

PLACES WHERE I HAVE BEEN

I have said the beauty of the St. John Valley. It should be classified as scenic with its rolling hills, especially above Madawaska and its very pleasant river. From St. Francis to Grand Falls the current is slow with very few exceptions. Above St. Francis, the rapids are more frequent and the hills are closer to the river. The good fishermen get nice big fish out of that big river.

When I left home to go to college, I spent over six years at Ste. Anne de la Pocatiere. The college there is built on a ledge a few hundred feet over the plains around it. The shore of the St. Lawrence River, the south shore, I mean, is quite low and flat. The River Ouelle comes in from the south and flows into the St. Lawrence in a big bay (La Grande Anse). To the south across a couple of miles of flat land the country rises to a stony plateau, wooded practically all the way to the frontier of Maine. To the north across the St. Lawrence, we could see the foothills of the Laurentian Mountains. In 1924, those hills were wooded from La Malbaie to Baie St. Paul. But in the thirties people moved from the cities in there and built farms and parishes so that now we can see the fields on the mountainsides and in the evening the lights of the farms and towns.

At the shore opposite the village there is a pier where schooners would come by sail to pick up or unload freight. There used to be a ferry about five or six miles up-river from Ste. Anne but now there is only one ferry 45 miles downriver.

The river at Ste. Anne is about 20 miles wide. When the tide was down, the water was about $\frac{1}{4}$ of a mile away. When it was up, it came to a wall built to keep it from the fields. Those walls had gates closed by valves to let the water flowing in the river go but those valves would close to keep the salt water out. Fishermen would build fences with long sticks planted in the mud. Those fences had the shape of a "J" with the head at the shore and the hook away from it. When the tide was high fish would come near the shore to feed. When the water went down they would follow the fence and get caught in the hook and left dry. Then the men would go with rubber boots and pick them.

Some years as many as 100 porpoises were caught in these traps. The fishermen would shoot them and drag them on dry land with horses. Their fat flesh was cut in pieces and melted into oil used on leather (shoes and harnesses). The local ladies would save some of that fat for cooking. I was told that it is very good when fresh. The mountain on which the college was built was ideal for hiking and the district had many scenic places where we would go picnicking in summer when the weather permitted.

When I went for the priesthood our novitiate was at Ville Lasalle west of Montreal, on the shore of Lake St. Louis and about a mile or so above the Lachine Rapids. To avoid those rapids the ships going up to the Great Lakes had to use the canal. During the summer we went to a set of cottages on Lac Des Deux Montagnes on the Ottawa River. There we had good big boats that we would use to travel on the lake and up the river. We would go as far as Long Sault where, years back, a group of Frenchmen from the settlement of Ville-Marie, now Montreal, had fought to death against the Iroquois coming to destroy their settlement. Their bravery impressed the Indians so much that they gave up and went home. In 1937, I spent a summer vacation in the Laurentian Mountains northeast of Ottawa. It was a district of lakes and beautiful hills. We could visit two or three lakes, sometimes more in our canoes.

That year, I was sent west to complete my studies. I landed at Lebret, Saskatchewan, on the south shore of a beautiful lake in Qu'Appelle Valley. The south shore where we were was wooded, the north was barren. Saskatchewan is a plateau about 200 feet above sea level. The rivers dig their valleys about a hundred feet below the level of the prairie. We were in the southern half of the Province and wood was scarce. Poplar was practically the only tree that could be found. On the prairie, there were some low places where water would be found in spring. Those places (sloughs) were bordered by alders. They would offer some shelter from the wind for game (deer, rabbits, coyotes) and horses and cattle who were left out during the winter. The grass-eating animals loved the small branches of poplars, which were not much more than bark and buds. The water of Qu'Appelle River was very rich in sulphite. The taste was not too bad, but it was laxative. In 1940, I was sent to Gravelbourg, Sask., as professor at the college there. That was about a couple of hundred miles southwest from Qu'Appelle Valley. There, too, the water contained a good percentage of sulphite. We would get used to it after awhile but the visitors were sensitive to it. A few miles away, there was a little lake with deposits of sulphite. It was gathered and shipped out for use in the manufacture of paper.

