

# Jean Bart.

According to the early records of Lancaster county, Bart township, one of the richest and most important of the whole series, was organized in the spring of 1744. The information at hand is very meagre; but it may be regarded as a curious fact that even the origin of its name cannot now be certainly determined. It has, indeed, been confidently stated in several historical works that the township was named in honor of Sir William Keith, who was Governor of the province from 1717 to 1726, and that the name "Bart" is simply the usual contraction of his title of Baronet. This, however, is evidently a mere guess, and it is not even plausible. Apart from the fact that sixteen years before the organization of the township Sir William Keith had fled from America to escape his creditors, and that there is no reason to suppose that he enjoyed any special popularity in Lancaster county, it seems ridiculous to imagine that any community should ever have attempted to honor a particular Baronet by naming a place "Bart," especially as there is no reason to suppose that the abbreviation was ever pronounced as it is written. It would hardly seem more absurd at the present day to attempt to confer honor upon an honorable member of Congress by naming a township "Hon."

Attention has been called to the fact that there is, or was, a village in Nova Scotia named Bart, and that our forefathers may have heard of the place from soldiers who had landed in that province. This suggestion, however, merely removes the question another degree; and the query naturally suggests itself, Whence did the Nova Sco-

tian village derive its name? Is it not probable that, instead of naming the township after an obscure village, both village and township were called after some distinguished personage whose career suggested itself to the pioneers as worthy of unusual honor? Here a little attention to historic records, suffices to show that a man bearing this name had but recently passed away who possessed all the qualities necessary to commend him to popular admiration; a man whose published life was hawked about by peddlers and read with intense interest by American pioneers who appreciated his romantic deeds and rejoiced in his wonderful heroism. It is from this eminent man that we believe the name of our beautiful township to be derived. Though it may seem useless, at a meeting like the present, to recall facts which are recorded in general history, it has been said that "history needs to be continually rewritten and retold," and to relate the main events of a career whose splendor our forefathers desired to perpetuate cannot fail to prove interesting in these latter days.

Jean Bart—or, as he was called in English, John Bart—was born October 21st, 1650, at Dunkirk, the most northern port of France. It has been observed that if he had been born four years earlier or four years later he could not have been called a Frenchman; for his birthplace, which was originally Flemish, was in rapid succession occupied by Spain, France and England. At the time of Bart's birth it was held by France, but not long afterwards was taken by Cromwell and remained an English dependency until Charles II. sold it to France, in whose possession it still continues. Colbert, the great French Minister of State, perceived the advantages of the position and at once set to work to improve the harbor, and to foster in the hearts of the people that fondness for

naval pursuits to which the town has for ages owed its chief distinction.

It is said by some writers that Bart was a poor fisher-boy, and though this is true in a certain sense, it is also true that by the fisher-folk of Dunkirk he was regarded as of distinguished descent. His father, Cornil Bart, had been successful as a privateer, but was wounded in the last English siege of Dunkirk, and was for years confined to his room, a helpless cripple. Catharine Bart, his mother, was a daughter of Michael Jacobsen, who was called "the sea fox." Jacobsen was commander of a privateer which was on the point of being taken by a Dutch squadron, but rather than fall into the hands of his enemies he fired the magazine with his own hands and perished proudly in the presence of his captors. Only two men escaped from the explosion, and one of these was Luke Bart, the grandfather of little Jean.

The corsairs of Dunkirk were celebrated all over Europe. They sailed under special commissions, bearing "letters of marque," and accomplished deeds of bravery which all the world admired; and yet there was little in their career which commended itself to men who were ambitious of distinction. Their own government acknowledged them only in a left-handed way; their enemies declared them pirates, and when they happened to be taken they were apt to be strung to the yard-arm without much ceremony. Of course, there was little chance of promotion, for official position was supposed to be the exclusive prerogative of the nobility, who regarded all men of lower rank with undisguised contempt.

In consequence of the crippled condition of the father, the Bart family became impoverished, and Jean was actually no more than a fisher-boy. His early education was defective, and he hardly learned more than to read

and write. His mother protested against his inclination for a seafaring life; but the stirring tales of his father bore their natural fruit, and at the age of twelve Jean Bart embarked on a Dunkirk smuggler. In four years, it is said, he learned "to reef and steer, to knot and splice, to point a rope and to steer a gun." His captain was a cruel man, and on one occasion barbarously executed a Huguenot sailor who had accidentally killed a mess-mate. At the danger of his life Jean Bart protested against the captain's deeds, and in the investigation which followed he boldly testified against him. It was said that this bold conduct first directed attention to the heroic boy, and that his statement led to the modification of the laws which gave naval commanders the power of life and death.

Soon afterwards Bart was requested to convey several noblemen to the Dutch fleet, commanded by Admiral De Ruyter, which was then blockading the English fleet at the mouth of the Thames. He set sail at night in a half-decked boat, taking with him an intimate friend and two brave sailors. The noblemen soon became very sick, and were naturally anxious to get to the Dutch fleet as soon as possible; but Bart was no fool, and, feeling assured that if things came to the worst his little boat could escape into shallow water, he determined to gather, on his own account, some information that might prove acceptable to the Dutch Admiral. He, therefore, sailed near to Queensborough to see what the English were doing, and having counted the ships and taken other observations, he turned back and safely reached the Dutch fleet. Having discharged his passengers he boldly requested to see the Admiral. To Jean an admiral was a sort of demigod, and when admitted to his presence for the first and last time in his life his courage failed him.

