when England and France were engaged from time to time in those desperate wars for the control of North America, in which the dominion of the Northern waters in and about the Gulf of St. Lawrence seemed to be the prize which was so bitterly contested, but the gain or loss of which went far to determine the question which of these nations should control the lakes and the valleys of the Mississippi. With the strifes and jealousies of this half century, the fortunes and fate of the unhappy colonists of Nova Scotia, which are the theme of our pathetic poem, were most intimately connected.

To understand and appreciate the poem of Evangeline, one needs not only to be made acquainted with the geographical features of the country in which it is placed, but to trace the growth of the people whose unhappy fate it depicts to the imagination. The poem is not merely a pathetic recital which moves our tenderest sympathies and inculcates the noblest lessons of duty and faith; it also reproduces with varied intensity a tragical picture of our past national history; and as such it is fitted to instruct us, if we interpret it aright, respecting the bitter and costly experiences out of which our present political and civil blessings have been secured; while it also inculcates the most salutary lessons in respect to the harsh judgments which we are often too ready to pronounce upon those whose nationality or whose faith may differ from our own.

It is generally conceded that the English were, in a certain sense, the first discoverers of North America, inasmuch as one of the Cabots landed upon this continent before Columbus, and touched here and there upon its coasts, from Labrador to Florida, as early as 1498. In 1504, a few French fishermen cast their lines upon the Banks of Newfoundland. In 1534, Jacques Cartier sailed through the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and touched upon the principal inlets on its western waters, as the river

Miramichi, the Bays of Chaleur and Gaspé, without however entering or discovering the great river beyond. In a second expedition, made the year following, he ascended the St. Lawrence and the Saguenay, and reached Quebec and Montreal. The year following this entire region was claimed by the French under the name Canada, and as such was distinguished from Acadia, which had been previously applied to the countries lying on the Bay of Fundy and the gulf. In 1530, a company of London merchants entered and explored the Gulf of St. Lawrence. In 1583, Sir Humphrey Gilbert, a brother-in-law of Sir Walter Raleigh, came with five vessels to Newfoundland to take formal possession of the same for the Queen of England, and to establish a colony. As yet no attempt had been made to occupy the country, on the part of either England or France, and yet Gilbert found thirty-two vessels lying in the harbor of St. Johns, Newfoundland, on entering the same, showing conclusively that these regions were already abundantly resorted to for fish and peltry. The attempt of Sir Humphrey to effect a settlement proved a failure, in consequence of his untimely death. In 1598, Henry IV. of France, settled a colony of criminals on the eastern coast of Nova Scotia, but with no success. It is worthy of remark that while the evidence is superabundant that these waters were resorted to by fishermen in great numbers, there is no record that the Bay of Fundy was entered before 1600. From 1599 to 1602 repeated efforts were made, with some semblance of success, to establish a trading port and colony at Tadousac, at the mouth of the Saguenay, by several very able Frenchmen, viz.: Pontegravé, Chauvin, Champlain, and De Monts, the last of whom was constituted Lieutenant-General of all Acadia lying between the fortieth and forty-sixth degrees of latitude. With this patent begins the history of the many efforts to colonize this country by the French, which were usually matters of individual enterprise under some extravagant grant of territory or privilege. Of the five vessels which were dispatched in the first expedition, one was sent to Tadousac to prosecute the fur trade, one was sent to Canso to clear the coast and inlets from all intruding competitors in this trade, and two, with one hundred and twenty colonists, were destined to some attractive position, which might be selected. The visitor at Tadousac, at the present day, does not fail to visit the little church

which carries him back, if not to the first attempts at colonization in Canada by the French, at least to a very early period; a period so early that an edifice large enough for the inhabitants would accommodate no more than some thirty to fifty worshipers. After sundry landings and adventures, the two vessels laden with colonists entered the Bay of Fundy, and were soon introduced to the noble bay now known as the Bay of Annapolis, at the south end of the vale of Acadia already described, which was first known as the harbor of Port Royal, and subsequently became the scene of manifold sieges and massacres for almost a century and a half; being taken and retaken by a succession of adventurous and legitimate representatives of the two great powers, who contended for the supremacy over its waters and the adjacent lands. After making a satisfactory reconnoisance of this delightful spot Champlain traversed the coast of the great French Bay, as the Bay of Fundy was called, and made a minute record of its wonderful features. The colony at Port Royal was not fairly begun until 1606, and it suffered manifold fortunes of evil, although contriving to maintain a precarious existence; as it became the prize of successive greedy adventurers who contrived to gain conflicting titles from the imperial court. It was also now and then occupied by claimants under the English crown or some commercial company. Or again it was assailed by some half-pirate, and less than half Puritan, from the rising New England colonies. It is not surprising that Acadia itself passed to and fro like a football from France to England and from England to France, as the fortunes of war or the chances of a treaty might decide. Its western boundary was also uncertain, whatever might be the hands into which it happened to fall. The chivalrous fortunes and the romantic adventures of the La Tours which moved the sympathies and tested the diplomacy and vexed the consciences of the Puritan magistracy of Massachusetts Bay, and almost tempted the Plymouth Colonists to what were very nearly acts of freebooting, cannot here be recited without withdrawing our thoughts too far from our theme. We should not omit to notice that the western boundary of Acadia was also in dispute between England and France, or rather between the several trading companies, or the "Lieutenant-Generals" of one country or the other, who were constantly struggling with each other for the prizes which promised so much in the future. The Penobscot river

