

A Female Emigrant's letters 1836

The Backwoods of Canada

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Among the numerous works on Canada that have been published within the last ten years, with emigration for their leading theme, there are few, if any, that give information regarding the domestic economy of a settler's life, sufficiently minute to prove a faithful guide to the person on whose responsibility the whole comfort of a family depends—the mistress, whose department it is “ to hand the house in order.”

Dr. Dunlop, it is true, has published a witty and spirited pamphlet, “ The Backwoods-man,” but it does not enter into the routine of feminine duties and employment, in a state of emigration. Indeed, a woman's pen alone can describe half that is requisite to be told of the internal management of a domicile in the backwoods, in order to enable the outcoming female emigrant to form a proper judgment of the trials and arduous duties she has to encounter.

“ Forewarned, forearmed,” is a maxim of our forefathers, containing much matter in its pithy brevity ; and, following its spirit, the writer of the following pages has endeavoured to afford every possible information to the wives and daughters of emigrants of the higher class who contemplate seeking a home amid our Canadian wilds. Truth has been conscientiously her object in the work, for it were cruel to write in flattering terms calculated to deceive emigrants into the belief that the land to which they are transferring their families, their capital, and their hopes, a land flowing with milk and honey, where comforts and affluence may be obtained with little exertion. She prefers honestly representing facts in their real and true light, that the female part of the emigrant's family may be enabled to look them firmly in the face ; to find a remedy in female ingenuity and expediency for some difficulties ; and, by being properly prepared, encounter the rest with that high-spirited cheerfulness of which well-educated females often give extraordinary proofs. She likewise wishes to teach them to discard every thing exclusively pertaining to the artificial refinement of fashionable life in England ; and to point out that, by devoting the money consumed in these incumbrances to articles of real use, which cannot be readily obtained in Canada, they may enjoy the pleasure of superintending a pleasant, well-ordered home. She is desirous of giving them the advantage of her three years' experience, that they may properly apply every part of their time, and learn to consider that every pound or pound's worth belonging to any member of an outcoming emigrant's family, ought to be sacredly considered as *capital*, which must make proper returns either as the means of bringing increase in the shape of income, or, what is still better, in healthful domestic comfort.

These exhalations in behalf of utility in preference to artificial personal refinement, are not so needless as the English public may consider. The emigrants to British America are no longer of the rank of life that formerly left the shores of the British Isles. It is not only the poor husbandmen and artisans, that move in vast bodies to the west, but it is the enterprising English capitalist, and the once affluent landholder, alarmed at the difficulties of establishing numerous families in independence, in a country where every profession is overstocked, that join the bands that Great Britain is pouring forth into these colonies ! Of what vital importance is it that the female members of these most valuable colonists should obtain proper information regarding the important duties they are undertaking ; that they should learn before-

hand to brace their minds to the task, and thus avoid the repinings and discontent that is ^t to follow unfounded expectations and fallacious hopes !

It is a fact not universally known to the public, that British officers and their families are usually denizens of the backwoods ; and as great numbers of unattached officers of every rank have accepted grants of land in Canada, they are the pioneers of civilization in the wilderness, and their families, often of delicate nurture and honourable descent, are at once plunged into all the hardships attendant on the rough life of a bush-settler. The laws that regulate the grants of lands, which enforce a certain time of residence, and certain settlement duties to be performed, allow no claims to absentees when once the land is drawn. These laws wisely force a superiorly-educated man with resources of both property and intellect, to devote all his energies to a certain spot of uncleared land. It may easily be supposed that no persons would encounter these hardships who have not a young family to establish in the healthful ways of independence. This family renders the residence of such a head still more valuable to the colony ; and the half-pay officer, by thus leading the advanced guard of civilization, and bringing into these rough districts gentle and well-educated females, who soften and improve all around them by *mental* refinements, is serving his country as much by founding peaceful villages and pleasant homesteads in the trackless wilds, as ever he did by personal courage, or military stratagem, in times of war.

It will be seen, in the course of this work, that the writer is as earnest in recommending ladies who belong to the higher class of settlers to cultivate all the mental resources of a superior education, as she is to induce them to discard all irrational and artificial wants and mere useless pursuits. She would willingly direct their attention to the natural history and botany of this new country, in which they will find a never-failing source of amusement and instruction, at once enlightening and elevating the mind, and serving to fill up the void left by the absence of those lighter feminine accomplishments, the practice of which are necessarily superseded by imperative domestic duties. To the person who is capable of looking abroad into the beauties of nature, and adoring the Creator through his glorious works, are opened stores of unmixed pleasure, which will not permit her to be dull or unhappy in the loneliest part of our Western Wilderness, the writer of these pages speaks from experience, and would be pleased to find that the simple sources from which she has herself drawn pleasure, have cheered the solitude of future female sojourners in the backwoods of Canada.

