THE EXPULSION OF THE ACADIANS

By C. BRUCE FERGUSSON

The conflict in Acadia has a melancholy interest, since it ended in a catastrophe which prose and verse have joined to commemorate, but of which the causes have not been understood. . .
The government of Louis XV began with making the Acadians its tools, and ended with making them its victims.

Francis Parkman.

If there are any on whose loyalty he cannot rely he will make them leave the colony, and will send them either to old England or to one of the colonies of that nation depending on whatever facilities are available.

Instructions of French government to Duc d'Anville
relating to the Acadians. 1746.

It was barbarous, inhuman, but it was according to this international law that England acted. And since in this manner England has been readily charged with all the iniquities, and the noble and loyal conduct of France, her rival, has been held in comparison, it is necessary to examine that conduct. It will be revealed that France also had practised and attempted to practise deportation. In 1689 King Louis XIV gave instructions to Frontenac to seize the colony of New York and deport its inhabitants, *together* or *separately*; in the first half of the eighteenth century, France deported the total population of the Natches. Even before England did, she threatened the Acadians with deportation;. . .

Marcel Trudel.

SOME observers have said that Germany's annexation of Alsace-Lorraine was worse than a crime—it was a blunder; others have seemed to say that the expulsion of the Acadians was not a blunder but rather a crime. However that may be, history caught up with the Acadians in 1755, when six thousand or more of them were uprooted from their beloved lands in Nova Scotia, placed on board ships and deported to British colonies to the south. Ninety-two years later, moreover, in a blend of fact and fancy, Longfellow caught them up in the unforgettable lines of the poem *Evangeline*. Since that time, it seems, the warp of fact and the woof of imagination have been so interwoven by poetic licence in a memorable mosaic of sentimentality and suffering, that it is difficult to separate fact from fancy and to get at the sober truth of the matter. Yet even the most aloof observer must feel sympathy for any group of people who experience the testing of exile from their accustomed place, no matter whose the responsibility for the exile, and no matter whether that forced expatriation was deserved or undeserved. That being the case, the heart goes out to the Acadians of 1755, without any need for the head to appreciate anything of the circumstances, or for any question to be asked of the why or the wherefore. But the two hundredth anniversary of that event should provide the occasion for real attempts to understand what actually happened in 1755, and why and how it took place.

Was the expulsion of the Acadians a misfortune or was it a disaster? Were they the undeserved victims of misfortune, or did they reap disaster from their own folly? These are the salient questions which should be borne in mind whenever consideration is given to the fate of the Acadians in the year 1755. Their story, it is clear, is an admirable illustration of the relative strength of the ties that bind, and of the forces that influence, a people, as well as a supreme example of how a dramatic and colourful episode in the history of any people may be readily translated into the misty realm of romance, so that careful attention is needed for an adequate realization and a proper understanding. The story of the Acadians may be regarded as a tale that is told. But its versions differ, some of them are marred or distorted by emotion or bias, by artificial colouring or by unfounded judgments, and new appraisals are sometimes needed.

Centre or core of the Acadian problem was the oath of allegiance. One important factor was the fact that between the final capture of Port Royal by the British in 1710 and the fateful year 1755 most of the Acadians were unwilling to take the unconditional oath of allegiance. They refused to take the unqualified oath, insisted that they should not be required to take up arms in the event of war, and advanced the rather fantastic claim that they should be regarded as "French Neutrals."

Clearly the Acadian demand was an extraordinary one. It was the accepted conception then as now that the obligations incumbent upon those living within the bounds of the authority of a state included the taking of the oath of allegiance to that state. That was the case when New Sweden was obliged to submit to the New Netherlands in 1655, with those Swedes who desired to remain on the Delaware being expected to give an oath of unqualified allegiance to the new authority. That was also the case when the New Netherlands was obliged to submit to the English in 1664, and the Dutch about the Hudson and elsewhere were expected to do the same, if they remained beyond the period of a year. It was likewise the case, so far as France was concerned, when Frontenac received instructions respecting the expedition against New York, in the event of its capture, in 1689; and when the Duke d'Anville received instructions relating to his formidable but ill-fated expedition of 1746. Furthermore, this rule of broad international application was applied not only to the French in Canada after 1763, but also to those of Louisiana after 1803 when that territory became part of the United States, and to the Mexicans of northern Mexico after its cession to the United States in 1847.

