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The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents

Travels and Explorations

of the Jesuit Missionaries

in New France

1610—1791

THE ORIGINAL FRENCH, LATIN, AND ITALI-
IAN TEXTS, WITH ENGLISH TRANSLA-
TIONS AND NOTES; ILLUSTRATED BY
PORTRAITS, MAPS, AND FACSIMILES

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The next day, some French people, who came to see me, went to visit her, and found her holding a Crucifix in her hand, and addressing it in a low voice: "Thou who hast died for me, be merciful to me; I wish to believe in [33] thee all my life; have pity upon my soul." I report all these details purposely, that you may see that our Savages are not so barbarous that they cannot be made children of God. I hope that there, where sin has reigned, grace will triumph. This poor woman is still living, nearer to Heaven than to health.

I shall finish this Chapter with an account of the very remarkable punishment of a Canadian Woman, who, having closed her ear to God during her sickness, seems to have been rejected at her death. When Father Brebœuf went to see her, to speak to her about receiving the faith, she laughed at him and scorned his words. Having been prostrated by sickness, and the Savages wishing to break camp, they carried her to this worthy family who have lived here for quite a long time; but, as they had no place to keep her, these Barbarians dragged her to the fort; if we had not been so far away, they would no doubt have brought her to us, for I am inclined to think that they presented her to our Frenchmen because we had received with so much kindness the two deceased Christian Savages. [34] Monsieur de Champlain, as it was already late, gave her shelter [page 141] for one night. Those who were in the room where she was placed, had to leave, as they could not bear the odor from this woman.

In the morning, Monsieur de Champlain caused a number of the Savages to be called; and, being reproached by him for their cruelty in abandoning this creature, who was of their tribe, they took her and dragged her toward their Cabins, repulsing her as they would a dog, and giving her no covering. This wretched woman, finding herself abandoned by her own people and exposed to the severity of the cold, asked that we should be called. But, as there were no Frenchmen there, the Savages did not care to take the trouble to come all the way to our house, a good league from their Cabins; so that hunger, cold, disease, and the children of the Savages, as it is reported, killed her. We did not hear of this tragedy until some days after her death. If we had a Hospital here, all the sick people of the [35] country, and all the old people, would be there. As to the men, we will take care of them according to our means; but, in regard to the women, it is not becoming for us to receive them into our houses. [page 143]

CHAPTER III.

ON THE MEANS OF CONVERTING THE SAVAGES.

THE great show of power made at first by the Portuguese in the East and West Indies inspired profound admiration in the minds of the Indians, so that these people embraced, without a contradiction, the belief of those whom they admired. Now the following is, it seems to me, the way in which to acquire an ascendancy over our Savages.

First, to check the progress of those who overthrow Religion, and to make ourselves feared by the Iroquois, who have killed some of our men, as every one knows, and who recently massacred two hundred Hurons, and [36] took more than a hundred prisoners. This is, in my opinion, the only door through which we can escape the contempt into which the negligence of those who have heretofore held the trade of this country has thrown us, through their avarice.

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The second means of commending ourselves to the Savages, to induce them to receive our holy faith, would be to send a number of capable men to clear and cultivate the land, who, joining themselves with others who know the language, would work for the Savages, on condition that they would settle down, and themselves put their hands to the work, living in houses that would be built for their use; by this means becoming located, and seeing this miracle of charity in their behalf, they could be more [page 145] easily instructed and won. While conversing this Winter with my Savages, I communicated to them this plan, assuring them that when I knew their language perfectly, I would help them cultivate the land if I could have some men, and if they wished [37] to stop roving,—representing to them the wretchedness of their present way of living, and influencing them very perceptibly, for the time being The Sorcerer, having heard me, turned toward his people and said, " See how boldly this black robe lies in our presence." I asked him why he thought I was lying. " Because, " said he, " we never see in this world men so good as thou sayest, who would take the trouble to help us without hope of reward, and to employ so many men to aid us without taking anything from us; if thou shouldst do that, " he added, " thou wouldst secure the greater part of the Savages, and they would all believe in thy words."

