

The foundation of the Mission of St. Mary of the Lake, (Gannan-thaa,) at the old Iroquois'

Judging from the many perils and hardships it involved, as well as the various thrilling incidents it furnished, and still more by the situations most dreadful it oftentimes created, the founding of the Mission of Our Lady of the Lake was a mighty enterprise, and thus constitutes an historic event of the old Indian mission time, such as to deserve a whole poem to celebrate the courage of those pioneers who launched on the daring adventure that led to it...

The Jesuits of New France, at the time, knew well what the undertaking involved of daring acts... and even along with ~~that~~ ^{affording} ~~but a skantle assurance~~ as to its result; they knew also by an experience acquired from many years of frequent dealings with those Indians, comprised under the designation of Iroquois, what meant for them in matter of personal security to entrust their lives to the sole and entire discretion of those people so rash and violent in their recklessness....

In spite of their seeming good will and tone of sincerity in seeking ^{once more} the amity of the French, despite their earnest pleading for Missionaries to be sent to their country with the specified purpose to ^{in their midst} ~~establishing~~ an elaborate and permanent mission--- no matter the amount of benevolence displayed by the Iroquois ambassadors in their peace negotiations, nevertheless the French Governor and the Jesuits of Quebec, remained extremely perplexed as to what course to take ^{instance, and once} ~~in the present~~ ^{having} having seriously pondered all the moral motives upon which to base their decision, they at last gave their assent, they could not easily succeed in keeping their minds clear of all rear thought persistently warning them that in this whole maneuvering, an immense plot was being devised by the shrewd Iroquois to involve all the members of the projected mission in a general massacre, once definitely established in their midst.

The Departure of the Founders from Quebec

As soon as the resolution was taken, all those destined to

partake in the undertaking were urged to hasten the preparatives of the voyage. Every one, then, proceeded actively to his own preparation; some, filling and strapping their havresacks; others picking and assembling their particular utillages according to attribution and services of each, etc. (I)

It was for a few days an endless going from the Fort to the shore and back, of individuals busy carrying packs, ^{while others} and filling the boats ranged in a line along the shore..

Although limited to strictest requirement, the cargo amounted to quite a load, for, the supplies had to be somewhat in accordance with the crew which itself was calculated after the importance of the undertaking. Fifty Frenchmen, workers and soldiers, under the command of a military Officer, Monsieur Dupuis. Four Jesuit Fathers: François Lemercier, in quality of Superior--Menard, Fremin, Dablon; Three lay-Brothers, and forty Hurons besides, in all forming a total of one hundred people who in the morning of the departure stood on the shore, in readiness to embark. Two large barks with sails and oars, and several lighter crafts, mainly bark canoes were put to contribution to hold comfortably all the travelers in addition to the cargo ~~addition to the cargo.~~

"The small but quite spectacular fleet pulled off shore on May 17, 1656, taking its full swing on the great St. Lawrence, under the eyes of almost all ^{what} Quebec counted of French and Indians of diverse nations or tribes, who, from the shore were shouting to us the expression of their best wishes in the Lord for a speedy and happy voyage," wrote the chronicler, a member of the expedition, and continuing: "Many of those who thus acclaimed us, were following us with eyes of compassion and with trembling hearts, holding us as many possible victims destined to the fires and cruelty of those tribes toward whom we were going."

As the chronicler proceeds from date to date in his itinerary so shall we follow him step by step in our narrative.

At the end of their first day's journey, having ~~already~~ travelled a distance of thirty-six miles, they stopped for the night, not far below a small foreland called "Pointe Saint Croix," The Missionaries estimating that spot bearing a so mystical name, a fit place wherein to celebrate the mystery of the cross, resolution was reached that the caravan should halt there, on the following morning for the purpose of saying mass.

But through a mysterious mixture of inadvertancy and oblivion on the part of the captain and pilots, after putting up the sails by a fair wind they started before daylight, and continuing on, passed the 'Point' without drawing ashore contrarily to prearrangement.

Heaven was watching over the expeditioners by keeping them from the presently infested place, Three hundred Mohawks happened to be encamped thereabouts. Had Heaven permitted these barbarians to attack the pilgrims during the celebration of the Mass what a disaster would have ensued! Through God's mercy they were spared that dreadful calamity.

