

MALPEQUE

ADA MACLEOD

IN a sheltered fold of the wave-harried concave of Prince Edward Island, there nestles a hamlet—Malpeque, or Princetown—old, historic, alluring. In its name is embalmed a memory of three races. The aborigines called it *Makpek*, “the big water”, from the bay beside it; the French modified the name to “Malpeque”; and when Surveyor General Holland, at the behest of George III, came to make ready for British settlers, he named it Princetown after the prince who became George IV.

Makpek was the chief Indian village on Isle “Abegweit”, (many there are who regret that this latter name was not retained for the Island, with its poetic meaning, “cradled on the wave”). From this centre there used to be, in summer, much traffic back and forth to the mainland, and the tourist, crossing to-day on the car-ferry and motoring to the “North Shore House” of Princetown, traverses the ancient Indian trail from *Buslooakade*, “the landing place” (Borden), through *Bedek*, “the sultry place”, past the traditional scene of the battle “where the Mohawk met the Micmac on the banks of Indian River”, and thence to Makpek. From time immemorial it had been a camping place, and the first settlers found the shores of Darnley River lined with immense piles of “middens,” chiefly oyster-shells, which for generations after supplied lime to the farmers. About the middle of last century, the rotted stump of a very large pine was dug up, and beneath its roots was a deposit of these shells many feet in thickness. One end of Darnley Bridge rests on the site of an ancient Indian burying-ground, and when excavations were being made, numerous skeletons were unearthed, of unusually large size, the skulls of which would easily slip over an ordinary-sized man’s head. This record of their great stature is corroborated by Abraham Gesner in a report on the geology of the Island in 1854, in which he describes observations at Savage Harbour:

By the encroachment of the sea on the south side, a number of Indian skeletons have been exposed and washed from the bank. These skeletons were lying together in different positions, as if the bodies had been thrown into a common pit, the top of which was only one foot beneath the soil. Some of the bones were found to be of great size, and in general they all exceeded in their dimensions those of the race in their present state. The site of

this pit on the extremity of a small point of land supports the opinion that the savages had been surprised and cut off, or killed in battle, and as no relics of warlike instruments were found at the place, except those of the aborigines, it is probable that the event took place before the advent of Europeans. From an old tradition of the affair among the Indians, the bay has been called Savage Harbour.

It is thought that Malpeque Bay is the "River of Boats" mentioned by Jacques Cartier, as in his first voyage he sailed past its narrow entrance, and saw canoes of savages fishing in its teeming waters. In 1728 the first French settlement was made, when John Lambert and Charles and Peter Arsenault with their families came from Acadia to build new homes for themselves in the forest that extended to the very water's edge. Probably the earliest description of this locality was penned by Picton of Marseilles, Secretary to the Governor of Louisbourg, as in 1752 he sailed around the Island to report on its harbours and navigable rivers. The following translation is from his journal:

From Raeico (now "Rustico") we set sail for Malpeque where we arrived that evening, after having enjoyed a prospect of a charming coast. But we were greatly incommoded with *marignoins* or gnats, whose stings are more pungent here than in any other part of the country. They bite with such venom and fury that persons not accustomed to their insolence are apt to lose all patience. The harbor of Malpec is very convenient for the cod-fishery—nature having formed several small islands as well as strands adapted for drying, and besides there is a brisk sharp air proper for the purpose. The lands adjacent to the harbour of Malpec are the best of the whole Island of St. John. The banks of the rivers are covered with all sorts of beautiful trees. Between this and the harbor of Cachecampec is a large grove of cedars about three leagues in circumference. The white cedar distils a kind of incense, but bears no fruit like the cedar of Mount Lebanon. The Acadian women are accustomed to chew this incense, which preserves their teeth and makes them exceeding white.

One of the islands mentioned above—well-known over half a continent, in connection with the "Curtain Island Oyster"—is named after the Abbé Courtin, a priest of the "Mission Etrangères" of Paris, who came to Quebec in 1723, and after studying the Micmac language ministered to the Indians of Malpeque in 1731. The following year he was drowned while crossing a Cape Breton river.