was in a certain sense acquiesced in rather than agreed upon as this boundary line for the time, until England and France should finally settle the question by the stern arbitrament of war, which, as was hoped, might also determine the control of the entire coast from Labrador to Florida. We ought not to omit to notice the fact that, as the New England colonies became stronger and more self-relying, the Acadian coasts became more interesting to them as scenes of adventure and as objects of fear and, perhaps, as possible prizes of war. Though the French colonies proper were contemptibly inferior to those in New England in point of wealth or numbers or military prowess, yet, by reason of the commanding position of their well placed fortresses and well chosen ports, their few and scattered forces could successfully prey upon the New England fishermen and effectually control the access of the latter to the St. Lawrence. Above all, by their command of this river they were able to maintain ready communication with those Indian tribes which, from Nova Scotia to the Ohio, traversed the forests and occupied the fastnesses in the rear of the English, and, on any occasion of war between themselves and the colonies, or between England and France, could be employed with terrific effect; as many a new settlement in forest or stream or lovely vale could testify, in its records of cruel ambuscade and nightly burning.

Those Indians, whom the French controlled, had also, to a considerable extent, been converted to the Romish faith, and were thus bound more firmly in alliance to France. But whether Christian or Pagan, they became largely the natural enemies of the English colonists, and could easily be aroused to sudden and cruel attacks by influences from both Louisburg and Quebec.

In the year 1713, the first act was opened of the drama with which we are immediately concerned. In that year the Treaty of Utrecht was concluded after a contest which had continued for nearly twenty years, with a single interruption. With this treaty began those troubles and difficulties which terminated in the expulsion of the Acadians from their homes in 1755.

These events cover a period of strife and anxiety of more than forty years. By this treaty "all Nova Scotia or Acadia comprehended within its ancient boundaries, as also the city of Port Royal now called Annapolis," was yielded to Great Britain. But as to what these "ancient boundaries" actually "comprehended," the parties disagreed, England claiming that Acadia embraced all

the territory east of a line drawn from the mouth of the Kennebec to Quebec, including the south shore of the St. Lawrence, Prince Edward Island, and Cape Breton, and France that Acadia only included the southern half of the peninsula of Nova Scotia. Out of this disagreement proceeded a long train of conflicts, in open and secret hostility, which were not finished till the capture of Quebec in 1759, which put an end to the influence of France in America.

It is important to keep distinctly in mind that it was only four years before this event, at the time when the strife for the possession of this continent was reaching its crisis, that the expulsion of the Acadians was resolved upon and partially carried into effect. This was in the year 1755, at the opening of the final struggle for the possession of North America, between France and England. The expulsion of these colonists was the only one of four important measures attempted by the English government at the opening of the war, which was crowned with success—and, indeed, which was not in some sense a failure. The three other measures were, the attack on Fort du Quesne by General Braddock, an attempt on the fort at Niagara, and an expedition against Crown Point. A crisis was felt to be approaching for Acadia itself. The removal of the so-called "French Neutrals" was, not so much a deliberate measure of state policy which looked to remote consequences, as a bold and almost desperate act in a final struggle for the possession of the entire territory, in which a prompt and decisive blow was supposed to be imperatively required.

