

ACADIAN EXILES IN FRANCE

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THERE are few islands more enchanting than Belle Ile en Mer, off the coast of Brittany. In the small harbours that lie along its coast there is all the quaint and colourful charm of a Breton seaport. The white houses of the fishing folk form little groups at the head of a cove, as though huddled together for warmth and protection from the cold winds and driving rain which sweep in from the Atlantic. At the little town of Le Palais, more white houses line the *quais* beneath the sombre ramparts of the citadel. During the day the island is almost deserted by its male population, but at nightfall—when the fishing boats return—the waterfront is alive with movement, sound and colour. The dull red and dark brown of the sails mingle with the brighter red and light blue of the heavy canvas oilskins worn by the fishing folk. Wooden sabots ring on the stone pavement of the *quais*. Fishwives press through the throng to replenish their baskets, and soon return calling out their wares as they pass along the narrow streets. The boats are made snug for the night, with sails furled or left idly aloft for the morning expedition. Sometimes a light blue gossamer net is draped carelessly over the rigging, contrasting oddly with the brick red sails. Small boats may be seen making their way to the landing stage. The clatter of wooden shoes grows louder and then gradually fainter, as groups of fishermen set out for their homes or perhaps linger for a while at some *estaminet* to discuss the day's catch over a glass of cider. Presently the clear notes of a bugle sound from the ramparts high above the houses on the *quais*. Then all is quiet again, and there is time to meditate on the strange links which history sometimes forges between distant places.

Situated opposite the western coast of Brittany and in front of Morbihan, Belle Ile is one of the largest of a group of small islands which lie along the Atlantic coast of France; separated from Quiberon, the nearest point on the mainland, by the strait called Les Courreaux. The visitor who comes to Belle Ile to-day is impressed at once by the simple life of its fishing community, and its remoteness from the continent. But in spite of its apparent seclusion, there have been stirring chapters in the history of this small island, and even to-day its massive fortifications attest its importance in the coastal defences of France. On two notable occasions it has fallen

into the hands of England. In 1572 it fell before a Protestant fleet under the Count of Montgomery returning from an unsuccessful attempt to relieve the Huguenots at La Rochelle. Two hundred years later the English flag again flew over the citadel at Le Palais during the closing phase of the Seven Years War. At this time the island was defended by a garrison of thirty-two hundred men under the command of the Chevalier de Sainte Croix, and during the reign of Louis XIV its fortifications had been strengthened by the great Vauban who had erected defence works at every vulnerable point of France. At Le Palais the citadel was protected by twenty-seven cannon and six mortars, while seventy-five additional cannon and four mortars were placed along the coast to prevent a landing. On April 7th, 1761, an English fleet under Admiral Keppel appeared off the island, but the attack did not begin until April 23rd, when the English succeeded in effecting a landing and the French retired within the citadel. Le Palais was then placed under siege, but it was able to hold out until June 7th, when it fell before an attacking force under the command of Generals Hodgson and Crawford. From this date until it was returned to France in 1763, Belle Ile was occupied by an English garrison with General Crawford as its first Governor-General. Under the terms of the capitulation the inhabitants were permitted to remain on the island, enjoying the free exercise of their religion in the same manner as their compatriots in Canada who in the previous year had surrendered to General Amherst. During the period of the English occupation, General Crawford earned the goodwill of the French inhabitants through his energy and his generosity in providing for their welfare. There are great roads built by him from Le Palais to Lochmaria and Sauzon, which remain to this day as a witness to his activity. The ultimate fate of the island was in doubt until the Treaty of Paris returned it to France, but there does not appear to have been any attempt to settle it by the English. Perhaps the nearest approach to a durable establishment was made by two enterprising Englishmen who opened a brewery at Le Palais, but it is said that their venture was not attended with success. In 1763 the English garrison withdrew, and the island reverted to France. By a curious coincidence, the new Governor-General, representing the King of France, was Lord Warren, a Jacobite of Irish descent, Chevalier de Saint Louis, and Marshal of the Armies of France.

It was in May, 1763, that the English garrison evacuated Belle Ile. Two months later there arrived on the island a deputation of Acadians from the port of Morlaix, who had come to examine the possibilities of establishing there a colony of Acadian exiles.

The members of this deputation were Honoré LeBlanc, Joseph Trahan and Simon Granger. Later events were to show that they carried away an excellent impression of the island. Two years elapsed, however, before the colony was finally established, and then it was the notorious Abbé Le Loutre who guided the settlers to their new homes.

