

The Jesuits on Native Women and Marriage

The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents

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TRAVELS AND EXPLORATIONS OF THE JESUIT MISSIONARIES IN NEW FRANCE

1610 — 1791

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Vol. XVIII HURONS AND QUÉBEC 1640 CHAPTER V. CONTINUATION OF THE SAME SUBJECT.

... Another young man told us that his baptism had stopped his ears. "I no longer hear," said he, "the licentious words that heedless youths sometimes utter in our cabin. It is impossible to understand how glad my heart is to see itself free from its sins." [60] I learned from good authority what I am about to relate. A young man between twenty-five and thirty years old, while pursuing his way, lay down to sleep in a cabin of Savages. In the night, a woman approached him. He, perceiving her purpose, anticipated temptation by saying to her, "Go away, for I am a Christian; those who pray to God do not commit such sins."

I have said elsewhere that the young Savages who are seeking a wife go to visit their mistresses at night. We forcibly denounce this most pernicious custom; for although, in general, all is done with great decency, yet the risk of offending God is too great.

Now, when any young Savages arrive from outside, our 'Christians immediately inform us of it, that we may watch and see that all keep within the bounds of duty. They themselves rebuke the young men who take too much liberty, reproaching them with calling the demons into their cabins, and with drawing down the curse of God upon their heads. There happened a very [61] remarkable thing in regard to this. A young man not yet baptized, who was wooing a Christian girl, went to see her at night [Page 139] At first this girl did not rebuff him, but listened to his conversation, which so scandalized the Christians. that we were immediately informed of it. We summoned her and reprimanded her sharply, reproaching her with behaving like a profligate who did not believe in God, and telling her that even the caresses of this young man at such a time were sinful. This poor girl, greatly surprised, replied to the Father who chided her, "My Father, it is true that I have listened to this young man, but he did not caress me. I am not French; I have seen Frenchmen trifling with girls, caressing and kissing them, but this is not our custom, —those who seek us only talk to us, and then go away. Believe me," said she, "when this young man was speaking to me I remembered very well that I was a Christian, and that I was unwilling to offend God. I merely told him that he should address himself to you in this matter." "The [62] report is, however," said the Father, "that you did not behave properly." "Those who pray to God," she replied, "will not say that. For I assure you that I have done nothing wrong, beyond listening to him, conducting myself according to our ancient

customs." Thereupon, a certain person, for the sake of a joke and also to assure himself of the genuineness of the girl's simplicity, said to her, "I shall know truly whether this young man has deceived you, for I will have you take a potion that will make you vomit immediately if he has touched you." "(Shall I not vomit," said she, "unless he has touched me?" "Not at all." "Well, then, give it to me now and you will see my innocence." His companion gave her a spoonful of very black syrup, which she took with a very cheerful face, and swallowed [Page 141] confidently. "If I do not vomit," she exclaimed, "except in case I have done wrong, I fear nothing." She was praised for her firmness, a sign of her purity —But she was made to understand so clearly the harm there was in scandalizing her neighbor, and Placing herself in danger of being deluded [63] by the devil, that she and her companions profited by it. And a few weeks afterwards, when other young men came to visit them at night, they straightway told them that they should go away, —that they were Christians, and that, if the men wished to marry any of them, they should address themselves on that subject to the Fathers who had baptized the girls. But, as these young men did not go away, the girls took firebrands and threatened to thrust them in their faces if they did not leave. To be born in barbarism and act in this manner, is to preach Jesus Christ boldly. ...

Vol. XXIII

Hurons, Québec, Iroquois

1642–1643

CHAPTER V.

OF THE GOOD SENTIMENTS OF SOME CHRISTIANS OF THIS SAME MISSION.

[page 61] ... A Christian young Man on a journey met an infidel woman, who solicited him to do what he could not yield to her without prejudice to his conscience. "Thou art a bitch", he replied to her; "withdraw from me." "But what fearest thou in these woods? answered the shameless woman, "no one sees us." "But the great master of our lives has his eyes fixed upon us", replied the good believer, "and it is he whom I fear."

...

