CHAPTER V.

FROM 1655 TO 1679.

The Iroquois Triumphant — Obliteration of Dutch Power — French Progress — La Salle visits the Senecas — Greenhalgh's Estimates — La Salle on the Niagara — Building of the Griffin — It Enters Lake Erie — La Salle's Subsequent Career — The Prospect in 1670.

AFTER the overthrow of the Kahquahs and Eries the Iroquois lords of Erie county went forth conquering and to conquer. This was probably the day of their greatest glory. Stimulated but not yet crushed by contact with the white man, they stayed the progress of the French into their territories, they negotiated on equal terms with the Dutch and English, and, having supplied themselves with the terrible arms of the pale-faces, they smote with direst vengeance whomsoever of their own race were so unfortunate as to provoke their wrath.

On the Susquehanna, on the Alleghany, on the Ohio, even to the Mississippi in the west and the Savannah in the south, the Iroquois bore their conquering arms, filling with terror the dwellers alike on the plains of Illinois and in the glades of Carolina. They strode over the bones of the slaughtered Kahquahs to new conquests on the great lakes beyond, even to the foaming cascades of Michillimacinac, and the shores of the mighty Superior. They inflicted such terrible defeat upon the Hurons, despite the alliance of the latter with the French, that many of the conquered nation sought safety on the frozen borders of Hudson's Bay. In short, they triumphed on every side, save only where the white man came, and even the white man was for a time held at bay by these fierce confederates.

Of the three rival bands of colonists already mentioned, the French and Dutch opened a great fur trade with the Indians, while the New Englanders devoted themselves principally to agriculture. In 1664, the English conquered New Amsterdam, and in 1670 their conquest was made permanent. Thus the too Dutch Lepidus of the continental triumvirate was gotten rid of and thenceforth the contest was to be between the Anglo-Saxon Octavius and the Gallic Antony.

Charles II., then King of England, granted the conquered province to his brother James, Duke of York, from whom it was called New York. This grant comprised all the lands along the Hudson, with an indefinite amount westward, thus overlapping the previous grant of James I. to the Plymouth Company, and the boundaries of Massachusetts under the charter of Charles I., and laying the foundation for a conflict of jurisdiction which was afterwards to have an important effect on the destinies of Western New York.

The French, if poor farmers, were indefatigable fur-traders and missionaries; but their priests and fur-buyers mostly pursued a route north of this locality, for here the fierce Senecas guarded the shores of the Niagara, and they like all the rest of the Iroquois were ever unfriendly, if not actively hostile to the French. By 1665, trading-posts had been established at Michillimacinac, Green Bay, Chicago and St. Joseph, but the route past the falls of Niagara was seldom traversed, and then only by the most adventurous of the French traders, the most devoted of the Catholic missionaries.

But a new era was approaching. Louis XIV. was king of France, and his great minister, Colbert, was anxious to extend the power of his royal master over the unknown regions of North America. In 1669, La Salle, whose name was soon to be indissolubly united to the annals of Erie county, visited the Senecas with only two companions, finding their four principal villages from ten to twenty miles southerly from Rochester, scattered over portions of the present counties of Monroe, Livingston and Ontario.

In 1673 the missionaries Marquette and Joliet pushed on beyond the farthest French posts, and erected the emblem of Christian salvation on the shore of the Father of Waters.

In 1677 Wentworth Greenhalgh, an Englishman, visited all the Five Nations, finding the same four towns of the Senecas described by the companions of La Salle. Greenhalgh made very minute observations, counting the houses of the Indians, and reported the Mohawks as having three hundred warriors, the Oneidas two hundred, the Onondagas three hundred and fifty, the Cayugas three hundred, and the Senecas a thousand. It will be seen that the Senecas, the guardians of the western door of the Long House, numbered, according to Greenhalgh's computation, nearly as many as all the other tribes of the confederacy combined, and other accounts show that he was not far from correct.

In the month of January, 1679, there arrived at the mouth of the Niagara, Robert Cavelier de La Salle, a Frenchman of good family, thirty-five years of age, and one of the most gallant, devoted and adventurous of all the bold explorers who under many different banners opened the new world to the knowledge of the old. Leaving his native Rouen at the age of twenty-two, he had ever since been leading a life of adventure in America, having in 1669, as already mentioned, penetrated almost alone to the strongholds of the Senecas. In 1678 he had received from King Louis a commission to discover the western part of New France. He was authorized to build such forts as might be necessary, but at his own expense, being granted certain privileges in return, the principal of which appears to have been the right to trade in buffalo skins. The same year he had made some preparations, and in the fall had sent the Sieur de La Motte and Father Hennepin (the priest and historian of his expedition) in advance to the mouth of the Niagara. La Motte soon returned.