As a general remark to all sorts and conditions of settlers, she would observe, that the struggle up the hill of Independence is often a severe one, and it ought not to be made alone. It must be aided and encouraged by the example and assistance of an active and cheerful partner. Children should be taught to appreciate the devoted love that has induced their parents to overcome the natural reluctance felt by all persons to quit for ever the land of their forefathers, the scenes of their earliest and happiest days, and to become aliens and wanderers in a distant country,—to form new ties and new friends, and begin, as it were, life's toilsome march anew, that their children may be placed in a situation in which, by industry and activity, the substantial comforts of life may be permanently obtained, and a landed property handed down to them, and their children after them.

Young men soon become reconciled to this country, which offers to them, that chief attraction to youth,—great personal liberty. Their employments are of a cheerful and healthy nature ; and their amusements, such as hunting, shooting, fishing, and boating, are peculiarly fascinating. But in none of these can their sisters share. The hardships and difficulties of the settler's life, therefore, are felt peculiarly by the female part of the family. It is with a view of ameliorating these privations that the following pages have been written to show how some difficulties may be best borne and others avoided. The simple truth, founded entirely on

personal knowledge of the facts related, is the basis of the work ; to have had recourse to fiction might have rendered it more acceptable to many readers, but would have made it less useful to that class for whom it is especially intended. For those who, without intending to share in the privations and dangers of an emigrant's life, have a rational curiosity to become acquainted with scenes and manners so different from those of a long-civilized country, it is hoped that this little work will afford some amusement, and inculcate some lessons not devoid of moral instruction.

The Backwoods of Canada.

Letter I

Departure from Greenock in the Brig *Laurel*—Fitting-up of the Vessel—Boy Passenger.—
Sea Prospect—Want of Occupation and Amusement—Captain's Goldfinch.

Brig *Laurel*, July 18, 1832.

I RECEIVED your last kind letter, my dearest mother, only a few hours before we set sail from Greenock. As you express a wish that I should give you a minute detail of our voyage, I shall take up my subject from the time of our embarkation, and write as inclination prompts me. Instead of having reason to complain of short letters, you will, I fear, find mine only too prolix.

After many delays and disappointments, we succeeded at last in obtaining a passage in a fast-sailing brig, the *Laurel* of Greenock ; and favourable winds are now rapidly carrying us across the Atlantic.

The *Laurel* is not a regular passenger-ship, which I consider an advantage, for what we lose in amusement and variety we assuredly gain in comfort. The cabin is neatly fitted up, and I enjoy the luxury (for such it is, compared with the narrow berths of the state cabin) of a handsome sofa, with crimson draperies, in the great cabin. The state cabin is also ours. We paid fifteen pounds each for our passage to Montreal. This was high, but it includes every expense ; and, in fact, we had no choice. The only vessel in the river bound for Canada, was a passenger-ship, literally swarming with emigrants, chiefly of the lower class of Highlanders.

The only passengers besides ourselves in the *Laurel* are the captain's nephew, a pretty yellow-haired lad, about fifteen years of age, who works his passage out, and a young gentleman who is going out as clerk in a merchant's house in Quebec. He seems too much wrapped up in his own affairs to be very communicative to others ; he walks much, talks little, and reads less I but often amuses himself by singing as he paces the deck, " Home, sweet home," and that delightful song by Camoens, " Isle of beauty." It is a sweet song, and I can easily imagine the charm it has for a home-sick heart.

I was much pleased with the scenery of the Clyde ; the day we set sail was a lovely one, and I remained on deck till nightfall. The morning light found our vessel dashing gallantly along, with a favourable breeze, through the north channel ; that day we saw the last of the Hebrides, and before night lost sight of the north coast of Ireland. A wide expanse of water and sky is now our only prospect, unvaried by any object save the distant and scarcely to be traced outline of some vessel just seen at the verge of the horizon, a speck in the immensity of space, or sometimes a few sea-fowl. I love to watch these wanderers of the ocean, as they rise and fall with the rocking billows, or flit about our vessel ; and often I wonder whence

they came, to what distant shore they are bound, and if they make the rude wave their home and resting-place during the long day and dark night ; and then (recall to mind the words of the American poet, Bryant,—

“ He who from zone to zone
Guides through the boundless air their certain flight,
In the long way that I must tread alone
Will guide my steps aright.”

Though we have been little more than a week on board, I am getting weary of the voyage. I can only compare the monotony of it to being weather-bound in some country inn. I have already made myself acquainted with all the books worth reading in the ship’s library ; unfortunately, it is chiefly made up with old novels and musty romances.

