

A Letter from Louisbourg, 1756 (with an introduction by Ken Donovan)

Monsieur de la Varenne et Ken Donovan

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Documents

A Letter from Louisbourg, 1756

The following letter from Monsieur De La Varenne to a friend at La Rochelle, dated 8 May 1756, was one of four selections in *An Account of the Customs and Manners of the Micmakis and Maricheets, Savage Nations, Now Dependent on the Government of Cape Breton* (London, printed for S. Hooper and A. Moreley, 1758).¹ It describes the geography, climate, and vegetation of Acadia, the customs and manners of the Acadians including the dress of the men and women, their dwellings and domestic furniture. Varenne also provides a detailed account of the living conditions of the Micmacs and how the French, particularly those of Louisbourg, interacted with the native people.

While sympathetic to the Acadians, Varenne believed "that these people were absolutely untractable as to the English, and thoroughly under the direction of priests in an interest quite opposite to theirs". As a result, he maintained, "I do not see that the English could do otherwise than they did" in expelling the Acadians. For the most part, the Acadians had ignored the pleas of French officials to settle Isle Royale after the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 and Varenne's bitterness towards the Acadians is therefore understandable, if not forgivable.² In general, Louisbourg officials appear to have had little sympathy or appreciation for the Acadians and their way of life. One notable exception was Governor Augustin De Boschenry De Drucour, who shortly after his arrival at Isle Royale, accused various Louisbourg officials, including his predecessor, Governor Jean-Louis Comte de Raymond, of not treating the Acadians fairly.³ Nevertheless, Governor Drucour's concern for the Acadians quickly waned for there are surprisingly few references to the expulsion of the Acadians in the official correspondence of Isle Royale. To Louisbourg residents like Varenne, the Acadians were resourceful but uneducated peasants.⁴

1 See pp. 73-130. The Halifax City Regional Library owns an original edition of *An Account of the Customs and Manners* and have granted permission for the publication of the Varenne letter. The other selections in *Account of the Customs and Manners* include two items which, although published anonymously, are attributed to Pierre Maillard: "Micmaki Country", 27 March 1755 and "Memorial of the Savages, called Mickmakis and Maricheets, for continuing the War with England since the last Peace, Ile Royale 175—". The fourth item in the *Account of the Customs and Manners* is a letter by the Abbé P.F.X. de Charlevoix on the "Character of the Savages of North America".

2 See Bernard Pothier, "Acadian Emigration to Ile Royale after the Conquest of Acadia", *Histoire Sociale*, No. 6 (November 1970), pp. 116-31.

3 Le Chavalier De Drucour à M. De Surlaville, Louisbourg, 22 octobre 1754 in Gaston Du Bosq de Beaumont, ed., *Les derniers jours de l'Acadia 1749-58* (Geneve, Slatkine-Megariotis Reprints, 1975), p. 126.

4 See also "Iles Royale et St. Jean 1751. Voyage Du Sieur Franquet au Port Lajoie au Havre De

Unfortunately, Monsieur Varenne cannot be identified in the Louisbourg documentation. The original edition of his letter was undoubtedly written in French but it probably has not survived. Except for a few minor changes, the original spelling and punctuation have been retained.

KEN DONOVAN

Though I had, in my last, exhausted all that was needful to say on our private business, I could not see this ship preparing for France, especially with our friend MOREAU on board, without giving you this further mark of how ardently I wish the continuance of our correspondence. It will also serve to supplement any former deficiencies of satisfaction to certain points of curiosity you have stated to me; this will give to my letter a length beyond the ordinary limits of one: and I have beforehand to excuse to you, the loose desultory way in which you will find I write, as things present themselves to my mind, without such method or arrangement, as a formal design of treating the subject would exact. But who looks for that in a letter?

I need not tell you how severely our government has felt the dismemberment of that important tract of country already in the possession of the English, under the name of Acadia; to say nothing of their further pretentions, which would form such terrible enroachments on Canada. And no wonder it should feel it, considering the extent of so fruitful, and valuable a country as constitutes that peninsula. It might of itself form a very considerable and compact body of dominion, being, as you know, almost everywhere surrounded by the sea, and abounding with admirable and well-situated ports. It is near one-hundred leagues in length, and about sixty in breadth. Judge what advantages such an area of country, well-peopled, and well-cultivated, and abounding in mines, might produce. It is full of hills, though I could not observe any of extraordinary height, except that of Cape Doree, at the mouth of the River des Mines, the most fertile part of it in corn and grain, and once the best peopled. There are a number of rivers very rapid, but not large, except that of St. John's, which is the finest river of all Acadia, where good water is rather scarce.