I may be mistaken; but, if I can draw any conclusion from the things I see, it seems to me that not much ought to be hoped for from the Savages as long as they are wanderers; you will instruct them today, tomorrow hunger snatches your hearers away, forcing them to go and seek their food in the rivers and woods. Last year I stammered out the Catechism to a [38] goodly number of children; as soon as the ships departed, my birds flew away, some in one direction and some in another. This year, I hoped to see them again, as I speak a little better; but, as they have settled on the other side of the great river St. Lawrence, my hopes have been frustrated. To try to follow them, as many Religious would be needed as there are cabins, and still we would not attain our object; for they are so occupied in seeking [page 147] livelihood in these woods, that they have not time, so to speak, to save themselves. Besides, I do not believe that, out of a hundred Religious, there would be ten who could endure the hardships to be in following them. I tried to live among them last Autumn; I was not there a week before I was attacked by a violent fever, which caused me to return to our little house to recover my health. Being cured, I tried to follow them during the Winter, and I was very ill the greater part of the time. These reasons, and many others that I might give, were I not afraid of being tedious, make me think that we shall work a great deal and advance very little, if we do not make these Barbarians stationary. [39] As for persuading them to till the soil of their own accord, without being helped, I very much doubt whether we shall be able to attain this for a long time, for they know nothing whatever about it. Besides, where will they store their harvests? As their cabins are made of bark, the first frost will spoil all the roots and pumpkins that they will have gathered. If they plant peas and Indian corn, they have no place in their huts to store them. But who will feed them while they are beginning to clear the land? For they live only from one day to another, having ordinarily no provisions to sustain them during the time that they must be clearing. Finally, when they had killed themselves with hard work, they could not get from the land half their living, until it was cleared and they understood how to make the best use of it.

Now, with the assistance of a few good, industrious men, it would be easy to locate a few families, especially as some of them have already spoken to [page 149] me about it, thus of themselves becoming accustomed, little by little, to extract something from the earth.

I know well there are persons of [40] good judgment who believe that, although the Savages are nomadic, the good seed of the Gospel will not fail to take root and bring

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forth fruit in their souls, although more slowly, as they can only be instructed at intervals. They imagine also that, if a few families come over here, as they are already beginning to do, the Savages will follow the example of our French and will settle down to cultivate the land. I myself was impressed with these ideas, when we first came over here; but the intercourse which I have had with these people, and the difficulty that men accustomed to a life of idleness have in embracing one of hard work, such as cultivating the soil, cause me to believe now that if they are not helped they will lose heart, especially the Savages at Tadoussac. As to those of the three rivers, where our French People are going to plant a new colony this year, they have promised that they will settle down there and plant Indian corn; this seems to me not altogether assured, but probable, inasmuch as their predecessors once had [41] a good village in that place, which they abandoned on account of the invasions of their enemies, the Hiroquois.

The Captain of that region told me that the land there was quite good, and they liked it very much. If they become sedentary, as they are now minded to do, we foresee there a harvest more abundant in the blessings of Heaven than in the fruits of the earth.

The third means of making ourselves welcome to these people, would be to erect here a seminary for little boys, and in time one for girls, under the [page 151] direction of some brave mistress, whom zeal for the glory of God, and a desire for the salvation of these people, will bring over here, with a few Companions animated by the same courage. May it please his divine Majesty to inspire some to so noble an enterprise, and to divest them of any fear that the weakness of their sex might induce in them at the thought of crossing so many seas and of living among Barbarians.

In the last voyage there came some women who were pregnant, and they easily surmounted these difficulties, as others had [42] done before them. There is also some pleasure in taming the souls of the Savages, and preparing them to receive the seed of Christianity. And then experience makes us feel certain that God, who shows his goodness and power to all, has, nevertheless, for those who expose themselves freely and suffer willingly in his service, favors seasoned with so much sweetness, and succors them in the midst of their dangers with so prompt and paternal assistance, that often they do not feel their trials, but their pain is turned to pleasure and their perils to a peculiar consolation. But I would like to keep here, where we are, the children of the Hurons. Father Brebœuf leads us to hope that we shall have some, if he goes with our Fathers into those well-peopled countries, and if there is anything with which to found a seminary. The reason why I would not like to take the children of one locality [and teach them] in that locality itself, but rather in some other place, is because these Barbarians cannot bear to have their children punished, nor even scolded, not being able to refuse anything to a [43] crying child. They carry this to such an extent that upon [page 153] the slightest pretext they would take them away before they were educated. But if the little Hurons, or the children of more distant tribes, are kept here, a great many advantages will result, for we would not be annoyed and distracted by the fathers while instructing the children; it will also compel these people to show good treatment to the French who are in their country, or at least not to do them any injury. And, lastly, we shall obtain, by the grace of God our Lord, the object for which we came into this distant country; namely, the conversion of these nations.

