

LA SALLE'S MONUMENT AT ROUEN.

BY HAMILTON B. STAPLES.

To the list of objects abroad, of peculiar interest to an American on account of their historical association with his own country, the sculptured stone which covers the dust of Captain John Smith at St. Sepulchre's, the Raleigh window at St. Margaret's, the statue of Columbus at Genoa, there is now added another, the mural monument to La Salle at Rouen. It consists of a massive marble slab, by estimation eight feet high and nearly four wide. When I saw it, June 14, 1887, it was finished and leaned against the wall of one of the chapels on the north side of the Cathedral. Long before this, it has been permanently attached to the wall of Notre Dame—a church nearly four hundred years old when La Salle was born. I will attempt a further description of it. In the upper part there is a bronze tablet embedded in the marble, in the centre of which is a bas-relief likeness of La Salle in profile. Above the likeness is the coat-of-arms of La Salle. The likeness and coat-of-arms are set in a shell, which also affords a background. On a scroll, unrolled on each side of the shell, are the words Robert Cavelier de La Salle MDCXLIII. MD. The letters, except the last two, denote the year of his birth, while the letters MD. repeated, perhaps signify in part 1687, the year of his death, the rest of the letters being hid in the folds. The shell is supported on each side by scroll work and there are open spaces where leaves and flowers are introduced. The centre and lower part of the monument present a raised marble

surface with regular sides, in each corner of which is represented a star of eight points, and upon the face of which is the following inscription in gilded letters :

A la mémoire de
 Robert Cavalier de La Salle
 Baptisé à Rouen le 22 Novembre 1643
 En la paroisse de Saint-Herbland
 Aujourd'hui réunie à l'église-Cathédrale de Notre Dame
 Anobli le 13 Mai 1675 par Louis XIV
 En récompense des services rendus à son pays
 Mort le 19 Mars 1687
 Après avoir découvert et exploré
 Les bassins de l'Ohio et du Mississippi,
 Et pendant vingt années du Canada au Golfe du Mexique
 Fait connaître aux sauvages de l'Amérique
 La Religion Chrétienne et le nom français
 Ce monument
 Consacré à honorer son patriotisme et sa piété
 A été érigé par les soins
 De Monseigneur Thomas Archevêque de Rouen
 Primat de Normandie.
 L'An mil huit cent quatre vingt sept.

The raised surface which contains the inscription appears to mask a bronze anchor, parts of which project from its borders, in the centre at the top a section of the stock with a ring, at the bottom the point and on each side the fluke of an anchor and the end of the stock with a ring. The anchor is usually suggestive of maritime explorations, but when we consider the extent to which La Salle prosecuted his discoveries upon the great lakes and rivers of North America and that his last great discovery of Texas was the result of a maritime adventure, we can well concede the appropriateness of the emblem. To this it may be added that no man was ever so much sustained by the hope of which an anchor is the symbol as La Salle.

Recurring to the portrait and arms of La Salle, the accessories are very appropriate. The heraldic decorations at Versailles of the time of Louis XVI. as well as the architecture and furniture of that period have for characteristic details the shell and the scroll. The panel work of the time presents a series of scrolls or a combination of scroll and shell. It is fitting that the portrait and arms of La Salle should have the same environment. The conception of this use of bronze in connection with marble is classic and deserves to be revived in commemorating one so deeply imbued with the spirit of Roman heroism. Middleton in his "Ancient Rome in 1885," referring to the remains of a decorated platform behind the rostra, says "On the marble slabs are a number of metal pins, showing that they were decorated with metal emblemata or reliefs, probably of gilt bronze."

The portrait of La Salle as here represented, must be presumed to be a veritable likeness. In the *Narrative and Critical History of North America*, Vol. 4, p. 244, there is a portrait of La Salle from a design given in Grévier which, as the note on the same page informs us, is said to be based on an engraving preserved in the *Bibliothèque de Rouen*, entitled *Cavilli de La Salle, François*. In regard to this portrait, it may be observed, first, that it represents a much older person than La Salle was at the time of his death—and second, that it does not express the qualities of mind and of character which must have been stamped on the countenance of La Salle. The face, benign and irresolute, cannot be that of La Salle. The mobility and fulness of outline of the features are inconsistent with the historic conception of the man.

In the *Magazine of American History*, Vol. 8, part 1, in connection with an article by Grévier upon La Salle, there is an engraving of him and below are the words "After a photograph of the original painting." This painting is justly regarded as in a sense imaginary. It represents a