The soil in the vallies is rich, and even in the uplands, commonly speaking, good. The grains it yields are wheat, pease, barley, oats, rye, and Indian corn, and especially that of the vallies, for the higher ground is not yet cultivated. The pastures are excellent and very common, and more than sufficient to supply Cape Breton, with the cattle that may be raised. There is fine hunting, and a plentiful fishing for cod, salmon, and other fish, particularly on the east-side, which is full of fine harbours at the distance of one, two, three, four, or of six or

Saint Pierre . . .", in *Rapport de L'Archiviste de la Province de Québec pour 1923-1924* (Québec, 1924), pp. 134-5.

seven leagues at farthest from one another, within the extent of ninety leagues of coast. It is thought, in short, this fishery is better than any on the coasts belonging to France.

The air is extremely wholesome, which is proved by the longevity of its inhabitants. I myself know some of above an hundred years of age, descendants from the French established in Acadia. Distempers are very rare. I fancy the climate is pretty near the same as in the north of China, or Chinese-Tartary. This country too, being rather to the southward of Canada, is not so cold as that; the snow not falling till towards St. Andrew's day: nor does it lie on the ground above two or three days at most, after which it begins to soften; and though the thaw does not take place, the weather turns mild enough to allow of working, and undertaking journeys. In short, what may be absolutely called cold weather, may be reduced to about twenty-five or thirty days in a winter, and ceases entirely towards the end of March, or at latest, the middle of April. Then comes the seed-time. Then are made the sugar and syrups of maple, procured from the juice or sap of that tree, by means of incisions in the bark, which sap is carefully received in proper vessels.

I could never find any ginseng-root; yet I have reason to believe there may be some in or near the hills, as the climate and situation have so much affinity to the northern provinces of China, or Northwest Tartary, as described to us by our missionaries.

We have very little knowledge of the medicinal herbs in this country, though some of them have certainly great virtue. There are the maiden-hair, the saxi-frage, and the sarsaparilla. There is also a particular root in this country of an herb called Jean Hebert, about the ordinary size of the Salsifx, or Goatsbread, with knots at about an inch, or an inch and an half distance from one another, of a yellowish colour, white in the inside, with a sugarish juice, which is excellent for the stomach.

There has been lately discovered in these parts a poisonous root, much resembling, in color and substance, a common carrot. When broke it has a pleasing smell; but between the flakes may be observed a yellowish juice, which is supposed to be the poison. Of four soldiers that had eaten of it in their soup lately, two were difficultly preserved by dint of antidotes; the other two died in the utmost agonies of pain, and convulsions of frenzy. One of them was found in the woods sticking by the head in a softish ground, into which he had driven it, probably in the excess of his torture. Such a vegetable must afford matter of curious examination to a naturalist; for as it does so much harm, it may also be capable of great good, if sought into by proper experiments.

The spirit of turpentine is much used by the inhabitants. The gum itself is esteemed a great vulnerary; and purges moderately those who are full of bilious, or gross humors.

For the rest there is, I believe, hardly any sort of grain, tree, or vegetable, especially in the north of France that might not be successfully raised in Acadia.

The rains are frequent in every season of the year. There are indeed often violent squalls of wind, especially from the South, and from the West, but nothing like the hurricanes in the West-Indies. It is a great rarity if thunder does any mischief. Some years ago there was a man killed in his hut by it; but the oldest men of the country never remembered to have known or heard of any thing like it before. There have been earthquakes felt but rarely, and not very violent. This country produces no venomous beasts, at least, that I could hear of. In the warmer season there are sometimes found snakes, not, however, thicker than one's finger, but their bite is not known to be attended with any fatal consequence. There are no tygers, nor lions, nor other beasts of prey to be afraid of unless bears, and that only in their rutting-time, and even then it is very rare that they attack. As there are no carnivorous animals except the lynxes, who have a beautiful skin, and these rarely fall upon any living creatures; the sheep, oxen, and cows, are turned out into the woods or commons, without any fear for them. Partridges are very common, and are large-sized, with flesh very white. The hares are scarce, and have a white fur. There are a great many beavers, elks, cariboux, (moose-deer) and other beasts of the cold northern countries.

The original inhabitants of this country are the savages, who may be divided into three nations, the Mickmakis, the Maricheets, or Abenakis, (being scarcely different nations) and the Canibats.

