

THE SENTINEL OF THE ST. LAWRENCE.

By PERCY A. HURD.

VOLTAIRE once spoke contemptuously of Canada as "*quelques arpents de neige.*" The average Englishman thinks of Newfoundland as little else than a very few acres of snow with fogs, dogs, and codfish thrown in, and huge fires and constant faction fights to give a people isolated in mid-Atlantic something to think and talk about.

Yet, if the whole truth be told, Newfoundland is rich in historic interest. She is England's oldest colony. That of itself is no mean distinction. Upon her shores England began her great work of conquering and peopling half the world and building up a Greater Britain beyond the seas. Canada opened her career under the rigid tutelage of French seigneurs and Jesuit priests. South Africa began as a Dutch colony; Australia was first a dumping ground for English convicts; but Newfoundland has been the home of the free Briton from the very start.

Nearly four centuries have passed since John Cabot sighted her bleak coast from the prow of the good ship *Matthew*, of the port of Bristol, and when we remember all that has happened since then—the harassings of Basques and French, the tyranny of English Court favourites and monopolists, the stupidity and neglect of English statesmen, and last, but not least, the incessant religious and political squabbles of Catholics and Orangemen, merchants and "people"—when we think of all this, we realise the truth of Lord Salisbury's remark that Newfoundland has indeed been the sport of historic misfortune. Yet there is abundant life in the old colony. Standing at the Atlantic gateway to all British North America, she holds a position of rare strategic importance; and her sturdy British stock and her wealth of fishery, forest, and mine may yet secure for her an honoured place in the future of English-speaking peoples.

The beginnings of Newfoundland well illustrate Professor Seeley's aphorism that England seemed to set about her mighty work of State expansion in a fit of absent-mindedness. Fired by the example of Columbus with a desire to explore the mysteries of the new highway to the East

by the West, "John Cabotto, citizen of Venes," and his sons, prayed "your most noble and habundant grace" King Henry VII. for letters patent, to discover new lands for the English Crown. They were bidden do so "upon their own proper cost and charges," and ordered to hand over one fifth part of the net profits of their voyage for the King's use. And when, having found the new land and given England without a penny's cost to herself a right to the sovereignty of North America, it was the magnificent gratuity of £10 that Henry bestowed upon "Hym that found the new isle." The "Hym" was probably the sailor who first sighted land from the masthead. John Cabot himself, though men "ran after him like mad" for a time, was rewarded with a beggarly pension of £20 out of the revenue of Bristol. He lies buried no one knows where, and until a few years ago there was not so much as a spot of land to perpetuate his name on the continent he gave to England.

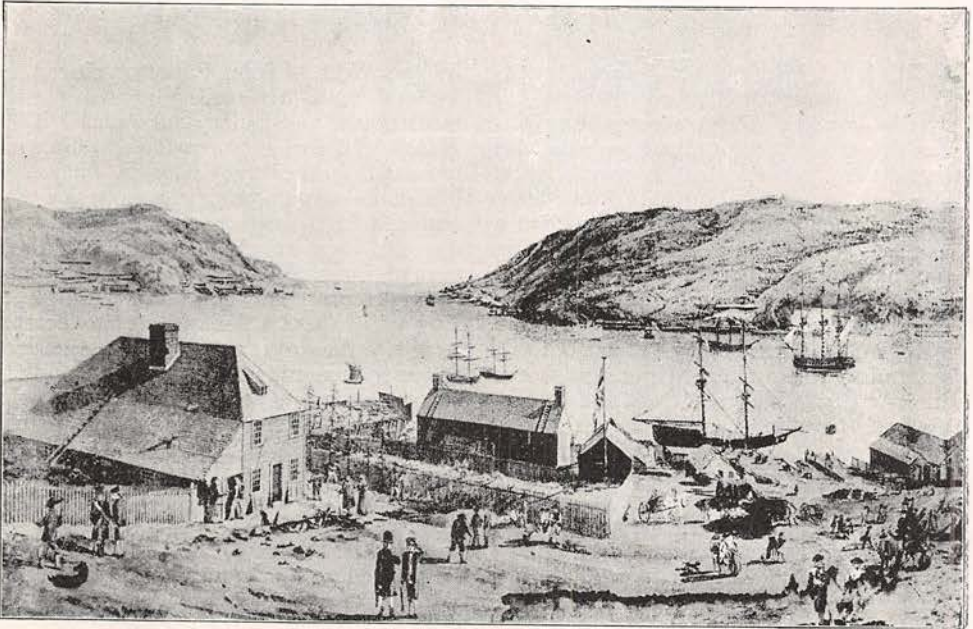
The foothold which the merchant adventurers of the West of England thus gained in Newfoundland they have never lost, and many a little Devon and Dorset seaport is still the "old home" of some of the best families in the colony. As recently as 1834 we read of hundreds of sturdy Devonshire "youngsters" going out each spring for two summers and a winter to the fishery. The little "Dartmouth Inn and Newfoundland Tavern" at Newton Abbott was the acknowledged place for shipping, and when the parson came to "Pruverbs" in the Church service every villager knew that the "Newfanlan men" would soon be home.