When the weather is fine I sit on a bench on the deck, wrapped in my cloak, and sew, or pace the deck with my husband, and talk over plans for the future, which in all probability will never be realized. I really do pity men who are not actively employed : women have always their needle as a resource against the overwhelming weariness of an idle life ; but where a man is confined to a small space, such as the deck and cabin of a trading vessel, with nothing to see, nothing to hear, nothing to do, and nothing to read, he is really a very pitiable creature.

There is one passenger on board that seems perfectly happy, if one may judge from the liveliness of the songs with which he greets us whenever we approach his cage. It is “ Harry,” the captain’s goldfinch—“ *the captain’s mate*,” as the sailors term him. This pretty creature has made no fewer than twelve voyages in the *Laurel*, “ It is all one to him whether his cage is at sea or on land, he is still at home,” said the captain, regarding his little favourite with an air of great affection, and evidently gratified by the attention I bestowed on his bird.

I have already formed a friendship with the little captive. He never fails to greet my approach with one of his sweetest songs, and will take from my fingers a bit of biscuit, which he holds in his claws till he has thanked me with a few of his clearest notes. This mark of acknowledgment is termed by the steward, “ saying grace.”

If the wind still continues to favour us, the captain tells us we shall be on the banks of Newfoundland in another week. Farewell for the present.

Letter II.

Arrival off Newfoundland.—Singing of the Captain’s Goldfinch previous to the discovery of Land.—Golf of St. Laurence.—Scenery of the River St. Laurence.—Difficult navigation of the River.— French Fisherman engaged as a Pilot.—Isle of Bic.—Green Island.— Regular Pilot engaged.—Scenery of Green Island.— Gros Isle—Quarantine Regulations.— Emigrants on Gros Isle.—Anival off Quebec— Prospect of the City and Environs.

Brig *Laurel*, River St Laurence,
August 6, 1832.

I LEFT off writing, my dear mother, from this simple cause,—I had nothing to say. One day was but the echo, as it were, of the one that preceded it ; so that a page copied from the mate’s log would have proved as amusing, and to the full as instructive, as my journal, provided I had kept one during the last fortnight.

So barren of events has that time been that the sight of a party of bottle-nosed whales, two or three seals, and a porpoise, possibly on their way to a dinner or tea party at the North Pole, was considered an occurrence of great importance. Every glass was in requisition as soon as they made their appearance, and the marine monsters were well nigh stared out of countenance.

We came within sight of the shores of Newfoundland on the 5th of August, just one month from the day we took our last look of the British isles. Yet though the coast was brown, and rugged, and desolate, I hailed its appearance with rapture. Never did any thing seem so refreshing and delicious to me as the land breeze that came to us, as I thought, bearing health and gladness on its wings.

I had noticed with some curiosity the restless activity of the captain's bird some hours previous to "land" being proclaimed from the look-out station. He sang continually, and his note was longer, clearer, and more thrilling than heretofore; the little creature, the captain assured me, was conscious of the difference in the air as we approached the land. "I trust almost as much to my bird as to my glass," he said, "and have never yet been deceived."

Our progress was somewhat tedious after we entered the gulf. Ninety miles across is the entrance of this majestic river; it seems an ocean in itself. Half our time is spent poring over the great chart in the cabin, which, is constantly being rolled and unrolled by my husband to gratify my desire of learning the names of the distant shores and islands which we pass.

We are without a pilot as yet, and the captain being a cautious seaman is unwilling to risk the vessel on this dangerous navigation; so that we proceed but slowly on our voyage.

August 7.— We were visited this morning by a beautiful little bird, not much larger than our gold-crested wren. I hailed it as a bird of good omen—a little messenger sent to bid us welcome to the New World, and I felt almost a childish joy at the sight of our little visitor. There are happy moments in our lives when we draw the greatest pleasure from the most trifling sources, as children are pleased with the most simple toy.

From the hour we entered the gulf a perceptible change had taken place in all on board. The captain, a man of grave, quiet manners, grew quite talkative. My husband was more than usually animated, and even the thoughtful young Scotchman became positively an entertaining person. The crew displayed the most lively zeal in the performance of their duty, and the goldfinch sung cheerily from dawn till sunset. As for me Hope was busy in my heart, chasing from it all feelings of doubt or regret that might sadden the present or cloud the future.

I am now able to trace distinctly the outline of the coast on the southern side of the river. Sometimes the high lands are suddenly enveloped in dense clouds of mist, which are in constant motion, rolling along in shadowy billows, now tinted with rosy light, now white and fleecy, or bright as silver, as they catch the sunbeams. So rapid are the changes that take place in this fog-bank, that perhaps the next time I raise my eyes I behold the scene changed as if by magic. The misty curtain is slowly drawn up, as if by invisible hands, and the wild, wooded mountains partially revealed, with their bold rocky shores and sweeping bays. At other times the vapoury volume dividing, moves along the valleys and deep ravines, like lofty pillars of smoke, or hangs in snowy draperies among the dark forest pines.