The Mickmakis are the most numerous, but not accounted so good warriors as the others: but they are all much addicted to hunting, and to venery; in which last, however, they observe great privacy. They are fond of strong liquors, and especially of brandy: that is there greatest vice. They are also very uncurious of paying the debts they contract, not from natural dishonesty, but from their having no notion of property, or of meum or tuum. They will sooner part with all they have, in the shape of a gift, than with any thing in that of payment. Honors and goods being all in common amongst them, all the numerous vices, which are founded upon those two motives, are not to be found in them. Yet it is true, that they have chiefs to whom they give the title Sagamo; but all of them almost, at some time or other, assume to themselves this quality, which is never granted by universal consent, but to the personal consideration of distinguished merit in councils, or in arms. Their troops have this particularity that they are, for the most part, composed of nothing but officers; insomuch that it is rare to find a savage in the service that will own himself a private man. This want of subordination does not, however, hinder them from concurring together in action, when their native ferocity and emulation stand them, in some sort, instead of discipline.

They are extremely vindictive, of which I shall give you one example. Mons. Daunay, a French captain, with a servant, being overset in a canoe, within sight of some savages, they threw themselves into the water to save them, and the servant was actually saved. But the savage, who had pitched upon Mons. Daunay, seeing who it was, and remembering some blows with a cane he had a

few days before received from him, took care to souse him so often in the water, that he drowned him before he got ashore.

It is remarked, that in proportion as the Europeans have settled in this country, the number of the savages considerably diminishes. As they live chiefly upon their hunting, the woods that are destroyed to cultivate the country, must in course contract the district of their chace, and cause a famine amongst them, that must be fatal to them, or compel them to retire to other countries. The English, sensible of this effect, and who seemed to place their policy in exterminating these savages nations, have set fire to the woods, and burnt a considerable extent of them. I have myself crossed above thirty leagues together, in which space the forests were so totally consumed by fire, that one could hardly at night find a spot wooded enough to afford wherewithal to make an extempore cabbinn, which, in this country, is commonly made in the following manner: Towards night the travellers commonly pitch upon a spot as near a rivulet or river as they can; and as no one forgets to carry his hatchet with him, any more than a Spanish don his toledo; some cut down wood for firing for the night; others branches of trees, which are stuck in the ground with the crotch uppermost, over which a thatching is laid of fir-boughs, with a fence of the same on the weather side only. The rest is all open, and serves for door and window. A great fire is then lighted, and then every body's lodged. They sup on the ground, or upon some leaved branches, when the season admits of it; and afterwards the table serves for a bed. The savages themselves rarely have any fixed hut, or village, that may be called a permanent residence. If there are any parts they most frequently inhabit, it is only those which abound most in game, or near some fishing-place. Such were formerly for them, before the English had driven them away, Artigoneesch, Beaubassin, Chipody, Chipnakady, Yodayck, Mirtigueesh, La Hève Cape Sable, Miramecky, Fistigoisch, La Baye des Chaleurs Pentagony, Medochtek, Hokepack, and Kihibeki.

At present these savage nations bear an inveterate antipathy to the English, who might have easily prevented or cured it, if instead of rigorous measures, they had at first used conciliative ones: but this it seems they thought beneath them. This it is, that has given our missionaries such a fair field for keeping them fixed to the French party, by the assistance of the difference of religion, of which they do not fail to make the most. But lest you may imagine I am giving you only my own conjectures, take the following extract from a letter of father Noel de Joinville, of a pretty antient date.

"I have remarked in this country so great an aversion in the convert-savages to the English, caused by difference of religion, that these scarce dare inhabit any part of Acadia but what is under their own guns. These savages are so zealous for the Roman Catholick church, that they always look with horror upon, and consider as enemies those who are not within the pale of it. This may serve to prove, that if there had been priests provided in time, to work at the conversion of the savages of New England, before the English had penetrated

into the interior of the county as far as they have done, it would not have been possible for them to appropriate to themselves such an extent of county as, at this day, makes of New-England alone the most magnificent colony on the face of the earth."