The importance of this act as a necessity of war, can be appreciated only as we vividly conceive the condition of the province at the time when it was adopted, as this is explained by the history of the forty years, which, as we have already said, began with the peace of Utrecht. Immediately on the cession of Acadia by this treaty, but contrary, as it would seem, to its natural interpretation, France proceeded to appropriate to itself the whole of Prince Edward Island, the northern part of Nova Scotia, bordering on the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and the Island of Cape Breton. By this occupation she secured to herself the command of the direct approaches to the Gulf and the River St. Lawrence, which involved the command of the fisheries, and almost necessarily the access to Canada. To secure to herself the utmost of these advantages, she proceeded without delay to construct the fortress of Louisburg, on the Island of Cape Breton,

at an enormous expense. So soon as this stronghold was erected, it became an object of alarm to the entire New England coast—not merely for the danger with which it threatened its fishermen, but because it was regarded as an admirable place of refuge and departure for any French fleet which might be fitted out for the destruction of Boston or any other of the Eastern ports. So soon as it was finished, it was regarded with almost superstitious terror. The daring and almost romantic expedition, which, in 1745, was arranged for its destruction, was planned and executed by New England patriots; and when the news of its surrender was communicated through the New England pulpits, the congregations spontaneously uttered their thanksgivings in the most jubilant strains which the old Bible and Psalm book could furnish. When, also, soon after this event a formidable armada was fitted out to recover the fortress, and probably to invade the New England ports, and this was scattered by a fierce tempest, there were no words which could express the sense of the greatness of the danger from which the English colonists had been delivered. The scattering of this fleet was regarded as a signal answer to the united and fervent prayers of all the New England churches. The mortification and chagrin of the colonists were extreme when soon after Louisburg was restored to France by the treaty of Aix La Chapelle. Over against this fortress on the north side of the peninsula of Nova Scotia, among and near its most fertile portions, were settled the Acadian population, some 8,000 to 10,000 in all, besides the few hundred near Annapolis, the majority being in near vicinity and within ready access to Louisburg, the Gulf, and Canada. They constituted nearly the whole of the fixed population of Nova Scotia who cultivated the soil. Besides the small garrisons of Port Royal and Halifax, and previous to 1747, there had not been more than a few hundred in all the peninsula of Scotch or English descent. In 1747 a half military colony of 2,500 souls had been settled at Halifax, but it had as yet scarcely struck its roots into the soil. During the interval of thirty years previous to this, a new generation of French descent had been born, who had practically regarded themselves as the sole possessors, by occupation, of this as their native country, and had been schooled and trained to the most complete devotion to the French king as their only sovereign.

Immediately after the first nominal transfer of the soil to the crown of

England, the inhabitants of the region about the head of the Bay had been summoned to take the oath of allegiance to the English Queen Anne within a year. This they declined to do, pleading various reasons, and proposing to leave the country rather than consent, perhaps in good faith, or possibly thinking that the government would be frightened into the concessions which they asked for. After the year had elapsed which was allowed them for making their decision, they pleaded other reasons, as their fear of the displeasure of the Indians, professing meanwhile the purpose to live as faithful subjects of the English crown, only entreating not to be compelled to withdraw their allegiance from the *Grand Monarque*. By sufferance and delay, which was perhaps more creditable to the kindness than to either the energy or the statesmanship of the colonial government, they had acquired an anomalous position in relation to the English crown, and being tolerated in their position, became known as "The French Neutrals."

Practically almost the entire population of the colony and all those who cultivated the soil had persistently refused to take the oath of allegiance or to acknowledge any obligation to the existing government, which should bind their consciences. The evidence was also abundant and overwhelming that they were animated by some common understanding, which was inspired by their religious and patriotic sentiments, that the English government was never to be recognized by themselves as supreme. They were not only animated by the hope and assurance that the French authority would be re-established, but they had been taught and had learned to believe that their duty to their God and their king forbade them to transfer their allegiance to the English sovereign.

Those who justify their final refusal to take the oath when it was solemnly required some thirty years afterwards, and charge the English government and the provincial officials with injustice and cruelty, insist that the acquiescence of the crown and the officials in their previous refusals and delays for more than thirty years was itself a tacit consent to the position which they had assumed, which was equivalent to a solemn treaty. The neutrals were a rude and simple people, scarcely needing and certainly not possessing any civil organization for their communes or villages, and finding in their priests all the magistrates whom they needed—a people without arts, without letters, but

not without manners, which though rude, were in a certain sense refining in their influence, and finding in the restraints of religion all the bounds which they required for their petty jealousies, and their ardent but mercurial tempers. Whether or not their lives were as harmless, their morals were as pure, and their manners as attractive as they are painted by Raynal and Bancroft, it is not important to decide. We can readily believe from what we know of their countrymen of a similar type at the present moment that they were sincere and loyal and loving even though they might be ignorant and superstitious and obstinate, that they had many gentle tastes and kindly manners, although their cabins might be filthy, their clothing coarse, and their persons unattractive. That they were indolent and unenterprising we may very easily believe, and yet may reasonably hold that with all their sloth, and their contented and narrow ignorance, they might be animated by piety, loyalty and love toward God and man.