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CHAPTER IV.

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were. "We have seen them," they answered; "it is an animal that has a long tail, 4 feet, and a head; we can see all that," they said.

I asked them about the thunder; they said that they did not know what animal it was; that it ate snakes, [98] and sometimes trees; that the Hurons believed it to be a very large bird. They were led to this belief by a hollow sound made by a kind of swallow which appears here in the Summer. I have not seen any of these birds in France, but have examined some of them here. They have a beak, a head, and a form like the swallow, except that they are a little larger; they fly about in the evening, repeatedly making a dull noise. The Hurons say that they make this noise from behind, as does also the bird which they think is the thunder; and that there is only one man who has seen this bird, and he only once in his lifetime. This is what my old man told me.

These are some of their superstitions. How much dust there is in their eyes, and how much trouble there will be to remove it that they may see the beautiful light of truth! I believe, nevertheless, that any one who knew their language perfectly, in order to give them good reasons promptly, would soon make them laugh at their own stupidity; for sometimes I have made them ashamed and confused, although I speak almost entirely by my hands, I mean by signs.

I am going to conclude this chapter with a [page 225] surprise; they complain in France of a [99] Mass, if it lasts more than half an hour; a Sermon limited to an hour seems too long; those Religious services are performed hardly once a week; and yet those poor ignorant people cry and howl all the time.

The Sorcerer often brings them together at midnight, or at two or three o'clock in the morning, in a cold which freezes everything. Day and night he holds them with bated breath, during not one nor two hours, but three or four in succession, to perform their ridiculous devotions. They make the poor women go out from their Cabins, rising at midnight and carrying their little children over the snow to their neighbors. Men, harassed by the work of the day, who have eaten but little and hunted a long time, at the first cry waken and promptly betake themselves to this Witches' Sabbath; and, what will seem beyond all belief, I have never known a single complaint to arise among them, neither among the women nor the men, nor even the children, each one showing himself prompt and glad to obey the voice of the Sorcerer or juggler. Alas, my God, will the souls that love you be [100] without feeling, when they see more zeal shown for folly than for truth? Is Belial more lovely than Jesus? Why then is he more ardently loved, more promptly obeyed, and more devotedly adored? But let us pass on.

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CHAPTER V.

ON THE GOOD THINGS WHICH ARE FOUND AMONG THE SAVAGES.

If we begin with physical advantages, I will say that they possess these in abundance. They are tall, erect, strong, well proportioned, agile; and there is nothing effeminate in their appearance. Those little Fops that are seen elsewhere are only caricatures of men, compared with our Savages. I almost believed, heretofore, that the Pictures of the Roman Emperors represented the ideal of the painters rather than men who had ever

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existed, so strong and powerful are their heads; but I see here upon the shoulders of these people the heads of Julius Caesar, of Pompey, of Augustus, of Otho, and of others, that I have seen in France, drawn upon [101] paper, or in relief on medallions.

As to the mind of the Savage, it is of good quality. I believe that souls are all made from the same stock, and that they do not materially differ; hence, these barbarians having well formed bodies, and organs well regulated and well arranged, their minds ought to work with ease. Education and instruction alone are lacking. Their soul is a soil which is naturally good, but loaded down with all the evils that a land abandoned since the birth of the world can produce. I naturally compare our Savages with certain villagers, because both are usually without education, though our Peasants are superior in this [page 229] regard; and yet I have not seen any one thus far, of those who have come to this country, who does not confess and frankly admit that the Savages are more intelligent than our ordinary peasants.