But with this good father's leave, he attributes more influence to religion, though as the priests manage it, it certainly has a very considerable one, than in fact belongs to it. Were it not for other concurring circumstances that indispose the savages against the English, religion alone would not operate, at least so violently, that effect. Everyone knows, that the savages are at best but slightly tintured with it, and have little or no attachment to it, but as they find their advantage in the benefits of presents and protection, it procures to them from the French government. In short, it is chiefly to the conduct of the English themselves, we are beholden for this favorable aid of the savages. If the English at first, instead of seeking to exterminate or oppress them by dint of power, the sense of which drove them for refuge into our party, had behaved with more tenderness to them, and conciliated their affection by humoring them properly, and distributing a few presents, they might easily have made useful and valuable subjects of them. Whereas, disgusted with their haughtiness, and scared at the menaces and arbitrary encroachments of the English, they are now their most virulent and scarce reconcilable enemies. This is even true of more parts in America, where, though the English have liberally given presents to ten times the value of what our government does, they have not however had the same effect. The reason of which is clear: they make them with so ill a grace, and generally time their presents so unjudiciously, as scarce ever to distribute them, but just when they want to carry some temporary point with the savages, such, especially, as the taking up the hatchet against the French. This does not escape the natural sagacity of the savages, who are sensible of the design lurking at the bottom of this liberality, and give them the less thanks for it. They do not easily forget the length of time they had been neglected, slighted, or unapplied to, unless by their itinerant traders, who cheat them in their dealings; or poison them with execrable spirits, under the names of brandy and rum. Whereas, on the contrary, the French are assiduously caressing and courting them. Their missionaries are dispersed up and down their several cantonments, where they exercise every talent of insinuation, study their manners, nature, and weaknesses, to which they flexibly accommodate themselves, and carry their points by these arts. But what has, at least, an equal share in attaching the savages to our party, is the connivance, or rather encouragement the French government has given to the natives of France, to fall into the savage-way of life, to spread themselves through the savage nations, where they adopt their manners, range the woods with them, and become as keen hunters as themselves. This conformity endears our nation to them, being much better pleased with seeing us imitate them, than ready to imitate us, though some of them begin to fall into our notions, as to trafficking and bartering, and knowing the use of money, of

which they were before totally ignorant. We employ besides a much more effectual way of uniting them to us, and that is, by the intermarriages of our people with the savage-women, which is a circumstance that draws the ties of alliance closer. The children produced by these are generally hardy, inured to the fatigues of the chase and war, and turn out very serviceable subjects in their way.

But what is most amazing is, that though the savage-life has all the appearance of being far from eligible, considering the fatigues, the exposure to all weathers, the dearth of those articles which custom has made a kind of necessities of life to Europeans, and many other inconveniencies to be met with in their vagabond course; yet it has such charms for some of our native French, and even for some of them who have been delicately bred, that, when once they have betaken themselves to it young, there is hardly any reclaiming them from it, or inducing them to return to a more civilized life. They prefer roving in the woods, trusting to the chance of accidents for their game which is their chief support, and lying all night in a little temporary hut, patched up of a few branches; to all the commodiousness they might find in towns, or habitations, amongst their own countrymen. By degrees they lose all relish for the European luxuries of life, and would not exchange for them the enjoyments of that liberty, and faculty of wandering about, for which, in the forests, they contract an invincible taste. A gun with powder and ball, of which they purchase a continuation of supplies with the skins of beasts they kill, set them up. With these they mix among the savages, where they get as many women as they please: some of them are far from unhandsome, and fall into their way of life, with as much passion and attachment, as if they had never known any other.

Mons. Delorme, whom you possibly may have seen in Rochelle, where he had a small employ in the marine-department, brought over his son here, a very hopeful youth, who had even some tincture of polite education, and was not above thirteen years old, and partly from indulgence, partly from a view of making him useful to the government, by his learning, at that age, perfectly the savage language, he suffered him to go amongst the savages. The young Delmore would, indeed, sometimes return home just on a visit to his family; but always expressed such an impatience, or rather pining to get back again to them, that, though reluctantly, the father was obliged to yield to it. No representations in short, after some years, could ever prevail on him to renounce his connexions, and residence amongst the Abenakis, where he is almost adored. He has learned to excel them all, even in their own points of competition. He out does them all in their feats of activity, in running, leaping, climbing mountains, swimming, shooting with the bow & arrow, managing of canoes, snaring and killing birds and beasts, in patience of fatigue, and even of hunger; in short, in all they most value themselves upon, or to which they affix the idea of personal merit, the only merit that commands consideration amongst them. They are not yet polished enough to admire any other. By this means, however, he perfectly reigns amongst them, with a power the greater, for the submission to