As soon as La Salle arrived, he went two leagues above the Falls, built a rude dock, and laid the keel of a vessel with which to navigate the upper lakes. Strangely enough Hennepin does not state on which bank of the Niagara this dock was situated, but the question has been carefully investigated, especially by Francis Parkman, the historian of French power in Canada, and by O. H. Marshall, Esq., of Buffalo, the best authority on early local history in Western New York, who have proven beyond a reasonable doubt that it was on the east side, at the mouth of Cayuga creek, in Niagara county, and in accordance with that view the little village which has been laid out there has received the appellation of "La Salle."

Hennepin distinctly mentions a small village of Senecas situated at the mouth of the Niagara, and it is plain from his whole narrative that the Iroquois were in possession of the entire country along the river, though few of them resided there, and watched the movement with unceasing jealousy.

The work was carried on through the winter, two Indians of the Wolf clan of the Senecas being employed to hunt deer for the French party, and in the spring the vessel was launched, "after having," in the words of Father Hennepin, "been blessed according to the rites of our Church of Rome." The new ship was named "*Le Griffon*," (The Griffin) in compliment to the Count de Frontenac, minister of the French colonies, whose coat of arms was ornamented with representations of that mythical beast.

For several months the *Griffin* remained in the Niagara, between the place where it was built and the rapids at the head of the river. Meanwhile Father Hennepin returned to Fort Frontenac (now Kingston) and obtained two priestly assistants, and La Salle superintended the removal of the armament and stores from below the Falls.

When all was ready the attempt was made, and several times repeated, to ascend the rapids above Black Rock, but without success. At length, on the seventh day of August, 1679, a favorable wind sprung up from the northeast, all the *Griffin's* sails were set, and again it approached the troublesome rapids.

It was a diminutive vessel compared with the leviathans of the deep which now navigate these inland seas, but was a marvel in view of the difficulties under which it had been built. It was of sixty tons burthen, completely furnished with anchors and other equipments, and armed with seven small cannon, all of which had been transported by hand around the cataract.

There were thirty-four men on board the *Griffin*, all Frenchmen with a single exception.

There was the intrepid La Salle, a blue-eyed, fair-faced, ringleted cavalier; a man fitted to grace the *salons* of Paris, yet now eagerly press-

ing forward to dare the hardships of unknown seas and savage lands. A born leader of men, a heroic subduer of nature, the gallant Frenchman for a brief time passes along the border of our county, and then disappears in the western wilds where he was eventually to find a grave.

There was Tonti, the solitary alien amid that Gallic band, exiled by revolution from his native Italy, who had been chosen by La Salle as second in command, and who justified the choice by his unswerving courage and devoted loyalty. There, too, was Father Hennepin, the earliest historian of these regions, one of the most zealous of all the zealous band of Catholic priests who, at that period, undauntedly bore the cross amid the fiercest pagans in America. Attired in priestly robes, having with him his movable chapel, and attended by his two coadjutors, Father Hennepin was ready at any time to perform the rites of his Church, or to share the severest hardships of his comrades.

As the little vessel approached the rapids, a dozen stalwart sailors were sent ashore with a tow-line, and aided with all their strength the breeze which blew from the north. Meanwhile a crowd of Iroquois warriors had assembled on the shore, together with many captives whom they had brought from the distant prairies of the West. These watched eagerly the efforts of the pale-faces, with half-admiring and half-jealous eyes.

Those efforts were soon successful. By the aid of sails and tow-line the *Griffin* surmounted the rapids, all the crew went on board, and the pioneer vessel of these waters swept out on to the bosom of Lake Erie. As it did so the priests led in singing a joyous *Te Deum*, all the cannon and arquebuses were fired in a grand salute, and even the stoical sons of the forest, watching from the shore, gave evidence of their admiration by repeated cries of "Gannoron! Gannoron!" Wonderful! Wonderful!

This was the beginning of the commerce of the upper lakes, and like many another first venture it resulted only in disaster to its projectors, though the harbinger of unbounded success by others. The *Griffin* went to Green Bay, where La Salle and Hennepin left it, started on its return with a cargo of furs, and was never heard of more. It is supposed that it sank in a storm and that all on board perished.