Brave and devoted were these Franciscan friars—earliest of missionaries to Ile St. Jean—although none of them were called to suffer martyrdom as some of the Jesuits in other parts of Canada. Their very names are forgotten, but one figure among them stands out, cameo-like, from the shadows of two centuries ago. It is that of Father Kargariou—once a man of high degree in Old France—trudging on snowshoes over the trackless, snow-piled ice of the northern coast. With the cowl of his scanty habit drawn tightly about his head to protect him from the bitter cold of midwinter, he traverses the weary stretch between St. Peter's and Malpeque. He is on his way to this latter place to give instruction to the Indians. He remains with them two months, "his only shelter the rude wigwam open to all kinds of weather, and often dirty to an intolerable degree. A few spruce boughs, which served for seats by day and for beds by night, constituted their entire stock of furniture. From the fire, placed in the middle, rose a thick smoke, which, carried about by currents of air, added greatly to the discomfort. Men, women and children were huddled together in the narrow space, while the dogs moved about at will, barking and snarling in perfect freedom, and sleeping sometimes on the ground and not infrequently on the people. In such lodgings the missionary was obliged to live during his stay at Malpeque. The records he kept at the time bear evidence of his destitute condition. The handwriting is in marked contrast with that of former entries. It is very irregular in form, and almost illegible, showing that it was done whilst the writer was in an uncomfortable and unsteady position. He did not even have ink at his disposal. Its place had to be supplied by a dark liquid that seems to have been a mixture of water and soot."¹ In 1749 Father Maillard, known as the "Apostle of the Micmacs", began his annual visits to the Indians, and made Malpeque his headquarters. He died in Halifax in 1762, and "was laid to rest in a Protestant cemetery, as there was no burial place for Catholics in Halifax until years after his death."

In 1753 the Acadians of Malpeque built their first church at Low Point, and dedicated it to the Holy Family. The first resident priest of this now long-vanished church was Father Cassiet, succeeded by Father Dosqué who was stationed here at the time of the Expulsion. A recent issue of *The Dalhousie Review* contained an article telling of the settlement in France of refugees from Port Royal and Minas Basin, under the guidance of the famous

1. *Une Seconde Acadie*, Casgrain.

Abbé Le Loutré. Somewhat later, under Boscawen's orders, transports were sent to St. John's Island to remove the Acadians there, but estimates differ widely as to the number deported. Three of the ships, at least, set sail for France. The largest was the *Duke William* under Captain Nicholl, and with him sailed Father Girard and his parishioners of Point Prim, but in a terrific storm in the Bay of Biscay the vessel foundered with three hundred and sixty-five souls, the priest and captain and a few others being saved. At the same time, the *Violet* under Captain Saggett went down with nearly four hundred on board. Father Cassiet and his people of St. Louis (now Scotchfort) arrived safely, and he lived to extreme old age and was laid to rest in the cemetery of Montant, his native village. The Acadians of Malpeque, on account of their distance from the central settlements, were not disturbed, but the larger number of them voluntarily made their way to Quebec along with Father Dosqué who was appointed rector of the cathedral in that city.

The new era of British possession was ushered in by Holland's survey of St. John's Island to which he gave its first English place-names, and which he divided into three counties with a shire-town in each, named respectively after George III, Queen Charlotte, and the Crown Prince. Judging that the current of trade in the new colony would set in the direction of the motherland, he foresaw *Princetown* as one of the leading seaports, and he laid it out with care, even to streets and pasture lots, on the little peninsula beside Macpee "the big water." But the channels of trade led elsewhere, and it never became a town, scarce even a village; yet by the lure of its name the first Scottish settlers were drawn to the Island. For in 1770—three years before the famous *Hector* emigration to Nova Scotia—the ship *Annabella* brought Argyllshire families to Malpeque, because it had been represented to these people, by the proprietor of the township, that they were coming to cultivated farms, grouped about a flourishing seaport town. But as the weary group landed on the shore on a stormy October evening, they beheld nothing but sombre ranks of spruce and pine extending down to the very water's edge. And fate had a still more cruel blow in store, for that night the storm became a tempest, so that the ship was dashed to pieces and all their supplies were lost. They were forced to spend the winter in the wigwams of the Indians, their only food dried corn, sea-cow "flippers", and shellfish dug from under the shore ice. Yet the hero-soul of the pioneer was in these people, and we find them resolutely setting their faces to conquer adverse fate—hewing the giant trees, building

their log-houses, hoeing in about the stumps, their first potatoes and seed-grain obtained from a French settlement at some distance. And when the rich red soil returned to them a yield of a hundred-fold, they saw a vision of what this new land had in store for them and their children. Erelong they ceased their mournful singing of the Highland *Sorridh*, "the farewell", and began to name their girl-babies after the *Annabella*. In 1772 Montgomery, Lord Advocate for Scotland, brought a large party of settlers to Malpeque, and according to the census of 1798, the first taken under British rule, there were many more settlers in this township than in any other, with the exception of Charlottetown Royalty itself.