it not only being voluntary, but the effect of his acknowledged superiority, in those points that with them alone constitute it. His personal advantages likewise may not a little contribute thereto, being perfectly wellmade, finely featured, with a great deal of natural wit, as well as courage. He dresses, whilst with the savages, exactly in their manner, ties his hair up like them, wears a tomby-awk, or hatchet, travels with rackets, (or Indian shoes) and, in short, represents to the life the character of a compleat savage-warrior. When he comes to Quebec, or Louisbourg, he resumes his European dress, without the least mark appearing in his behavior of that wildness or rudeness one would naturally suppose him to have contracted by so long a habit of them with the savages. No body speaks purer French or acquits himself better in conversation. He takes up or lays down the savage character with equal grace and ease. His friends have at length, given over teasing him to come and reside for good amongst them; they find it is to so little purpose. The priests indeed complain bitterly, that he is not overloaded with religion, from his entering so thoroughly into the spirit of the savage-life; and his setting an example, by no means edifying, of a licentious commerce with their women; besides, his giving no signs of his over-respecting either their doctrine or spiritual authority. This they pretend hurts them with their actual converts, as well as with those they labor to make; though, in this conduct, he is not singular, for the French wood-rangers, in general, follow the like course in a greater or lesser degree. These representations of the priests would, however, have greater influence with our government, if the temporal advantage they derive from these rovers, undisciplined as they are, did not oblige them to work at their relaxation in spirituals.

But it is not only men that have taken this passion for a savage life; there have been, though much rarer, examples of our women going into it. It is not many years since a very pretty French girl ran away into the woods with a handsome young savage, who married her after his country fashion. Her friends found out the village, or rather ambulatory tribe into which she had got; but no persuasions, or instances, could prevail on her to return and leave her savage, nor on him to consent to it; so that the government not caring to employ force, for fear of disobliging the nation of them, even acquiesced in her continuance among them, where she remains to this day, but worshipped like a little divinity, or, at least, as a being superior to the rest of their women. Possibly too she is not, in fact, so unhappy, as her choice would make one think she must be; and if opinion constitutes happiness, she certainly is not so.

There are not wanting here, who defend this strange attachment of some of their countrymen to this savage life, on principles independent of the reason of state, for encouraging its subjects to spread and gain footing amongst the savage nations, by resorting to their country, of which they, at the same time, gain a knowledge useful to future enterprizes, by a winning conformity to their actions, and by inter-marriages with them. They pretend that even this savage life itself is not without its peculiar sweets and pleasures; that is the most adapted, and the

most natural to man. Liberty, they say, is no where more perfectly enjoyed, than where no subordination is known, but what is recommended by natural reason, the veneration of old age, or the respect of personal merit.

The chase is at once their chief employment and diversion; it furnishes them with means to procure those articles, which enter into the small number of natural wants. The demands of luxury, they think too dearly bought with the loss of that liberty and independence they find in the woods. They despise the magnificence of courts and palaces, in comparision with the free range and scope of the hills and vales, with the starry sky for their canopy: they say we enjoy the Universe only in minature, whilst the savage-rovers enjoy it with the great. Thus reason some of our admirers here of the savage-system of life, and yet I do not find that these refining advocates for it, are themselves tempted to embrace it. They are content to commend what themselves do not care to practice. Those who actually do embrace it, reason very little about it, though no doubt, the motives above assigned for their preference, are generally, one may say, instinctively, at the bottom of it. Their greatest want is of wine, especially at first to those who are used to it; but they are soon weaned from it by the example of others, and content themselves with the substitution of rum, or brandy, of which they obtain supplies by their barter of skins and furs. In short, their hunting procures them all that they want or desire, and their liberty or independence supplies to them the place of those luxuries of life, that are not well to be had without the sacrifice in some sort of it.

It is more difficult to find an excuse for the shocking cruelties and barbarities, exercised by the savages on their unhappy captives in war. The instances, however, of their inhumanity are certainly not exaggerated, nor possible to be exaggerated, but are multiplied beyond the limits of truth. That they put then their prisoners to death by exquisite tortures, is strictly true; but it is as true too, that they do not serve so many in that manner as has been said. Numbers they save, and even incorporate with their own nation, who become as free as, and on a footing with, the conquerors themselves. And even in that cruelty of theirs, there is at the bottom a mixture of piety with their vindictiveness. They imagine themselves bound to revenge the deaths of their ancestors, their parents, or relations, fallen in war, upon their enemies, especially of that nation by whom they have fallen. It is in that apprehension too, they extend their barbarity to young children, and to women: to the first, because they fear they may grow up to an age, when they will be sure to pursue that revenge of which the spirit is early instilled into them; to the second, lest they should produce children, to whom they would, from the same spirit, be sure to inculcate them. Thus, in a round natural enough, their fear begets their cruelty, and their cruelty their fear, and so on, ad infinitum. They consider too these tortures as matter of glory to them in the constancy with which they are taught to suffer them; they familiarize to themselves the idea of them, in a manner that redoubles their natural courage and ferocity, and especially inspires them to fight desperately in battle, so as to