Judge Prowse, of Newfoundland,* whose researches make his newly published "History of Newfoundland" a work of the highest historical value as well as of absorbing interest, has disposed of the idea which previous historians had that after Cabot's discoveries Newfoundland was deserted for nearly a century. A son of Devon himself, Judge Prowse laughs at

* We are indebted to Judge Prowse for the use of the photographs, etc., from his "History of Newfoundland" (Macmillan), which illustrate this article.

the idea that "the most pugnacious and pertinacious race in all the three kingdoms" would enter upon a most profitable business and then give it up. A contemporary account of Cabot's voyage,

splendid and profitable fishery, we feel, with Judge Prowse, that this is hardly "the west country way." It is, moreover, contrary to the records, for in the Acts of Henry VIII., 1541, and Edward VI., 1548,



VIEW OF ST. JOHN'S ABOUT 1770.

written in the same year, 1497, speaks of the sea off Newfoundland as "full of fish, which are taken not only with the net, but also with a basket in which a stone is put, so that the basket may plunge into water"; and the Englishmen with Cabot are reported as saying that "they can bring so many fish that the kingdom will have no more business with Islanda [Iceland], and that from this country there will be a very great trade in the fish they call stock-fish." Portuguese and French records show that the fishermen of those countries knew of this harvest of the sea, and as early as 1506 we find the King of Portugal gathering a handsome revenue from his tenth share of profits in Newfoundland. When, therefore, the historians of the past assure us that for the first half of the sixteenth century no English fishers or traders were to be seen in Newfoundland, and that our sailors jeopardised their lives on these lonely waters just to bring home "strange birds and savage men to amuse the citizens of London," leaving the French and Portuguese to gather all the benefits of a

the Newfoundland fishery is classed with old-established trades like the Iceland and Orkney fisheries; and in later years we find Raleigh, the great coloniser of the Elizabethan age, declaring the Newfoundland fishery to have already become "the mainstay and support of the western counties"—then the great maritime centre of England—and asserting that "a successful attack on the Newfoundland [fishing] fleet would be the greatest misfortune that could befall England."

