

THE HALIFAX-CASTINE EXPEDITION

D. C. HARVEY

FROM the earliest times the history of Nova Scotia has been associated closely with that of the territory between the St. Croix and the Penobscot; but it was an expedition which sailed from Halifax, in August 1814, that forged a golden link between these two regions: for the profits of this expedition were used to found a College, which was designed to wage war, not against a neighbouring people, but against ignorance and prejudice at home. Moreover, it was the last war-like expedition that left the shores of Nova Scotia against any part of New England; and its return, a few months later, may be said to have inaugurated that long era of peace which has since prevailed between these two natural neighbours, racial and geographical.

Though this expedition was war-like in the ordinary sense of that word, it was not aimed at New England *per se*, but rather at the Government of the United States, which was trying to coerce its north-eastern extremity into active hostility against its neighbours. In a sense, therefore, the British expedition was both an effort to keep open communications between the Maritime colonies and Canada, where the real War of 1812 was being waged, and an invitation to this reluctant section of the enemy to seek or submit to incorporation with the adjoining British colonies, and to share in the immediate economic benefits of that time and place. In fact, it might be regarded as an attempt on the part of the British to regularize a state of military neutrality and economic co-operation that already existed, since, from the beginning of the war, on the initiative of the inhabitants of Eastport, Maine, an arrangement had been made for mutual respect of each other's local neutrality, and an active trade had been carried on between the Maritime colonies and New England, although the United States and the British Empire were at war.

In order to understand how such an arrangement could have been made and such an expedition could have been sent, it is necessary to recall the peculiar part that the St. Croix-

Penobscot region had played in the struggle between the French and the British to delimit their boundaries on the Atlantic seaboard, and later between Great Britain and New England to the same end. It should be remembered that the French and the British attempted to exploit this region at almost the same moment. The activities of English fishermen on the coasts of Maine, in 1603, had been urged as one of the reasons for giving De Monts a commission to forestall them by planting a French colony there; and it was the attempts of French Jesuits to set up a colony near the ruins of the English plantation of Sagadahoc, on the Kennebec, that brought down the vengeance of Argall upon Mt. Desert and Port Royal in 1613. From the founding of New England in 1620 and the grant of Nova Scotia to Sir William Alexander in 1621 until the Treaty of Paris in 1763, which finally decided that both New England and Acadia should be British, there had been constant disputes as to the boundaries of Acadia and New England, the claims of both advancing or receding in accordance with their strength at the moment; but the eastern limit of New England's claim never went beyond the St. Croix, nor the western claims of Acadia beyond the Kennebec. Perhaps the most generally accepted boundary was the Penobscot. On this region, therefore, French and British alike concentrated their gaze between 1613 and 1763. In Penobscot harbour the La Tours traded before they were ousted by the English and moved to Cape Sable. There Sir Thomas Temple made his headquarters after Cromwell's conquest of Nova Scotia, and there Grandfontaine went to receive the transfer of Acadia after the Treaty of Breda. There, also, the Baron de Saint-Castin traded, loved, and left his name to the geographer, just as he left his money behind a rock when raided by the English. For a century and a half this region knew less of peace and more of concentrated commercial rivalry than any other part of New England or Acadia.

When the French and British wars ceased, in 1763, title to this whole region between the St. Croix and the Kennebec was still disputed between the Crown and Massachusetts. Prior to the American War of Independence, some half-hearted suggestions were made of setting up a new colony to be called New Ireland; and, after the war had broken out and Machias had become the headquarters of raids upon Nova Scotia, the British occupied the region in force, and revived the project of making it a separate colony as a refuge for Loyalists; but, when peace was made, the territory was yielded to the United

States, thus inserting a wedge in the British dominions that was destined to perpetuate the old border disputes between Acadia or Nova Scotia and New England. These disputes had not been settled when the War of 1812 commenced; and, as the war proceeded, it was so unpopular with all New England that it seemed as if she might be induced to secede from the union and return to the commercial fold of the British Empire. Under these circumstances, then, it was good strategy for the British forces to occupy the old disputed area, either as the easiest way to obtain commercial entry to the United States from the Atlantic seaboard, or as a means of neutralizing a region between the British colonies and New England, in which the Government of the United States had obtained some success in recruiting during the war against Canada. Though Castine was the headquarters of their occupation, 1814-15, it must not be forgotten that the British subdued and occupied the entire region between the Penobscot and the St. Croix, as they had done previously, 1779-83.