prefer death to captivity, of which the consequences are, and may be, so much more cruel to them. Another reason is also assignable for their carrying things to these extremities: War is considered by these people as something very sacred, and not lightly to be undertaken; but when once so, to be pushed with the utmost rigor by way of terror, joining its aid towards the putting the speediest end to it. The savage nations imagine such examples necessary for deterring one another from coming to ruptures, or invading one another upon slight motives, especially as their habitations or villages used to be so slightly fortified, that they might easily be surprised. They have lately indeed learned to make stronger inclosures or pallsadoes, but still not sufficient entirely to invalidate this argument for their guarding against sudden hostilities, by the idea of the most cruel revenge they annex to the commission of them. It is not then, till after the maturest deliberation, and the deepest debates, that they commonly come to a resolution of taking up the hatchet, as they call declaring of war; after which, there are no excesses to which their rage and ferocity do not incite them. Even their feasting upon the dead bodies of their enemies, after putting them to death, with the most excruciating tortures they can devise, is rather a point of revenge than of relish for such a banquet.

That midst all their savageness they have, however, some glimmering perception of the laws of nations, is evident from the use to which they put the calumet, the rights of which are kept inviolate, thro' especially the whole northern continent of America. It answers nearest the idea of the olive-branch among the antients.

As to your question, Sir, about the English being in the right or wrong, in their treatment of the Acadians, or descendants of the Europeans first settled in Acadia, and in their scheme of dispersing them, the point is so nice, that I own I dare not pronounce either way: but I will candidly state to you certain facts and circumstances, which may enable yourself to form a tolerably clear idea thereon.

But previously I shall give you a succinct description of these people: They were a mixed breed, that is to say, most of them proceeded from marriages, or concubinage of the savage women with the first settlers, who were of various nations, but chiefly French, the others were English Scotch, Swiss, Dutch, &c. the Protestants amongst whom, and especially their children were, in process of time, brought over to a conformity of faith with ours. They found that they could not easily keep their footing in the country, or live sociably with the great majority of the French, but by this means of coming over to our religion.

Certain Normans, of which number was Champlain, were the first French that discovered Port-Royal, now Annapolis, where they found some Scotch settled, who had built a fort of turf, and planted in the area before it some plumb-trees, and walnut-trees, which was all the works of agriculture, and fortification the British nation had made in this country before the year 1710. This is the chief reason too, why they so much insist on calling Acadia, Nova Scotia, and pretend to be the first inhabitants and true proprietors. These Scotch

were driven from Port Royal by the Normans. It is true, they had discovered the river of Port Royal before the Normans, and had built a turf-fort; but it is by no means true, that they were therefore the true settlers on this river, and less yet in the whole of Acadia. The true inhabitants are those who cultivate a country, and thereby acquire a real permanent situation. The property of ground is to them who clear, plant, and improve it. The English had done nothing in this way to it till the year 1710. They never came there, but on schemes of incursion or trade; and in all the wars they had with the French, on being superior to them, they contented themselves with putting them to ransom; and though they sometimes took their fortified places, they did not settle in them. As all their pretension in Acadia was trade, they sometimes indeed detained such French as they could take prisoners; but that was only for the greater security of their traffic in the mean while with the savages. Traders, continually obliged to follow the savages in their vagabond journeys, could not be supposed to have time or inclination for agriculture. This title then the French settlers had; and in short, the whole body of the inhabitants of Acadia, from time immemorial, may be averred to have been French, since a few families of English and other Europeans, cannot be said to form an exception, and those, as I have before observed, soon become frenchified. Except a few families from Boston or New England, I could never learn there were above three of purely British subjects, who also, ultimately conforming both in the religious and civil institutions to the French, became incorporated with them. These families were the Peterses, the Grangers, the Cartys. These last indeed descended from one Roger John-Baptist Carty, an Irish Roman-Catholic. He had been an indented servant in New-England, and had obtained at length his discharge from his master, with permission to remain with the French Acadians for the freer exercise of his religion. Peters was an ironsmith in England, and together with Granger married in Acadia and was there naturalized a Frenchman. Granger made his abjuration before M. Petit, secular-priest of the seminary of Paris, then missionary at Port Royal (Annapolis). These and other European families then soon became united with the French Acadians, and were no longer distinguished from them. Most of these last were originally from Rochelle, Xaintonge, and Poitou: but all went under the common name of Acadians, and were once very numerous. The Parish of Annapolis Royal alone in 1754, according to the account of father Daudin, contained three hundred habitations, or about two thousand communicants. The Mines, which are about five-and-thirty leagues from Port Royal, and the best corn country in Acadia, were also very populous; nor were there wanting inhabitants in many commodious parts of this peninsula.