La Salle was not afterwards identified with the history of Erie county, but his chivalric achievements and tragic fate have still such power to stir the pulse and enlist the feelings that one can hardly refrain from a brief mention of his subsequent career. After the *Griffin* had sailed, La Salle and Hennepin went in canoes to the head of Lake Michigan. Thence, after building a trading-post and waiting many weary months for the return of his vessel, he went with thirty followers to Lake Peoria on the Illinois river where he built a fort and gave it the expressive name of "Creve Cœur" — Broken Heart. But notwithstanding this expres-

sion of despair his courage was far from exhausted, and, after sending Hennepin to explore the Mississippi, he with three comrades performed the remarkable feat of returning to Fort Frontenac on foot, depending on their guns for support.

From Fort Frontenac he returned to Crevecœur, the garrison of which had in the meantime been driven away by the Indians. Again the indomitable La Salle gathered his followers, and in the fore part of 1682 descended the Mississippi to the sea, being the first European to explore any considerable portion of that mighty stream. He took possession of the country in the name of King Louis XIV., and called it Louisiana.

Returning to France he astonished and gratified the court with the stories of his discoveries, and in 1684 was furnished with a fleet and several hundred men to colonize the new domain. Then every thing went wrong. The fleet, through the blunders of its naval commander, went to Matagorda bay, in Texas. The store-ship was wrecked, the fleet returned, La Salle failed in an attempt to find the mouth of the Mississippi, his colony dwindled away through desertion and death to forty men, and at length he started with sixteen of these, on foot, to return to Canada for assistance. Even in this little band there were those that hated him, (he was undoubtedly a man of somewhat imperious nature,) and ere he had reached the Sabine he was murdered by two of his followers, and left unburied upon the prairie.

A lofty, if somewhat haughty spirit, France knows him as the man who added Louisiana and Texas to her empire, the Mississippi Valley reveres him as the first explorer of its great river, but by the citizens of this county he will best be remembered as the pioneer navigator of Lake Erie.

The adventurous Frenchman doubtless supposed, when he steered the *Griffin* into that vast inland sea, that he was opening it solely to French commerce, and was preparing its shores for French occupancy. He had ample reason for the supposition. Communication with the French in Lower Canada was much easier than with the Anglo-Dutch province on the Hudson, and thus far the opportunities of the former had been diligently improved.

Had La Salle then climbed the bluff which overlooks the transformation of the mighty Erie into the rushing Niagara and attempted to foretell the destiny of lake and land for the next two centuries, he would without doubt, and with good reason, have mentally given the dominion of both land and lake to the sovereigns of France. He would have seen in his mind's eye the plains that extended eastward dotted with the cottages of French peasants, while here and there among them towered the proud mansions of their baronial masters. He would have imagined the lake white with the sails of hundreds of vessels flying the flag of Gallic

kings, and bearing the products of their subjects from still remoter regions, and he would perchance have pictured at his feet a splendid city, reproducing the tall gables of Rouen and the elegant facades of Paris, its streets gay with the vivacious language of France, its cross-capped churches sheltering only the stately ceremonies of Rome.

But a far different destiny was in store for our county, due partly to the chances of war, and partly to the subtle characteristics of race, which make of the Gaul a good explorer but a bad colonizer, while the Anglo-Saxon is ever ready to identify himself with the land to which he may roam.

CHAPTER VI.

FRENCH DOMINION.

A Slight Ascendency -- De Nonville's Assault — Origin of Fort Niagara — La Hontan's Expedition — The Peace of Ryswick — Queen Anne's War — The Iroquois Neutral — The Tuscaroras — Joncaire — Fort Niagara Rebuilt — French Power Increasing — Successive Wars — The Line of Posts — The Final Struggle — The Expedition of D'Aubrey — The Result — The Surrender of Canada.

FOR the next forty-five years after the adventures of La Salle, the French maintained a general but not very substantial ascendency in this region. Their voyagers traded and their missionaries labored here, and their soldiers sometimes made incursions, but they had no permanent fortress this side of Fort Frontenac (Kingston) and they were constantly in danger from their enemies, the Hedonosaunee. Yet the French sovereigns and ministers considered the whole lake region, including the territory of Erie county, as being unquestionably a part of "New France" (or Canada.) Their maps so described it, and they looked forward with entire assurance to the time when French troops and French colonists should hold undisputed possession of all that vast domain.

In 1687, the Marquis de Nonville, governor of New France, arrived at Irondequoit bay, a few miles east of Rochester, with nearly two thousand Frenchmen and some five hundred Indian allies, and marched at once against the Seneca villages, situated as has been stated in the vicinity of Victor and Avon. The Senecas attacked him on his way, and were defeated, as well they might be, considering that the largest estimate gives them but eight hundred warriors, the rest of the confederates not having arrived.