Their fear of the Indians might have been, and doubtless was, at times, intense, and always a controlling motive, which held them in subjection to French emissaries. The few English colonists of Acadia and the many in New England had ample reason to know that the French and Indians had often moved together in those horrid raids which had visited so many forest hamlets with the torch and scalping knife, and had made the thought of either a thought of terror to mothers and children even in the oldest settlements. It should not be forgotten that the Acadians themselves were held in subjection by similar fears, and were thus made the ready and subservient victims of those political and priestly agents, who were acting in the service of the French government.

These agents were often, not to say usually, desperate and ferocious men who would not scruple to threaten them with vengeance in the most appalling forms should they refuse compliance with their commands, and yield to the demand of the Colonial authorities, which were known to be more persistent, and to be backed by orders from London.

Doubtless the element of devotion to the church of which the French King was the recognized defender entered very largely into this persistent loyalty to the French crown. Loyalty to king or church, however blind it may be, is always a noble and elevating sentiment. Even when it is attended

with ignorance and bigotry, the loyalty of the peasant who is also devout, is nobler than that of the courtier whose devotion to the church is another name for his servile subjection to his king and his selfish greed of gain. But whatever we may think of the motives and feelings of the reluctant and temporising Acadians we cannot question that, politically considered, in the eyes of the English government their position was utterly indefensible; and the patience and leniency with which the most of their communities were permitted to evade the plainest civil obligations, can only be explained by the weakness of the government and the hope that time would bring a new generation to a better mind. In the meantime active influences were known to be used which were not only fitted to prevent the so-called "French neutrals" from taking the oath, but which tended to alienate them more completely from the provincial authorities. The most candid and kindly critics of the position which they assumed, and the feelings which they expressed, could interpret their persistent refusals and delays in no other sense than as expressing the secret expectation that they would very soon be able to resume their old position as subjects of their old king, and to render him active service. Had they simply maintained an attitude of passive inaction between the hostile forces which pressed on them from either side, their position would have been far more defensible. Simple inaction on their part would in a certain sense have been justified in the eyes of the most partial judges, and their loyalty to their ancestral church and king might have been its own defense. Had they passively resisted the opportunities and the influences which pressed them to give aid and comfort to the French cause, they might in the course of these years have won the confidence of the colonial authorities and dispelled their fears at this critical hour. Unfortunately the evidence is overwhelming that their attitude had been anything but an attitude of actual, even though an unwilling neutrality. They were in a convenient and most tempting position, of which they freely availed themselves, to send ample supplies to the French fortress of Louisburg so long as it stood, and after it had been restored. Constant evidence was furnished that cattle and other provisions had been taken across the border to their kinsfolk and countrymen who were known to be in arms against the English colony. Moreover, within the peninsula itself, on the other side of what was conceded by sufferance to be

the border line between the English and French authority, and within the fertile districts at the head of the Bay, there were thousands of their own race in open allegiance to the French interest, and in active sympathy with every hostile plan or movement against the foreign aggressor. A new and formidable fortress was constructed on this border line within Nova Scotia itself, from which an able and determined ecclesiastic issued his orders, which were none the less formidable and effective because they were stealthy and mysterious. This ecclesiastic had also recently effected the removal of a thousand Acadians into the so-called French territory, not alone by appealing to their religious and patriotic feelings, but by burning the houses of an entire village. The occasion was one of the extremest necessity, and that necessity was becoming more extreme under the discouraging aspect of the English cause in the United colonies.

We have enumerated at some length the character of the crisis when it was suggested by the resolute men who had charge of the government that could colonists of English stock be immediately transferred to Acadia, or could the French colonists be distributed among the English settlements, the difficulties which embarrassed the government might be overcome.

It was in vain to hope for a speedy emigration from New England. There was too much to fear and very little to hope for—by an inhabitant of New England, as a motive to induce him to become one of an emigrating colony in Nova Scotia in the neighborhood of Louisburg, and with the even chance that Nova Scotia might again become, as it had often been before, a French colony. The exigency was instant and impending, a single false move might be fatal, and a successful rising or invasion in northern Nova Scotia might be fatal to critical movements in prospect or in progress on the St. Lawrence and Lake Champlain.

The other alternative was adopted. The bold measure was taken of transporting the inhabitants of several villages from their homes to the more important of the English colonies on the Atlantic Coast, by companies of two or three hundred in a vessel, by families; due regard being had to their comfort, so far as comfort could be conceived as possible, in the administration of a measure so dire and dreadful as this extreme alternative enforced by what was conceived to be a military necessity. The measure

was indeed extreme and violent. Many judges would pronounce it indefensible. The Acadians were regarded and treated as prisoners of war, who had, for more than thirty years, persistently refused to discharge the universally recognized obligations of the inhabitants of a conquered territory, prominent among which is the obligation either to tender allegiance to the ruling power or to leave the country. But obligations of this kind, obvious as they are, and summarily enforced as they must be at times, seem to our hearts no justification for the burning of villages and the wholesale transportation of communities.