The character of the French Acadians was good at the bottom: their morals far from vitious; their constitution hardy, and yet strongly turned to indolence and inaction, not caring for work, unless a point of present necessity pressed them; much attached to the customs of the country, which have not a little of the savage in them, and to the opinions of their forefathers, which they cherished as

a kind of patrimony; it was hard to inculcate any novelty to them. They had many parts of character in common with the Canada French. A little matter surprises, and sets them a staring without stirring their curiosity to examine or exciting their inclination to adopt or embrace it. They are remarkably fond of rosaries, crucifixes, agnus deis, and all the little trinkets consecrated by religion, with which they love to adorn their persons, and of which the priests make no little advantage in disposing of amongst them: and in truth, it is almost incredible what a power and influence they have over them, and with which they despotically govern them. One instance I am sure cannot but make you laugh. In September, 1754, the priest at Pigigeesh, had appointed his parishoners to perform the religious ceremony of a Recess, and to make them expiate some disgust they had given him, obliged them, men, women, and children, to attend the adoration of the holy-sacrament with a rope about their necks; and what is more, he not only made them all buy the rope of him, in which you may be sure he took care to find his account, but exacted their coming to fetch it barefooted, from his parsonage house; and this they quietly submitted to. In short, considering the sweets of power on whomsoever exercised, our good fathers the missionaries are not so much to be pitied, as they would have us believe, for their great apostolical labors, and exposure to fatigue; since it is certain they live like little kings in their respective parishes, and enjoy in all senses the best the land affords; and even our government itself, for its own demands, is obliged to pay a sort of court to them, and to keep them in good humor.

The Acadian men were commonly drest in a sort of coarse black stuff made in the country; and many of the poorer sort go bare-footed in all weathers. The women are covered with a cloak, and all their head dress is generally a handkerchief, which would serve for a veil too, in the manner they tied it on, if it descended low enough.

Their dwellings were almost all built in an uniform manner; the inhabitants themselves it was who built them, each for himself, there being but few or no mechanics in the country. The hatchet was their capital and universal instrument. They had saw-mills for their timber, and with a plane and knife, an Acadian would build his house and his barn, and even make all his wooden domestic furniture. Happy nation! that could thus be sufficient to itself, which would always be the case, were the luxury and the vanity of other nations to remain unenvied.

Such in short were the French Acadians, who fell under the dominion of the King of Great Britain, when the English experienced, from both the Acadians and savages, a most thorough reluctance to the recognition of their new sovereign which has continued to this day.

As to the savages it is certain, that the governors for the English acted entirely against the interest of their nation, in their procedure with them. They had been long under the French government, so far as their nature allows them to be under any government at all; and besides, almost all the Micmakis, and great

numbers of the Maricheets, or Abenakis, were converted to our faith, and were consequently under the influence of the priests. It could not then be expected, naturally speaking, that these people could all of a sudden shake off their attachment to, and connexions with our nation; so that, even after the cession of Acadia, they continued, with a savage sullenness, to give marks of their preference of our government. This could not fail of giving the English umbrage; and their impatience not brooking either delays, or soothing them into a temper and opinion more favorable to them: they let it very early be seen, and penetrated by the savages, that they intended to clear the country of them. Nor would this exterminating plan, however not over-humane, have been perhaps wholly an impolitical one, if they had not had the French for neighbors, who, ever watchful and alert in concerning themselves with what past in those parts, took care underhand, by their priests and emissaries, to inflame them, and to offer them not only the kindest refuge, but to provide them with all necessaries of life, sure of being doubly repaid by the service they would do them, if but in the mischief they would do the English, to whom it was a great point with our government to make Acadia as uncomfortable, and as untenable as possible. It was no wonder then, that the savages, ill-used by the English, and still dreading worse from them, being constantly plied by our caresses, presents, and promises, should prefer our nation to that. I have before said, that religion has no great hold of these savages, but it could not be but of some weight in the scale, where their minds were already so exulcerated against those of a different one, whom they now considered as their capital enemies. You may be sure likewise, our priests did not neglect making the most of this advantage, which the English themselves furnished them by their indiscreet management: for certain it is, that a few presents well placed, proper methods of conciliation, and a very little time, would have entirely detached the savages from our interest, and have turned the system of annoyance of the English against the French themselves. Some English governors indeed grew sensible of this, and applied themselves to retrieve matters by a gentler treatment, but the mischief was already done and irretrievable; and our missionaries took care to widen the breach, and to keep up their spirit of hatred and revenge, by instilling into them the notions of jealousy, that such overtures of friendship, on the part of the English, were no better than so many snares laid to make them perish, by a false security, since they could not hope to do it by open violence. One instance may serve to shew you the temper of these people: Some years ago the English officers being assembled at the Mines, in order to take a solemn recognition from them of the King of Great Britain, when a savage, a new convert, called Simon, in spite of all dissuasion, went himself alone to the English commander, and told him, that all his endeavours to get the King of England acknowledged, would be to no purpose; that, for his part, he should never pay any allegiance but to the King of France, and drawing a knife said, "This indeed is all the arms I have, and with this weapon alone, I will stand by the King of France till death."

