

A PEACE AMBASSADOR TO THE IROQUOIS

Prelude -----

When a sudden and perfect calm survenes amidst a formidable tempest, breaking down its course right in the paroxysm of violence, in presence of such a wonder, a miracle has to be proclaimed for it is something unnatural and therefore, some power superior to the laws of nature must have entered into play; and if this coincides with confident prayers and humble supplication of saintly souls for help and safety, then there is no need of hesitation in admitting the direct intervention of God.

During the year 1653 a sudden change happened in the minds of the fierce Iroquois. A spirit of peace found entry into their souls. Delegation after delegation were sent by them to the French not only carrying words of peace but moreover pleading for the Black-Robe to be sent to them, with the promise that they would hear him if he were going to teach them and that the whole nation would embrace the Religion of the Palefaces as a consequence of their sowing the seed of Divine Truth amongst them.

This brought a sudden and unexpected calm among the French Colonists for it came ⁱⁿ a time of intense warring when all the minds among the Iroquois were bent upon destroying all the country, including the French, the Huron, the Algonquins. Such sudden change of mind could be but ascribed to God; for, as He alone can abate the storms of the atmosphere, can as well abate the wrath of men and turn their pursuits towards objectives quite different even in direct opposition to those they have always been striving after, ^{and} ^{thus} arrive at making them take steps in accordance with His providential schemes.

God's own scheme for the time being was twofold. First, He, wanted to save New France from being crushed by the Iroquois. Secondly, He, wanted to convert these same Iroquois to the Faith.

Three or four years had elapsed since the Huron Mission had been destroyed by the warring excursions of this nation an inveterate

enemy to them. They had by these ruinous excursions reduced, ~~by that~~ much, the field of Christian Apostolate and restricted in the same proportion missionary activities. They must be made to compensate for the loss and the wrong sustained by God's Religion; for the Iroquois had deprived her by their wanton devastations of an important portion on her sacred domain. Yes! the Iroquois must compensate with something of their own, ^{by} ~~with~~ their proper domain being opened to the preaching of the Gospel. Thus, shall they retribute to the church what they had ravished from her and peace was needed for that.

Then it was clear that in all these happy diplomatic procedures the Iroquois were moved more by the impulse of God than by an impulse of their own.

They were following a course determined by God's calculation rather than by one of their own and therefore, most conducive to their better substantial good. There is a way proper to God to avenge Himself with respect to some offensive people who have once incurred His wrath but whom He has sworn not to destroy: this course, He, the Master, followed at an early date, with respect to the Iroquois Indian Nations.

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What an emotional moment for Father Lemoine--one may easily surmise, when he received his mandate from the religious and civil authority to start to the Iroquois country to consolidate the peace already agreed upon, at Quebec, between that warring nation and the French, including, as stipulated, the Hurons and the Algonquins, their irreconcilable enemies. It was a hard task, he knew, to maintain such people in the persuasion of keeping forever ^{entered} the ~~axe~~ ^{war} they had just buried, nor allow their hands to grasp again the deadly tomahawk.

Eight years only had passed since Father Jogues (now venerated as a Saint) in a similiar manner fell victim of the Iroquois' inconstancy because of superstitious fear.

But Father Lemoine was not a man to be intimidated by such considerations; he was ready to face any adversities, to suffer any eventual turn of fortune--even death to incorporate these indomitable Tribes to God's Kingdom by first pacifying them.

Let us now give you an account of this Jesuit's embassy after the old Missionaries' Records of the time.

-----HIS TRIP TO THE IROQUOIS-----

Father Simon Lemoine started from Montreal on August 17 (1655) accompanied by twelve Indians of the MohawkkTribe and two Frenchmen, travelling not by train or by automobile as nowadays, but in a bark canoe, the only vehicle in those remote ^{in this country of ours yet} times.

Father Lemoine was no longer an apprentice in canoe travelling; he had at that epoch many a hard and dangerous journey on his record. He had already made the trip to the Hurons where he had been a companion of apostolate to Saint Jean de Brebeuf and Lalement, etc. up to their Martyrdom. He had been to the Onondaga Iroquois the year previous in a peace errand similiar and ^{equally} dangerous to that which he is now undertaking.

He was not more ^{intimidated} ~~abash~~ physically in face of the terrible rapids to be encountered in canoe on the St. Lawrence, than he was ^{set} ~~abash~~ morally in face of the war-axe of the untamed Iroquois. *

On the second day of their journey the Father's canoe met with an accident which could have had a tragical issue ... a full bath was forced upon upon the occupants in the large St. Lawrence. His men had, whether by inadvertancy or imprudence, gone too far ^{up} into those famous rapids called by the French Sault St. Louis, (Lachine Rapids) ^{and then} which as for a prize of their temerity ^{gained for themselves} caused their boat to capsize and by the vigor of the currents ^{and carried behind} was brought back into a large and deep bay, supposedly Laprairie, where the occupants by floating alongside their canoe found, ^{under heavens' protection} calm water and safety.