"These Mohawks poured out their gall begotten from their lost chance with our party by attacking on their way downward ~~but~~ last canoes," states the chronicler, "upsetting one of them in the river, wounding one of the two Jesuit brothers by a double discharge of a gun. They put the Hurons into bonds, and illtreated the few Onnondaga Iroquois, sent by their nation to Quebec to urge and hasten our coming to their country. After pleading and menacing, the Onnondagas succeeded in having the attackers come to terms, who, then released the Hurons and proceeded to make apology to all for

these offenses as if the whole unpleasant incident had been the mere effect of their having mistaken them for other people.

May 19th, our travellers reached Three Rivers, where they made a prolonged halt. They resumed their journey only on May 29 to be welcomed by the inhabitants of Montreal two days later. The following day, June 1st, one canoe was dispatched from the latter place, by the expeditioners, to the Onnondagas, with a message advising these Iroquois of their direct march toward their country.

June 8th, they bowed to Montreal in taking leave of the place in twenty canoes well freighted--- they had discarded their bigger crafts, rendered unavailable by so many rapids or cascades that are to be encountered on the immense St. Lawrence, between Montreal and Lake Ontario.

Our expeditioners had hardly gone beyond sight of Montreal, five or six miles above the town, when a squad of Mohawks caught sight of them. These marauders anticipating at first sight that they were Hurons with whom they had no peace, prepared for an assault; but, on further inspection, seeing their representative number and imposing force, they did not want to engender trouble, but resolved rather upon taking to the woods for concealment.

"Afterward, made conscious of their error" says the Chronicler, "as they saw our banner displaying in the air, as we sped on, the sacred Name of Jesus painted in large letters on an oriflame of white taffeta, they were reassured and thereupon determined in all confidence to make a peaceful approach onto us."

But, for their misfortune they had not counted with the Onnondaga subjects to be found associated with the French excursioners, by whom they were received with words of abuse, reproaching them their treachery and their wanton brigandage committed of late against them; and, as by way of retaliation they leaped into the canoes of these misled congeners of theirs, seized their arms, and

laid hands on all the things that were worth taking away from their baggage. Here the Author of the Relation sounds the note of sympathy for those despoiled victims, in concluding his narration of this brutal incident by the following reflexion; "such was the sole benefit and consolation these unfortunate ^{people} beings brought back with them for ~~their~~ ^{in all confidence} having come in ~~benevolently~~ ^{To} greet us."

In keeping along the shore of Lake St. Louis, one cunity of their fleet, by an unavoidable mishap ^{sustained a wreck} ~~were wrecked~~—an accident liable to happen sometimes on account of the weak material employed in the construction of these small Indian vessels of old. The alarm ^{given} of the accident, all the crew as soon drew ashore. As they were light, these boats were also quick to build; in a fraction of a day's work a new ^{CRAFT} ~~one~~ was already in due shape to resurrect the defunct one.

With Lake St. Louis behind them, our travellers were soon challenged by the angry temper of the River, by which they were called upon to engage in fierce battles against its currents which seemed as if always trying to keep travelers from progressing by launching forth ^{THEIR} ~~the~~ tumbling and rebounding billows ⁵ with such a rush as to perfectly justify their being called rapids...

June 13— ^{to June 24 16th} ~~On that day, and for three consecutive days,~~ Navigation was particularly hard, as described by the Author of the old Relation. "We were engaged into torrents of waters so violent that we were constrained to go into the water up to our waists and use all our might hauling and pushing our canoes." Sometimes their only means to make headway was to carry them entirely. "We were getting drenched all over.," notes the chronicler, "For when we had our lower halves in the river, sometimes, the rain pouring down from heaven drenched as much our upper halves."

But so much water had no power to damp the missionary ardor with which the Fathers were animated, for, we read this reflection from the chronicler, on the occasion of a certain toiling day; "The sum of holy joy ^{which} Heaven diffused in our souls from toiling for God's Kingdom outweighs overwhelmingly the amount of fatigues accumulated in our limbs from these hard navigation days."

Moose and deer, by their frequent appearance made the hunt so good that they were killing game more than sufficient to keep their meat reserve to answer their daily consummation during all that particular phase of their voyage.