It is necessary at this point to explain how a considerable number of Acadian refugees were then sheltered at Morlaix and other seaports along the coast of Normandy and Brittany. The majority of the Acadians who were expelled from Nova Scotia during the period 1755-1759 were sent to the American colonies, where they remained until the close of the Seven Years War. Some of these made permanent homes in the colonies to which they had been transported; but the greater number returned later to Nova Scotia, where they began the foundations of new settlements along the shores of St. Mary's Bay and in the northern wilderness of what is now the province of New Brunswick. In addition to these, a larger number of the Acadians than is generally supposed returned to France and were permanently lost to the New World. Some of these, it will be seen, had no alternative, since they were sent directly to France or England. Others no doubt were too embittered by their experiences during the expulsion to return to a foreign allegiance which they held accountable for their sufferings, choosing rather to come back to the land of their origin in the hope that their loyalty would have its recompense at the hands of their royal master. Rameau de Saint Pierre has distinguished three separate groups of Acadians who returned to France during and after the period of proscription. To the first group belong fifteen hundred exiles from the region of Minas. These were refused by the colonies of Massachusetts and Virginia, and later again transported to England where they remained in the ports of Liverpool, Southampton, Penryn and Bristol, until they were able to cross over to France at the end of the war. The second group was smaller, comprising two hundred refugees taken at Cape Sable and along the St. John River. These were expelled in 1759, and taken either to France or to England. The third group was the largest, consisting of the Acadian population of Prince Edward Island, deported by Admiral Boscawen in 1758. Rameau gives the total number expelled from Prince Edward Island as four thousand. Several ships in the convoy are said to have capsized during the voyage across the Atlantic, but the survivors eventually disembarked at various French ports where they were to be found at the close of the war. In the archives of the Department of Vienne at Poitiers, there is a complete census of the Acadians

in France, which places the total number at twenty-five hundred and seventy. This census was evidently taken in 1767, four years after the Acadian deputation from Morlaix arrived on Belle Ile. Over a thousand refugees were at one time sheltered at St. Malo, but smaller groups found a refuge in such places as Boulogne, Cherbourg, Morlaix, L'Orient, Nantes, and La Rochelle, their temporary place of residence depending no doubt on the port at which they disembarked on arrival in France. It was the intention of the French government to place the Acadians in permanent establishments as soon as the necessary arrangements could be made. In the meanwhile they were living precariously on a small subsistence allowance granted them by Louis XV as a slight recognition of the losses they had endured for their loyalty.

It so happened that the first Acadians to be placed in a permanent settlement in France were those who were sheltered at Morlaix. And since there is no evident reason why these should have been favoured above the others, we may conclude that they owed their good fortune to the influence of the Abbé Le Loutre, whose reappearance at this time is an event of more than passing interest. Le Loutre was an outstanding figure in the period of Nova Scotian history which preceded the expulsion of the Acadians. In 1737 he was sent out to Canada by the Society of Foreign Missions of Paris, coming soon afterwards to Nova Scotia as missionary to the Micmac Indians. This province had been ceded to Great Britain in 1713 by the Treaty of Utrecht, but Cape Breton and Prince Edward Island were still held by France, as well as that part of ancient Acadia which lay north of the isthmus of Chignecto. When Le Loutre arrived in Nova Scotia, the long struggle for colonial supremacy was gradually drawing to its closing period; but in the meantime the small English garrison at Annapolis Royal was threatened with attacks from Louisbourg and Quebec, and the Acadians who formed the population of the peninsula still retained the hope of returning to their former allegiance. In these circumstances, it was difficult for a French priest to maintain a sincere neutrality; but during his first few years in the province Le Loutre seems to have enjoyed the confidence and respect of Mascarene, who was then Governor at Annapolis Royal. In 1744 the garrison was attacked by an expedition from Louisburg under the command of Du Vivier, and was saved only by the stern resolution of Mascarene. During this attack Le Loutre gave open assistance to Du Vivier, and thereafter for a period of ten years all his efforts were directed against English authority in the province. So great was his influence, indeed, that the later expulsion of the

Acadians has been attributed by some to his masterful personality, and the implacable hatred of English rule which he succeeded in planting not only among the Indians who feared and respected him, but also among the simple Acadian peasants, who if left to themselves might have submitted, however reluctantly, to the obligations of an unqualified allegiance to Great Britain. After a career of adventure and intrigue which has few parallels in Canadian history, Le Loutre was at Beausejour in 1755 when that fortress surrendered to Colonel Monckton. Always resourceful in an emergency, he escaped capture and made his way eventually to Quebec. From this port he presently sailed for France, but in the course of the voyage the vessel on which he travelled was taken by an English frigate. Le Loutre was then sent as a prisoner to Fort Elizabeth on the Island of Jersey, where he remained until the end of the Seven Years War. On his release he crossed to France, where he found the Acadian exiles homeless and in urgent need of assistance and leadership. For almost ten years they had been the sport of fate, and they were beginning to lose something of the courage which had upheld them in their earlier wanderings. The priest who had known them in the days of their affluence in Acadia now appeared to them in their adversity. From this date until his death ten years later he devoted himself to their welfare.