The peninsula of Castine projects itself into Penobscot harbour between the Castine and Penobscot rivers, and during the War of 1812 was the site of a typical New England town, which had been incorporated in 1796. At the time of the first British occupation, the peninsula was for the most part a tree-covered wilderness, cleared only in the immediate vicinity of the old trading posts. It was the British who built the first fortifications on the peninsula in 1779; but the Americans had a small garrison there during the War of 1812, as they also had at Eastport and other north-eastern Atlantic ports. The British chose Castine as their headquarters on this expedition, not because it was larger or more important than Eastport or Machias, but because it was the most westerly point that they had occupied in 1779 and proposed to retain or occupy during the War.

As already stated, the War of 1812 was unpopular with New England; and, at the very beginning, a suggestion had been made by the inhabitants of Eastport that they and the British colonies should refrain from hostilities on land and carry on friendly intercourse as usual. This suggestion had been adopted by the Governor of Nova Scotia, with the later approval of the imperial authorities; and during the first two years of the war an active illicit trade had been carried on between Maine, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, by which naval and food supplies reached the West Indies and Great Britain, and British manufactured goods and West Indian

products ultimately reached all the Atlantic states of the Union. American agents came to Halifax and, in co-operation with local merchants, arranged for shipments by license, and these licenses were recognized by British naval officers. New England customs officers were induced either to close their eyes to the origin of these profitable shipments or to connive at a smuggling trade that was carried on by land through St. Andrews or beyond the three-mile limit through transfer of cargoes. In any event, New England ingenuity found a way to maintain profitable good-will towards the neighbouring colonies, until the British changed their policy and decided to blockade the whole Atlantic coast.¹

This change of policy was due to the successful termination of the war against Napoleon, which enabled the British Government to despatch its Peninsular veterans to America and release more of the navy for the same service. In accordance with this new policy, Lt. Gov. Sherbrooke was instructed to occupy that part of the United States which interrupted winter communication with Canada, or to make such a demonstration against the enemy as would hasten the end of the war. Accordingly, he decided to occupy the historic borderland between Acadia and New England and to incorporate it, for the time being at least, within the British commercial system.

Such, then, was the more or less indefinite purpose of the expedition which left Halifax on August 26, 1814, for the coast of Maine, to complete the work of a smaller force from Halifax and Bermuda, that had met at Shelburne in July, and proceeded to Eastport and Moose Island. The land force of this expedition comprised the first company of Royal Artillery, two rifle companies of the 60th Regt., and detachments of the 29th, 62nd, and 98th Regts., between three and four thousand men, under command of Major-General Gerard Gosselin. The naval force consisted of three 74's, the *Dragon*, *Spenser* and *Bulwark*, two frigates, the *Bacchante* and *Tenedos*, two sloops of war, the *Sylph* and *Peruvian*, an armed schooner, a tender, and ten transports, all under command of Rear Admiral Edward Grif-fith. The combined forces had intended to take Machias on

1. An excellent illustration of this ingenuity may be found in a letter of Richard Tremain to Lt. Gov. Sherbrooke, November 23, 1813. "A vessel sails from Halifax loaded with dry goods. She is met in the sound by another with a Clearance from Newport or New London to New York, or Brunswick, with the same description of goods inserted in her Clearance although she sails in Ballast. The goods are transferred from one vessel to the other in the out ports in the sound. The goods are carried to New York, or Brunswick from whence they are sent to Philadelphia, and Southern States."

the way to the Penobscot; but, on learning that the United States corvette, the *Adams*, had gone up the Penobscot for repairs, the officers decided to sail direct for Castine. They arrived there on September 1st and called upon Lieutenant Lewis, who occupied the fort with a small garrison of forty men, to surrender. He at first refused; but, when the British reconnoitred in force, he blew up the fort and made his escape with two small field pieces. The British immediately took possession and issued a proclamation, notifying the inhabitants of their intention to occupy the whole region, threatening severe punishment to all who would resist, but promising protection to all who would surrender their arms and behave peaceably, and prompt payment for all supplies furnished the military and naval forces. This done, they made immediate arrangements to ascend the Penobscot in search of the *Adams*, and to accept or enforce the submission of the towns on the banks of the river.