On the 17th of the same month they came up to ~~the outlet of~~ a certain lake which had been nameless since the epoch of its formation... a disadvantage however which has been taken away from it, since the day it opened its large gates for the passage of the epical founders of the Mission of Our Lady of the Lake.

"On our way," as the old narrative has it, "we arrived at the lower end of a lake which some travellers used to confound with Lake St. Louis; "We agreed in calling it St. Francois to distinguish it from the preceeding ~~one~~ called St. Louis."

It is referred by the same informant as having a surface of thirty by ten miles. It owes its existence to a copious and magnificent enlargement of the St. Lawrence as is the case with Lake St. Louis. "Groups of beautiful islands occupy large spaces of its surface at both its extremities."

We may easily take for granted every member of the party who attended the christening ceremony agreed perfectly in admitting that with such dimension and at such ^{an} age, the lake in question was old and big enough indeed to be baptized.

On June the 25th, a group of Indian hunters seeing the canoes of our French Travellers, frightened by such an imposing fleet, took to the woods for safety, abandoning canoes and baggages on the shore, which was by no means wise of them--for Indians and French

helped themselves equally freely with what they found in the canoes of the fleeing hunters—arms, beaver skins and diverse serviceable articles.. But, after, one of the hunters being caught and recognized as pertaining to the Andastague Indians, a non inimical nation, the French repaired their predatory deed, by refunding with apology all the material substance of their spoliation; but their Indian companions less susceptible to scruple of conscience and to sentiment of humanity, did not feel compelled in their rough nature to perform a similar act of justice and civility toward the poor despoiled victims.

June 26, in the evening, while the party was quietly reposing in a provisory encampment put up for the night, moanings such as uttered by a person in worst predicament, happened to strike the ears of the camping party; the lugubrious sounds emitted were reaching the camp quite clearly, amplified by the stillness of the night and the water of the lake as a carrying medium. Suspicions arose naturally in the minds of the campers, that it might possibly be some miserable captive actually fleeing away from the hands of the Iroquois to escape an abominable fate, and reduce to extremety resulting from fatigue and starvation.

Thereupon Monsieur Dupuis, the officer in charge, commanded to beat the drum as a sign to him of the presence of their regiment at a close distance ^{from} to him. The poor man too shy or too timorous for hazarding a spontaneous appearance, came along drudgingly toward the encampment as soon as he had heard the drum.

The pitiful personage revealed himself a Huron Indian, named Joachim Ondakout, a very good christian well known in Quebec, recently made war prisoner with many of his compatriots by the three hundred Mohawk warriors at Pointe Ste. Croix, as mentioned above. Bent, therefrom, on continuing their raiding and plundering, this mightily sanguinary

regiment of men-hunters kept going down toward Quebec by the St. Lawrence, and made the Ile D'Orlean the theatre of their brigandage. On this island was found, at the time, the unfortunate small colony of Hurons who had migrated from their country to Quebec for safety, and finally had settled thereon, two years after the destruction of their beloved country by the same Iroquois.

This Huron's condition was most pitiful, he was but skin and bones; more bones than skin, for he had half his body scorched at the stake, at the Mohawk village--Osserneson. He had just undergone the first stage of his martyrdom, according as sentenced by his captors. The last series of tortures destined to finish him were suspended above his head just for the night, when through a providential way he succeeded in escaping. He had run away with hardly any clothes on, and kept tramping and tramping in this horrible condition seventeen days with nothing to eat except wild berries such only as could be found across his way. He had traversed immense stretches of land covered with dense forest without issue, when his plaintive voice was heard at the encampment, where he received such a timely succour that saved his life. The first attention given him consisted in a medecine to dispose his stomach debilitated by a long deficient diet to receive food without injury. Then having set him in sufficient shape, his charitable hosts put to his disposal a well freighted canoe with a Huron boy to carry him down to Quebec among his people.

On the night of June 27, having successfully fought their way through the last rapids to be encountered on the St. Lawrence, the pilgrims were already halfway between Montreal and the Onnondaga country, the term of their journey. At that phase of their hard voyage, on the point to enter upon the superb Lake Ontario (then called Lac des Iroquois) the travelling squad could raise their heads in hope and look forward for a few days at least of calm and relatively restful navigation on such magnificent expanse of water as afforded by the lake, free of current and rapids...