Apparently the Abbé Le Loutre arrived on Belle Ile for the first time early in January, 1764. He was accompanied by three of the Acadians from Morlaix, possibly the same three who had gone to spy out the land in July of the previous year. At Le Palais they met the Governor, Lord Warren, and conferred with him regarding the proposed location of the colony, returning afterwards to Morlaix to report the result of their mission to the Acadian families that were to form the settlement. Evidently the prospects held out to the refugees were highly satisfactory, for on the 17th of February in the same year the Abbé wrote to Lord Warren, thanking him for the kindness shown to the deputation, and assuring him that seventy-seven families had decided to come to Belle Ile. Lord Warren was greatly pleased with this news. He had formed a high opinion of Le Loutre on his first visit, and was himself anxious to increase the number of settlers on the island as soon as possible. Some time elapsed, however, before the first detachment of settlers arrived, and in the interval there were disturbing rumours that the Duc de Choiseul proposed to send all the Acadians to the colony of Cayenne. This rumour was soon dispelled, but a considerable delay arose out of the difficulty in concluding negotiations with the Estates of Brittany whose consent was a indispensable

condition of the establishment of the colony. Le Loutre, having the interests and happiness of his Acadians as his one object, had stipulated that they should not be scattered among the several parishes of the island, but placed in one establishment at the junction of the three parishes of Palais, Bangor and Lochmaria. The Estates, however, were interested mainly in colonizing the island, and for this purpose it seemed best to distribute the settlers among the parishes and seigniories into which it was divided. On the 7th of March it was announced that they had consented to the establishment of the colony, but under the conditions annexed to the concession it appeared that the Acadian families were to be distributed over the island instead of being gathered together in one compact settlement as they had wished. During this same month Le Loutre made another visit to Belle Ile in order to complete arrangements for the reception of the colonists. Lord Warren was absent at the time, but the arrival of the Abbé was reported to him in a letter from M. Lamy, an officer of the garrison. From this letter it is evident that the priest was ill when he arrived on the island but—to quote M. Lamy—his illness had by no means prevented him from working in his chamber for the establishment of his Acadians. In September the Abbé returned to Morlaix, having completed his negotiations with Lord Warren, and within a short time he sent two Acadians, Amand Granger and Joseph LeBlanc, to prepare lodgings for the seventy-seven families that were soon to arrive. On Sept. 22nd twenty families came from St. Malo, but the arrival of the remainder who were at Morlaix was postponed until early in November. Even in this last stage of their wanderings the Acadians were not immune from the bludgeoning of fate. It is reported that as the two flatboats from Morlaix entered the harbour of Le Palais, one of them was on the verge of capsizing, and the other was swept on the rocks below the citadel. Boats were sent out at once to rescue them, and happily no lives were lost; but the nearness of this calamity was an ill omen for the unfortunate exiles who for some time had looked upon Belle Ile as the promised land at the end of their long sojourn in the wilderness.

Having come at last to the place where they were to make their future homes, the Acadian families were distributed in accordance with the decision of the Estates, among the four parishes of the island. Twelve families were assigned to the parish of Palais; thirty-one to Bangor, twenty to Sauzon, and fifteen to Lochmaria. Within the several parishes there was a further distribution among the seigniories under which their lands were to be held, but in the terms of

their concessions it was provided that they should be exempted from the customary feudal dues for a period of five years. Not content even with this concession, Le Loutre went personally to Versailles and there obtained from the king more substantial benefits for his Acadians. Each family was to receive a house, a horse, a cow, three sheep, and a sum of four hundred *livres* to cover initial expenses. Starting out with this capital, it was expected that the Acadians would soon be self-supporting and well able to hold their place among the tenant population of the island.