Until the war was officially brought to a close by the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 the situation was rather unsettled, with the articles of capitulation agreed upon at the surrender of Port Royal applying only to those within three miles of the fort and with the other Acadians anxious and uncertain about what the future held in store for them. One of the articles of capitulation provided that the inhabitants within the *banlieue*, an area having a radius of a cannon shot or three miles from the fort, should remain upon their estates, with their corn, cattle and furniture, for two years, if they were not desirous of leaving before the expiration of that time, they taking the oaths of allegiance to Her Britannic Majesty. In accordance with the terms of this article, the inhabitants within the *banlieue*—57 heads of families —did take such oaths by the end of the third week of January 1711, and that, in itself, seemed to portend auspiciously. But the war had not yet ended, French agents were active and the Acadians outside the *banlieue*, not being included in the articles of capitulation, were in a state of uneasiness and uncertainty. These Acadians applied to the British Governor for protection and offered to take the oath of allegiance. But the Governor who told them that by the arbitrament of war they had become prisoners, and who had collected a tribute from them, could give them no terms until Her Majesty's more particular orders were received. As a result of uncertainty over their situation the Acadians outside the *banlieue* became uneasy, tried to keep the Indians hostile to the English and attempted to stir up the Acadians within the *banlieue* who had already taken the oath of allegiance. Further apprehension was also caused by the hostile designs of the Indians and the French from Canada, as well as by the influence of the French missionary priests. That this apprehension was justified is clear from the fact that a party of 65 Englishmen which was sent in two flat boats and a whaleboat in June 1711 for the purpose of encouraging friendly Acadians in supplying wood and timber for the garrison was ambushed by a war party of French and Indians and all but one of them were killed or captured. Soon even those Acadians within the *banlieue* who had taken the oath of allegiance joined their compatriots in blockading the fort at Annapolis Royal, and the English were not only threatened with assault but with being one and all put to the sword.

The Treaty of Utrecht brought the war to an end. By it such of the Acadians as might choose to leave Acadia or Nova Scotia were free to do so within the space of a year,[1] taking with

1 There have been different views as to the beginning and the end of the "year" of this Treaty, and some have held the untenable one that it was still in effect at the time of the founding of Halifax.

them their personal effects; while a letter of Queen Anne permitted such emigrants to sell their lands and houses. Those who remained in Nova Scotia were guaranteed freedom of worship under certain conditions. These were that they should accept the sovereignty of the British Crown, and that they and their pastors should keep within the limits of British law.

Now two roads lay before the Acadians, and it was a momentous question for themselves and for the local British authorities which one of them they would choose: whether they would remove themselves to French territory within the year stipulated in the Treaty of Utrecht, or remain in Nova Scotia and become British subjects. The one course meant their continuance as French nationals but their abandonment of their lands in Nova Scotia; the other meant the retention of their lands, the taking the oath of allegiance to the British monarch and the relinquishment of their French citizenship. Neither of these alternatives was their choice. Instead they tried for many years to combine what they wished of the two alternatives and eventually found themselves in an untenable position.

The best time to have settled the question of the oath was immediately after the Treaty of Utrecht. Then the Acadians numbered fewer than two thousand and, if the interests of security, as well as international propriety, demanded that they take the oath or leave Nova Scotia and they persisted in refusing to do the one or the other, their deportation then would neither have been as formidable nor regarded with so much disfavour as forty-two years later when they had increased to five or six times that number. The reason why the question was not then settled was that the Acadians themselves were loath to leave their fertile meadow-lands in Nova Scotia, whence they drew subsistence by means of cattle raising and farming, for uncleared and unknown or less fertile lands elsewhere, where much hard work would be needed, and the British authorities in Nova Scotia had neither the forces nor the resources to press the question to an issue. Other factors also supported the tendency to let matters drift; including the anxiety of the French authorities to maintain good relations with the British at a time when they were involved in difficulties with Spain.

Time and again the Acadians were given the opportunity to take the oath of allegiance. But the French authorities, who found that the Acadians were in the main reluctant to remove to Cape Breton Island, soon saw and seized advantages in the situation and employed French agents and French missionaries for the purpose of keeping the Acadians faithful to King Louis.

This was indeed an anomalous state of affairs: the "year" of the Treaty of Utrecht soon passed; most of the Acadians remained in Nova Scotia; French missionaries, who were French agents as well as Roman Catholic priests, strove to keep the Acadians attached to both their religion and the French interest, and, on occasion, openly avowed that their object was to keep the Acadians faithful to the French monarch; none of these missionaries was ever molested by the British authorities, except when detected in practices alien to his proper functions and injurious to the government; freedom of worship continued to be accorded to the Acadians, notwithstanding the fact that most of them persisted in refusing to take the oath of allegiance, the condition on which they had acquired that privilege; and the British government, in spite of the concern of the British authorities in Nova Scotia, did nothing effective either to have the French missionaries in that colony give a pledge that they would do nothing contrary to the interests of Great Britain or to have them replaced by other priests to be named by the Pope at the request of the British government.

