

THE DAILY EXAMINER

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A VISIT TO THE MAGDALENS.

Their Population, Industries and Requirements.

A LAND OF CLEAR SKIES AND BEAUTIFUL TEMPERATURE.

A Primitive Yet Noble-Souled People—Description of the Isles.

To go to the Grand Entry, 20 miles north by land, a fishing centre of considerable importance and of late years being pretty extensively colonized, it is necessary to drive the greater part of the distance on what is called South Beach. This is a narrow line of grey sand, which, but for a channel near this island, connects it with All Right. We drove through the pleasant country between House Harbor and South Beach, after visiting the hills at Low Point and being shown over Mr. Alex. C. Arsenault's factories and stores there, and found it a lovely spot indeed, with its clean hard floor of grey sand upon which horses trot off as in a park, regardless of the clean on one side dashing up white crested billows and the stiller waters of the Great Lagoon on the other. There is a fishing village of some size at South Beach and as we passed through it a number of men were engaged in hauling up their boats above high water mark. They had just returned from their traps and the hand barrows were already well filled with lobsters, somewhat larger in size than those taken on our coast, and an odd codfish caught while overhauling. This is a superb bathing place; the shore is so clean, smooth and firm, the water so clear, lively and invigorating and sufficiently deep to please all classes of bathers. The red cliffs of the cape to the right are rapidly falling away and the bold swimmer loves to strike out to a detached piece of the rocky headland, which, harder than the rest, still defies the anger of the waves.

Looking through the lobster establishments we were informed that they were largely operated by the Portland Packing Co., which appears to have stations wherever this precious crustacean is to be taken. A Mr. Tidmarsh, brother of our friend of that name, is their general manager, and he must be a pretty decent fellow indeed as he appeared to be in high favor with everybody. The centre of operation of this company in the islands is Grand Entry where the manager resides and where the canning factories are more perfectly equipped than we have seen anywhere else. At Grand Entry, Father Blacquier has the erection of a handsome little mission church in contemplation, and it is not at all improbable that, with the flight of years, the population will be sufficiently increased to support a resident pastor. Then, or probably before, the ecclesiastical authorities may put into execution a proposal long before them of erecting those islands into an Apostolic Prefecture.

Off in the distance from Grand Entry is Byron Island, the location of more fishing industries; and north of it the Bird Rock, where millions of great sea fowl congregate to hatch out their young in the summer months. Here the Marine Department has a lighthouse, signal station and telegraph; but only those tied down by some regulation of the public service remain over winter. All will recall with a thrill of horror, the sad case of the three young men who, stationed here, lost their lives last winter in the pursuit of seals, after days of the most terrible suffering from exposure on the treacherous ice-floes of the Gulf. This is historic ground too. Those rocks were discovered by no less a personage than Jacques Cartier during his first voyage in the summer of 1534 and the intrepid navigator takes care to make special mention of them in his precious chronicle of that famous cruise. His journal declares them to be "as steep and upright as any wall," a description as true today as it was three centuries ago. Cartier named the Bird Rocks "Isles des Margaux," Galet Islands from the myriads of those birds found there. A great variety of other sea birds frequent them also. The almost infinite variety of gulls, besides loons, pelicans, sea parrots, etc. are well represented. Some of the eggs of these birds are very large—larger than those even of our domestic goose—and they are often of the most delicately beautiful coloring. In the past, many vessels have taken away loads of them which their owners peddled along the maritime towns, but this traffic has been entirely prohibited by the Government in order that the birds whose presence served more effectually as a signal to mariners than all the lights and fog horns possible, would not thus be exterminated. A sail around the Bird Rocks is then one of the features of a Magdalen trip.

Byron is a lovely island which, as well as being a valuable fishing station, boasts an extraordinary rich soil. Cartier was its discoverer also, and he appreciated it so highly as to call it Byron, after his friend and patron, Admiral Philippe Chabot, Sieur de Brion. On all the maps we have at hand this name is erroneously spelled "Byron" or "Biron" as if it were named from the great poet of that name, who was not born for hundreds of years after Lord de Brion assisted Cartier in making his first great voyage from the port of St. Malo.

As might be expected, too, Cartier was delighted with the Magdalens, through

which he sailed, after a lengthy exploration of the bleak and uninviting coast of Newfoundland. "One of their fields" he says, "is worth more than all the Newland" although he has left us a favorable impression of "Ye ancient colony's" splendid bays and harbors.

Grindstone Island, the centre of the Magdalen group is perhaps the largest and most extensively farmed of the other islands. It is completely herringboned by a ridge of grassy hills, the surface about the high parts of the coast being sharply undulating while where it runs to meet the sand bars or barachois, it is flat and often wet and swampy. In those low portions a vigorous second growth of spruce and fir flourishes. We were informed that several persons hold and cultivate, principally for hay growing, from 100 to 300 acres of land on the Grindstone. Our hostler of the other day, Mr. Pator, is one of the best of these having brought his agricultural notions and sunny others with him from his native Scotland. Mr. Nelson Arsenault farms a great tract of land, also, and with it manages a large cranberry plantation, whose fruit is only equalled by the immense fox berries of the sand hills to the north. On the west side of this island is Etang du Nord where the steamer calls at a government breakwater and where the shore is lined with fishing establishments and the sea alive with the manoeuvring craft of fishermen. The parish church, a stately edifice just completely remodelled exteriorly, stands on a high prominence overlooking Pleasant Bay. Vicar General De Finance serves it most efficiently and is perhaps better appreciated than most of us, if appreciation can be calculated by dollars and cents; for we were assured that of his 300 families not a single one failed in any year to contribute cheerfully and handsomely to his support. Had the priests of this province such a tale to tell there would certainly be much less heard of expensive religion and priestly exactions, since it is never he who preys that brays. As in the province of Quebec there is a resource to law for the collection of Church taxes in the Magdalens, but in reality the civil power is never invoked, the more acceptable voluntary system, as with us, obtaining universally.

Water is not always easy to be had on the Grindstone, and as with the other islands anything more exhilarating is out of the question altogether. Indeed, this is the only quarter of the globe where prohibition seems to prohibit completely, and the credit of bringing it about belongs entirely to the clergy. It is not wonderful, then, that on this Island, which, unlike the others, does not abound in springs, water is bored for at great distances and dug for with wonderful persistency. We saw a number of those ungrateful wells,—one a monument to Rev. Dr. Chaisson's unsuccessful enterprise,—through the settlement. They are now fenced around, as are many other great holes in the surface of the island, caused by the decomposition of the soft gypsum rock which abounds here. We were pleased to meet Dr. Solomon, an old Island student and friend, at this place, and to know that he is successfully wrestling with all the ills to which humanity is heir in the islands.

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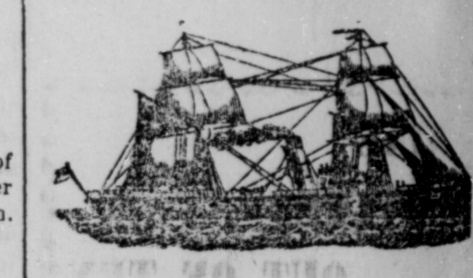
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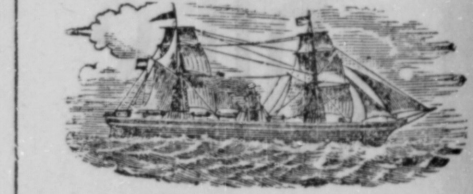
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Ch'town, May 13, 1898