



THE CROSS AND THE MANITOU.

A^cLegend of Belle Isle.



OW frequently, as we sail on the beautiful Detroit River, or tread the busy streets of the prosperous city, does the mind go back to the remote past, wondering what kind of men were those brave explorers who first visited the wilds of these regions and gazed upon them in all their virgin loveliness. History has preserved to us the names of two of these.

Francois Dollier de Casson had served as a cavalry officer of renown under Turenne, and laid aside, in his ancestral halls in Brittany, his sword, sheathed in laurels, to take up the cross which was to lead him through the trackless forests of the new world.

Abbé Bréhant de Galinée was a student whose knowledge of surveying and geography made him a valuable acquisition to the explorers of a new country, and to his graphic pen we are indebted for a detailed account of the visit of the missionary explorers to Detroit.

They arrived in Montreal from France at the time when La Salle's great project for the exploration of the far West was the theme of every tongue. So thoroughly were all imbued with the spirit of adventure, the desire of gain and the glory of extending the arms and name of France, that even enlisted soldiers were allowed to apply for a discharge if they wished to accompany him.

La Salle had just received the necessary permission and orders from De Courcelles, then Governor of Canada, to fit up his expedition for the exploration of that great river called by the Iroquois, Ohio, by the French, Belle Rivière, really an arm of the Mississippi, of which such marvelous things were told by the Indians, who came each season to trade at Quebec and Montreal.

Numerous tribes who had never been visited by the "black gown" were said to people its shores. So Dollier and Galinée determined to carry to these nations the knowledge of the true God.

On the 6th of July, 1669, the little fleet of seven birch bark canoes, each manned by three men, and

laden with the necessary merchandise to exchange with the Indians along their route for provisions, beaver skins and other furs, bade adieu to Montreal amid the joyous notes of the Te Deum and the sound of the arquebus. They reached Lake Frontenac (Ontario) August 2, and the 24th of September an Indian village called Timaouataoua, where they remained some time waiting for guides. There they overtook Louis Joliet, who was on his way to Lake Superior in search of a copper mine, wonderful specimens from which had been sent to Montreal by the Jesuit Allouez. The latter was then at Sault Ste. Marie, whither he had gone through the Ottawa River, Lake Simcoe, and with numerous portages into Georgian Bay. It was also Joliet's object to discover a shorter route, and one which could obviate the necessity of so many tedious portages. Accident had revealed this route to La Salle. Being out hunting one day he found an Iroquois exhausted by sickness and travel worn. He tenderly cared for him, and the Indian repaid his kindness by sketching on a clean sheet of bark, with a piece of charcoal, the position of the lakes and the route to the Ohio and Mississippi. This crude chart proved a precious legacy to the energetic and intrepid La Salle. Unfortunately he was taken ill, and his malady was of so severe a nature that he was forced for the time

to give up his cherished project. But Dollier and De Galinée, urged by Joliet, determined to abandon the expedition to the Ohio and Mississippi, and go in search of the tribes along the lakes. They bade adieu to Joliet and La Salle and started on their perilous journey, accompanied by seven men. They wintered at Long Point on the northern shore of Lake Erie. From the mildness of the climate when compared with that of Lower Canada, the quantity of its game, the purity of its waters, the abundance of its fruit, especially the grape from which they made sufficient wine to use for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, they called it "The Terrestrial Paradise of Canada."

It was in the early spring of 1670 that their canoes landed at Detroit. It was an enchanting scene, which unfolded like a coy maiden, its rare loveliness to the admiring eye of the European. He saw the fresh virgin forests clad in the vestments of spring, the broad sweeping river, with its graceful curves in whose limpid waters thousands of fish could be seen, along the banks teeming herds of bison, and droves of deer gazing with wondering eyes on the stranger. The air was perfumed by woodland flowers which scattered their sweet incense to the music of the birds, whose gorgeous plumage almost rivalled the flowers in hue. Above all was present that grand solemn

silence only found in the heart of the forest, resting like a hushed benediction. After wandering about some time in this fair region, and with hearts overflowing with emotions of love and gratitude towards Him who had led their footsteps here, they came upon an open clearing in the center of which arose a grassy mound crowned by a rude stone idol. It was a crude production of nature, created by her in a fit of abstraction and which the Indians had attempted to convert into the semblance of a deity by touches of vermilion. Offerings of tobacco, skins of animals, and articles of food were scattered in reckless profusion at its feet. This, then, was the great Manitou, of whom their guides had spoken, who held in his hand the winds, and whose mighty voice was heard in the storm that swept over the lakes. He was held in great veneration, and as the Indian launched his frail bark on the treacherous waters of the lakes he would come with his offering of propitiation to this wayside place of pilgrimage. The missionaries, indignant at this exhibition of idolatry, broke the statue in a thousand pieces, and in its place erected a cross, at whose foot they affixed the coat of arms of France with this

INSCRIPTION:

In the year of grace 1670, Clement IX being seated in the chair of St. Peter, Louis XIV reigning in France, Monsieur de Cour-

celles being Governor of New France and Monsieur Talon being the Intendant of the King, two missionaries of the Seminary of Montreal, accompanied by seven Frenchmen, arrived at this place and are the first of all the European people who wintered on the land bordering on Lake Erie, which they took possession of in the name of their King, as a country unoccupied, and have affixed the arms of France at the foot of this cross.

(Signed)

FRANCOIS DOLLIER,

Priest of the Diocese of Nantes, Brittany.

DE GALINÉE,

Deacon of the Diocese of Rennes, Brittany.

Taking the largest fragment of the broken idol, the missionaries lashed two canoes together and towed it to the deepest part of the river so that it should be heard of no more. But the tradition says that after the fathers were far away, a band of Indians coming to offer their homage to the deity found only its mutilated remains. Each took a fragment which he placed in his canoe as a fetish, and it guided them to where the Spirit of the Manitou had taken refuge under the deep, sombre shadow of Belle Isle. He bade them bring every fragment of his broken image and to strew them on the banks of his abode. They obeyed his order, and behold! each stone was converted into a rattlesnake, which should be as a sentinel to guard the sacredness of his domain from the profaning foot of the white man. To the answering call of those who came to his leafy retreat he would mockingly re-echo their words. Many a laughter loving party as they lazily float

on the moonlit waters of the Detroit, amuse themselves in awakening the angry spirit of the Indian god as they test the echoes of Belle Isle.

Belle Isle has changed name four times.

1. It was called Isle Ste. Claire (Charlevoix).
2. Rattlesnake Island from the number of these serpents which infested it.
3. Hog Island (Isle Aux Cochons), by the French from the number of these animals put there to destroy the snakes.
4. Belle Isle, in 1845, after Miss Belle Cass, daughter of General Cass and afterward the wife of Baron Von Limburg.