There is no evidence in the official documents or reports that the orders of the colonial authorities were enforced with any special barbarity. There is, however, abundant evidence that such measures must necessarily have been executed by summary proceedings, involving hasty alarm, and what would seem to be barbarous cruelty—if they were to be executed at all. So soon as the vessels which were destined to transport the unhappy Acadians, they knew not whither, appeared hovering about the coasts, alternately coming and going with the surging and retreating tides, the inhabitants had doubtless begun to take the alarm and to be more or less distracted by undefined terror. As detachments of troops moved upon one and another of the villages which were convenient to the front or near the French lines on the north, the dwellers had fled in a body, and placed themselves beyond the reach of capture. In the village of Grand Prè, either because the movement was very early or probably because the situation was less favorable for escape, the men obeyed the summons to repair to the church *en masse*, ostensibly to receive some communication from their masters. They had no sooner been collected than they were surrounded by troops and held as prisoners of war, and informed that they were to be transported on the instant with their families to the English colonies. Little time was given to them to collect their wives and children, and neither time nor opportunity were afforded for the disposal of their movable property. Their cattle were necessarily left behind; many of the members of their families had naturally fled in terror at the first alarm, along the unfenced and bewildering meadows. Many of those who heard in their hiding places the awful tidings, were either so palsied by fear that they could not return to their homes, or their eyes

were blinded by despair, so that like lost children they could not find their kindred. As a consequence, of the members of the same family some might be and were transported to Massachusetts; others to Pennsylvania, and others to Georgia. To finish this chapter of horrors, as the men were marched in sullen despair to the vessels into which they were crowded with cruel haste, in order to make sure of the restless tide, and mothers and children, such as were together, were thrust into the boats, which were impatiently detained—the order was given to fire the village of more than two hundred and fifty houses that there might be no gathering place for man or beast, and no rallying hearth for wife or children. It makes little impression on one's feelings to be told that in their proceedings the English authorities had followed the example of the French ecclesiastic Le Loutre, who seems to have been the inspiring genius of much evil to the unhappy Acadians, and among other of his cruel and imperious acts, had himself destroyed the houses of a thousand in order to compel them to emigrate within his own lines. It is not improbable that this act of wanton cruelty had suggested to the English authorities the thought of resorting to a similar measure. The fact illustrates at once the stress of the times and the desperate character of the conflict between the parties.

It is to be regretted that the documents are somewhat scanty and indefinite in their details of the incidents connected with this enforced emigration. So far as these documents and reports furnish any evidence they compel us to conclude the French were left to care for themselves after they had been landed at their ports of destination, and treated like voluntary emigrants, who had been provided with no equivalents for their homes or other property, and received little attention or sympathy except such as the scant pity of those times would permit under the stress of privation and war.

It would be interesting to know from private journals and public newspapers how these forlorn strangers and destitute emigrants were looked upon and treated as they were discharged upon the wharves at Boston, New York or Philadelphia. All the notices and memorials of this sort which we have are pathetic and touching to the last degree. It is evident that the colonial authorities did not welcome them with any special cordiality, as likely to add either to the industrial or moral strength of their commonwealths, and that

they must have regarded themselves as only strangers. It is estimated that some three thousand in all were landed and distributed at different ports along the Atlantic coast. Of these it is computed that two thousand sooner or later returned to their native and beloved Acadia. So soon as Quebec was captured and the supremacy of England was established in the northern provinces, there seemed to be no further objections, and no hindrances to the return of the fugitives. Though in their poverty and isolation they must have suffered many hardships in their transit from city to city, and through the long sea voyages in such fishing and trading vessels as they could find, the fact is not discreditable to the inhabitants of the English colonies, that two-thirds of these prisoners of war found their way back again to their old homes, and that it is computed that of the inhabitants of what was Acadia, some one hundred thousand are at present of the Acadian stock. Of those who did not reach their old homes, and did not die of their wanderings, some were sent by the kindness of Southern colonists to the French West India Islands, and some were befriended and found homes with their co-religionists in Maryland. A considerable number also made new homes for themselves in Louisiana, by favor of the Spanish government, and doubtless here and there one established a solitary household among strangers to his lineage and faith in the busy ports of the English colonies.*

In judging of this transaction we ought not to forget that such measures, however humanely administered, can never seem other than needlessly cruel. Involuntary emigration, especially of large communities, invariably breaks many hearts, and destroys hundreds of happy homes. The needful severities of the law of property, even when enforced in the spirit of strict and unbribed justice, furnish the material in disappointed hopes and severed associations for thousands and tens of thousands of domestic tragedies. Even so recently as the year 1825, thousands of families were driven out from their homes and

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**Selections from the public documents of the province of Nova Scotia, edited by Thomas B. Atkins, D.C.L., commissioner of Public Record, Halifax, N. S., Charles Annand, Publisher, 1869.*

History of Acadia, from its first discovery to its surrender to England by the Treaty of Paris, by James Hannay, St. Johns, New Brunswick, 1879.