person of the age of La Salle, but not with the face or features that must have characterized him. The face is too handsome and pleasure-loving. It is a face unfurrowed by care and disappointment; untried by misfortune, unhardened by treachery. The likeness on the monument, however, corresponds to the historical conception of La Salle in age and character. It is here presented to the world under the auspices and on the responsibility of the Archbishop of Rouen, the Primate of Normandy. It cannot be supposed that any pains would be spared to obtain the most veritable likeness of La Salle extant. The engraving at Rouen cannot have escaped notice. The internal evidence, too, in its favor is very strong. By the portrait we are able to recognize the man: his adamant resolution, his dauntless courage, his haughty, intractable temper, his severe self-repression, his boundless ambition all are here discernible. We can discover a trace of the melancholy which preyed upon him in his last years, when scheme after scheme for profiting by his discoveries had failed, and he was threatened with irretrievable ruin. This is one of the rare cases where a profile is more satisfactory than the front face. Fairhold says that "a face which seen directly in front is attractive by its rounded outline, blooming color, and lovely smile, is often divested of these charms when seen in profile, and strikes only so far as it has an intellectual expression. Only where great symmetry exists connected with a preponderance of the intellectual over the sensual, will a profile appear finer than the front face." I cannot ascertain from what source the Archbishop derived the arms of La Salle, but under the circumstances they must be regarded as authentic. The shield may be briefly described in terms of heraldry, the field gules or red indicated by parallel lines drawn in pale, in chief a star argent, in base a dog courant argent. The Achievement is ensigned with the helmet in profile with the visor closed, invariably assigned to baronets, knights and esquires. This coat-of-

arms was probably assumed at the time he was ennobled by Louis XIV., May 13, 1675. This was after the discovery of the Ohio river, but before the erection of the fort and village of Frontenac, and the voyage down the Mississippi. He had at this time determined to devote his life to the discovery of a passage from the Great Lakes to the South Sea, the pathway to the East and its unlimited trade. He had also formed a scheme for the diversion of the fur trade from the English to the French by a series of forts beginning at Niagara. In the light of these projects, there is something very bright and prophetic in the device upon the shield. The dog in heraldry is the emblem of loyalty and fidelity, and this sentiment animated him in seeking to extend the dominion of France and to secure for it the trade of these vast regions. The dog, too, was a fit emblem of his life, a life of tireless pursuit, of exploration, of finding new "paths to dwell in." The star on the shield of eight points, a rare but permitted number, is suggestive of the heaven-inspired faith and zeal which supported him in a life of trials such as few have had to endure, of a purpose perhaps to penetrate regions where the stars would be his only guide, of an identification of himself in some blind fashion with the course of empire, perhaps dimly revealed to him in the strange solitudes of the West. It is a very singular coincidence that the State of Texas which he discovered on his last expedition should have adopted a single star as the device of its seal and flag.

The inscription on the monument claims more for La Salle in one particular than can be fairly conceded. It recounts that he discovered and explored the basins of the Mississippi and the Ohio rivers. This is virtually a claim that he discovered both rivers and the portion of country drained by them and their smaller tributaries. This claim requires modification. De Soto is accredited with having discovered the Mississippi river early in 1541. June 17, 1673, Marquette and Joliet, having descended the

Wisconsin reached the Mississippi river and explored it as far down as the mouth of the Arkansas river. In 1680, Hennepin explored the Illinois river and the upper Mississippi, but that he explored the Mississippi from the mouth of the Illinois to the Gulf, as he afterwards claimed, is not believed by reliable historians. As to the work of La Salle, it may be regarded as established that he discovered and explored the Ohio river, that he first explored the Mississippi from the mouth of the Arkansas to the Gulf, that he first discovered the mouths of the Mississippi and first took formal political possession of the vast region extending from the Great Lakes to the Gulf and from the Alleghanies to the Rocky Mountains in the name of the French King. While the inscription thus fails in entire accuracy it is nevertheless in the main true, a noble and impressive summary of a great life, in its objective aspects and results. On the subjective side it falls far short of giving an adequate impression of the qualities and characteristics of the man himself. Of this interior picture, an American historian has given us the form and lineaments. Of course I allude to Mr. Parkman's *La Salle*, a memorial to the great explorer destined to outlive bronze and marble.

To an assembly of scholars in the country which owes so much to La Salle, it is not just to think of him only as an explorer. He was, in fact, a statesman as well. In the first place, he anticipated the development of international law in adopting the principle that a title by discovery needs to be perfected by actual occupation. In the next place, he first conceived the idea of the commercial value of the Mississippi, and its indispensable importance to the growth and development of the great West. This idea, fully comprehended by Jefferson and John Quincy Adams, led to the acquisition of Louisiana by the United States by the treaty of April 30, 1803. Thus the Great Republic entered into his self-sacrificing labors. His original project was to ascertain whether the river which he supposed to be but the

continuation of the Ohio, emptied into the Atlantic Ocean, or the Gulf of Mexico, or the Gulf of California. His own opinion was that it discharged into the South Sea and thus would open a passage to the East. When he had satisfied himself that the river discharged into the Gulf of Mexico, he ceased to be a visionary and became a statesman. He saw that this and not the route through Canada was the destined route for the trade likely to spring up from the settlement of the great West. He therefore proposed to effect a settlement at the mouth of the Mississippi river and there to construct forts to guard its entrance. He had already established his colony on the Illinois river, erected there Fort St. Louis and begun to form the vast confederacy of the Indian tribes by which it was hoped to consolidate the power of France, to attract thither, as to a vast emporium, the fur trade of all that great region of which the Mississippi was the outlet to the sea, and to furnish a military force for the conquest of the silver mines of Mexico. Was there ever a more magnificent dream of empire than that which comprised as an outlying domain of France, Canada, the Great Lakes and the region whereof La Salle took possession in the name of the French King? In the language of Parkman, "America owes him an enduring memory, for in this masculine figure she sees the pioneer who guided her to the possession of her richest heritage."

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