I am never weary of watching these fantastic clouds; they recall to me the pleasant time I spent in the Highlands, among the cloud-capped hills of the north.

As yet, the air is cold, and we experience frequent squalls of wind and hail, with occasional peals of thunder ; then again all is serene and bright, and the air is filled with fragrance, and flies, and bees, and birds come flitting past us from the shore.

August 8.—Though I cannot but dwell with feelings of wonder and admiration on the majesty and power of this mighty river, I begin to grow weary of its immensity, and long for a nearer view of the shore ; but at present we see nothing more than long lines of pine-clad hills, with here and there a white speck, which they tell me are settlements and villages to the south ; while huge mountains divested of verdure bound our view on the north side the river. My admiration of mountainous scenery makes me dwell with more interest on this side the river, and I watch the progress of cultivation among these rugged and inhospitable regions with positive pleasure.

During the last two days we have been anxiously looking out for a pilot to take us up to Quebec. Various signals have been fired, but hitherto without success; no pilot has condescended to visit us, so we are somewhat in the condition of a stage without a coachman, with only some inexperienced hand to hold the reins. I already perceive some manifestations of impatience appearing among us, but no one blames the captain, who is very anxious about the matter ; as the river is full of rocks and shoals, and presents many difficulties to a person not intimately acquainted with the navigation. Besides, he is answerable for 'the safety of the ship to the underwriters, in case he neglects to take a pilot on board.

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While writing the above I was roused by a bustle on deck, and going up to learn the cause was informed that a boat with the long looked-for pilot had put off from the shore ; but, after all the fuss and bustle, it proved only a French fisherman, with a poor ragged lad, his assistant. The captain with very little difficulty persuaded Monsieur Paul Breton to pilot us as far as Green Island, a distance of some hundred miles higher up the river, where he assured us we would meet with a regular pilot, if not before.

I have some little difficulty in understanding Monsieur Paul, as he speaks a peculiar dialect ; but he seems good-natured and obliging enough. He tells us the corn is yet green, hardly in ear, and the summer fruits not yet ripe, but he says, that at Quebec we shall find apples and fruit in plenty.

As we advance higher up the river the country on both sides begins to assume a more, genial aspect. Patches of verdure, with white cottages, are seen on the shores and scattered along the sides of the mountains ; while here and there a village church rears its simple spire, distinguished above the surrounding buildings by its glittering vane and bright roof of tin. The southern shores are more populous but less picturesque than those of the north, but there is enough on either side to delight the eye.

This morning we anchored off the Isle of Bic, a pretty low island, covered with trees and looking very pleasant. I felt a longing desire to set my foot on Canadian ground, and must own I was a little disappointed when the captain advised me to remain on board, and not attempt to make one of the party that were preparing to go on shore : my husband seconded the captain's wish, so I contented myself with leaning over the ship's side and feasting my eyes on the rich masses of foliage as they waved to and fro with the slight breeze that agitated them. I had soon reason to be thankful that I had not followed my own wayward will, for the afternoon proved foggy, and on the return of the boat I learned that the ground was swampy just where the party landed, and they sunk over their ankles in water. They reported the island to be covered knee-deep with a most luxuriant growth of red clover, tall trees, low shrubs,

and an abundance of wild flowers. That I might not regret not accompanying him, my husband brought me a delightful bouquet, which he had selected for me. Among the flowers were fragrant red roses, resembling those we call Scotch burnet-leaved, with smooth shining leaves and few if any thorns ; the blue flower called Pulmonaria or Lungwort, which I gathered in the Highlands ; a sweet pea, with red blossoms and wreaths of lovely pale green foliage ; a white orchis, the smell of which was quite delicious. Besides these were several small white and yellow flowers, with which I was totally unacquainted. The steward furnished me with a china jar and fresh water, so that I shall have the pleasure of a nosegay during the rest of the voyage. The sailors had not forgotten a green bough or two to adorn the ship, and the bird-cage was soon as bowery as leaves could make it.

Though the weather is now very fine, we make but slow progress ; the provoking wind seems determined to blow from every quarter but the right. We float up with the flood tide, and when the tide fails cast anchor and wait with the best grace we can till it is time to weigh anchor again. I amuse myself with examining the villages and settlements through the captain's glass, or watching for the appearance of the white porpoises tumbling among the waves. These creatures are of a milky whiteness, and have nothing of the disgusting look of the black ones. Sometimes a seal pops its droll head up close beside our vessel, looking very much like Sinbad's little old man of the sea.

