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MARQUIS DE MONTCALM

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MARQUIS DE MONTCALM

Early in November, 1924, a notable banquet was given at the historic palace of Versailles, near Paris, by Sir Campbell Stuart, the Canadian Editor of the London *Times*. H.R.H. the Duke of Connaught, former Governor-General of Canada, presided. The occasion was the formal inauguration of a new and important historical society which has been formed for the purpose of gathering, in Great Britain, France and Canada, all available family records, letters, documents and portraits which may serve to throw further light upon the early history of our country.

Among the many distinguished guests was the Marquis de Montcalm, direct descendant of that Marquis de Montcalm who, one hundred and sixty-five years before, had heroically fallen in battle for his country at Quebec. At that Versailles banquet the present Marquis, in seconding a toast in graceful words, referred briefly to his great ancestor, and then spoke of his visit to Quebec in 1908, attending the Tercentenary celebration, and of his pleasure in having met there descendants of the families of Wolfe, of Murray and of Carleton—some of whom were also at the banquet. This was the language of sincerity as well as of courtesy, for the names of Montcalm and Wolfe have long been enshrined together in the hearts of all thinking people acquainted with the history of their time. Two noble antagonists met in combat before the walls of Quebec that September day of 1759, and both fell gloriously. It was a committee of French and English citizens of Quebec who, nearly a hundred years ago, erected the Wolfe and Montcalm monument which overlooks the Dufferin Terrace in that city, and which bears the memorable Latin words:

> *Mortem virtus communem, famam historia, monumentum posteritas dedit.*
>
> *Their courage gave them a common death, history a common renown, and posterity a common monument.*

Louis Joseph de Montcalm-Gozon, lord of Saint Véran, Candiac, Tornemire, Vestric. Saint Julien d'Arpam, baron de Gabriac, to give his full title once only, was born at the Château de Candiac, near Nîmes, in the south of France, on February 29, 1712. At the age of six he was sent to Grenoble, to receive his education under the care of M. Dumas, a relative of the family.

At the age of fifteen he was well versed in Latin, Greek and history, though the tutor had to complain that he did not read, write or speak French well. This defect was largely corrected in due time, but his poor hand-writing, another defect, never improved to the end of his life. On the other hand, Montcalm had acquired a taste for books and study which never left him. But best of all, a firm character, thanks to his wise and good mother, had been formed in the most promising period of life, that is, in his boyhood. Thus when he found that the tutor had been complaining to his father that he was in need of "docility, industry and willingness to take advice," he wrote to his father a spirited declaration of his aims in life.

"First, to be an honourable man, of good morals, brave and a Christian. Secondly, to read in moderation; to know as much Greek and Latin as most men of the world; also the first four rules of arithmetic, and French and Latin *belles lettres*, as well as have a taste for the arts and sciences. Thirdly, and above all, to be obedient, docile and very submissive to your orders and those of my dear mother, and also to defer to the advice of M. Dumas. Fourthly, to fence and ride as well as my small abilities will permit."

The willingness to defer to the advice of M. Dumas was good strategy, and an early promise of a distinguishing feature of his future generalship.

Most surely, also, he lived up to the good intention to be an honourable man, of good morals, brave and a Christian. All the sons of the French nobility at that period of the eighteenth century could be counted upon to be brave, but their prevailing outlook on life in the other respects of character were not always as high as that of Montcalm's. Here and there, as many records show, the old-time virtues were to be found in the castles as well as in the homes of the poorer classes. But a very large part of the nobility, thanks to the sense of moral and social irresponsibility which absolute monarchs and their corrupt courts had conferred upon them, chiefly by transferring all taxation from their shoulders to those of the people at large, were pursuing that primrose path of indulgence which finally led, in the third quarter of the century, to the French Revolution. It was the system of government that was wrong, and it was a wrong system, as we shall see, that led to the downfall of New France.