Hardly two days of smooth paddling had made our pilgrims forget the strain sustained from their previous toilsome navigation on the St. Lawrence, when, alas! another serious concern began to harass them. It was the fact that their month's provisions were rapidly going down. Thus, in presence of that alarming reality, seeing themselves with no prospect of sure catch of any sort looming up for quite a term yet, the crew was therefrom urged to go at a greater speed, and by longer paddling days, even with encroachment upon the night time in order to escape the pursuit of such an enemy as famine.

On one of those days while cruising on Lake Ontario, an hideous object came incidentally into sight: it revealed certain canoes moving slowly towards the Pilgrims and passed alongside of them like horrifying shades or silhouettes of the underworld. Those canoes, three in number, were mounted by Mohawk men-hunters holding in display four human scalps taken over Nez-percé Indians (a tribe of the west), ~~which~~ and all fresh-tore off from their genuine possessors. Besides these Mohawks had with them three war-captives, -one woman and two children.

Moreover to render the spectacle ~~themore~~ ^{more} ludicrous and for a better ^{display of} their military valor, the spoliators had taken care to suspend ~~them~~ ^{their boat} to tops of masts their hairy spoils, which, under the blowing breeze, ~~as the~~ ^{were going,} described in the air arcs and sections of arcs, like weird birds that keep flapping about a certain fixed point...

On July the 1st a canoe was looming in the distance, our French sailors started in a race with their canoes pointed towards the apparition; overtaking it, they found that the occupants were Indians of the Onnondagas. Right there these apprised the French and Missionaries of their being expected by their tribesmen and that Father Chaumonot who had been left among Onnondagas was feeling well.

July the 3rd, under the menace of famine, the flottilla made haste to reach a place called "Ottiatannehengue" well known for its wealth of fish in summer season, and where they therefore hoped to

find successful Indian fishers with plenty of fish stored up, and be all likely in position to supply to their long-felt need of food. So, for a warning to the people of the encampment that they were coming, Monsieur Dupuis ordered the discharge of two small cannons of his artillery. But to their great disappointment not a single pair of human ears were there to hear the cannons nor any individual to succour them—people and fish were all gone; it was just past the season for either. In this juncture a messenger was dispatched to Onnondaga village to bring the news of their progressive journey and to negotiate without delay about food to be sent immediately. He started under the stipulation that he should push his canoe diligently by day and night. In spite of all his haste, this messenger could not soon return to the waiting party, as he had ninety miles to travel to reach Onnondaga. In the hope of obtaining quicker relief, one of the French was sent to a nearer place; but unfortunately he found nobody there either to afford the required succour., the place being equally deserted.

The fishing-nets of the French, although kept constantly lowered deep, remained empty, and the travellers' stomachs too by way of consequence.

At this period, Dame Famine was holding them by the throat--according to the Chronicler's expression. Furthermore, in addition to that already full measure of adversities and trying circumstances, Father Lamerrier, the superior, became ill; likely a result of the famine and fatigue combined. In this predicament, the worst was that the only thing needed to afford him relief, food, was totally lacking. Nothing on hand to help the sick Father to get better, except strictly what could be provided by Mother Nature,, the ground to lie on, the sky for covering, and wild berries for diet. The kind of berries mentioned here in the Old Relation, were cranberries, called "atoka" by the Indians of the time. It was incumbent upon the young members of the expedition to supply the whole crew with this food by going to a nearby prairie to pick them, which in their ^{dire} necessity and

hunger they found tasty, although being by themselves not so much endowed with savour nor with nourishing quality. At this time conditions were so hard for the travellers that the Indian element of the party, who should have been the last to suffer from the famine as being supposedly more accustomed to severe diet, found the actual pressure so hard that their resistance failing, they were seen dwindling away from the party one after another until five only remained constant out of forty as they were at the start.

The fifth and sixth of July, their fishing attempt resulted at last in ^a certain catch, a medium sized pike; as there were sixty to partake of it there was hardly a mouthful for each. However they were advancing all the same; for, on the seventh they arrived at the mouth of Gannanthaha river; which gives, by the gathering of its water into a basin, existence to the lake of the same name...on whose shore the Missionaries had decided to establish their head-quarters. The following day they saw ahead of them a rapid of the wildest temper to be encountered. It was more than enough to discourage men going on with empty stomachs for days; they had for nourishing support the previous evening, one drop of liquor which the commander Dupuis had distributed to each. They were deadly-pale already, but their paleness still grew in shade in presence of this challenging rush of waters.

