Marc Lescarbot
Nova Francia
A Description of Acadia, 1606
Translated by
P. Erondelle, 1609
With an Introduction by H. P. Biggar, D.Litt.

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Map I.

Reproduced from the 1st Edition of Lescarbot's History of New France.
sands, banks, and other dangers, which the sailors into those parts may now the more easily find and avoid, by the knowledge that this translation giveth them of it, let the navigators judge thereof, who (for want of such knowledge) have found themselves in evident peril of death, and many altogether cast away. If a man that showeth forth effectually the zealous care he hath to the welfare and common good of his country deserveth praises of the same, I refer to the judgment of them that abhor the vice of ingratitude (hateful above all to God and good men) whether the said Mr Hakluyt (as well for the first procuring of this translation as for many works of his set out by him for the good and everlasting fame of the English nation) deserveth not to reap thanks. As for this my labour, if it be censured favourably, and my good affection (in undertaking the translating of this work for the benefit of this land) taken in good part, it will encourage me to endeavour myself to do better hereafter.
INTRODUCTION

BY H. P. BIGGAR

Marc Lescarbot, part of whose Histoire de la Nouvelle France is here translated, was born at Vervins near Laon about the year 1570. After receiving a good education, he took up the study of law, and, though only licentier es droits, pronounced in 1598 two Latin orations before the Papal Legate, Cardinal de Medecis (afterwards Leo XI), who had come to Vervins for the conclusion of a treaty of peace with Spain. To the edition in French of the second oration Lescarbot added a few original poems. In the following year, during which he was called to the Bar, he published translations of two short works in Latin by Cardinal Baronius, the first on the reunion of the Coptic Church with Rome and the second on the application of the Synod of Kieff for amalgamation with the Holy See.

Of Lescarbot's work at the Bar at Paris we know little. In his History he tells us that "Lawsuits are the bane of man's existence, for in the pursuit of them men waste their money and their health. And often justice is not obtained after all, either through the ignorance of the judge, from whom the truth is withheld, or through malice or from the wickedness of the Attorney General, who sells his case."

Among Lescarbot's clients was Jean de Biencourt, Seigneur de Poutrincourt, who stood high in the favour of Henry IV. In 1604 this man accompanied the Sieur de Monts on his expedition to the Bay of Fundy where the land about Port Royal, or Annapolis Basin, as it is now called, was made over to him. During Poutrincourt's absence Lescarbot was placed in charge of his affairs, which seem to have given him plenty of
employment. However, on Poutrincourt's return, "those," says Lescarbot, "who had attacked him savagely during his absence at once became silent and gracious."

De Monts having transferred his settlement in 1605 from Ste. Croix to Port Royal, invited Poutrincourt to go out and take charge of it. Poutrincourt accepted, and asked Lescarbot to bear him company. After some reflection, he consented. He was induced thereto, he tells us, "by his desire to flee a corrupt world and to examine this land with his own eyes." An injustice done to him at the Law Courts was the principal motive of this determination.

Setting sail from La Rochelle in May, 1606, they reached Port Royal at the end of July. On July 30, 1607, Lescarbot set out on his return. In addition to the rivers St. John and Ste. Croix, he visited Canso, whence the vessel set sail for France. He reached St. Malo in safety at the end of September.

Reparation having been made to him in court, Lescarbot resumed his practice at the Bar. It was during the Easter Law Vacation of 1608 that, at the instance of his friends, he was persuaded to write a history of French efforts to establish a foothold in the New World. His plan was, after describing the voyages of Verrazano, Cartier, Villegagnon, and Laudonnière from books in the King's Library, to write an original account of the attempt recently made by de Monts to colonize Acadia. This work, which was finished at the end of November, was published early in 1609 under the following title: Histoire de la Nouvelle France contenant les navigations découvertes et habitations faites par les François és Indes Occidentales et Nouvelle France sous l'avœu et autorité de noz Rois Tres-Chrétiens et les diverses fortunes d'iceux en l'exécution de ces choses depuis cent ans jusques à hui.

The translation into English, as stated in the notice
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“To the Reader,” was made at the instance of Richard Hakluyt. Only Chapters XXXI to XLVIII of Book II and the whole of Book III, on the Manners and Customs of the Indians, were translated by Pierre Erondelle. The thirty chapters of Book I, describing the voyages of Verrazano, Ribaut, Laudonnière, and Villegagnon, as well as the first thirty chapters of Book II, describing those of Cartier, Roberval, and Champlain, were omitted. Lescarbot’s French translation from the Latin of the Histoire merveilleuse de l’abstinence triennale d’une fille de Confolens en Poitou, published in 1602, had already appeared in English in 1604, but without his name.