On September 2nd they occupied Belfast, which submitted without resistance. They then proceeded to Hampden, where the *Adams* lay in the mouth of the Sowadabscook at its junction with the Penobscot. At Hampden they met a slight show of resistance, as Capt. Morris had removed the guns from his ship, had erected batteries on the pier and on shore, and had gathered around him about five hundred local militia. But both the militia and the crew of the *Adams* were greatly outnumbered, and when the former dispersed in disorder, Capt. Morris spiked his guns and retreated, first to Bangor, and finally to the Kennebec. As the total number of casualties on both sides did not exceed a baker's dozen, of whom only two were killed, and as this list comprised all the casualties of the expedition, it cannot be said that the inhabitants of this region suffered much from the war of 1812; but Hampden and Bangor, because of their show of resistance, were punished rather harshly, in accordance with the proclamation referred to above. The houses and shops of some of the principal inhabitants were plundered, a number of vessels burned, and bonds were exacted from both towns for the future delivery at Castine of certain large vessels that were on the stocks. Otherwise, there was no oppression, and every effort was made to induce them to submit quietly to the British administration and pursue their regular avocations in peace and security. The British did not ascend the Penobscot beyond Bangor, and they remained in force only three days, having returned to Castine by Septem-

ber 6th. They also withdrew their forces from Belfast and from Buckmaster, which had been occupied by part of the expedition while the others were up the river. Henceforth, their troops were in evidence only in Castine; and the American citizens on the Penobscot, therefore, had no reason to complain of or to fear military oppression. On September 5th, Sherbrooke had issued another proclamation, stating that "the municipal laws as established by the American Government for the maintenance of peace and tranquillity, in that part of the District of Maine lying between the Penobscot river and Passamaquoddy Bay, will continue in force until further orders; and the civil magistrates are permitted to execute the laws as heretofore, and shall be supported in so doing."

On September 12th, Sherbrooke and part of the expedition left Gosselin in command of a garrison in Castine and proceeded against Machias. Capt. Leonard, who was in command of Machias with a garrison of fifty men and some militia, destroyed some of his guns, blew up the fort and retreated before the British had launched their attack. When the British took possession on September 13th, they found only fifty head of cattle to greet them. One of the officers remarked that this was the first fort he ever saw manned with bullocks. Having feasted on the bullocks, and completed the conquest of the whole region, Sherbrooke returned to Halifax, after an absence of only six weeks, and, in consultation with his attorney-general, made arrangements for the future government of the conquered territory as a British province.

Although a military government was set up owing to the exigencies of the moment, an effort was made to give the inhabitants of the region the full benefits of civil government and to incorporate them into the British colonial system. By the proclamation of September 21st, all judges, justices of the peace and similar officers who were acting under the authority of the former government were commanded to administer justice and preserve peace and good order, agreeably to the laws, usages and customs in force at the time when the British took possession. The inhabitants were expected to take an oath either of allegiance or of neutrality in order to enjoy their civil rights; but only those who took the oath of allegiance could enjoy the full economic privileges of the old colonial system. A customs office was set up at Castine, with a British collector in charge, and it was to be the commercial headquarters for the whole region. Merchants and traders who took the oath of allegiance could obtain a license to engage in the coast-

ing trade within the region from the Penobscot to the St. Croix, and could purvey the products of the region itself or any British goods lawfully entered at Castine. They could also import any articles of British growth or manufacture from Great Britain or Ireland or the West Indies in British bottoms, or export their own produce in British ships to any part of the Empire, provided the commerce was carried on through the port of Castine and was subject to the same duties and regulations as were exacted or enforced in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Such, then, was the mild and humane system of government that was set up at Castine after the British occupation of the Penobscot-St. Croix region, in September, 1814. It lasted, with slight modifications, until the conclusion of the war and the re-establishment of peace. The British forces evacuated Castine on April 26, 1815; and General Gosselin returned to Halifax with the profits of the customs house in his coffers, leaving behind him a legacy of good-will by "his correct and gentlemanly deportment". On the whole, the occupation of the region was not resented by New England, and it has been seen that it was not seriously opposed by the people of Maine. In fact, while the peace negotiations were dragging along at Ghent, the possibility of British assistance in a secession movement that would have involved all New England was secretly explored. Whether this was a diplomatic move to ensure British complacency in surrendering the conquered territory, or an expression of genuine sympathy with the British Empire in its world-wide struggle for liberty, cannot now be determined. But the fact remains that the British occupation of the historic Penobscot region during the last eight months of the war of 1812 was not oppressive or unpopular, nor was it such as to leave bitter memories among the people concerned. As no local colonial levies were included in the British expedition, it was clearly a matter between the Government of the United States and the Government of Great Britain, and it left the hitherto friendly relations between Maine and Nova Scotia undisturbed.

It was fitting, therefore, that after the war the Imperial Government should leave the fund obtained from trade between these regions at the disposition of the Governor and Council of Nova Scotia for the furtherance of the arts of peace and civilization; and it was equally fitting that the Governor and Council should finally decide that it should be appropriated for the assistance of a military library and the founding of a non-sectarian college.