One thing I will remember about southern Saskatchewan is that most of the roads were not graveled and after a couple of days of rain those dirt roads were impossible. You could not even walk on them. They called that mud Gumbo. It would stick to your wheels and fill the fenders so that you could not even steer. If you tried walking your feet would get so big and heavy that you could not even walk. The only thing to do if you were caught on one of those muddy roads was to stay put and wait until it was dry enough to move. Of course, if you were a native, you would stay home and wait there until you could go.

I spent a few months in North Dakota and Minnesota. North Dakota seems to be the continuation of the Saskatchewan Plateau. It sure is windy and cold in the winter and the southwestern part of it seems to be more hilly than Saskatchewan. I visited a ranch belonging to a Father Long, pastor of Edgeley, ND. It was not far from the boundary between North Dakota and South Dakota, just a few miles from the site of Custer's defeat. I like the people of North Dakota, there is a quality in their religious life that we do not find everywhere and often. Minnesota has more trees and more lakes but not too many hills. When I was in Ada, the pastor I was helping there one day took me to Lake Itaska, the source of the Mississippi River. It was a good sized lake but when it left the lake, the river was just a creek. People had thrown stones in it and we could cross it without getting wet.

I had the privilege of traveling on Lake Winnipeg in northern Manitoba. That thing is 200 miles long and 50 miles wide! I have seen waves on it over five feet high. This water is very good and its fish excellent. It is open for net fishing a good part of the year. Pike and pickerel are the best of its fish. North of the mouth of the Winnipeg River, the only people living on its shore are Indians and traders with missionaries in most of the Indian settlements. I think I have mentioned elsewhere that there is something special about the Indians and to think of it about anybody who lives in the big woods. As a rule they are open to anybody who comes to them. There is nothing nervous about what they are doing and they never talk loud. It seems that the daily contact with God's country fills them with reverence; they talk as we sometimes do in church.

Coming back to Maine, I spent a few winter months in Calais, Me. That was my first snowless winter. Sure, it would snow, but it always turned to rain and the snow went down the drain. On Washington's Birthday, I was treated to a pailful of fresh clams. And soon after I moved to Moosehead Lake with its beautiful mountains, its wonderful big lake and its cool summer air. Kineo Mountain is pure flint, very precious to the Indians for their spears and arrowheads. Some of that flint had been found as far as Minnesota. The Blue Ridge, starting at Brassua Lake and coming east to the shore of Moosehead, is made of the same mineral. Some of it has gone in the dam at the foot of the lake and if you walk among the leftovers, they ring like broken dishes. When the water is low on Brassua Lake, hundreds of fireplaces are found on the beach near the ledge. It is believed that those were used by the Red Paint Indians who lived there before the coming of those who were found there by the first white men who visited that part of the State of Maine. In 1957, I came to Eagle Lake, an old mill town by the lake of the same name. That district has been classified as scenic by the State and I am not

surprised. The Fish River Valley is not very long but its lakes are next to none in beauty and have been the paradise of fishermen for some hundred years. Long Lake, Square Lake, Eagle Lake, Fish Lake and the Deboulie Lakes have a reputation next to none. Even Cross Lake gives you pleasant surprises. If you go south on Route 11 from Fort Kent, you will admire the Three Brooks Mountain south of Eagle Lake and visible for over ten miles. Then you go by Hedgehog Mountain, steep and challenging. Not far from it, as you come to Soucy's Hill, you can have a distant view of the Queen of Maine's Mountain, Katahdin. Before you reach Portage Lake, if you look west you will be treated to the view of half a dozen respectable mountains planted in the heart of Maine's big woodland. Before you come to Patten you will be treated to the magnificent view to the left of the valley made by the Mattawamkeag River, and to the right, Mount Katahdin itself, surrounded by a court of beauties that would be the pride of any state. Of course, I have flown across the continental U.S. over the Catskills and over the Rockies from Denver to Las Vegas and to Los Angeles, but even if I was thrilled by the view, we were flying at 29,000 feet and cannot say that I have a good idea of that part of the world. As a rule, that is not the way we see the landscape and I dare say that I would get another thrill if I would drive over that part of our country.

