

D'ANVILLE'S DISASTER, 1746

CONSTANCE FAIRBANKS PIERS.

Like a Greek tragedy the story runs,
When high endeavour, star-crossed from the first,
By winds and waves, calms, fogs and pestilence,
Was deeply cursed.

Recapture of lost Louisbourg was planned,
With ships and men and armament replete;
All France was certain swift success would be
An easy feat.

The brave and noble admiral, d'Anville,
Impulsive d'Estournel and La Jonquière
Were fain to deem their force invincible—
They knew no fear.

By baffling on-shore winds delayed, in June
The great armada's strength put out to sea,
Only to meet at once from tempests' wrath,
Calamity.

More time was lost when deadly calm prevailed,
Which later broke in lightning, demon-driven
To strike the helpless ships, where men were killed
And stout masts riven.

As if to mock this horrible distress,
Disease then came their woes to aggravate;
Men died by hundreds, and the fatal scourge
Did not abate.

At last in western waters, near the dread
Low Isle of Sable, nigh to Acadie,
The elements, in monstrous tumult met,
Took awful fee.

It topped all terrors they had known before—
That night of diabolic misery,
When ships unmanageable crashed and sank
In fiend-lashed sea.

But thirty-one hard-stricken ships remained—
Not half of those which grandly sailed from France—
By pestilence, and then starvation faced,
Through sad mischance!

In blinding fog they drifted far apart,
And lost each other on that unknown sea;
Till d'Anville found the ships at his command
Numbered but three.

Toward the rendezvous, Chebucto Bay,
In piteous plight his thwarted course he set,
Where broken-hearted, death relieved his cares
And healed his fret.

Some other battered vessels then made port,
Poor remnant of a former mighty fleet,
With d'Estournel the highest in command
Marked for defeat.

In gloom each prospect rose before his eyes,
His soul was crushed with broken high-born pride;
The saddest part of this sad tale is that
Self-stabbed he died.

But ere his wound had stilled his faltering voice,
In mind and body prostrate, suffering,
He pardon penitently craved of God,
And from his king.

Till autumn spread its gorgeous panoply,
Encamped on shore the sick and dying lay;
But winter threatened, they must all embark
And haste away.

La Jonquière bravely rallied all his force,
Hoping Annapolis at least might be
A prize worth effort in a last attempt
At victory.

But vain were hopes of victory for France,
Defeat had met them from no human foe,
Nor fault was theirs who could not strike for her
One single blow.

What bitter sorrow must have gnawed their hearts,
 In desperate retreat o'er ocean's foam;
 The sport of tempests, starved, and few, and sick,—
 Ah! sick for home!

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*By Bedford Basin's safe and sheltered tide,
 Poppies are not, nor crosses row on row,
 For men in graves forgotten long ago,
 Who in their country's service sadly died.
 Along the stretch of lovely water-side,
 On shoals and points and landings that we know,
 Remindful names remain which whisper woe,
 And mournful tales of d'Anville's fate still bide.*

*But now a cairn, that we may not forget,
 Stands by the road, so all who pass may see
 How Time has charmed the ancient strife away;
 Where French and English late in concord met
 To honour those whom adverse destiny
 Baffled of triumph in that bygone day.*