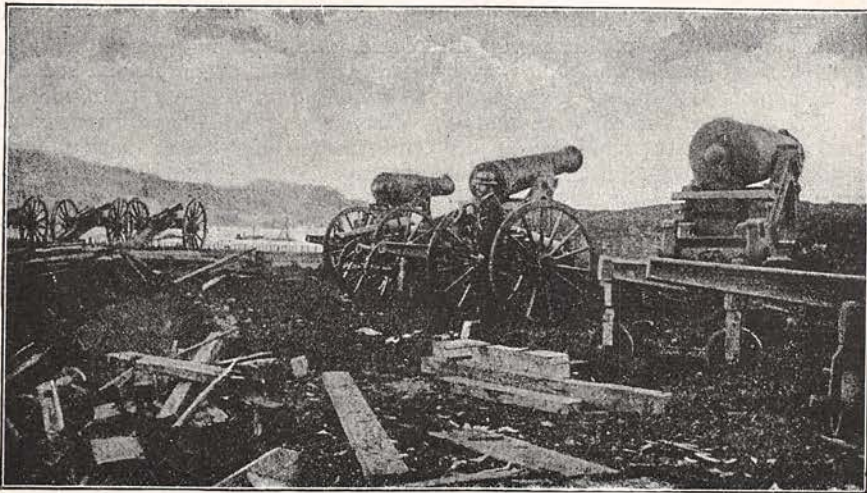
This fact—that England's dominion in Newfoundland was a continuous dominion from the time of Cabot's discovery—is of far more than academic interest. It throws light upon the most brilliant period of English history—the golden age, when the New World came to redress the balance of the Old. The historians have been so busy weaving romance round the voyage of the *Mayflower* and the settlement of the little band of "Pilgrim Fathers" on the barren coast of Massachusetts, that they have overlooked the real source and origin of the beginnings of colonisation in North America. When the harassed

Puritans sent from Holland to King James for leave to go to America he asked, "What profit might arise?" "Fishing" was their sole answer. "So God have my soul," the King replied, "'tis an honest trade; 'twas the Apostles' own calling," and so they got their leave. It was the fishing which the hardy sons of Devon had carried on so quietly and yet so profitably year after year that acted as a magnet to the forefathers of American civilisation when they sought a land free from tyrannies of Church and State.

Every spring with the advent of the easterly winds venturesome mariners set out from Dartmouth, Bideford, Bristol, and other ports in the west, in their ships of from fifty to eighty tons' burden, to compete with Portuguese, Bretons, and Normans and Basques in the inexhaustible cod, whale, and seal fisheries of Newfoundland. The historians were too much concerned with the doings of kings, queens, and courtiers to record the fact, but Judge Prowse has no difficulty in proving that this trade, growing year by year, almost unknown to the Court, and therefore to the dreaded tax-gatherers,

learnt their first lessons in the taming of the Spaniard. Without these lessons the Invincible Armada might have met quite another fate.

But though these were great days for English seamanship, they were poor days for Newfoundland. She was left without law, without religion or government—the haunt of pirate-traders. The island was, in the words of an Under-Secretary of State in after years, looked upon as nothing more than "a great ship moored near the banks during the fishing season for the convenience of English fishermen." The bold attempt of Sir Gilbert Humphrey, a scholarly knight of Devon, half-brother to Sir Walter Raleigh, to colonise the island in 1583 was a dismal failure. Some of the 250 followers who went with him from Devonshire have left us a record of their doings, and we can picture the scene. The gaily dressed Elizabethan courtier had rough English, Spanish, and Portuguese fishermen gathered round him on Garrison Hill in the centre of St. John's Harbour, and there, beneath the banner of England, his commission under the great seal of England was "openlie and solemnlie read,"



POINT AUX CANONS, ST. PIERRE.

was the nursing mother of England's maritime supremacy. Voyaging to and fro, these West-countrymen gained a rare skill and daring in seamanship. St. John's, Newfoundland, was even then a rendezvous for all foreigners; and meeting them there in days when the spoiling of a foreigner was as regular an incident as the sharing of cod, these rough West-country fishermen

and he received a turf and hazel wand in feudal fashion as token of his jurisdiction for 200 leagues in every direction. The "royalties, liberties, and privileges" were indeed "many, great, and large," for they included Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, part of Labrador, as well as the islands of Newfoundland, Cape Breton, and Prince Edward Island. But Sir

Gilbert was more a dreamer than a man of affairs. He was ill-fitted to meet the bitter hostility of the West-countrymen, who resented the intrusion of a courtly coloniser into their fishing quarters; and his patent and his great schemes came to nought with the sinking of his little frigate on the homeward voyage.