The red man and the white man in North America, from its discovery to the present time, by George E. Ellis, Boston, Little Brown & Co. 1882.

The Acadian Exiles, or French Neutrals in Pennsylvania, by William B. Reed, memoirs of Hist. Soc. of Pennsylvania, Vol. VI., Philadelphia, 1850.

the homes of their ancestors in the north of Scotland at the order of their feudal proprietor, in order to make room for sheep-farms; and their houses were burned over their heads if they refused to move within two months to the scanty holdings from which they could earn no sufficient livelihood.

Having become familiar with the Place and Story, we are the better prepared to judge of and appreciate the Poem.

The events which we have sketched could hardly fail to make a more or less deep impression upon the generation which witnessed them. Not a few of the soldiers of Winslow's command who surrounded the church at Grand Prè, and hurried the miserable prisoners by the bayonet into the boats which awaited them on the shore, must have often reverted to the scene of horror with many a sad relenting such as they could neither repress nor conceal. Narrow as were the sympathies and tenacious as were the prejudices of the English colonists, they could not but be affected by the piteous story of these Acadian sufferers, as it was told at many a fireside by those who participated in the first act of harm, or subsequently came into more or less direct personal contact with some of these sorrowing and homeless wanderers. Even the stern New Englander, who had been taught from his earliest childhood to shrink from a devotee of this church as a dweller in darkness, could not but be softened to sympathy as he listened to the tale of some one of these forlorn exiles, who had moved the pity of Goodman So-and-So at the North End in Boston, or been stranded at Newport or New Haven. The Puritan, it should also be remembered, although he had of necessity a hard side toward those who differed from him in his views of the Christian truth, had always very tender sympathies for those whom he found wounded and helpless by the wayside. There was always more of the Good Samaritan in his heart than he has had credit for. If the New England soldiers under Colonel Winslow did the work which was enjoined upon them with a resolute spirit and a military promptness, their mothers and sisters were likely to hear the story with many a tear of warm-hearted sympathy for the Acadian women and children whom their husbands and brothers had so summarily driven from their homes.

The pathetic narrative and its sad traditions would be sure to survive also, that wild and beautiful coast which stretches from Portland to the

Bay of Fundy. It would be certain to be repeated with manifold variations and often with the intensest feeling by the fishermen and "coasters," who for generations have plied in all its waters. Scores of other histories of adventure and cruelty, as is well known, swarm to this day in the memories and heat the brains of its excitable and imaginative population. From the Penobscot to Labrador this coast is all alive with stories and suggestions of Indian surprises; of hazardous escapes; of piratical and freebooting adventures; of lawless invasions; of daylight attacks and midnight orgies; of the mysterious burial of accursed treasure, and of the still more mysterious and unsuccessful efforts to recover it. Besides these, there are not a few other narratives of the more dignified and imposing movements and the formal sieges of regular and national warfare. But among all these stories none could take precedence, for its many imaginative and emotional elements, of the tale of the simple Acadians of Grand Prè. The few but eloquent relics of the burnt village, which would now and then present themselves, could not fail to touch the heart of every visitor of the scene; and the more impressively, by reason of the beauty and fertile luxuriance of the surrounding landscape, and serve to keep alive the tenderest remembrances of the tragic event which had there taken place generations before. The illiterate and narrow Acadians, if they could read no history from the printed page, could never forget the story of the events of horror and of hate which had befallen their ancestors and kindred, beginning with the dreadful surprise of the first day of terror, through the weary days and years of wandering and exile which had brought them at last to their desolated homes, to renew their sorrow and their hate.