A large flat rock on the landing-place is still called "Chappell's Chair" because here, in 1775, Benjamin Chappell stood while he preached to his recent shipmates, and to the folk who came to greet them on their arrival. He was a convert and intimate friend of Wesley, brought to the Island much of Wesley's fervour, and is known as the Father of Methodism in the province. He removed to Charlottetown and became its first postmaster, but had much ado in prevailing upon people to call for their letters. He was a joiner, and kept a diary written on parchment which is still a treasure-house of information concerning these far-off days. Evidently few were busier than himself, with his frequent preaching tours and his manifold duties, such as the making of "ye wood leg of Mrs. Baker."

The first English-speaking priest on the Island was Rev. James Macdonald, who came in 1772 with the Glenaladale settlers on the *Alexander* arriving in Scotchfort. Being conversant with French, English and Gaelic, he had been sent out from Scotland as a missionary to the Highlanders and Acadians, and spent his first winter in Malpeque. There is extant one of his letters dated from this place and addressed to the Bishop of Quebec, "written in an easy style of Latin."

Twenty years were to elapse before the early settlers of Malpeque looked upon the face of a Protestant minister. In 1791 Rev. James McGregor, the earliest Presbyterian missionary in the Maritime Provinces, paid his first visit; but the young people of that day, to whom the experience was utterly novel, did not know the proper conduct for a religious service, so that McGregor was compelled to "read the Psalm in an exceeding loud voice" to drown the noise of talking. But soon they listened willingly to his instruction, and three years later a church was built at "Ellison's Brook", on land that had been given to the people by Governor Fanning. A school also was erected here;

to this day it is called "Fanning School," and the star pupil each year receives a grant which was bequeathed by the Governor's daughter. Princetown was the first organized Presbyterian congregation on the Island. Its first pastor was Mr. Urquhart of Scotland who came in 1800, and he was succeeded in 1870 by the notable Dr. John Kier, a graduate of Glasgow University, who for half a century ministered in this place, and was laid to rest in its churchyard. When Dr. McCulloch of Pictou Academy removed to Halifax as the first Principal of Dalhousie College, Dr. Kier took his place as theological tutor, and it was at the Academy that the call came suddenly to rest from his labours. Just two months previously a great event had been celebrated in Malpeque—his Jubilee, when three thousand people had assembled to do him honour.

The Princetown "Literary and Scientific Society", the earliest of its kind on the Island, was organized by Dr. Kier, as was also a library for his parishioners which included works such as D'Aubigné's *History of the Reformation* and the then newly published Allison's *History of Europe*. He was for many years President of the Princetown Agricultural Society, and set the example to other pioneer ministers to care for their flock in material things—introducing improved stock and better methods of farming. On Dr. Kier's arrival, a new church had been built, and sixty years later the present stately edifice was erected. In its steeple there is a bell which has never been rung within living memory; and one wonders what special significance there may be in the verse inscribed about its rim, *Inter natos mulierum non surrexit major Joanne Baptista*.

Just one hundred years ago seven women of this place banded themselves together in the "Princetown Female Society for the Propagation of the Gospel"—the earliest Woman's Missionary Society in Canada. In that first year they raised the sum of £21 10s., half of which was sent to the British and Foreign Bible Society, and the remainder used in furnishing Bibles to needy settlements on the Island. A bronze tablet to mark this event was recently unveiled in Princetown Church, and it is interesting to note that two names on the tablet—Mrs. John Kier and Mrs. Pidgeon—are those of the two grandmothers of the leaders in the recent Church Union controversy—Principal Fraser and Dr. George Pidgeon.