Moreover, if it is a great blessing to be free from a great evil, our Savages are happy; for the two tyrants who provide hell and torture for many of our Europeans, do not reign [102] in their great forests,—I mean ambition and avarice. As they have neither political organization, nor offices, nor dignities, nor any authority, for they only obey their Chief through good will toward him, therefore they never kill each other to acquire these honors. Also, as they are contented with a mere living, not one of them gives himself to the Devil to acquire wealth.

They make a pretence of never getting angry, not because of the beauty of this virtue, for which they have not even a name, but for their own contentment and happiness, I mean, to avoid the bitterness caused by anger. The Sorcerer said to me one day, speaking of one of our Frenchmen, "He has no sense, he gets angry; as for me, nothing can disturb me; let hunger oppress me, let my nearest relation pass to the other life, let the Hiroquois, our enemies, massacre our people, I never get angry." What he says is not an article of faith; for, as he is more haughty than any other Savage, so I have seen him oftener out of humor than any of them; it is true also that he often restrains and governs himself by force, especially [103] when I expose his foolishness. I have only heard one Savage pronounce this word, Ninichcatihin, "I am angry," and he only said it once. But I noticed that they kept their eyes on him, for when these Barbarians are angry, they are dangerous and unrestrained. [page 231]

Whoever professes not to get angry, ought also to make a profession of patience; the Savages surpass us to such an extent, in this respect, that we ought to be ashamed. I saw them, in their hardships and in their labors, suffer with cheerfulness. My host, wondering at the great number of people who I told him were in France, asked me if the men were good, if they did -not become angry, if they were patient. I have never seen such patience as is shown by a sick Savage. You may yell, storm, jump, dance, and he will scarcely ever complain. I found myself, with them, threatened with great suffering; they said to me, "We shall be sometimes two days, sometimes three, without eating, for lack of food; take courage, *Chihiné*, let thy soul be strong to endure suffering and hardship; keep thyself from being sad, otherwise thou wilt be sick; see how we do not cease to laugh, [104] although we have little to eat." One thing alone casts them down,—it is when they see death, for they fear this beyond measure; take away this apprehension from the Savages, and they will endure all kinds of degradation and discomfort, and all kinds of trials and suffering very patiently. Later, I shall give several examples of this, which I am reserving for the end of these chapters.

They are very much attached to each other, and agree admirably. You do not see any disputes, quarrels, enmities, or reproaches among them. Men leave the arrangement of the household to the women, without interfering with them; they cut, and decide, and

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give away as they please, without making the husband angry. I have never seen my host ask a giddy young woman that he had with him what became of the provisions, although they were disappearing [page 233] very fast. I have never heard the women complain because they were not invited to the feasts, because the men ate the good pieces, or because they had to work continually,—going in search of the wood for the fire, making the Houses, dressing the skins, and busying themselves in [105] other very laborious work. Each one does her own little tasks, gently and peacefully, without any disputes. It is true, however, that they have neither gentleness nor courtesy in their utterance; and a Frenchman could not assume the accent, the tone, and the sharpness of their voices without becoming angry, yet they do not.

They are not vindictive among themselves, although they are toward their enemies. I will here give an example that ought to confound many Christians. In the stress of our famine, a young Savage from another quarter came to see us, who was as hungry as we were. The day on which he came was a day of fasting for him and for us, for there was nothing to eat. The next day, our hunters having taken a few Beavers, a feast was made, at which he was well treated; he was told besides that the trail of a Moose had been seen, and that they were going to hunt for it the next day; he was invited to remain and to have his share of it; he answered that he could stay no longer, and, having inquired about the place where the animal was, he went away. Our Hunters, having found and killed this Elk the [106] next day, buried it in the snow, according to their custom, to send for it on the following day. Now, during the night, my young Savage searched so well, that he found the dead beast, and took away a good part of it without saying a word. When the theft [page 235] became known to our people, they did not get into a rage and utter maledictions against the thief,—all their anger consisted in sneering at him; and yet this was almost taking away our life, this stealing our food when we were unable to obtain any more. Some time afterward, this thief came to see us; I wanted to represent to him the seriousness of his offence, but my host imposed silence; and when this poor man attributed his theft to the dogs, he was not only excused, but even received to live with us in the same Cabin. Then he went for his wife, whom he carried upon his back, for her legs are paralyzed; a young female relative who lives with him brought his little son; and all four took their places in our little hut, without ever being reproached for this theft; on the contrary they were received very kindly, and were treated as if [107] belonging to the family. Tell a Savage that another Savage has slandered him, and he will bow the head and not say a word; if they meet each other afterward, they will pretend not to know anything about it, acting as if nothing had been said. They treat each other as brothers; they harbor no spite against those of their own nation.