~~On the way, their only reliance for food was in their guns~~ ^{also} ~~or any other hunting weapon they might have been provided with~~ and ~~chances to put these instruments to usefulness were to present themselves soon, at least one~~ ^{for} ~~for~~, ^{ce} ~~for~~, ^{I was} ~~on the third day of the voyage, they had not yet entered Lake St. Louis, when they saw a large herd of caribous in a rich meadow grazing leisurely an herbage of their choice~~ ^{choice} ~~choice~~ provided to them by the Author of Nature... What an allurements for instinctive hunters as were the primitive Indians! They also made good the providential ^{luck} ~~hunt~~ by ~~abating~~ ^{They would have continued to shoot no doubt,} to the ground in a trifle of time eighteen of these animals. The rest of the flock of course, ~~per-~~ ^{on} ~~haps, hundreds of them, seeing that slaughtering of their own kind,~~ ^{it} ~~relished not so much that sport so to the detriment of~~ ~~scarcely as could be seen in the distance, but of search for safety; and none of them we may safely say were to be seen for the remaining season in~~ ^{quite a while maybe for} ~~the same field, by other eventual travellers who would have also liked to~~ ^{after these} ~~their own kind, of course -~~ ^{Then} ~~supply themselves with such good fresh meat from same cheap mother~~ ~~nature's open market; alas! empty... Nothing like hunters to chase~~ ~~away game.~~ ^{if the} ~~and relishing not so much their own destruction~~ ^{had not vanished from sight by a quick flight.}

With so much flesh meat in their canoes, if it made the travellers' stomachs stronger it made also their canoes the heavier

~~to the detriment of their own food. ++~~

*... And it happened that the first peril encountered on the way, was not from the iroquois' ill-temper but from the river's. For on the journey's second day, the Pather's own party met with an accident of a wet nature, that could easily have had a fatal issue. Having approached uncautiously the frightful rapids (today Lachine Rapids) their canoe was overturned by ^{the} currents, and carried adrift to a large bay where by keeping floating alongside of the ~~now~~ wrecked boat, our travellers succeeded happily to find shallow waters and through a great mercy of God have their lives saved.

11 Their kitchen consisted in game incidentally killed in the forest along the way - a base of ravitainment rather aleatory by itself and insecure. But it began well for the peace party. They had just entered on Lake St. Louis, the third day of their journey, when they saw a large herd of cariboues in a rich meadow grazing leisurely on herbage of their choice provided to them by the Author of Nature... What an alluremant for instinctive hunters as were the primitive Indians! They also made good the providential luck by abating to the ground in a trifle of time eighteen of these animals. They would have continued to shoot no doubt the rest of the flock, perhaps hundreds of them, if on seeing that slaughtering of their own kind, the herd had not vanished from sight by a quick flight.

to propel and specially so when it was question of carrying on their shoulders at each rapids to be encountered on the St. Lawrence up to Lake Ontario.

Once on the placid Lake Ontario they were delivered naturally of that rapid's annoyance, but another molestation none the less troublesome and a lot more disquieting: it was ^{presented itself} when grim famine began to sit by their sides at meal time, an unwelcome and uncomfortable guest. What of their first abundance? We may ask... It was but matter of souvenir to make their actual shortening the more trying....

It was not yet starvation, only they had to try their teeth on meat such as the wolf, the fox, the wild cat when they chanced to kill any. The worst was when they could not even procure wild berries, and thus reduce sometimes after a hard day's journey to boiled water with clay thrown in, to give at least the potion, by thickening it an illusionary nourishing property.

Finally, the party arrived safely at the Mohawks! Castle, called "Ossernenon" (today Aurisville N.Y.) on the 17th of September just a month after their departure from Montreal.

The reception given to Father Lemoine was most enthusiastic and full of courtesy and flattery. From the time of his first appearance, the attention of the people was attracted ^{on} to him as to an object of great curiosity and considerable importance. Every one wanted to see him, examining him from head to ~~feet~~; for, many of them had never seen a man in such attire. It was the triumph of Indian civility and courtesy where only a few years previous, hatred and incivility were triumphant in regard to similiar personage (the Black-Robe).

In the chief's lodge where they were introduced, three superb wampums or belts of porcelain beads were hung ^{to} from a horizontal rod. These wampums were to be presented to the extraordinary envoy; each one had its own language and significance. The first was destined to calm all apprehension that might have risen in the messenger's soul from some suspicion as to any possibility whatsoever of unkindliness or treacherous proceedings on the part of the Iroquois. The second wampum had to comfort

his heart and keep away all souvenir of the past capable of disturbing his rest. The third had to act as a foot-bath of balmy water to clean them of the dust from the road and rest them of the fatigue resulting from his long journey.