Pierre Erondelle, whom tradition holds to have been a Huguenot refugee, had settled in London as early as 1586, in which year he brought out a Remonstrance and Exhortation Catholick aux Princes Chrestiens in French and English. He styles himself on the title-page natif de Normandie. In 1605 he had published The French Garden for English Ladies and Gentlewomen to walk in, and in 1615 brought out The French Schoole-Maitre, wherein is most plainely shewed the true and perfect way of pronouncing the French tongue. In it he described himself as “professor of the said tongue.” Copies of these three works are in the Bodleian. One can find no trace of this man in the Huguenot registers, but mention is made in 1629 of an Adrienne Erondelle, wife of Jerome Soye, whose daughter Anne was baptized on November 29 of that year.

Shortly after the publication of his History, Lescarbot was thrown into prison on the charge of having written a work against the Jesuits. He must have been soon released, for in 1610 appeared his Conversion des Sauvages, giving an account of Poutrincourt’s return to Port Royal and of his efforts to convert the neighbouring Indians.
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Lescarbot brought out a second edition of his History in 1611, and a third in 1617. From 1612 to 1614 he lived in Switzerland, in the suite of the French representative Pierre Jeannin de Castille, who had married the only daughter of President Jeannin, to whom Lescarbot had dedicated the second edition of his History. In 1612 he published his Relation dernière de ce qui s'est passé au voyage du sieur de Poutrincourt en la Nouvelle France depuis 20 mois ença, where he describes events at Port Royal from 1610 onwards.

In 1619 Lescarbot, probably as a result of his appointment as Naval Commissioner, married Françoise de Valpergue, whereby he came into possession of the seigneuries of Wiencourt and St. Audubert, near Amiens. We do not know the date of his death, but it was after 1629, for in that year appeared La Chasse aux Anglois en l'île de Rez, his last work of which we have any record.

His friend Poutrincourt had been killed in 1615 at Mery-sur-Seine in an attempt to take it out of the hands of his own Commander-in-Chief, the Marquis de Vieuville.

Lescarbot’s complete history has been translated into English from the third edition of 1617 by Principal W. L. Grant, LL.D., of Upper Canada College, Toronto, in volumes i, vii, and xi of the Champlain Society, published at Toronto in 1907, 1911, and 1914. The French text is also given for each portion of these three volumes. In volume xi have also been reprinted Lescarbot’s Muses de la Nouvelle France, containing a number of poems connected with his sojourn in the New World, while in appendix i of that volume will be found a complete bibliography of Lescarbot’s works.

The first part of Erondelle’s translation was abridged in the fourth part of Purchas His Pilgrimes, book viii, chapter vii, pp. 1619-1641, 1625, but book ii was
omitted. The work was reprinted in full, however, in 1745, in the second volume of the Harleian Collection, pp. 795-917. This volume was reissued two years later as volume vii of H. and J. Churchill's Collection, but since then it has never been reprinted.

Lescarbot had an inquisitive mind and an original manner of looking at life. The result is that, thanks to an agreeable style, he gives us a most entertaining account of the foundation of the first French colony in Acadia and of his own journey across the Atlantic in 1606. He tells us that during the long winter evenings in Canada he used to retire to his room, which contained the few volumes he had brought with him from Paris. Here, far from the company, he read and wrote as at home. At this time he composed several of the poems printed in his Muses de la Nouvelle France. "I am not ashamed to confess," he tells us farther, "that at the request of our chief, M. de Poutrincourt, I devoted some hours each Sunday to the religious instruction of our men, both in order to improve their minds and to offer an example to the Indians of our manner of living. And these efforts did not prove fruitless: for several admitted they had never heard the matters pertaining to the Deity so well set forth, having previously been ignorant of the doctrines of Christianity, which is indeed the state of the greater portion of Christendom."

It was this independent outlook, with a faculty for clear thinking, which give to this work its special value. No work on the early history of America has been written with anything like the same vivacity and alertness of mind. To read Lescarbot is to enter again into the outlook of an intelligent Frenchman of the sixteenth century. This contemporary translation certainly has a flavour of the times, and in Dr. Grant's opinion "ranks not far below John Florio's celebrated translation of Montaigne."