Montcalm riding along the French line before The Battle of the Plains

In his fifteenth year (1727), Montcalm entered the army as an ensign in the regiment of Hainaut. This fact, however, did not prevent him from following his studies. It appears, indeed, that M. Dumas still continued to look after his education, for in 1728 he was instructing him at Paris—very probably in higher mathematics than the "first four rules of arithmetic;" such as might be required at that time from a youth ambitious to rise in the military profession. Montcalm, with his buoyant southern disposition, had a healthy and commendable ambition to rise in life, properly steadied by a knowledge of the value of faithful application to that end. In 1733, writing to his father from a camp, when engaged in the war between Frederick

Augustus III, Elector of Saxony, and Stanislas Leckzinski, father of Mary, Queen of France, for the throne of Poland, he said: "I am learning German, and read more Greek, thanks to my loneliness, than I have done for three or four years."

In this sketch we need only follow briefly his military career in France, though he took part in several long campaigns with honour and great distinction, and was steadily rising by his merit. In 1743, he was appointed colonel of the regiment of Auxerrois. From 1744 to 1748, he led that regiment in the war in Italy, receiving five wounds and being taken prisoner at the battle of Piacenza, where the French and Spaniards were so severely defeated by the Austrians. In 1747 he was promoted to the rank of brigadier, and in 1749 he was placed at the head of a cavalry regiment. It is sufficient to say of the long period from 1727 until 1755, that he had obtained a training and experience in the discipline and art of war which were to be of service to him in the years 1756 to 1759, when the military responsibility for the defence of Canada was to be placed upon his shoulders.

Not all those twenty-eight years, however, were devoted to warfare. There were years of peace. In 1735, his father died, leaving the family estate considerably burdened with debt. To lighten this burden, in the interest of his mother, became at once his first consideration. Then, in the following year, through the good offices of the Marquis de la Fare, a friend of the family, he married happily and well. The bride was Angélique Louise Talon du Boulay, daughter of the Marquis du Boulay, and member of the family of the Intendant Talon of Canadian history. She brought with her a moderate fortune, and proved a most devoted wife and a wise and affectionate mother to ten children who were born of the marriage. When the children numbered six, two sons and four daughters, Montcalm wrote: "May God preserve them all and make them prosper in this world and the next! Perhaps it will be thought that the number is large for so moderate a fortune, especially as four of them are girls; but does God ever abandon His children in their need?"

Montcalm was deeply devoted to his mother, his wife and his children; and the six years of military idleness from 1749 to 1756, which he spent at Château de Candiac, are often referred to as the happiest in his life. It is upon that happiness that he dwells in innumerable letters from Canada, from which he was destined never to return.

Late in the autumn of 1755, Montcalm visited Paris, where the Minister of War, Count d'Argenson, hinted to him that he might be appointed to the command of the troops in Canada. A few months later he received a letter from the minister, dated January 25, 1756, which began:

"Perhaps, Monsieur, you will not expect to hear from me again on the subject of the conversation I had with you the day you came to bid me farewell at Paris. Nevertheless I have not forgotten for a moment the suggestion I then made you, and it is with the greatest pleasure that I announce to you that my views have prevailed. The King has chosen you to command his troops in North America, and will honour you on your departure with the rank of major-general."

The Chevalier de Lévis was named as his second in command with the rank of brigadier, and the Chevalier de Bourlamaque as his third, with the rank of colonel. His aide-de-camp was the Count de Bougainville. All three, Lévis, Bourlamaque and Bougainville, proved most worthy of their posts, and a warm and sincere personal friendship united them with their chief in the many days of anxiety and difficulty to follow. In one of the letters that Montcalm wrote to his mother and his wife before sailing for Canada, he mentions with pride that he had presented his eldest son to the royal family. This son, with the title of Chevalier de Montcalm, was eighteen years old, and to the delight of his father had been appointed to the command of a regiment in France—one of those appointments at an early age which were fairly frequent at that period both in England and in France. We may recall the fact, too, that on this side of the Atlantic George Washington, then a British subject, headed a war-party at the age of twenty-one. Warm affection for all members of his family breathed in these letters of Montcalm, and the same overflowing affection was to be poured out in many a letter during the next three years from Canada.