The chief reasons for this anomalous state of affairs were the feebleness of British authority in Nova Scotia, the neglect and the apathy of the British ministers and the fact that the Acadians leaned so heavily on their French spiritual and temporal advisers. For a while, it is true, the *imperium in imperio* which existed was such that the inner power seemed to wax and strengthen every day while the outer relatively pined and dwindled. But the time was to come when the British ministers would waken from their lethargy, bestir themselves and, warned by the signs of the times, send troops and settlers into the Province at the eleventh hour. Then it was that the Acadians were to find how deplorable their position really was. Perhaps the only thing that could have averted the danger of Acadian hostilities or revolt and have made unnecessary the harsh measures to which such conduct afterwards gave rise was for the British ministry to have sent out a force sufficient both to protect the inhabitants against French terrorism and to leave no doubt that the King of England was master of Nova Scotia in fact as well as in name. But such did not take place until after long delay and until the problem had attained greater proportions. In the meantime, although those Acadians who remained in Nova Scotia had been transferred by France to the British Crown by the Treaty of Utrecht, French officers on occasion denounced them as rebels and threatened them with death if they did not fight at their bidding against Great Britain, and

British officers threatened them with expulsion if they did not remain loyal to King George. These were the horns of the dilemma for the Acadians; and while for a time they avoided both they were ultimately confronted with the necessity for a decision they had tried to avoid.

French policy after 1713 reveals that France was unwilling to reconcile herself to the loss of Acadia, although it had with its ancient limits been ceded to Great Britain by the Treaty of Utrecht. Nor was France to neglect Nova Scotia or Acadia, even if for years Great Britain was to do so. On Isle Royale the French not only built up a mighty base at Louisbourg, as the watch-dog and protector of the Gulf and the approaches to Quebec, and as the base and the guardian for the fishery, but also established there a Governor who was charged with the management of Acadian affairs, and who had zealous and efficient agents among the Acadians in the missionary priests, who were sent into Nova Scotia by the Bishop of Quebec, or in a few cases by their immediate ecclesiastical superiors in Isle Royale, and whose services in keeping the Acadians in the French interest were recognized and acknowledged by French political leaders and officials. At first the French authorities endeavoured to induce the Acadians to migrate to Isle Royale, where the growing power of the fortress at Louisbourg was a symbol that France was preparing to contest the supremacy of the continent with Great Britain, and sent envoys into Nova Scotia, with the permission of the local British officials, to visit the Acadian settlements and to tell the Acadians what inducements they were prepared to give them to remove. A few of the Acadians did go to Isle Royale, and nearly all of them in the emotion of the moment signed declarations of their willingness to migrate to French territory, but it was soon seen that this mood quickly changed and that the Acadians in the main had no inclination to leave their homes. At the same time the British authorities, realizing the value of settlers in Nova Scotia, hopeful of having the Acadians become loyal British subjects, and having no desire to see them migrate to Isle Royal where they would greatly add to the numbers and the strength of a potential enemy near at hand, were almost as anxious to keep the Acadians in Nova Scotia as they were forty years later to get them out of it. Soon, moreover, the French authorities realized that the Acadians were of greater benefit to France by remaining in Nova Scotia, whence they could furnish Isle Royale with much-needed supplies, where religion and patriotism might be combined or confused in keeping them in the French interest, and where in time

of war they might be a source of strength for French invaders aiming at the re-capture of old Acadia or a fifth column which would be a decisive factor in any test of strength. If the Acadians had really wished to emigrate, the British Governor could have done little to stop them for his authority hardly extended beyond gunshot of his fort at Annapolis Royal and all the Acadians except those of Annapolis and its immediate neighbourhood were free to go or stay at will.