Their weak endeavor however resulted into an advancement of three miles. But the task of the day over---part of the men falling sick, others growing despondent for lack of strength, everything converged to indicate that they had gone to the limit of all efforts in effective travelling.

At last their trial drew to an end, when appeared to their languishing eyes a canoe loaded with provisions. Here, the pilgrims were forced to exclaim: "God's providence is admirable!" according to the chronicler, and immediately after, the following text is read "Deducit ad inferos reducite."

"The relieving canoe was making head on with such a speed that

he seemed," notes the chronicler, "to be advancing more by strokes of bird's wings than by strokes of oars, and he continues with the following typical expressions; "The very sight of this long wanted succour, by cheering our hearts, was producing the illusion of a genuine sustentation. Our strength was entering by our eyes, and before we sat to eat, our fatigue had vanished; the food by its very presence, had as by a magical effect, the virtue to bring back health as well as joy."

The whole flotilla drew to shore, as the canoe savior arrived. *There was a harangue first delivered by the captain of the boat to the address of the French party. A Harangue was not what the travellers needed most. But we must know that the Iroquois of old were great haranguers and were putting discourses in all their public ceremonies, and the French had to take patience with that ancestral custom.* ~~Its first mate, after a complimentary harangue, which he delivered with warm accents to the waiting Founders, in the name of the Onnodague people and Father Chomonot, immediately ordered the boat released of its burden upon the shore; then, bags of corn-flour and numbers of large salmon~~ *The complimentary address finished,* already cooked were offered and served to the finished travellers...

to in their present hard circumstances The rescued party rendered thanks to God, according to the Old Relation, for so opportune an intervention. Forthright the large boiling pot is suspended over the fire for the preparation of the "sagamite" and happiness together with plentifulness had returned to the camp. "One single day is enough to rub out of memory the sufferings of ten bad ones," remarks here the Author of the Relation, "and nothing remained of our famine except the glorious merit of having suffered something for Our Dear Lord Jesus."

Henceforth, to the end of their journey it was a blessed abundance; even the river by an effect of God's munificence became as by way of compensation the more generous to their regard according as it ~~anteriorly~~ *had previously* ~~had~~ showed itself more strictly shut up to generosity; for they began to draw from its bosom more fish than they could possibly consume.

On the 10th of July, toward evening, they came within a short day's journey ~~from~~ *within* the lake where the mission's quarters were to be raised. There, they received the first welcome of the Iroquois nations by the mouth of one of the foremost captains of the Onondagas. In a harangue he gave interpretation as how great his joy was and that

of his tribesmen, arising from the fact of their coming. "The four nations," he added, "together with the elders who wait for you are likewise participating in the same joy."

On the 11th day at three o'clock, the pilgrims arrived at the entrance of Lake Gannanthaha.

The ancients among the Onnondagas knowing the missionaries' determination to establish their quarters on the shore of this lake, gathered thither with a multitude of Indians to assist at the arrival of the fathers with the contingent of Frenchmen accompanying them. This lake is said by the chronicler to be at the time forming an expanse of water of six by three miles. Now follows a description of the Lake in the records. Three particularities are recorded; the existence of sources of mineral water with such a proportion of salt, that even salt in its specific form is found on the surface of the soil around these sources. The second particularity was that the surroundings of the lake has been chosen by the turtle doves to flock in the spring time, and in such a number as to permit sometimes a catch of several hundred of them in one morning. The third notable thing, was that their neighborings were at the time the dwelling place of a certain kind of reptile called "Serpent a sonnette", rattle snakes, who are never seen to venture to any distance but keep always at close range from these sources. These snakes are called thus from the fact that they cary toward the extremity of their tails, scales which by a shake gives a certain sound similar to that of little clappers, which can be heard at a distance of twenty paces.

The Indians claim, continued the chronicler, that these scales are good to cure toothaches, and that the meat is good medecine for fever, which they ate with same appetite as they did the eel. They cut off the tail and the head which is flat and of a quandicular form, and ate the rest. His body is three feet long, his thickness is about that of a man's wrist. He has four teeth, two above and two below as long but sharper ~~still~~ than our little needles.

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