The only extra troops that were accorded to Montcalm for Canada were two regiments—the La Sarre and the Royal Roussillon—making a total of about 1,200 men. Three ships-of-the-line conveyed the regiments, and three frigates the general and his chief officers. The departure was made at the end of March, and on the eleventh of May Montcalm's ship was held up by ice on the St. Lawrence some distance below Quebec, making it necessary for him to reach Quebec by land.

Here it is necessary to ask, What was the purpose of France in sending Montcalm and his small army to Canada at this time? History is not the mere record of aimless movements, however interesting these may be in themselves as narratives. In the present case it is necessary to have certain facts clearly in mind to render the history of the three years 1756-1759 intelligible. The outstanding and most impelling fact was that, after many years of spasmodic warfare, both England and France now fully realized that they had to come to death-grips for the possession of North America. The

position of affairs, and the respective possessions of the two combatants on this continent, will make the situation clearer.

1. France, in 1756, held in Canada chiefly what is now the province of Quebec, together with much of the territory now forming the province of Ontario and what is now Prince Edward Island, with merely nominal claims upon the unoccupied territory westward. The British territory in Canada at the same date included Acadia, Newfoundland, and a large territory surrounding Hudson Bay, occupied by the Hudson Bay Company. Acadia included what is now the two provinces of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, except Cape Breton.

2. The British territory in what is now the United States, included the New England and other colonies along the Atlantic coast, from Maine in the north to Georgia in the south, and bounded westward by the Alleghany mountains. France claimed all the territory west of the Alleghanies, except the large south-west part belonging to Spain. To support its claim to the wide territory extending from the upper Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico, and including the valleys of the Ohio and the Mississippi, France undertook the building of a chain of forts whose purpose was to hem the British colonies to the Atlantic coast.

3. The people of the colonies, however, were not content to be hemmed in. Small as the population was, though greater than that of New France, there was a tendency to push westward, and traders and others were moving in from Pennsylvania to what is now the state of Ohio. Where the city of Pittsburg now stands the French had built a fort called Fort Duquesne, and it was in the way of the traders of the Ohio Company which had been authorized by the British. Governor Dinwiddie, of Virginia, aided by the young George Washington, endeavoured to do something in 1754 to force a passage, and in 1755 the British government sent General Braddock from England with a force of 2,000 regulars, as commander in chief in America. Braddock was brave, but he was absolutely unfamiliar with the methods of bush-fighting pursued by the colonials, French and British, and by the Indians alike. Moreover, he had a contempt for the colonial soldiery, and would not listen to the advice of their officers. At Philadelphia, Benjamin Franklin had aided him splendidly in obtaining the right kind of waggon-transports, but that shrewd observer had already made up his mind that the general would not succeed. As Carlyle said, he advanced in “pipe clay” fashion, such as might be suitable for the open plains of Europe, and on July 9, 1755, his army was overwhelmed by an ambush of the French and Indians, when approaching Fort Duquesne, himself and over sixty officers

being among the slain. The defeat, when the news reached England, greatly increased the determination to bring matters to a decisive issue in North America.

Next it has to be kept in mind that the great struggle now beginning was part and parcel of the Seven Years' War (1756-1763) in Europe. That part of Germany then called Prussia was ruled by Frederick the Great, and by a combination of circumstances he and his small population of five million were opposed by a vast combination. First of all, there was Austria, headed by Maria Theresa, who was still smarting from the fact that Frederick, some years previously, had taken Silesia from her. Frederick had also insulted the Empress Elizabeth of Russia, and the Elector of Saxony and the rulers of other parts of Germany (not yet united into a confederation) were afraid of the strong army that the young king of Prussia had built up. The combination against him, therefore, was Austria, Russia, Sweden, Saxony and other parts of Germany, and France. How France came to be in on the side of Austria, quite recently her bitter foe, is significant of the period. Madame La Pompadour, who ruled Louis XV of France, had also been one of the women heedlessly insulted by the mocking Frederick. This alone might not have led her to suggest the idea of taking up arms on behalf of Austria, but the advisers of Maria Theresa obtained her consent that she should send presents and kind messages to Madame La Pompadour, and this succeeded. England, at the instance of the statesmanship of the elder Pitt, sided with Frederick of Prussia. In the end, England and Prussia won out, and nowhere is the story told more graphically than in Carlyle's ten volumes on Frederick the Great, even if Frederick's real faults of character are too much palliated. If the mention of a ten-volume work of history sounds alarming in these days, let it be remembered that Robert Louis Stevenson, when asked what two works of English literature of the nineteenth century would in his opinion live into future ages, replied: Carlyle's "Frederick the Great," and Browning's "Ring and the Book."