It is fortunate for me that my love of natural history enables me to draw amusement from objects that are deemed by many unworthy of attention. To me they present an inexhaustible fund of interest. The simplest weed that grows in my path, or the fly that flutters about me, are subjects for reflection admiration, and delight.

We are now within sight of Green Island. It is the largest, and I believe one of the most populous, we have passed. Every minute now seems to increase the beauty of the passage. Far as the eye can reach you see the shore thronged with villages and farms in one continuous line. On the southern side all are gay and glittering with the tin roofs on the most important buildings ; the rest are shingles, whitewashed. This I do not like so well as the plain shingled roofs ; the whiteness of the roofs of the cottages and homesteads have a glaring effect, and we look in vain for that relief to the eye that is produced by the thatched or slated roofs. The shingles in their natural state soon acquire the appearance of slates, and can hardly be distinguished from them. What would you say to a rose-coloured house, with a roof of the same gaudy hue, the front of the gay edifice being garnished with grass-green shutters, doors, and verandah. No doubt the interior is furnished with corresponding taste. There is generally one or more of these *smart* buildings in a Canadian village, standing forth with ostentatious splendour above its more modest brethren.

August 11.—Just below Green Island we took on board a real pilot, who, by the way, I do not like half so well as Monsieur Paul. He is a little bit pragmatistical, and seems evidently proud of his superior knowledge of the river. The good-natured fisherman relinquished his post with a very good grace, and seems already excellent friends with his more able rival. For my part I was very sorry when the new pilot came on board ; the first thing he did was to hand us over a pamphlet, containing regulations from the Board of Health at Quebec respecting the cholera, which is raging, he tells us, like a fearful plague both at that place and Montreal.

These regulations positively forbid the captain and the pilot to allow any person, whether of the crew or passengers, to quit the vessel until they shall have passed examination at the quarantine ground, under the risk of incurring a severe penalty.

This was very annoying ; as the captain, that very morning, had proposed taking us on shore at a lovely spot called Crane Island, to spend the afternoon, while we waited for the return of the tide, at the house of a Scotch gentleman, the owner of the prettiest settlement I had yet seen, the building, and grounds being laid out with great taste.

The situation of this island is of itself very beautiful. Around it are the waters of the St. Laurence, bearing on its mighty current the commerce of several nations : in the foreground are the populous and lively settlements of the southern shores, while behind and far far above it rise the lofty range of mountains to the north, now studded with rural villages, pleasant farms, and cultivated fields. The island itself showed us smooth lawns and meadows of emerald verdure, with orchards and cornfields sloping down to the water's edge. After a confinement of nearly five weeks on board, you may easily suppose with what satisfaction we contemplated the prospect of spending a few hours on this inviting spot.

We expect to reach the quarantine ground (Gros Isle) this evening, where the pilot says we shall be detained three days. Though we are all in good health, yet, having sailed from an infected port, we shall be detained on the quarantine ground, but not allowed to land.

August 12.—We reached Gros Isle yesterday evening. It is a beautiful rocky island, covered with groves of beech, birch, ash, and fir-trees. There are several vessels lying at anchor close to the shore ; one bears the melancholy symbol of disease, the yellow flag ; she is a passenger-ship, and has the small-pox and measles among her crew. When any infectious complaint appears, on board, the yellow flag is hoisted, and the invalids conveyed to the cholera-hospital or wooden building, that has been erected on a rising bank above the shore. It is surrounded with palisadoes and a guard of soldiers.

There is also a temporary fort at some distance from the hospital, containing a garrison of soldiers, who are there to enforce the quarantine rules. These rules are considered as very defective, and in some respects quite absurd, and are productive of many severe evils to the unfortunate emigrants [1].

When the passengers and crew of a vessel do not exceed a certain number, they are not allowed to land under a penalty, both to the captain and the offender ; but if, on the contrary, they should exceed the stated number, ill or well, passengers and crew must all turn out and go on shore, taking with them their bedding and clothes, which are all spread out on the shore, to be washed, aired, and fumigated, giving the healthy every chance of taking the infection from the invalids. The sheds and buildings put up for the accommodation of those who are obliged to submit to the quarantine laws, are in the same area as the hospital.

Nothing can exceed the longing desire I feel to be allowed to land and explore this picturesque island ; the weather is so fine, and the waving groves of green, the little rocky bays and inlets of the island, appear so tempting ; but to all my entreaties the visiting surgeon who came on board returned a decided negative.

A few hours after his visit, however, an Indian basket, containing strawberries and raspberries, with a large bunch of wild flowers, was sent on board for me, with the surgeon's compliments.

