

SAMUEL DE CHAMPLAINS FRANCE TO QUEBEC VOYAGE IN 1611

We set out from Honfleur on the first day of March. The wind was favorable until the eighth, when we were opposed by a wind south-southwest and west-northwest, driving us as far as latitude 42° , without our being able to make a southing, so as to sail straight forward on our course.

Accordingly after encountering several heavy winds, and being kept back by bad weather, we nevertheless, through great difficulty and hardship, and by sailing on different tacks, succeeded in arriving within eighty leagues of the Grand Bank, where the fresh fishery is carried on. Here we encountered ice thirty or forty fathoms high, or more, which led us to consider what course we ought to take, fearing that we might fall in with more during the night, or that the wind changing would drive us on to it. We also concluded that this would not be the last, since we had set out from France too early in the season. We sailed accordingly during that day with short sail, as near the wind as we could. When night came, the fog arose so thick and obscure that we could scarcely see the ship's length. About eleven o'clock at night, more ice was seen, which alarmed us. But through the energy of the sailors we avoided it. Supposing that we had passed all danger, we met with still more ice, which the sailors saw ahead of our vessel, but not until we were almost upon it. When all had committed themselves to God, having given up all hope of avoiding collision with this ice, which was already under our bowsprit, they cried to the helmsman to bear off; and this ice which was very extensive drove in such a manner that it passed by without striking our vessel, which stopped short, and remained as still as if it had never moved, to let it pass. Although the danger was over, our blood was not so quickly cooled, so great had been our fear, and we praised God for delivering us from so imminent a peril. This experience being over, we passed the same night two or three other masses of ice, not less dangerous than the former ones. There was at the same time a dripping fog, and it was so cold that we could scarcely get warm. The next day we met several other large and very high masses of ice, which, in the distance, looked like islands. We, however, avoided them all, and reached the Grand Bank, where we were detained by bad weather for the space of six days. The wind growing a little milder, and very favorable, we left the banks in latitude $44^{\circ} 30'$, which was the farthest south we could go. After sailing some sixty leagues west-northwest, we saw a vessel coming down to make us

out, but which afterwards wore off to the east-northeast, to avoid a large bank of ice, which covered the entire extent of our line of vision. Concluding that there was a passage through the middle of this great floe, which was divided into two parts, we entered, in pursuance of our course, between the two, and sailed some ten leagues without seeing anything, contrary to our conjecture of a fine passage through, until evening, when we found the floe closed up. This gave us much anxiety as to what was to be done, the night being at hand and there being no moon, which deprived us of all means of returning to the point whence we had come. Yet, after due deliberation, it was resolved to try to find again the entrance by which we had come, which we set about accomplishing. But the night coming on with fog, rain, snow, and a wind so violent that we could scarcely carry our mainsail, every trace of our way was lost. For, as we were expecting to avoid the ice so as to pass out, the wind had already closed up the passage, so that we were obliged to return to the other tack. We were unable to remain longer than a quarter of an hour on one tack before taking another, in order to avoid the numerous masses of ice drifting about on all sides. We thought more than twenty times that we should never escape with our lives. The entire night was spent amid difficulties and hardships. Never was the watch better kept, for nobody wished to rest, but to strive to escape from the ice and danger. The cold was so great, that all the ropes of the vessel were so frozen and covered with large icicles that the men could not work her nor stick to the deck. Thus we ran, on this tack and that, awaiting with hope the daylight. But when it came, attended by a fog, and we saw that our labor and hardship could not avail us anything, we determined to go to a mass of ice, where we should be sheltered from the violent wind which was blowing; to haul everything down, and allow ourselves to be driven along with the ice, so that when at some distance from the rest of the ice we could make sail again, and go back to the above-mentioned bank and manage as before, until the fog should pass away, when we might go out as quickly as possible. Thus we continued the entire day until the morning of the next day, when we set sail, now on this tack now on that, finding ourselves everywhere enclosed amid large floes of ice, as if in lakes on the mainland. At evening we sighted a vessel on the other side of one of these banks of ice, which, I am sure, was in no less anxiety than ourselves. Thus we remained four or five days, exposed to these risks and extreme hardships, until one morning on looking out in all directions, although we could see no opening, yet in one place it seemed as if the ice was not thick, and that we could easily pass through. We got under weigh,