The physical conditions of the struggle in America also require a preliminary explanation. At a period when the forest primeval still covered so much of the country, there were but three main routes of approach from the British colonies to the heart of Canada, namely, that of the St. Lawrence river from the east, that of Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence river from the west, and that of the Lake Champlain "gap" through which the Iroquois made their frequent raids on the French and the Hurons in the seventeenth century. Lake Champlain empties into the Richelieu river, which again enters the St. Lawrence at Sorel. Lake Champlain, Lake George and the

Hudson river form the long valley which is one of the greatest trade routes of to-day.

To return to Montcalm. Happy in possessing the full confidence of his able and trustworthy military assistants, Lévis, Bourlamaque and Bougainville, he was soon to meet many difficulties with the jealous and unfriendly Vaudreuil. Here we have to note how absolute government worked on this side of the water. In French Canada there were no elective assemblies such as prevailed in the British colonies to the south. All rule was directly from the king in France, acting through his chosen ministers. The principal representatives of the king in Canada were the Governor and the Intendant, each, however, reporting independently to France. The relative powers of each were not sufficiently defined to prevent clashes between them, and this indefiniteness seems to have been intended to ensure that each should be a check on the other, with the king deciding which was right. At this final period of the system, however, the Governor failed to be the check upon the Intendant that he should have been. That Intendant was Bigot, who was robbing the king and the people on a gigantic scale with the aid of associates as unscrupulous as himself, and Vaudreuil refused to listen to the many protests that were made to him.

This "paternal" form of government, in which the people had no voice whatever in the management of the affairs of the country, was in reality kind in intention but very far from kind in its effects, and was saved from being more oppressive than it was by the fact that the local clergy, drawn from the people themselves, were sympathetic and devoted to their interests. That the people were capable of a freer form of government was to be amply proved later, under British rule, when they took their full share with the English in the demand for and the gradual development of responsible government in Canada.

Vaudreuil was jealous of Montcalm because he believed himself capable of defending Canada, and had protested against the sending of more troops. He was the son of the Marquis de Vaudreuil who had been Governor of Canada early in the century, and he himself had been governor of Louisiana, that is, of the vast territory west of the Alleghanies, and not merely the territory of the state of that name to-day. Parkman says of him:

"He had not the force of character which his position demanded, lacked decision in times of crisis; and though tenacious of authority, was more jealous in asserting than self-reliant in exercising it. One of his traits was a sensitive egotism, which made him forward to proclaim his own part in every success, and to throw on others the burden of every failure. He was

facile by nature, and capable of being led by such as had skill and temper for the task. But the impetuous Montcalm was not of their number; and the fact that he was born in France would in itself have thrown obstacles in his way to the good graces of the governor. Vaudreuil, Canadian by birth, loved the colony and its people, and distrusted Old France and all that came out of it."

There was divided responsibility in military matters. Montcalm was sent out as commander-in-chief of the regulars already in the country and of those he brought with him. He corresponded, therefore, with the Minister of War, but Vaudreuil, who had charge of the local militia, corresponded with the Minister of Marine, because he had been brought up to the naval service. The Minister of War had suggested to Montcalm that he should have the immediate command of all the troops in Canada, and the king sent an order to that effect to Vaudreuil, with instructions to communicate it to Montcalm or withhold it as he should think best. Vaudreuil, of course, returned it to the minister.

The full story of Montcalm's campaigns in Canada is told in Parkman's "Montcalm and Wolfe," a history as interesting as the best historical novel, and far more valuable. Here but a brief outline may be given, with such explanations as may be necessary to connect the campaign with the general course of events.