The later history of the colony at Belle Ile is more difficult to trace as a connected narrative, although it is referred to from time to time by Le Gallen in his *Histoire de Belle Ile*. In the archives at Le Palais and at the *mairies* of the three other parishes, there may be seen a complete register of the Acadian families established on the island. This was prepared in 1767 by order of the Advocate-General of the king to replace the ancient records of marriages, baptisms and deaths, which had been lost during the expulsion. Genealogical tables were made in each parish, on information from the heads of families and their wives. The information thus obtained was carefully examined for the purpose of comparison and correlation, and then used in the preparation of new tables. Yellowed by age, these tables preserve the pedigree of many a name that may be found to-day among the Acadian population of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, for it seems likely that the greater number of the colonists at Belle Ile had come originally from Port Royal and the shores of Minas Basin. Several families bearing the name of LeBlanc appear on the list of settlers. In the genealogy of this family it is stated that their progenitor, Daniel LeBlanc, having gone out of France with his second wife and Marie LeBlanc daughter of his first wife, landed at Port Royal, the chief place of Acadia after the Treaty of Breda, 30th of July, 1661. Four sons were born to them at Port Royal, René, Jacques, Antoine and Pierre. Subsequently some of the family moved to the parish of St. Charles the Great, near Minas, where they could be numbered by the score at the time of the expulsion. To this family doubtless belonged René LeBlanc the Notary of Grand Pré of whom Longfellow wrote: "René LeBlanc, was the father of twenty children, and more than a hundred children's children rode on his knees." Appended to the genealogical record at Le Palais is an interesting declaration made by the Abbé Le Loutre concerning the founding of the colony and the previous history of its inhabitants. This declaration, bearing the date 1767, states that the Acadians placed in Belle Ile had been transported by the English to Boston and other

English colonies during the month of October, 1755; that from these colonies they had been transferred to old England and distributed among various towns in the course of the year 1756; that in 1763, after the Treaty of Paris, they had been transported to France and placed in various seaports; and that in 1765 in the month of October they had passed to this island by the orders of the Duc de Choiseul, Minister of Marine. All of which was truly declared and signed after reading by Jean Louis Le Loutre.

In passing it may be said that Belle Ile has still another link with the early history of Nova Scotia in the person of Joseph Le Blanc, *alias* Le Maigre, who was one of the settlers that came from Morlaix. This Joseph LeBlanc is mentioned frequently in the records of the province from 1744 onwards. In the beginning of 1745 it is reported that Alexander Bourg the Notary of Minas, Amand Bugeaud, and one Joseph LeBlanc called Le Maigre, were brought to Annapolis and examined regarding their conduct during the attack on the garrison by Du Vivier. Evidently their explanation was satisfactory, for they were allowed to return to their homes after pleading that they had done nothing except so far as they were compelled by superior force. It is recorded by Rameau, however, that LeBlanc had been sent by Du Vivier on a special mission to Louisbourg in September, 1744, the object of his visit being to obtain cannon for the proposed siege of Port Royal. During the voyage he was taken by an enemy vessel, but threw his despatches into the sea, and later succeeded in escaping from his captors. Subsequently he reached Louisbourg, returning to Port Royal late in October. Nor was this the first exploit in which he had taken a prominent part. In the previous year he had assisted in driving two droves of black cattle and sheep from Minas to Chignecto and Tatamagouche, whence they were to be sent to the French garrison at Louisbourg. In 1746 LeBlanc again acted as agent for the French, being employed on this occasion to furnish provisions to the ill-fated expedition of the Duc D'Anville which had sought a shelter in Chebucto Bay before proceeding to attack Annapolis. For this purpose he purchased eighty cattle and one hundred and fifty sheep, all of which were to be delivered at Annapolis. Meanwhile a series of disasters overtook the French fleet, preventing it from reaching its objective, and LeBlanc later made a claim on the government for two thousand *livres* to indemnify him for his losses. There is reason to believe that he did not obtain this sum until after his arrival on Belle Ile, and then only as a result of the good offices of the Abbé Le Loutre. In 1750 LeBlanc with a number of others was arrested by Major Lawrence on a charge of

encouraging some of the English soldiers to desert. At this time he narrowly escaped with his life, for Lawrence regarded him as the principal offender, and Cornwallis informed his Council that he had a warrant ready for his instant execution. The Council, however, decided that it would be advisable to have him tried by regular process with the other prisoners before the general court. Before this trial could be held, LeBlanc succeeded in escaping, and made his way to Port Toulouse on the island of Cape Breton. Here he must have remained for some time, for he was absent from Nova Scotia during the expulsion. In 1762 his name appears again in the records. At this date he was living in Halifax, where he acted as intermediary in a correspondence between some of the Acadians who were in England and those who still remained in Nova Scotia. Soon after this he crossed to France, for his name appears among the colonists of Belle Ile, and is mentioned from time to time in the correspondence between Le Loutre and Lord Warren. He settled in the neighborhood of Le Palais, where his last years form a peaceful epilogue to his adventurous career.