The next great epoch in Newfoundland history—the colonisation era—covering almost the whole of the seventeenth century, presents some curious features. Every man of influence at Court must have his part in the work of colonisation. The great Chancellor Bacon, Sir William Vaughan and his brother, Lord Carberry, Lord Falkland and Lord Baltimore were among the Court colonisers, and their schemes were often as fantastic as they were aristocratic. As in so many colonisation efforts of later years, there was zeal without knowledge. Of them all, not a vestige remains. The elaborate charters to which princes and potentates lent their names are buried away in musty and forgotten records, and all the grandiose names of New Falkland, Cambriol, Colchos, Golden Grove, Vaughan's Cove, Britaniola, with the one exception of Baltimore's Avalon, have disappeared from the maps. The colonisers whose colonisation has endured were the poor and humble men, who, driven from England by harsh laws, made their way to isolated hamlets on the Newfoundland coast. They had to face utter neglect of Governments at home, and the deadly enmity of the Devon ship fishermen, who feared the effect of settlements upon their fishing monopoly; but they clung to the patches of farm where they had built their rude homes, and became a bulwark against the foreign invaders who in later years sought to wrest the colony from England.

It was easy in those days to secure the dignity of admiral. A skipper had only to enter the harbour first and he became admiral and judge over all for the entire fishing season; while the masters of the second and third following vessels were vice-admiral and rear-admiral respectively. The admiral had, it is true, no gold lace. Pitch-besmeared jacket and trousers were enough for him, and seated on an upturned butter-tub in a fish-store, he dealt out justice to the man who paid most for it. The fishing admiral was, indeed, the servant of the merchants, and the worst offence a resident could commit was to till a portion of the soil. The litigant who began his case with the production of a

flowing bowl of calabogus was, says Judge Prowse, pretty sure to captivate the judicial mind, and sometimes the case came, alas! to an abrupt close by the collapse of the judge on the floor of the court. But what of that? He fined and whipped at his pleasure, and made his personal foes smart for it. During his first visit to one of the outports the Chief Justice found that the fishing admiral had given judgment after judgment in favour of his own firm. "How dare you, Sir, commit such a perversion of justice?" exclaimed the angry chief. "Well," was the calm reply of "the Lord High Admiral," "I must be a pretty sort of a vule of a judge if I couldn't do justice to myself!" No wonder the residents prayed the Home Government that they might be "governed as Britons, and not live like banditti or forsaken people, without law or gospel."

After a century of the unbridled rule of the fishing admirals came a century of naval governors, each dealing out martial law in his season. Lord George Graham, the Hon. John Byng, Lord Rodney, Commodore Francis William Drake, Lord Graves, Lord Radstock, and other famous heroes of the sea-duels between England and France were among the governors, and though as the population of the colony increased, their quarter-deck justice became an anomaly and a sore grievance, their rule marked a great advance upon that of the rude fishing admirals, and gave effectual recognition to the position of Newfoundland as a British colony. As an instance, note how Rodney dealt with the magistrates of Harbour Grace who asked leave to reduce the servants' wages on account of a bad fishery. "I can by no means approve of it," says Rodney decisively; "law and equity declare the labourer to be worthy of his hire. I have only one question to ask—namely, had the season been good in proportion as it has proved bad, would the merchants or boat-keepers have raised the men's wages?"

With the advent of the railway, steam-boat, and telegraph, Newfoundland, like the rest of the world, passed into the era of education, responsible government, and courts of justice. This is, of course, as it should be, but one cannot help regretting that the picturesque old days are now no more. What a sensation it would make in St. John's were a Chief Justice of to-day to send the Governor such a reply to specific charges as Chief Justice Tremlett sent to Governor Duckworth in 1811!—"To the first charge, your Excellency,"

he wrote, "I answer that it is a lie; to the second charge I say that it is a d—d lie; and to the third that it is a d—d infernal lie! And, your Excellency, I have no more to say.—Your Excellency's obedient servant, Thomas Tremlett." There is a bluff breezy freshness in such an official document as that, and we rejoice to think that the accused was sustained both by the Governor and the authorities in England.