The capture of the English fort of Oswego by Montcalm in 1756 was the chief event in the struggle of that year. That fort on the south side of Lake Ontario, and opposite to the French Fort Frontenac (Kingston) on the north shore, was of strategic importance. If it were to fall, the French, holding as they did the forts at Frontenac, Toronto and Niagara, would command the Lake Ontario water route, and then be able to concentrate all their efforts at the Lake Champlain gap. Oswego was also objectionable to the French, inasmuch as it was there that the Dutch traders of Albany were able to carry on their illicit fur trade with the Canadian Indians.

Oswego had several forts, but the defence of them was very weak at this time. Major Shirley had endeavoured to have reinforcements sent there, but having been superseded in the general command of the British forces his plans were not carried out. There were several serious blunders on the British side in America just then, and they were increased by the jealousy and want of union among the colonies themselves. Many of the defenders at Oswego were sick, owing to the fact that food supplies were very low. The military credit on Montcalm's part in this campaign was the skill with which he approached the forts and commanded the situation almost at once. The English surrendered after fifty had been killed; the loss in the actual fighting

being still less on the French side. Over a thousand prisoners were taken. There was plundering by the Indians, and some savagery, but Montcalm, by profuse promises of presents, managed to put an end to this. Vaudreuil, writing to his minister at Paris, took all the credit to himself and his brother Rigaud, the latter having been with Montcalm. He disparaged the work of the regulars, and complained that Rigaud and the Canadians had been ill-used by the general, and not allowed to enter the fort or share the plunder, any more than the Indians, who were so angry at the treatment they had met that he had great difficulty in appeasing them. To Montcalm personally, however, Vaudreuil used different language, and in spite of his dislike to the regulars was now asking for further reinforcements of them.

In England the loss of Oswego was felt even more deeply than the defeat of Braddock the previous year. Oswego was a weakened garrison, but it had fallen to an attack conducted by military rules; Braddock had been overwhelmed by an unfamiliar and sudden Indian ambush. The loss of Oswego not only closed the Lake Ontario pathway to the British; it also determined a large number of the wavering Iroquois of New York to the side of the French.

Constant bush-fighting continued each year, carried on by small and large war-parties, in the Lake Champlain and Lake George territory. The advanced fort of the French was that at Ticonderoga at the southern end of Lake Champlain, while the advanced fort of the British was Fort William Henry at the southern end of Lake George. In March, 1757, Rigaud was sent by Vaudreuil to attack Fort William Henry. In all, his force numbered 1,600, and had been equipped at great expense. The garrison at the fort consisted of 346 effective men, including the rangers. Major Eyre was in command, and having refused to surrender the enemy set fire to the buildings outside the fort and then retired to Canada.

In the summer of the same year the way seemed to be open for an attack on Fort William Henry by Montcalm. The British forces in the colonies had been considerably increased in 1757, but Earl Loudon, in general command, was making an unsuccessful attack on Louisburg, Cape Breton, and had taken with him a considerable number of the forces guarding the approach to Albany, south of Lake Champlain. A large force of French was gathered at Montreal, including many Indians who had been attracted by Montcalm's success at Oswego the previous year. One orator from Michilimackinac addressed him thus: "We wanted to see the famous man who tramples the English under his feet. We thought we should find him so tall that his head would be lost in the clouds. But you are a little man, my Father. It is when

we look into your eyes that we see the greatness of the pine-tree and the fire of the eagle."

