

STEPHEN BUDAI PARMENIUS A HUNGARIAN
MARTYR OF CANADIAN EXPLORATIONS

Five ships were ready to set sail in Causet Bay near Plymouth, England in early June, 1583.

Their destination was the New World. For, although "many voyages have been attempted, yet so far never any thoroughly accomplished by the English nation in those Northernly parts of America," reads Captain Edward Hayes' report "who alone continued unto the end, and by God's special assistance returned home with his retinue safe and entire."

The five ships were the Delight, 120 tons, the Barke Raleigh, 200 tons, the Golden Hinde, 40 tons, the Swallow, 40 tons and the Squirill, 10 tons.

Commissioned by Her Majesty, Elizabeth I, Sir Humphrey Gilbert and his five ships, about 260 men aboard, left Causet Bay on June 11th, 1583 "to erect an habitation and government in those Northernly countries of America."

Six years before his first attempt failed: he was driven back home "with the loss of a tall ship." This, his second voyage was more successful. He accomplished his mission but with most of his men he perished at sea.

Sir Walter Raleigh, the famous "globetrotter" of the 16th century set out on this expedition as captain of the second ship named after him. However, contagious sickness detained him and his ship from this disastrous voyage.

The small fleet made remarkable progress, but in the heavy fog and rain they lost contact with each other.

On the 19th day a long shoreline appeared on the horizon and Portugese and French fishing boats. The land in sight was the island of Newfoundland. How great was their delight when on July 30th the admiral ship, the Delight and the Golden Hinde sailed into the Bay of Conception and in the bay they met the Swallow again. A few days later, on August 3rd another joyful surprise awaited them:

"At St. John's, before the harbor we also found the Frigate or Squirill lying at anchor."

The English merchants already settled there met the newcomers with little confidence or friendship. It was quite understandable. The men on the Swallow had already robbed a newlander ship! However, when the General assured the merchants that they came with good intentions and with the commission of the Queen, the merchants gave them a friendly welcome, towed in the damaged ship and helped to repair it.

Newfoundland appeared to be an abundant land to the new arrivals.

On August 4th, Sunday, the General, i.e. Sir Humphrey Gilbert was brought on land by the English merchants and presented with roses and raspberries.

The next day, August 5th an important event took place in the new colony town of St. John's. A tent was erected for the General and the merchants; masters and strangers were summoned to be present at a ceremony of taking possession of "those countries on behalf of the Crown of England," the first British possession on the American continent!

Three laws were given to the new Crown Colony:

1. That religion in public exercise should be according to the Church of England.
2. That Her Majesty's right and possessions should be maintained.
3. And that the honour of the Queen should be upheld.

The multitude promised obedience to these laws and in turn they were granted rentals and privileges.

For about two weeks the explorers searched the inland and the islands along the shores. They found good roads and harbors, the land full of "commodities" for arts and industry, the forests with abundance of fowl and the waters in fish.

There was also plenty of trouble for the explorers. Honesty was not the prime virtue of some of these adventurers and stealing occurred frequently in the group. Some of them ran away to escape discipline. Sickness also broke out among them. Thus, the "Swallow" was ordered to return home with the sick on board.

For the convenience of these off-shore discovery trips the General transferred to the smallest vessel, the Frigate "Squirill."

Then, on August 20th, 1583, the remaining three ships, the Delight, the Golden Hinde and the Squirill, with the remainder of the crew left St. Johns and headed South West toward the shores presently called Nova Scotia, starting out on a disastrous journey. Passing by Cape Race and the Island of Sablon, the Bays of Trepassa and the Bay of Placentia, they reached Cape Breton.

"At last we fell into such flats and dangers that hardly any of us escaped" — reads Master Hayes'



narrative. "Nevertheless we lost our Admiral, (the ship Delight) with all the men and provisions, not knowing certainly the place."

The day was Thursday, August 29th. The wind rose and blew vehemently. Rainfall and fog made visibility very poor. The ships were driven among flats, rock and sandbars.

The two smaller vessels, the Golden Hinde and the Squirill, (on which the General was at this time) managed to escape the cliffs and gained depth signaling to the larger Delight to do likewise. The Admiral ship, however, "stroke ground and soon afterwards had her stern and hinder parts beaten in pieces."

In the violent storm the two smaller ships escaped. They kept a vigilant eye on the main ship "for we desired to save the men by every possible means. But all in vain. God had determined their ruin," says Master Hayes and concludes the narrative:

"This was a heavy and grievous event, to loose at one blow our chief ship . . . But more was the loss of our men which perished almost of a hundred soul. (According to other accounts 102.) Amongst whom was drowned a learned man, an Hungarian, born in the city of Buda, called thereof Budaeus, who of piety and zeal to good attempts, adventured in this action, minding to record in the Latin tongue, the gests and things worthy of remembrance, happening in this discovery, to the honour of our nation, the same being adorned with eloquent style of this orator and rare poet of our time."

In his chronicle-in-verse the chronicler and poet identifies himself as a Magyar and says:

"Raised in the sciences with the assistance of the most learned men, in whom our most happy Pannonia (Hungary) abounded, according to the custom of our people I was sent to visit the colleges of our Christian world." Stephen Parmenius de Buda (István Budai Parmenius in the original) was a Hungarian Protestant reformer, trained in Hungary and in Western European universities including Oxford. His penmanship proves that he was a scholar and a born poet.

And this pioneer-minded Hungarian Protestant clergyman of the 16th century became a martyr of early Canadian explorations when he perished in the storm on August 29th, 1583 121 leagues S.W. from Cape Race, at Cape Sable, Nova Scotia.

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Only the Golden Hinde returned to England under Captain Edward Hayes saving for posterity perhaps the most precious of its relics, the Budai Parmenius, Chronicle.

Sir Humphrey Gilbert whose motive for these journeys was "the planting of God's word" who was also lost at sea on the return trip, left to us a memorable motto which may have been a common treasure of both of them:

"We are as near to heaven by sea as by land."

Dr. Kalman Toth