The pioneers had a long and hard struggle, but sometimes there was a touch of comedy, as, for instance, the "Siege of Malpeque." Alexander Stewart of that place incidentally gave

particulars of this affair when he was called upon to give evidence in 1860 before the Land Commissioner's Court, which consisted of Hon. J. Gray (nominee of the British Government), Hon. Joseph Howe, and J. W. Ritchie of New Brunswick. Commissioner Gray said that he "had often heard of the Siege of Derry, but never of the Siege of Malpeque." It appears that in 1802 Governor Fanning had ordered a muster, but the Malpeque farmers, engrossed in their spring planting, had paid no attention to the order. The furious Governor, taking with him a detachment of soldiers, hastened to Princetown, but on his arrival not a man was to be found, as all had fled into the woods. After waiting some days in vain, he had to pledge himself that he would do them no injury if they would muster, which they did forthwith. But (to quote Stewart's words) "When he returned to Charlottetown he drew up a despatch representing the whole Island as in a state of rebellion, and that he had besieged Malpeque, the stronghold of the rebels, and completely subdued them. He gave at the same time a list of the killed and wounded, accompanying it with a draft for no inconsiderable amount to defray expenses of the siege. One of the officers, who was represented as being wounded, but who merely got his *trousers* torn on the way thither, applied for and received a pension."

Sometimes, too, there was the touch of tragedy. In 1813, when prices were high on account of the war, four young Malpeque men—McGougan, McKendrick, Matthews, and Woodside—built a vessel for the Newfoundland trade, loaded her with cattle, and all set sail, with Matthew Stewart as captain. Off Cape Ray they were captured by an American privateer. A Yankee crew was placed on board under the same captain, while the four owners were carried off in the other ship. Soon an English cutter hove in sight, and the crew of Americans hoisted British colours; but as the British vessel came near, Captain Stewart began to wave his hat and gesticulate, so that the Englishman at once came on board, took the Yankees prisoners, and placed two negroes to serve as crew with Captain Stewart to take the Malpeque vessel back to the Island. A violent storm arose, and the privateer with all on board went down. Stewart, never having seen black men before, was in terror, and could neither sleep nor rest, but his vessel was finally driven ashore on the Magdalens and all three were saved. In Malpeque, however, three young widows waited long for those who were never heard of more.

The early pioneers rest in a lonely fir-crowned spot, just where their ship landed, at "King Street", in the phantom town; and the vision that they saw for their children, even to many

generations, has been fulfilled,—not only in broadening acres and granaries overflowing, but in the finer amenities of life, without which worldly success is as a barren husk. To them, chiefly, this came in the love of worthy books—fostered by the intellectual men of the manse. Some years ago a young schoolmaster, newly come to Princetown, was pacing slowly along a leafy by-road—“Lovers’ Lane” it was called—but the young man was oblivious of that, for he was earnestly poring over a freshly-opened copy of the *Eclectic Magazine*, which had been recommended to him as a means of self-culture by Dr. Anderson of Prince of Wales College. A roughly dressed man, summer-fallowing a field by the roadside, stopped his team at the fence and asked to see the magazine. To the astonishment of the dapper young teacher, this unkempt ploughman showed by his conversation a long familiarity with the originals from which the *Eclectic* articles had been culled—the *Westminster*, *Blackwood’s*, *Edinburgh Review*, and others.

Then, too, there was the amenity of a leisure that seems nowhere to be found in our hurried modern life. There was always time in Malpeque to cultivate friendship, and one recalls the dear, delightful old ladies who used to set out after breakfast—always in pairs—with their black lustre aprons and their knitting, to spend the day at the home of a neighbour. Invitations were not given nor required. The visitors were always made welcome, the day quickly sped with chat and gossip which seemed to be ever kindly, and there would be an early tea of brisket, and wedges of black fruit cake, and wild strawberry jam, and “Malpeque cakes”—these last resembling southern “beaten biscuit”, smooth, crisp and toothsome.

Thus there evolved a spirit, a mellowed atmosphere that can emerge only where the families of a community have lived for generations in the same spot, amid the same congenial surroundings. In this, Malpeque is unique among Island settlements, for its family names to-day are those of the passengers on the *Annabella* and Montgomery’s ships. And the homes of some of them are the same dignified and comfortable dwellings built by their forefathers, whose broad panelled doorways, bordered by many-paned windows, seem to carry a memory of the welcoming smile of gracious hostesses of the past.

But Malpeque, as other places in the Maritime Provinces, has its problem of the exodus—the lure of the West and the “States” robbing it of its young men. It would indeed be a tragedy if in this way these fine old homesteads, where generations have laboured and loved, were to pass into the hands of aliens.