Some of these traditions must have early attracted the attention, kindled the imagination, and moved the heart of Mr. Longfellow in his childhood and youth. His birthplace and early home were at Portland, which is closely connected with all the coast beyond, and whose population must of necessity be alive to its past history and its present interests. His first American ancestor met his death by drowning near Anticosti, a desolate and forbidding island off the southern coast of Labrador, and his own reading and thoughts were early directed by "natural piety" to the stormy waters and foggy coasts which stretch far toward the east and north. Had he searched for a theme

which would kindle a poet's fancy and move a poet's heart his attention would naturally have been arrested by this memorable story, whether it had been casually suggested in his travels or his reading, or the traditions which he heard at the fireside. Moreover, the story which we have recited had not been wholly unknown to literature, before the gifted Longfellow selected it as the theme for Evangeline. The eloquent Abbé Raynal,* in a work of brilliant though ambitious eloquence, had told the story of the unhappy Acadians with no little sympathy, and depicted their imagined happy condition of pastoral and primitive innocence with not a little poetic feeling. It is of little import whether or not his work in general is written with a sober spirit and a sound philosophy, or whether it is essentially unphilosophical in its theory and unhistoric in its narrative. It gave to literature an ideal picture of a simple people, who had for generations dwelt apart from the corruptions of civilized society in almost primeval innocence and peace, and upon whom Nature had lavished her most abundant treasures of land and sea, at the least expense of labor and forethought. The picture of their condition and the story of their fate might both have been overdrawn; but it was at once attractive and eloquent, and it was a unique acquisition to the treasures of imaginative sentiment.

The distinguished historian of the United States who knows well how to enliven the sober prose of history with brilliant and moving pictures for the imagination, had followed the eloquent Raynal in a still more vivid and touching delineation of the beautiful lives and happy condition of this simple people before the sudden stroke fell upon them.

"For nearly forty years, from the peace of Utrecht, they [the French Neutrals] had been forgotten or neglected, and had prospered in their seclusion. No tax-gatherer counted their folds, no magistrate dwelt in their hamlets. The parish priest made their records and regulated their successions. Their little disputes were settled among themselves, with scarcely one appeal to English authority at Annapolis. The pastures were covered with their herds and flocks; and dikes, raised by extraordinary efforts of social industry, shut out the rivers and the tide from alluvial marshes of exuberant fertility. The

*Histoire Philosophique et Politique des Établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes. Tom. 6me. [illegible] La Haye, 1774.

meadows, thus reclaimed, were covered by richest grasses, or fields of wheat, that yielded thirty and fifty fold at the harvest. Their houses were built in clusters, neatly constructed and comfortably furnished; and around them all kinds of domestic fowls abounded. With the spinning-wheel and the loom, their women made of flax from their own fields, of fleeces from their own flocks, warm but sufficient clothing. The few foreign luxuries that were coveted could be obtained from Annapolis or Louisburg, in return for furs or wheat or cattle.

"Happy in their neutrality, the Acadians formed as it were, one great family. Their morals were of unaffected purity. Love was sanctified and calmed by the universal custom of early marriages. The neighbors of the community would assist the new couple to raise their cottage on fertile land, which the wilderness freely offered. Their numbers increased; and the colony, which had begun as the trading station of a company with a monopoly of the fur trade, counted perhaps, sixteen or seventeen thousand inhabitants."*

It is of little import whether or not these pictures of the life and lot of the Acadians are exact as history or whether the arguments, for or against the procedure of their English masters, which they suggest or contain, are or are not convincing. It is enough for us to notice that they were incorporated into literature before Mr. Longfellow composed his poem, and one if not both these delineations might have served to stimulate his imagination in the choice and treatment of his theme.

But the more definitely we can trace the history of these original suggestions which were the raw material of his work, the more wonderful seems the rich and varied product into which he has wrought this material. It is for this reason and this only that we have endeavored to conceive this material as it was gathered into his mind and memory before he began to fuse and recast it. Of the modern Poems which may have aided him by any suggestions, one only deserves to be named, viz., "*Hermann und Dorothea*," by Goethe. In two or three particulars this remarkable poem may have been of service to the author of Evangeline. We notice first and foremost its idyllic character, and the strength and dignity with which it conceives the incidents

* *G. Bancroft, History of the United States, vol. III., chap. viii. Revised edition.*

and affections of humble life; second, the similar experience of a community driven out from their homes on account of their religious faith; third, the contrasted and picturesque interest of a tale of love in humble life; and fourth, the successful use of the hexameter verse, an admirable vehicle for the delineation of simple manners and domestic love. We cannot suppose Longfellow to have been unacquainted with this poem, nor knowing it, not to have been instructed and animated by its varied suggestiveness when he had conceived the thought of Evangeline, and purposed to use the Acadian story as a poetic theme.

The skill with which he used and applied the resources of his theme cannot be easily overpraised. The genius which led him to set apart Evangeline as the central figure, and to hold her ever in the foreground of the successive scenes through which he leads her in her patient but sad and weary pilgrimage, finds a sympathetic response in the mind and heart of every reader.