While most of the Acadians maintained a careful neutrality in times of trouble, and Mascarene himself declared that their refusal to fight for the French besiegers was one reason for the success of his defence of Annapolis on one occasion, French designs involved the Acadians and some of them were implicated in hostile acts against the British in Nova Scotia. During the 1720's French authorities not only strove to foment trouble between the Indians and the English but they joined the Indians in a raid on Canso. On the outbreak of the War of the Austrian Succession, the French from Isle Royale seized Canso before the British on this side of the Atlantic were aware of the outbreak of hostilities. They then attacked Annapolis. In this attack Duvivier, the French commander, expected help from the Acadians who were French in blood, faith and inclination; and the latter, who would not join him openly lest the attack should fail, did what they could without committing themselves and made a hundred and fifty scaling ladders for the besiegers. To this seizure of Canso and this attack on Annapolis a contemporary French writer attributes the dire calamity which soon befell the French. When the capture of Louisbourg in 1745 by New Englanders with the aid of a British naval squadron was followed by French plans to retake it, reconquer old Acadia, burn Boston and lay waste the other seaboard towns, French officials counted on aid from the Acadians for their designs. The result was the assembling of a vast armada, comprising nearly half the French navy, and carrying three thousand one hundred and fifty veteran troops, under the Duc d'Anville, in 1746. This formidable expedition set out from France, and Ramesay, with a large body of Canadians, was sent to Acadia to cooperate with d'Anville's force. News of this design and the appearance at Chebucto of part of d'Anville's ill-fated fleet caused great excitement among the Acadians, who undoubtedly expected that they would soon again come under the Crown of France. Fifty of them went on board the French ships at Chebucto to pilot them to the attack on Annapolis. To their dismay, however, they found that no such attack would then be

made. Early in the next year, when Coulon de Villiers and his men in the depth of winter led his men from Beaubassin to Grand Pré, where in the dead of night they attacked Colonel Arthur Noble and his force, who were quartered in Acadian houses, and killed many of them in their beds, a number of Acadians acted as guides for Coulon's band and assisted them in other ways. With the restoration of Louisbourg to France, the British Government founded Halifax as a counterpoise to it and commenced their first real attempt at settling Nova Scotia. By the time of the eve of the Seven Years' War it was clear that a showdown would soon be reached with respect to North America. In 1755 Braddock was defeated on the Monongahela and Beauséjour was captured by New England troops. At the siege of Beauséjour about three hundred Acadians aided the French.

The developments of the 1740's, with French attacks on Canso and Annapolis, the d'Anville expedition, the massacre at Grand Pré, and other French designs, as well as the capture of Louisbourg and its restoration and the founding of Halifax, meant a heightened interest and an increased activity in Nova Scotia. New efforts to have the Acadians take the oath of allegiance to the British monarch had no better result than previous ones. British activity at the Isthmus of Chignecto, with a view to protecting the peninsula from French encroachments, were followed by two matters of very special significance. One, in 1750, was the first forcible removal of the Acadians: resolved that the Acadians at Beaubassin should be preserved from the contaminating influence of the British, Le Loutre, who had been unable to prevent the British from reaching that village, went forward with his Indians and set fire to it, in order to force its inhabitants to go to territory claimed by the French near Beauséjour, a short distance away. This was the beginning of the dispersal of the Acadians. Besides these, through great pressure from the French they migrated in such numbers that by 1752 two thousand of them were to be found in Ile St. Jean (Prince Edward Island), and about seven hundred in Isle Royale (Cape Breton Island). The other, in 1751, was an interesting commentary on the attitude of the French authorities towards the Acadian claim to neutrality which those authorities had encouraged while the Acadians remained under British sovereignty: this was the order of Governor La Jonquière that all Acadian refugees near Beauséjour who did not take the oath of allegiance to the French monarch and enlist in the militia companies would be branded as rebels and chased from the lands which they occupied.

Subsequently, just after the capture of Beauséjour in 1755, while the New England troops, who had achieved that victory, were still in Nova Scotia, and British ships of the line still lay in Halifax harbour, Governor Lawrence of Nova Scotia and his council at Halifax decided that the safety of the colony required that the Acadians should take the oath of allegiance, which they had so often refused to do, or be deported from the Province. They again refused, and they were thereupon deported to British colonies. In the circumstances, and particularly after the attacks on Annapolis Royal in 1744 and 1745 and the deeds done at Grand Pré in 1747, it seems both unfair and inappropriate to attempt to pin the chief responsibility for this decision on either Lawrence of Nova Scotia or Shirley of Massachusetts.

Lack of space prevents an account of the hardships experienced by those Acadians who were expelled or a description of the efforts made by the British authorities to keep families and people from the same community together. Suffice it to say that it might appear that the expulsion was unnecessary, for if the old situation had persisted for but another few years until the French menace on the continent had been eradicated the problem would no longer have existed, or if the Acadians could have taken the oath of allegiance prior to 1755, as those who remained in the Province and those who returned to it afterwards did, those harsh deeds would not have been done. Not many years after 1755, at any rate, probably about 2,000 of the exiled Acadians returned to Nova Scotia, where, along with a like number who escaped the expulsion, they received grants of land, took the oath of allegiance and assumed their full place in the life of the Province. On the two hundredth anniversary of that catastrophe which emerged from the vicissitudes of war and threats of war, all Nova Scotians of every racial origin rejoice with those of Acadian descent in marking the great achievements of the last two centuries.