I amuse myself with making little sketches of the fort and the surrounding scenery, or watching the groups of emigrants on shore. We have already seen the landing of the passengers of three emigrant ships. You may imagine yourself looking on a fair or crowded market, clothes waving in the wind or spread out on the earth, chests, bundles, baskets, men,

women, and children, asleep or basking in the sun, some in motion busied with their goods, the women employed in washing or cooking in the open air, beside the wood fires on the beach ; while parties of children are pursuing each other in wanton glee rejoicing in their newly-acquired liberty. Mixed with these you see the stately form and gay trappings of the sentinels, while the thin blue smoke of the wood fires, rising above the trees, heightens the picture and gives it an additional effect. On my husband remarking the picturesque appearance of the scene before us to one of the officers from the fort who had come on board, he smiled sadly, and replied, “ Believe me, in this instance, as in many others, ’tis distance lends enchantment to the view.” Could you take a nearer survey of some of those very picturesque groups which you admire, I think you would turn away from them with heart sickness ; you would there behold every variety of disease, vice, poverty, filth, and famine—human misery in its most disgusting and saddening form. Such pictures as Hogarth’s pencil only could have portrayed, or Crabbe’s pen described.

August 14.—We are once more under weigh, and floating up the river with the tide. Gros Isle is just five-and-twenty miles below Quebec, a favourable breeze would carry us up in a few hours ; as it is we can only make a little way by tacking from side to side when we lose the tide. I rather enjoy this way of proceeding, as it gives one a close view of both sides the river, which narrows considerably as we approach nearer towards Quebec. To-morrow, if no accident happens, we shall be anchored in front of a place rendered interesting both by its historical associations and its own native beauty of situation. Till to-morrow, then, adieu.

I was reckoning much on seeing the falls of Montmorenci, which are within sight of the river ; but the sun set, and the stars rose brilliantly before we approached within sound of the cataract ; and though I strained my eyes till they were weary of gazing on the dim shadowy scene around me, I could distinguish nothing beyond the dark masses of rock that forms the channel through which the waters of the Montmorenci rush into the St. Laurence.

At ten last night, August the 15th, the lights of the city of Quebec were seen gleaming through the distance like a coronet of stars above the waters. At half-past ten we dropped anchor opposite the fort, and I fell asleep dreaming of the various scenes through which I had passed. Again I was destined to be disappointed in my expectations of going on shore. The visiting surgeon advised my husband and me by no means to land, as the mortality that still raged in the town made it very hazardous. He gave a melancholy description of the place. “ Desolation and woe and great mourning—Rachel weeping for her children because they are not,” are words that may well be applied to this city of the pestilence.

Nothing can be more imposing than the situation of Quebec, built on the sides and summit of a magnificent rock, on the highest point of which (Cape Diamond) stands the fortress overlooking the river, and commanding a most superb view of the surrounding scenes. I did, indeed, regret the loss of this noble prospect, the equal of which I suppose I shall never see. It would have been something to have thought on and recalled in after years, when buried in the solitude of the Canadian woods.

The opposite heights, being the Point Levi side, are highly picturesque, though less imposing than the rock on which the town stands. The bank is rocky, precipitous, and clothed with trees that sweep down to the water’s edge, excepting where they are cleared away to give place to white cottages, gardens, and hanging orchards. But, in my opinion, much less is done with this romantic situation than might be effected if good taste were exercised in the buildings, and on the disposal of the ground. How lovely would such a spot be rendered in England or Scotland. Nature here has done all, and man but little, excepting sticking up some ugly wooden cottages, as mean as they are tasteless. It is, however, very possible there may

be pretty villas and houses higher up, that are concealed from the eye by the intervening groves.

The river is considered to be just a mile across from Point Levi to the landing-stairs below the custom-house in Quebec ; and it was a source of amusement to me to watch the horse ferry-boats that ply between the two shores. The captain told me there were not less than twelve of these comical-looking machines. They each have their regular hours, so that you see a constant succession going or returning. They carry a strange assortment of passengers ; well and ill-dressed ; old and young ; rich and poor ; cows, sheep, horses, pigs, dogs, fowls, market-baskets, vegetables, fruit, hay, corn, anything and everything you will see by turns.

The boat is flat, railed round, with a wicker at each end to admit the live and dead stock that go or are taken on board ; the centre of the boat (if such it can be called) is occupied by four lean, ill-favoured hacks, who walk round and round, as if in a threshing machine, and work the paddles at each side. There is a sort of pen for the cattle.

I am told there is a monument erecting in honour of Wolfe, in the governor's garden, looking towards the St. Laurence, and to be seen from Point Levi : the inscription has not yet been decided upon [2].