The following day in presence of all the people assembled, Father Lemoine delivered his important message in the name of the true God first the Creator of Heaven and Earth, secondarily in the name of the French Governor--- then followed the presentation of his own presents according to Indian fashion. This ceremony began by prayer to God, the first public invocation to God ever made among this people

The Mohawks responded again by presenting very rich presents, one of these particularly remarkable -- a representation of the sun with beads of porcelain to the number of six thousand -- a concrete symbol of the benefits of the peace pact among nations in comparison with those of the sun on earth.

Soon after this so demonstrative show of reciprocal good will and friendliness, Father Lemoine set out on a trip to New Amsterdam, (New York) quite an adventurous trip at the time.

Upon his return to the Mohawk Village, he had quite a sensational experience, one working into a striking contrast with the civilities he had met with during his first days with this nation. An Indian of the village, a real demoniac or acting demoniac-like, was seen rushing through the cabinseof the village like one suddenly overtaken by the demon of rage,,he wanted to kill Odessonk (the Indian name given to Father Lemoine). Armed with an axe, he smashed everything that stood in his way. He got within reach of the Father; his weapon is raised above the priest's head, the stroke will be dealt in a second and the Father's

skull will be split open as a natural result, but -- the arm remained in suspension as if the murderous hand had been held back by some tutelar being from above (Probably by the intended victim's guardian angel).

The crazy man continued his course still howling until a woman screamed: "Kill my dog, let it be a victim in Odessonks place for he is too much of a friend to us". Then recovering his normal nature, with ^{one} stroke of his weapon, killed the animal and holding up this victim as a trophy in guise of the priest's head, he started on a triumphal march through the village.

The following day, the man's relatives came to Father Lemoine with a present of porcelain beads in reparation for the offense, to wipe away, they said, the dust of the night, making reference to the night, during which the person in question, dreamed he was breaking the head of a White Man or perhaps heard his Manitou in dream tell him to do so.

The above incident is one instance of the malignity and imbecility of the belief in dreams so rampant among those pagans of old.

FATHER'S RETURN FROM THE MOHAWK.

As the purpose of his Mission included not wintering among these barbarians, and the hard season was fast advancing, Father Lemoine had to hasten his return to Quebec.

If the journey to these far off countries at that remote epoch proved hard and difficult, the journey back presented sometimes a still more embarrassing problem. Let us tell you what kind of trip Father Lemoine had on his way back from his embassy to the Mohawks...

He started out from the Mohawk Castle in the beginning of November with his two french companions and three Iroquois as guides.

So long they kept going by the common trail,...whether they carried their canoes after shouldering them, as in case of portages, or paddled them on navigable waters, the trip had nothing but bearable, although compaired with our modern travelling conveniencies it was the nec plus ultra of travelling discomfort. But what ^{was it} after they were met

on the way by a small ill-fated group of Mohawks who had just had an encounter with a certain party of Algonquins who made things hard for them by making three of their men prisoners. Father Lemoine's men, fearing a similar fate onto them at the hands of these Algonquins were they to encounter them, immediately diverted their course and took to the woods, abandoning their canoes and parts of their baggage on the shore.

They were soon engaged in a dense and trackless forest of fir trees with marshes all through soaked with stagnant half frozen water. The sky grew overloaded and the sun soon disappeared. Deprived thereof of all means of orientation they could but go astray. Night overtaking them, they stopped at the foot of a tree the roots of which, with moss gathered around, saved them from lying on a too wet surface. It was the 9th of November, 1661.

The following morning at daybreak, they must resume their tramp through the same marshy forest, in spite of the rainy weather, beating their way at random. What a harassing rambling....! Accompanied with that torturing anxiety caused by the absence of all guiding means of orientation--on account of the sun being hidden all the day.

It was almost night when they finally arrived at the term of that swampy stretch of land. But the change of ground was not much for the better. They had to proceed over on a soft ground by its nature, but made still more so by the irrigation of a number of streams intersecting it, so that they sank knee deep at each step they took.

Farther on, a river of quite a size by the volume of its water barred their way. Incontinently, trees are felled, divided into sections dragged to shore and flanked headlong on the watery surface in manner of a raft to transport them across with the help of poles as oars and paddles.

That toilsome work coupled with the exhaustive march of the day had carved in their stomachs a vacuum that sorely needed filling, while they hardly had in matter of food what might have amounted to a man's half meal.

The third day of their straying saw them as perplexed as to their localisation, although, once in a while, Father Lemoine's men climbed to the tops of the trees for reconnoitring. Only toward evening did they come to a stream which they recognized.

This happy hazard would have been more recomforting had they had something to eat that night.

Finally, after the fourth day of despair and weariness and starvation, they reached the St. Lawrence and saw Montreal on the other side. They had no means of crossing that wide expanse, but by means of a fire which they lighted and by discharging their muskets they attracted the notice of their friends, and a canoe was sent to take them over to the place they had left three ^{months} before.

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