The ingenuity with which the author avails himself of the opportunity to paint the varied life and to allude to the diversified history of the English colonies, which had been planted along the Atlantic coast, and sets them in picturesque and varied contrast with one another and with the French and Spanish life, which flourished so luxuriantly on the banks of the Mississippi, is admirable in the conception and execution. This varied yet strikingly American character of the poem, commended the poem from the first, to every critic for its indigenous flavor, as it has made a way for it to hundreds of thousands of American hearts. It should be remembered that at the time when these events occurred, each of the original colonies had developed a character which was strikingly its own, and the author with great truth and skill has made the most of this circumstance, by a series of masterly portraits, which are the more effective, the more incidentally they are given. The sober student of American colonial life would need to go very far and to read very widely before he could furnish himself from any other sources so full and varied a series of pictures of colonial manners and character as Evangeline furnishes.

Of the genuine pathos and purity of the tale nothing need be written. The poem speaks for itself. All hearts consent to its admirable simplicity

and its moving tenderness. Few creations of the kind, if any, have been accepted so universally as blending the ideal with the real, as the portrait of Evangeline acknowledged at once and by all,

> "As a creature not too bright and good,
> For human nature's daily food,—
>
> And yet a spirit still and bright,
> With something of angelic light."

The presence in thousands of American homes of Faed's ideal portrait of this ideal personage, is a moving tribute to the genius of the poet, and evidence of the appreciative sympathy of his thousands of readers.

It is almost unnecessary to speak of the elevated conceptions of fidelity to plighted and cherished love, of patience, submission and hope under calamity, and of faith in God, which are everywhere set forth in this poem. The sweet aroma of gentle goodness sustained and renewed by an unobtrusive faith, are all the more lovely when diffused through the lowly valleys of humble life, and spring up from the hard and thorny paths of protracted disappointment and bitter grief. The imposing rites, the frank confessions, the severe penances, the confiding trust, and the unquestioning obedience of the church of Evangeline—its self-denying priesthood, and its care for the sick and forlorn and dying—the mystic bond of Christian brotherhood, under which the rich and poor meet together as well in its cathedrals as in its hovels, as truly in its most elaborate as in its simplest worship—these and manifold other poetic material are used by the poet with skillful effect, from the first picture which he gives us of cheerful worship in Acadia, to the last death scene in a hospital, which he draws of Gabriel, nursed by a sister of charity. Skillful as Longfellow in many other of his poems has shown himself in his frequent use of the abundant material furnished by this church for spectacular effect, for spiritual elevation and emotional appeals, he has nowhere shown himself more completely a master in this direction than in Evangeline.

The final scene is in some sense a triumph of faith and hope. While it has more of plaintive pathos than of jubilant triumph, it yet lifts the thoughts and affections to the purer and more satisfying joys of the life immortal. From beginning to end the reader cannot, if he would, and would not if he could, desire to abate one jot from the strong and deep conviction

which gathers strength from every page of this delineation of patient submission and courageous life—gathers strength by what it feeds on, and triumphs at the last. There are few poems in which the imagination in its feeling sympathy stoops more gracefully to the lowliest humility, or in its confident elevation soars more naturally into seraphic hope than it does in this truly Christian Idyl.

If, as Lord Bacon has observed, poetry has always justly been esteemed as being something divine, because it elevates the soul above the meanness, the sordidness, and the selfishness of reality, this is eminently true of such a poem as Evangeline. All who read it cannot fail to feel that it honors, dignifies, and exalts that love of nature which is at once the chiefest and the most satisfying of the delights of life; that it cherishes those affections to kindred, and to home, which open to us our purest joys; that it strengthens that allegiance to duty which ennobles the meanest and the lowliest condition, and enforces that trust in God which makes the darkest hours of life the brightest. It was to these noble uses of the poetic gift that the great and good poet, so lately taken from us and so sincerely mourned, consecrated the divine gift which he so faithfully cultivated, and which he never more felicitously applied than in the delightful idyl which has transferred the thoughts and affections of so many readers to the valley of Acadia and the Bay of Fundy.

"As the ample moon,
In the deep stillness of a summer even,
Rising behind a thick and lofty grove,
Burns like an unconsuming fire of light
In the green trees; and kindling on all sides
Their leafy umbrage, turns the dusky veil
Into a substance glorious as her own,
Yea, with her own incorporated, by power
Capacious and serene. Like power abides
In man's celestial spirit; virtue thus
Sets forth and magnifies herself; thus feeds
A calm, a beautiful and silent fire,
From the encumbrances of mortal life,
From error, disappointment—nay from guilt,
And sometimes, so relenting justice wills,
From palpable oppression of despair."

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