and passed by a large number of _bourguignons_; that is, pieces of ice separated from the large banks by the violence of the winds. Having reached this bank of ice, the sailors proceeded to provide themselves with large oars and pieces of wood, in order to keep off the blocks of ice we met. In this way we passed this bank, but not without touching some pieces of ice, which did no good to our vessel, although they inflicted no essential damage. Being outside, we praised God for our deliverance. Continuing our course on the next day, we encountered other pieces, in which we became so involved that we found ourselves surrounded on all sides, except where we had entered. It was accordingly necessary to turn back, and endeavor to double the southern point. This we did not succeed in doing until the second day, passing by several small pieces of ice, which had been separated from the main bank. This latter was in latitude 44° 30'. We sailed until the morning of the next day, towards the northwest, north-northwest, when we met another large ice bank, extending as far as we could see east and west. This, in the distance, seemed like land; for it was so level that it might properly be said to have been made so on purpose. It was more than eighteen feet high, extending twice as far under water. We calculated that we were only some fifteen leagues from Cape Breton, it being the 26th day of the month. These numerous encounters with ice troubled us greatly. We were also fearful that the passage between Capes Breton and Raye would be closed, and that we should be obliged to keep out to sea a long time before being able to enter. Unable to do anything else, we were obliged to run out to sea again some four or five leagues, in order to double another point of the above-mentioned grand ice bank, which continued on our west-southwest. After turning on the other tack to the northwest, in order to double this point, we sailed some seven leagues, and then steered to the north-northwest some three leagues, when we observed another ice bank. The night approached, and the fog came on so that we put to sea to pass the remainder of the night, purposing at daybreak to return and reconnoitre the last mentioned ice. On the twenty-seventh day of the month, we sighted land west-northwest of us, seeing no ice on the north-northeast. We approached nearer for the sake of a better observation, and found that it was Canseau. This led us to bear off to the north for Cape Breton Island; but we had scarcely sailed two leagues when we encountered an ice bank on the northeast. Night coming on, we were obliged to put out to sea until the next day, when we sailed northeast, and encountered more ice, bearing east, east-southeast from us, along which we coasted heading northeast and north for more than fifteen leagues. At last we were obliged

to sail towards the west, greatly to our regret, inasmuch as we could find no passage, and should be obliged to withdraw and sail back on our track. Unfortunately for us we were overtaken by a calm, so that it seemed as if the swell of the sea would throw us upon the ice bank just mentioned, and we got ready to launch our little boat, to use in case of necessity. If we had taken refuge on the above-mentioned ice it would only have been to languish and die in misery. While we were deliberating whether to launch our boat, a fresh breeze arose to our great delight, and thus we escaped from the ice. After we had sailed two leagues, night came on, with a very thick fog, causing us to haul down our sail, as we could not see, and as there were several large pieces of ice in our way, which we were afraid of striking. Thus we remained the entire night until the next day, which was the twenty-ninth, when the fog increased to such an extent that we could scarcely see the length of the vessel. There was also very little wind. Yet we did not fail to set sail, in order to avoid the ice. But, although expecting to extricate ourselves, we found ourselves so involved in it that we could not tell on which side to tack. We were accordingly again compelled to lower sail, and drift until the ice should allow us to make sail. We made a hundred tacks on one side and the other, several times fearing that we were lost. The most self-possessed would have lost all judgment in such a juncture; even the greatest navigator in the world. What alarmed us still more was the short distance we could see, and the fact that the night was coming on, and that we could not make a shift of a quarter of a league without finding a bank or some ice, and a great deal of floating ice, the smallest piece of which would have been sufficient to cause the loss of any vessel whatever. Now, while we were still sailing along amid the ice, there arose so strong a wind that in a short time the fog broke away, affording us a view, and suddenly giving us a clear air and fair sun. Looking around about us, we found that we were shut up in a little lake, not so much as a league and a half in circuit. On the north we perceived the island of Cape Breton, nearly four leagues distant, and it seemed to us that the passage-way to Cape Breton was still closed. We also saw a small ice bank astern of our vessel, and the ocean beyond that, which led us to resolve to go beyond the bank, which was divided. This we succeeded in accomplishing without striking our vessel, putting out to sea for the night, and passing to the southeast of the ice. Thinking now that we could double this ice bank, we sailed east-northeast some fifteen leagues, perceiving only a little piece of ice. At night we hauled down the sail until the next day, when we perceived another ice bank to the north of

us, extending as far as we could see. We had drifted to within nearly half a league of it, when we hoisted sail, continuing to coast along this ice in order to find the end of it. While sailing along, we sighted on the first day of May a vessel amid the ice, which, as well as ourselves, had found it difficult to escape from it. We backed our sails in order to await the former, which came full upon us, since we were desirous of ascertaining whether it had seen other ice. On its approach we saw that it was the son [1] of Sieur de Poutrincourt, on his way to visit his father at the settlement of Port Royal. He had left France three months before, not without much reluctance, I think, and still they were nearly a hundred and forty leagues from Port Royal, and well out of their true course. We told them we had sighted the islands of Canseau, much to their satisfaction, I think, as they had not as yet sighted any land, and were steering straight between Cape St. Lawrence and Cape Raye, in which direction they would not have found Port Royal, except by going overland. After a brief conference with each other we separated, each following his own course. The next day we sighted the islands of St. Pierre, finding no ice. Continuing our course we sighted on the following day, the third of the month, Cape Raye, also without finding ice. On the fourth we sighted the island of St. Paul, and Cape St. Lawrence, being some eight leagues north of the latter. The next day we sighted Gaspé. On the seventh we were opposed by a northwest wind, which drove us out of our course nearly thirty-five leagues, when the wind lulled, and was in our favor as far as Tadoussac, which we reached on the 13th day of May.[2]

ENDNOTES:

2. They left Honfleur, France on the first day of March, and were thus seventy-four days in reaching Tadoussac. The voyage was usually made in favorable weather in thirty days.

SOURCE:

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