During the first few years of its existence, all went well with the little colony at Belle Ile. But in 1768, when it became necessary to pay the dues to the seigniorial proprietors, the colonists refused to make the payments on the ground that they had been overcharged. They then petitioned the king for a further exemption which was apparently granted, for they did not actually begin to pay until the following year. From this date, however, there was considerable dissatisfaction among the settlers, who found the dues more onerous than they had expected, and almost impossible to meet when the harvests were poor. In 1772 their situation was so distressing that Lord Warren sent an urgent appeal to Abbé Le Loutre to return to the island and see what could be done for their assistance. Le Loutre was then engaged in developing plans for the settlement of the Acadians who were still on the mainland, having remained in Belle Ile only long enough to see his charges safely established in their new homes. An extract from Lord Warren's letter, written Sept. 26th, 1772, shows how desperate was the plight of the Acadians at this time:

Where are you, Monsieur L'Abbé? Your letters no longer reach me. Are you ignorant of the sad situation of our poor colonists? What is going to become of them after such an unfortunate year, without either grain or fish to sustain them? All doors seem closed against them. They cannot overcome the harshness of the proprietors, who seem to be solely interested in the collection of their rents, and are not only deaf to their cries,

but refuse to advance them a loan of grain to sow the lands which are already prepared for the seed. . . . Do not forget, after all you have done for them, that you are the Moses of these poor Israelites. Goodbye, Monsieur L'Abbé, you know the full extent of my regards for you.

If it had lain in his power to return to Belle Ile, Le Loutre could never have resisted such an appeal as this. It is doubtful if the letter ever reached him, and certain that he was never seen again on Belle Ile. He died suddenly and obscurely at Nantes in December of the same year, while preparing for the establishment of another colony of the Acadians in Corsica. His work was yet unfinished. For many of the exiles a further period of wandering lay ahead. But with the resources at his command, no man could have done more to relieve the distress of the Acadians in France. Nor is it surprising that his name is revered among their descendants to the present day.

At Belle Ile there was evidently little improvement in the situation, at least for some years, and in 1775 the majority of the Acadians left the island, some it is said going to Corsica and others to America, probably Louisiana. The names of the families that remained are as follows: in the parish of Palais; LeBlanc, Daigre, Granger: in the parish of Bangor: LeBlanc, Richard, Billerey, Landry, Duon Gautrot, Moser (sometimes spelled Mauger): in the parish of Sauzon; Granger, Trahan, Daigre: in the parish of Lochmaria: Trahan, Gautrot, Granger. Each one of these names represents several families.

Of the subsequent history of the colony there is little to be said. The settlers who remained gradually became absorbed in the native population of the island, and lost their peculiar character as the years passed. Within a few years the Revolution fell upon France. During this period some of the Acadians played an important part in political changes which occurred on Belle Ile. By the law of 14th December, 1789, providing for the formation of municipal councils throughout France, there was composed at Le Palais a council consisting of M. Le Grand, Maire, and twelve other citizens including M. LeBlanc, a member of one of the Acadian families established on the island. The name LeBlanc appears also among the five municipal officers elected during the same year, while that of Honoré Daigre appears on the list of five alternates who were chosen at the same time. There were also chosen twelve notables including Honoré Daigre, and Amand Granger, and twelve alternates of whom Joseph Simon Granger was one. A member of the Le Blanc family was also a member of the Committee of Public Safety

during the Reign of Terror. These names may still be found on Belle Ile to-day, and a great part of the population of ten thousand which now inhabits the island is proud to trace its descent from the Acadians who arrived there as exiles from Nova Scotia more than one hundred and fifty years ago.

STAND FIRM, MY COUNTRY

(Pre-Election Verse)

D. FRASER HARRIS.

Stand firm, my country, in thine hour of need!
Thy danger cometh from the foes within,
Theirs is the treason, theirs the greater sin.
O Land of England! in this hour give heed
To those who serve thee not in word but deed.
Is this the land for which our sons have died,
And were they in the fiery furnace tried
That these fair fields from tyranny be freed?
My country, trust in those who love thee best,
In those who tremble lest thine ancient fame
Perish from earth, and leave thee dispossessed
Of any honour in thy once proud name.
Say, is this English land indeed the same
Where Justice came unstained through every test?