They are very generous among themselves and even make a show of not loving anything, of not being attached to the riches of the earth, so that they may not grieve if they lose them. Not long ago a dog tore a beautiful Beaver robe belonging to one of the Savages, and he was the first one to laugh about it. One of the greatest insults that can be offered to them, is to say, "That man likes everything, he is stingy." If you refuse them anything, here is their reproach, as I remarked last year: *Khisakhitan Sakhita*, "Thou lovest that, love it as much as thou [page 237] wilt." They do not open the hand half-way when they give,—I mean among themselves, for they are as ungrateful as possible toward strangers. You will see them take care of their kindred, the children of their friends, widows, orphans, and old men, never reproaching them in the least, giving them abundantly, [108] sometimes whole Moose. This is truly the sign of a good heart and of a generous soul.

As there are many orphans among these people,—for they die in great numbers since they are addicted to drinking wine and brandy,—these poor children are scattered

among the Cabins of their uncles, aunts, or other relatives. Do not suppose that they are snubbed and reproached because they eat the food of the household. Nothing of the kind, they are treated the same as the children of the father of the family, or at least almost the same, and are dressed as well as possible.

They are not fastidious in their food, beds, and clothes, but are very slovenly. They never complain of what is given them; if it be cold, if it be warm, it does not matter. When the food is cooked, it is divided without waiting for any one, not even the master of the house; a share is reserved for him, which is given to him cold. I have never heard my host complain because they did not wait for him, if he were only a few steps from the Cabin. They often sleep upon the ground, at the sign of the [109] stars. They will pass one, two, and three days without eating, not ceasing to row, hunt, and fatigue themselves as much as they can. It will be seen in the course of this relation, that all I have said in this chapter is very true; and yet I would not dare to assert that I have seen one act of real moral virtue in a Savage. [page 239] They have nothing but their own pleasure and satisfaction in view. Add to this the fear of being blamed, and the glory of seeming to be good hunters, and you have all that actuates them in their transactions.

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CHAPTER VI.

ON THEIR VICES AND THEIR IMPERFECTIONS.

THE Savages, being filled with errors, are also haughty and proud. Humility is born of truth, vanity of error and falsehood. They are void of the knowledge of truth, and are in consequence, mainly occupied with thought of themselves. They imagine that they ought by right of birth, to enjoy the liberty of Wild ass colts, rendering no homage to any one whomsoever, except when they like. They have reproached me a hundred times because we [110] fear our Captains, while they laugh at and make sport of theirs. All the authority of their chief is in his tongue's end; for he is powerful in so far as he is eloquent; and, even if he kills himself talking and haranguing, he will not be obeyed unless he pleases the Savages.

I do not believe that there is a nation under heaven more given to sneering and bantering than that of the Montagnais. Their life is passed in eating, laughing, and making sport of each other, and of all the people they know. There is nothing serious about them, except occasionally, when they make a pretense among us of being grave and dignified; but among themselves they are real buffoons and genuine children, who ask only to laugh. Sometimes I annoyed them a little, especially the Sorcerer, by calling them children, and showing them that I never [page 243] could place any reliance upon all their answers; because, if I questioned them about one thing, they told me about something else, only to get something to laugh and jest about; and consequently I could not know when they were speaking seriously, or when they were jesting. The usual conclusion of their discourses and conversations is: "Really, we did make [111] a great deal of sport of such and such a one."

I have shown in my former letters how vindictive the Savages are toward their enemies, with what fury and cruelty they treat them, eating them after they have made them suffer all that an incarnate fiend could invent. This fury is common to the women as well as to the men, and they even surpass the latter in this respect. I have said that they