The captain has just returned from the town. He very kindly brought on board a basket of ripe apples for me, besides fresh meat, vegetables, bread, butter, and milk. The deck is all bustle with custom-house officers, and men unloading a part of the ship's freight, which consists chiefly of rum, brandy, sugar, and coals, for ballast. We are to leave Quebec by five o'clock this evening. The *British America*, a superb steam-vessel of three decks, takes us in tow as far as Montreal. I must now say farewell.

Letter III.

Departure from Quebec.—Towed by a Steam-vessel.—Fertility of the Country.—Different Objects seen in sailing up the River.—Arrival off Montreal.—The Rapids.

Brig *Laurel*, St Laurence, below Montreal.
August 17. 1832.

It was after sunset, and a glorious evening, when we left Quebec, which we did in company with a fine steam-vessel, whose decks and gallery were crowded with passengers of all descriptions. A brave sight she was to look upon ; ploughing the bright waters which foamed and sung beneath her paddles ; while our brig, with her white sails, followed like a butterfly in her wake. The heavens were glowing with the richest tints of rose and saffron, which were reflected below on the bosom of the river; and then came forth the stars, in the soft blue ether, more brilliant than ever I saw them at home, and this, I suppose, I may attribute to the superior purity of the atmosphere. My husband said this evening resembled the sunsets of Italy.

Our voyage has proved a very pleasant one ; the weather moderately warm, and the air quite clear. We have within the last few days emerged from a cold, damp atmosphere, such as we often experience in Britain in the spring, to a delightful summer, moderated by light breezes from the river.

The further we advance up the country the more fertile it appears. The harvest is ripening under a more genial climate than that below Quebec. We see fields of Indian corn in full flower : it is a stately-looking crop, with its beautiful feathery top tinted with a rich purple

hue, below which tufts of pale green silk are waving in the breeze. When fully ripe they tell me it is beautiful to see the golden grain bursting from its silvery sheath ; but that it is a crop liable to injury from frost, and has many enemies, such as bears, racoons, squirrels, mice, fowls, &c.

We saw several fields of tobacco along the banks of the river, which looked healthy and flourishing. I believe tobacco is cultivated to some extent in both provinces ; but the Canadian tobacco is not held in such high esteem as that of Virginia.

There is a flourishing and very pretty town situated at the junction of the Richelieu river with the St. Laurence, formerly called Sorel, now called Fort William Henry. The situation is excellent. There are several churches, a military fort, with mills, and other public buildings, with some fine stone houses. The land, however, in the immediate vicinity of the town seems very light and sandy.

I was anxious to obtain a near view of a log-house or a shanty, and was somewhat disappointed in the few buildings of this kind that I saw along the banks of the river. It was not the rudeness of the material so much as the barn-like form of the buildings of this kind, and the little attention that was paid to the picturesque, that displeased me. In Britain even the peasant has taste enough to plant a few roses or honeysuckles about his door or his casement, and there is the little bit of garden enclosed and neatly kept ; but here no such attempt is made to ornament the cottages. We saw no smiling orchard or grove to conceal the bare log walls; and as to the little farm-houses, they are uglier still, and look so pert and ungraceful stack upon the bank close to the water's edge.

Further back a different style of building and cultivation appears. The farms and frame-houses are really handsome places, and in good taste, with clumps of trees here and there to break the monotony of the clearing. The land is nearly one unbroken level plain, apparently fertile and well farmed, but too flat for fine scenery. The country between Quebec and Montreal has all the appearance of having been under a long state of cultivation, especially on the right bank of the river. Still there is a great portion of forest standing which it will take years of labour to remove.

We passed some little grassy islands on which there were many herds of cattle feeding. I was puzzling myself to know how they got there, when the captain told me it was usual for farmers to convey their stock to these island pastures in flat-bottomed boats, or to swim them, if the place was fordable, and leave them to graze as long as the food continued good. If cows are put on an island within a reasonable distance of the farm, some person goes daily in a canoe to milk them. While he was telling me this, a log-canoe with a boy and a stout lass with tin pails, paddled across from the bank of the river, and proceeded to call together their herd.

We noticed some very pleasant rural villages to the right as we advanced, but our pilot was stupid, and could not, or would not, tell their names. It was Sunday morning, and we could just hear the quick tinkling of the church bells, and distinguish long lines of calèches, light waggons, with equestrians and pedestrians hastening along the avenue of trees that led to the churchyard ; besides these, were boats and canoes crossing the river, bound to the same peaceful haven.