By the end of July a force of about 8,000 men had gathered at Fort Ticonderoga, of whom about a fourth were Indians. Montcalm took an army of 6,000 to Fort William Henry, and here once more he displayed wonderful strategy in his investment. Getting part of his force to the rear of the fort he cut off the possibility of reinforcements making entrance within the fort from the English at Fort Edward, a few miles south. General Webb, at Fort Edward, however, might have sent the needed reinforcements in time if he had acted upon the first requests of Lieutenant Colonel Munro, in command at Fort William Henry. The latter had a force in the garrison of 2,200, including sailors and mechanics. Montcalm sent a letter to Munro, asking for surrender, and stating that only under that condition could he restrain the savages to observe the terms of capitulation. Munro said he would fight. From the fourth to the eighth of August the bombardment lasted, and then the fort was surrendered. By the terms of the capitulation the English troops were to march out with the honours of war, and be escorted to Fort Edward by a detachment of French troops. They were not to serve for eighteen months, and all French prisoners captured in America since the war began were to be given up within three months. Before signing the capitulation Montcalm called the Indian chiefs to council, and asked them to consent to the conditions and promise to restrain their warriors from any disorder. They consented and promised everything, but without avail. The Indians clambered at once into the fort in search of rum and plunder, and butchered the sick men unable to leave their beds. Other horrors followed. Montcalm was distracted, but finally with the aid of Lévis and Bourlamaque got control. "Kill me," he exclaimed to the mob, "but spare the English who are under my protection." The testimony of the English survivors wholly exonerates Montcalm and his officers from responsibility for the Indian savagery.

As usual, Vaudreuil took all the credit for the fall of Fort William Henry, and blamed Montcalm for not following up his success by proceeding to Fort Edward. This in spite of the fact that his orders were that the army should be back in Montreal before September, in time to assist in harvesting the crops.



Montcalm at the Battle of Ticonderoga

Montcalm's third and greatest victory was in the following year, 1758. Here it was a case of defence instead of attack, and a successful defence against overwhelming numbers. Here, too, there were no Indian allies, and hence no savagery. It was at Ticonderoga, though not in the fort. With an army of a little over 3,000 he was attacked by 25,000 under General Abercrombie. Montcalm had taken a position on a height, and in a very short time a breastwork of felled trees and branches had been erected. The fighting on both sides was brave and vigorous, the British endeavouring to take the place by a bayonet attack, but utterly unable to do so on account of the tangled brush wood among the logs of the rude *abattis*. Montcalm at once wrote his wife.

"Without Indians, almost without Canadians or colony troops—I had only four hundred—alone with Lévis and Bourlamaque and the troops of the line, thirty-one hundred fighting men, I have beaten an army of twenty-five thousand. They repassed the lake precipitately, with a loss of at least five thousand. This glorious day does infinite honour to the valour of our battalions. I have no time to write more. I am well, my dearest, and I embrace you."

The British loss was not five thousand, but nineteen hundred and forty-four officers and men in killed, wounded and missing. The loss of the French was three hundred and seventy-seven.

Montcalm erected a cross on the battlefield, on which he placed these Latin lines, composed by himself:

> "*Quid dux? quid miles? quid strata ingentia ligna?*
> *En signum! en victor! Deus hic, Deus ipse triumphat*."

Parkman neatly translates as follows:

> "Soldier and chief and rampart's strength are nought;
> Behold the conquering Cross! 'Tis God the triumph wrought."

Montcalm also translated it into four lines of French verse:

> "Chrétien! ce ne fut point Montcalm et la prudence,
> Ces arbres renversés, ces héros, leurs exploits,
> Qui des Anglais confus ont brisé l'espérance;
> C'est le bras de ton Dieu, vainqueur sur cette croix."

This third and greatest victory by Montcalm once more proved his remarkable generalship, but events were occuring elsewhere which made the fate of Canada inevitable in the following year. The battle of Ticonderoga took place early in July, 1758, and on the 26th of the same month the great fortress of Louisburg fell to Boscawen, Amherst and Wolfe. On August 27, Bradstreet crossed Lake Ontario and captured Fort Frontenac, while on November 29 Brigadier John Forbes, who had set out from Philadelphia, captured Fort Duquesne. Then in 1759, Amherst took the fort at Ticonderoga, and Sir William Johnson that at Niagara. The way was now open for the final act of the drama at Quebec.

In another pamphlet of this series "Sieges of Quebec: French Régime" is told the story of that final act, where Montcalm fell after a long and skilful defence of the city. The honour which was at once accorded to his memory by the English victors still exists, and in this brief sketch it is attempted only to outline those events of his life which may serve to show that he was possessed of a personality that was well worthy of the praise and honour which posterity has accorded to him. The tragedy of his death was that his longings during three years to rejoin his family at Candiac in France were not to be granted.

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