Then, again, there are no more jolly, good-natured princes like Prince William Henry (afterwards William IV.) to temper justice with fun on the magistrate's bench. An old gentleman who had known the Prince well in Newfoundland called at

escape is yet clear. At home the trouble of the moment is largely one of ways and means. Isolated as she is from her continent, and dependent upon the precarious fisheries for a bare means of subsistence, Newfoundland finds it difficult to pay her way as a self-governing colony. Abroad there is the vexatious French shore question to harass and impede colonial effort. In treaty after treaty, from the treaty of Utrecht in 1713 onwards, English Ministers have sacrificed the interests of the colony to France, so that the French fisherman is still found building his hut and fishing-stage on the Newfoundland shore, and the little islands of St. Pierre



OX-CART, ST. PIERRE.

Kensington Palace after the Prince had come to the throne. His Majesty was, Judge Prowse relates, delighted to see him, gave him a glass of the favourite calabogus, and talked pleasantly over a pipe. "And may I ask after her Majesty's health?" said the old Newfoundlander, thinking it the right thing to do. "Thank you," was the reply, "her Majesty" (Queen Adelaide) "is quite well, and would have had much pleasure in seeing you but, unfortunately, this is washing-day."

One turns regretfully from times like these, especially when they find such delightful records as they do in Judge Prowse's pages. They have, alas! left behind them a legacy of political and commercial turmoil from which no way of

and Miquelon on the south-west coast, which were ceded to France as a mere shelter for French fishermen during the fishing season, have become a fully fledged French colony, and the resort of all the smugglers of North America, to the harassing of legitimate trade in Newfoundland.

Carlyle once said of Ireland, "England's job of work inexorably needed to be done cannot go on at all, unless her back-parlour belong to herself." Newfoundlanders say much the same of the only permanent solution of their difficulty with the French. The trouble is that no English Ministry has yet been able by exchange of territory or purchase to make Newfoundland mistress of her own house.

Apart from these political questions, the three little islands of St. Pierre, Great Miquelon, and Little Miquelon, or Langlade, are a delightful survival of quaint eighteenth-century France, left almost untouched by all the bustle of the New World. When the Motherland had its



MARY MARCH,
ONE OF THE LAST OF THE BEOTHICS.

Reproduced from a Drawing by Lady Hamilton.

Revolution in 1789, St. Pierre, too, had its "Assembly General of the Commune," its "Committee of Notables," its "Club des Amis de la Constitution," and even its "Reign of Terror" and "Tree of Liberty." To-day, tourists who reach it in four days from New York, and in less time from Boston and Halifax, speak of St. Pierre as the Bordeaux, Marseilles, and St. Malo of a hundred years ago rolled into one, and reproduced in miniature. There are the brightly coloured sashes of the ox-drivers—the only horse ever imported

is said to have died of *ennui*—the gay headgear of the fisher-lasses, the brick-floored, wood-beamed cafés, the huge oil-lamps at every corner, the brightly painted images of the Virgin in niches here and there, the pattering of the sabots on the narrow brick footways, the gold-laced gendarme, and at ten o'clock each night that other great functionary—the letter-carrier and town-crier in one—marching round the town to the beat of the drum to warn good citizens to put out their light. These carry the thoughts far back into the past. It is all very quaint and interesting in itself; it is doubly so when we remember that these few square miles are all that remain to France of her once vast possessions in North America.

Of the natives of Newfoundland we know little. When Cabot landed at Bonavista, he found them to be a powerful tribe of Red Indians, using the skins and furs of wild beasts for garments, and, expert as they were in the use of bows and arrows, spears, darts, clubs, and slings, we can imagine what a paradise they found a country stocked with game and fish of all kinds. A cranium and a few bones in the museum at St. John's are all that is left to recall the vanished Beothics. For them, as for the kindred Red Indians of the American continent, the white man with his firearms and his fire-water proved too much. One of the last of the Beothics was Mary March, who was brought to St. John's in 1819, and sent back to her people loaded with presents in the hope of making peace between white and red man. The peace was never made. Years afterwards a traveller found a white deal coffin in an ancient burying-place of the natives, and within was the skeleton of Mary March, neatly shrouded in white muslin, with the body of her murdered husband at her side.