In a part of the St. Laurence, where the channel is rendered difficult by shoals and sand-banks, there occur little lighthouses, looking somewhat like miniature watermills, on wooden posts, raised above the flat banks on which they are built. These droll little huts were inhabited, and we noticed a merry party, in their holiday clothes, enjoying a gossip with a party

in a canoe below them. They looked clean and smart, and cheerful enough, but I did not envy them their situation, which I should think far from healthy.

Some miles below Montreal the appearance of the country became richer, more civilized, and populous ; while the distant line of blue mountains, at the verge of the horizon, added an interest to the landscape. The rich tint of ripened harvest formed a beautiful contrast with the azure sky and waters of the St. Laurence. The scenery of the river near Montreal is of a very different character to that below Quebec ; the latter possesses a wild and rugged aspect, and its productions are evidently those of a colder and less happy climate. What the former loses in grandeur and picturesque effect, it gains in fertility of soil and warmth of temperature. In the lower division of the province you feel that the industry of the inhabitants is forcing a churlish soil for bread ; while in the upper, the land seems willing to yield her increase to a moderate exertion. Remember, these are merely the cursory remarks of a passing traveller, and founded on no personal experience.

There was a feeling of anxiety and dread upon our minds that we would hardly acknowledge to each other as we drew near to the city of the pestilence, as if ashamed of confessing a weakness that was felt ; but no one spoke on the subject. With what unmixed delight and admiration at any other time should we have gazed on the scene that opened upon us.

The river here expands into a fine extensive basin, diversified with islands, on the largest of which Montreal is situated.

The lofty hill from which the town takes its name rises like a crown above it, and forms a singular and magnificent feature in the landscape, reminding me of some of the detached hills in the vicinity of Inverness.

Opposite to the Quebec suburbs, just in front of the rapids, is situated the island of St. Helens, a spot of infinite loveliness. The centre of it is occupied by a grove of lofty trees, while the banks, sloping down to the water, seem of the most verdant turf. The scene was heightened by the appearance of the troops which garrison the island.

The shores of the river, studded with richly cultivated farms ; the village of La Prairie, with the little island of St. Ann's in the distance ; the glittering steeples and roofs of the city, with its gardens and villas,—looked lovely by the softened glow of a Canadian summer sunset.

The church bells ringing for evening prayer, with the hum of voices from the shore, mingled not inharmoniously with the rush of the rapids.

These rapids are caused by a descent in the bed of the river. In some places this declination is gradual, in others sudden and abrupt. Where the current is broken by masses of limestone or granite rock, as at the Cascades, the Cedars, and the Long Sault, it creates whirlpools and cataracts. But the rapids below Montreal are not of this magnificent character, being made perceptible only by the unusual swiftness of the water, and its surface being disturbed by foam, and waving lines and dimples. In short, I was disappointed in my expectation of seeing something very grand ; and was half angry at these pretty-behaved quiet rapids, to the foot of which we were towed in good style by our faithful consort the *British America*.

As the captain is uncertain how long he may be detained at Montreal, I shall send this letter without further delay, and write again as soon as possible.

[1] It is to be hoped that some steps will be taken by Government to remedy these obnoxious laws, which have repeatedly entailed those very evils on the unhappy emigrants that the Board of Health wish to avert from the colony at large.

Many valuable lives have been wantonly sacrificed by placing the healthy in the immediate vicinity of infection, besides subjecting them to many other sufferings, expenses, and inconvenience, which the poor exile might well be spared.

If there must be quarantine laws—and I suppose the evil is a necessary one—surely every care ought to be taken to render them as little hurtful to the emigrant as possible.

[2] Since the period in which the author visited Quebec, Wolfe's monument has been completed. Lord Dalhousie, with equal good feeling and good taste, has united the names of the rival heroes Wolfe and Montcalm in the dedication of the pillar—a liberality of feeling that cannot but prove gratifying to the Canadian French, while it robs the British warrior of none of his glory.

The monument was designed by Major Young of the 97th Regiment. To the top of the surbase is fourteen feet from the ground ; on this rests a sarcophagus, seven feet three inches high, from which rises an obelisk forty-two feet eight inches in height, and the apex is two feet one inch. The dimensions of the obelisk at the base are six feet by four feet eight inches. A prize medal was adjudged to J. C. Fisher, LL.D. for the following inscription on the sarcophagus : —

Mortem virtus communem
Famam Historia
Monumoitium Potteritas
Dedit

On the surbase is an inscription from the pen of Dr. Mills, stating the fact of the erection of the monument at the expense of Lord Dalhousie, Governor of Lower Canada, to commemorate the death of Wolfe and Montcalm, Sept. 13 and 14, 1759. Wolfe fell on the field ; and Montcalm, who was wounded by the single gun in the possession of the English, died on the next day after the battle.

The Backwoods of Canada : Being Letters from the Wife of an Emigrant Officer ... (1836)

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