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SABLE ISLAND, WITH A CATALOGUE OF ITS VASCULAR PLANTS.

BY HAROLD ST. JOHN.

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of the plunderers, saying, "Notwithstanding those two Proclamations, the *love of Money*, which is the *Root of all Evil*, is so deeply rooted in the Hearts of some Fishermen, that they have sundry Times Stole our Cattle and our Goods, regarding neither the Laws of God or of Man, neither Justice to me, or Humanity to Shipwreck'd Men, which by their Wickedness they endeavor to Starve, and minding neither natural or revealed Religion and their eternal Damnation, nor even their own temporal Interest, which is certainly not to hinder but to promote the abovesaid Settlement, since it may be their Case one Time or other to be cast away upon the Island *Sables*, and to want there those Things which they have carried off."

In the year 1746, the Duc d' Anville, in his expedition against the British colonies, was overtaken by a severe storm near this island and lost a transport and a fire-ship.

In 1753, Le Mercier published a detailed notice of Sable Island.¹ It is really an advertisement, by means of which he hoped to sell the island, so we must understand and discount the very rosy light in which it is portrayed. As the article is of very considerable interest, and as it is not readily available to all readers, it seems worth while to quote it here in its entirety.

"TO BE SOLD by me the Subscriber

"(Andrew Le Mercier, Pastor of the French Church)

"THE ISLAND *Sables*.

"*The Publick hath here a short description of it for nothing.*

"SAID Island is situated at the Distance of about 40 Leagues from *Halifax*, thirty from *Cape Breton*, and 50 from *Newfoundland*; a good Market for the Produce of the Island, Cattle & Roots of all sorts. It is about 28 Miles long, one Mile over, and contains about 10,000 Acres of Land, 500 of which are quite barren, all the rest produces or may bear something. Their are neither River or Brooks or fresh Water, but everywhere even upon the Beach you may come to fresh clear Water by digging about 3 feet, by which means the root of the Grass is always kept cool and alive, so that it cannot be much subject to a Drought, as it was experienced three Years ago. The Climate may be called temperate, for as in Winter the Snow hardly lies above three

¹ Le Mercier, Andrew: The Island Sables. Boston Weekly News Letter, February 8 (1753).

Days on the Ground, so it is never extream hot in Summer, and it is a rare thing to be frightened by any Thunder. It bears no venomous Creatures of any sort, and hardly any Flies.—The high Winds clear the air, which makes it healthy; and nature hath furnished it with medicinal Plants and Shrubs:—It produces naturally near 20 sorts of Berries, out of which some People suppose very good Liquors and Wines might be expressed— It looks all green in Winter with the Juniper Bushes and red in Summer with the large Strawberries and other wild Fruits which it bears.—It hath abundance of wild or Beach Pease, which fatten the Cattle very well:—By several Pieces of petrified Wood found there it is supposed that the Sand hath a Property of petrifying Wood.—Within these seven or eight Years Providence hath opened a Communication between the great Pond (fifteen Miles long) and the Sea, which hath made a safe and large Harbour, but the Entrance is barred so that large and sharp Vessels cannot get into it; but as there is about 8 Feet of Water over the Bar at high Water there is sufficient Passage (as we know by Experience) for Vessels of 30 Tuns or more, if not built Sharp.—The Ponds abound with Flounders and Eels; the Beech itself with Clams and Sand Eels; the Air with Fowls, and especially with black Ducks, so as to make money with their Feathers. The Soil is so natural for all sorts of Roots, especially Turnipe, that they are not only uncommonly sweet there but also uncommonly large, some weighing 7 Pounds a piece:—Rye grows there very naturally and also Wheat at the Rate of 13 Bushels per acre. It is supposed that Flax would grow there very well; it would also produce Indian Corn well enough if the high Winds in the Fall did not break it:—There is neither Trees (but many Bushes) nor Stones.—The Grass is tall, thick and hath a very sweet taste and nourishing Property; there is some English Grass, but the other is more profitable, and there is enough to feed some thousand Heads of Cattle:—Horses breed and grow there without Care or Trouble; there is all Winter long Grass enough or near enough for them, so that they eat but little of the Hay which is made for them in the Summer or the Fall.—The raising of Sheep, Horn-Cattle, and especially of Horses is the most Advantagious (as for the Grain there are not above 400 Acres where it may be raised). The Care of Gardens and Cattle take up our People's Time in Summer, in Winter they go to kill Seils and boil their Fat into Oyl, as well as that of Whales, which now and then are cast away dead upon the Beach. The Island finds them in

Turf and the Sea brings them Wood; so they are not deprived of the Necessaries of Life, nor without Profits of several Sorts; besides their having the pleasure of saving many Men's Lives, according to the motto of the Island, viz—*Destruo & Salvo*. When I took Possession of the Island there was no four-footed Creatures upon it, but a few foxes some red and some black (some of which remain to this Day) now there are I suppose about 90 Sheep, between 20 or 30 Horses including Colts, Stallions and breeding Mares, about 30 or 40 Cows tame and Wild, and 40 Hogs. There are all sorts of Utensils for Farming and trying Fat, several Boats and six or seven small Houses and Warehouses. The advantages which do accrue or may accrue from the Improvement of that Place are so great that I would not easily part with it if I was so skilful in Navigation and Shipping as is necessary: That Ignorance of mine induces me (not any Defect in the Island itself) to part with it. If any Person desires to purchase it, and to know further about it, they may see at my House a Map and Plan of it, or if they live at a Distance by letters sent (Postage free) they may enquire about any Thing, they want to be satisfied in, and I will endeavor to give them all the Light they desire. I must know their Mind within 2 or 3 Months, that the Crew now upon the Island, may be disposed of accordingly."

"Boston, the 5th Day of

"February, 1753

Andrew Le Mercier,

Pastor of the French Church."

It does not appear that Le Mercier found a purchaser. He died on March 31st, 1764, and his will, drawn on the 7th of November, 1761, does not mention Sable Island. At least in 1760, the island was uninhabited and a certain Boston merchant, Thomas Hancock¹, desiring to relieve the sufferings of those shipwrecked, fitted out a schooner with "Horses, Cows, Sheep, Goats, Hogs and Animals likely to live on the Island. They were landed there and generally answered very well."

In 1760, a vessel with a part of the 43d regiment, returning from the capture of Quebec, was wrecked on the island. The evidence of this was found long afterward. "In the year 1842, during a severe gale, an old landmark in the form of a pyramid, said to be one hundred feet high, was completely blown away, exposing some small huts built of the timbers and planks of a vessel. On examination they were found to contain quite a number of articles of furniture, stores

¹ Rept. on Canadian Archives, 86 (1895).