A good Neophyte went to a neighboring village on the occasion of a noted feast, at which the invite warriors excited one another by their songs to perform some deed of valor. When he left the meeting, at a very late hour, a woman took his hand and invited him to lodge with her. "I have already secured my lodgings elsewhere," he replied. "The darkness prevents thee from recognizing me," said the decoy; "it was in that house that thou didst formerly lodge." "Yes indeed", he said, "but then I was not a Christian." God knows which of the two was the more astonished. However, the good Neophyte, fearing [44] that on this occasion the Devil might tempt him more energetically, resolved to make sure of his victory by flight. He left the village that very night, and about midnight he reached his own Cabin, where he was not expected till the following day. ...

Vol. XXII

QUÉBEC, HURONS

1642

CHAPTER II. OF THE GOOD ACTIONS AND GOOD SENTIMENTS OF THE NEW CHRISTIANS.

... We have always been of opinion that the **[Page 67]** marriages of the Savages would give us trouble. The liberty of having several wives, and of changing them at pleasure, is a great obstacle to the Faith, but it is not insurmountable. Grace is more powerful than nature. Monsieur the Chevalier de Montmagny, who wishes to give these good Neophytes a high opinion of that Sacrament, frequently honors their marriages with his presence. He has a fine feast prepared on the wedding day, which is attended by many of the principal among our French, after they have been present at the holy ceremonies of the Church. On these occasions we do not neglect [28] to speak of the stability of Marriage, as well as the importance of obeying God on that point. The Captains of the Savages are the first to frighten the newly-married couples against separating. The candor and simplicity of these good people would be something quite novel in France. When the Priest who officiates at the ceremonies of this Sacrament is about to question both parties as to their consent, if there be any Savage of importance present who is zealous, he calls out: "Stay, my Father, I wish to speak." Then, addressing the bridegroom and the bride who are standing before the Altar, he says to them: "Take care; there is but one more step to be taken, —if you go any further, you can never draw back. Your word is a bond that will unite you so closely that you will no longer be permitted to sever it. Keep your mouths closed, if you do not wish to be bound. If you speak, may your words be of iron, that they may never break. You are still free, —no one compels you; but if you speak, we will force you to keep your word. Now then, speak, or be silent, as you please." Then, turning towards the Priest, **[Page 69]** "Go on, [29] my Father, go on; I have finished my speech." This plain speaking reminds one of the golden Age of old, when nature was clothed in a simplicity more agreeable than all the artifices of the most polished Nations.

While I am on this subject, I will conclude this Chapter with it. Here is a new way of seeking a person in marriage. It has already been stated that, when 'a Pagan Savage wooed a maiden, he went to see her at night, and asked her in secret if she would accept him. If the maid replied that she did not wish to marry him, the young man went no further. If she replied that he was not to address her about the matter, he pressed his suit. Now, as we have vigorously rebuked such conduct, the Christians disapprove of it, and they apply to us to ask for a maid; but observe how some of them now act. They paint on a piece of bark a young man and a maiden, holding each other by the hand, in the position that they assume in Church when they get married; and the swain sends this picture to his mistress by one of his friends. **[Page 71]**

...

[Page 227] The inconstancy of marriages and the facility with which they divorce each other, are a great obstacle to the Faith of Jesus Christ. We do not dare to baptize the young people, though they may be very well disposed, because experience teaches us that the custom of abandoning a disagreeable wife or husband has a strong hold on them. ...

OF WHAT OCCURRED AT MISCOU.

Letter from Father Hierosme Lalemant, written from the Huron country to the Reverend Father Provincial of the Society of JESUS.

[Page 49] ... Add to this that the laws of the Country, which to them seem most just, attack the purity of the Christian life in a thousand ways, especially as regards their marriages — the dissolution of which, with freedom to seek another consort, is [146] more frequent and easy here than it is in France for a master to take another servant, when the one he has does not please him. The result is, truth to tell, that, in the closest of their marriages, and those which they consider most conformable to reason, the faith that they pledge each other is nothing more than a conditional promise to live together so long as each shall continue to render the services that they mutually expect from each other, and shall not in any way wound the **[Page 51]** affection that they owe each other. If this fail, divorce is considered reasonable on the part of the injured one, although the other party who has given occasion for it is blamed.

But the greatest opposition that we meet in these Countries to the spirit of the Faith consists in the fact that their remedies for diseases; ...