He fell on his knees and begged to be admitted to the Admiral's service. Having heard his news De Ruyter accepted him as an able-bodied seaman, though he was but sixteen years old. For five years Bart remained in the Dutch service, and first smelled powder in the great battle between De Ruyter and Monk; but when war was declared between France and Holland he returned to the service of his native country.

Our young hero had not been forgotten in Dunkirk, and, apparently by private subscription, a small privateer, mounting two guns, was placed at his disposal. His little vessel, named the "King David," proved a mighty man of war. In three months he took six Dutch vessels, and it was then determined to give him a better ship. During the next two years he was uniformly successful, even capturing an armed vessel that was much larger than his own. He was now a man of substance, and, contrary to the advice of his friends, married a poor girl, to whom he was sincerely attached. Four months after his marriage we find him once more at sea, and within a month he captured seventeen ships. As he could not convey all these vessels to harbor, he allowed the captains of four of them to escape on the payment of a ransom of about sixty thousand dollars. This was against the law, but Bart declared it a necessity, and escaped prosecution by giving half the ransom to the Dunkirk hospital.

For several years Bart continued his career in a somewhat independent fashion—once badly wounded, but altogether more successful than any naval officer of his age. The time had now come when his success had to be recognized by the Government. Colbert pleaded with the King to give him a commission in the navy; but Bart was not a nobleman, and the King hesitated three months before granting the

request. On the 8th of January, 1679, he was made a Lieutenant in the navy, and his days as a corsair were ended.

It was a great thing for the fisherman of Dunkirk to be thus honored, but it actually marked the beginning of a period of real suffering. The officers of higher ranks treated him with undisguised contempt, and it required all his self control to enable him to endure their insults. Colbert, however, soon gave him an independent command and sent him to the Mediterranean to chastise the Barbary pirates. As usual, Bart took his own way, seizing a Moorish vessel after it had placed itself under the protection of an English squadron, and returning home at last loaded with spoil and covered with glory.

During succeeding years Bart performed many acts of valor. Once with six vessels he captured a Dutch fleet of eight, besides releasing a number of French ships loaded with grain, thus saving France from impending famine. In a desperate conflict with a superior English force he was taken prisoner and conveyed to England, but in a few days he escaped from prison and safely crossed the channel in an open boat. Not long afterwards he took his revenge by sacking the English town of Newcastle and exacting a ransom of £700,000.

In order to give Bart a higher social position the King determined to raise him to the nobility, but the opposition of the nobles continued unabated. As Bart was rough and uncultured, they called him "the bear" and the Chevalier Forbin who undertook to present him to the King was termed "the bear-leader." On this occasion the great sailor was required to appear in a suit of cloth of gold, which was very uncomfortable, and on his way to the royal presence he is said to have employed language which was more usual on the quarter-deck than in a royal

palace. The King received him kindly, and announced that he had made him an admiral. Bart replied: "By this act your Majesty has shown true wisdom—you have done just right." A smile passed around the hall; but Louis XIV., who always knew what to say on such occasions, responded: "This is the reply of a man who knows how to estimate himself at his true value and is willing to serve his country in the future as in the past." On another occasion the King said, "Bart, I wish I had ten thousand men like you," and the sailor replied: "Your Majesty, I can very well believe it." Such outspoken self-esteem naturally led to ridicule; but Bart knew nothing of the ways of courts, and his unwavering self-confidence was one of the conditions of his heroic life.

Bart's naval career was concluded by the peace of Ryswick in 1697, but the King appointed him commandant of his native town of Dunkirk. It was a position of high honor, but it did not suit "the rover of the seas." Large sums of money passed through his hands, and he became morbidly fearful that his accounts might go astray. He had never been good at figures, and now he was in constant danger of making mistakes in summing up the reports of his subordinates. The resultant excitement brought on a fever, of which he died on the 27th of April, 1702. He lies buried before the altar of the principal church of his native city, and his statue occupies a prominent position in one of the public squares. Throughout northern France he is still a popular hero, and his biography is employed as a text-book in the primary schools.

At the time when Bart township was named the fame of the great Admiral had not begun to grow dim. He was the great hero of popular romance, and was regarded as a model of earnest

patriotism and sturdy manhood. We may also conceive of an additional reason why our forefathers felt inclined to do honor to his memory. They remembered how, in the mother-country, the higher classes had monopolized every position of honor and profit, so that a poor man had but little chance of advancing beyond the station in which he was born. Against this state of affairs they desired to protest. However it might be in Europe, they were determined that in America all men should enjoy equal rights and equal opportunities. Jean Bart—the fisherman of Dunkirk—had contended with the proudest aristocracy in the world, and had defeated them on their own chosen ground. Such a man the pioneers of Lancaster county must have delighted to honor; though they surely felt no interest in perpetuating the memory of an English Baronet of uncertain reputation like Sir William Keith, of whom our leading historians say that “before he left the province he had sunk into universal contempt.” To them the name of Bart stood for the cause of the people in its conflict with an overbearing aristocracy, and in its selection they manifested the patriotic spirit which subsequently led to the achievement of American independence.

J. H. D.



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