Yet, with all this obstinacy of sentiments, once more I dare aver, the savages would have been easily won over and attached to the English party, had these gone the right way about it: and I well know that the French, who knew best the nature of the savages, much dreaded it; and were not a little pleased to see the English take measures so contrary to their own interest, and play the game so effectually into our hands. In short, we took, as was natural, all the advantage of their indiscretion and over-sight.

I come now to the Acadians, or what may more properly be called the French Acadians. These would undoubtedly have proved very valuable subjects to the English, and extremely useful to them in improving a dominion so susceptible of all manner of improvement as Acadia, (Nova Scotia) if they could have been prevailed on to break their former ties of allegiance to the King of France, and to have remained quietly under the new government to which they were now transferred. But from this they were constantly dissuaded, and withheld by the influence of our French priests, cantoned amongst them, who kept them steady to our party. You may be sure our government did not fail of constantly inculcating the expediency of this conduct to our priests, who not only very punctually and successfully conformed to their instructions on this head, but very often in the heat of their zeal so much exceeded them, as to draw on themselves the animadversion of the English government. This answered a double end, of hindering that nation from finding those advantages in this country, by the prospect of which it had been tempted to settle in it, and of engaging it to consider Acadia itself, as something not material enough to think worth its keeping, at the expence which it must occasion, and consequently induce the English to be the readier to part with it again, on any future treaty of peace. This too is certain, that the French themselves knew neither the extent, nor the value of this country, till they were sensible of the improvements the English were projecting; and the use now so easy to discover might be made of so fine an establishment. But to return to the Acadians: It must be confest the English had, with respect to them, a difficult game to play. To force such a number of families of which too such great use might have been made, to evacuate the country, seems at first both impolitic and inhuman. But then it must be considered, that these people were absolutely untractable as to the English, and thoroughly under the direction of priests in an interest quite opposite to theirs. To have taken those priests entirely from them, would have exasperated them yet more, and was, in fact, a measure repugnant to that spirit of toleration in religious matters, of which they boast, and to which it must be owned they constantly adhered, as to these people, both in speculation and practice. None of the Acadians were ever molested purely for their religion; and even the priests of our nation were always civilly treated by them, whenever they had not reason to think they meddled in temporal matters, or stirred up their parishioners to rebellion. I have seen many of their own letters that acknowledge as much; so that upon the whole, I do not see that the English could do otherwise than they

did, in expelling their bounds a people, who were constitutionally, and invincibly, a perpetual thorn in their side, whom they could at best look on as secret domestic enemies, who wanted nothing but an occasion to do them all the mischief in their power, and of whom, consequently, there could not, for their interest and safety, remain too few in the land.

In the mean time the French took special care to appear at least to receive with open arms those refugees, whom their fear or hatred of the English drove out of that country; they gave them temporary places of habitation, both for them and their cattle, besides provisions, arms, tools, etc. till they should fix a settlement in some part of the French dominions here, which they recommended especially in the island of, or on the banks of the river of St. John; but they were at first very loth to come to a determination. And surely, these unfortunate victims of their attachment to the French government deserved all the reparation in its power to give them, for what they had quitted for the sake of preserving allegiance to it, even after their country had been transferred to another sovereign. I cannot, however, consistently with truth say, they were received as kindly as they deserved, which probably bred that undetermination of their's to fix a new settlement, as they were pressed to do by the French government. They retained still a hankering after their old habitations: the temporary new ones were far from being equally agreeable or convenient; and even the antient settlers in those places where these refugees were provisionally cantoned, began to make complaints of their encroaching upon them, and to represent their apprehensions of their becoming burthensome to them. Some of our people in power, more solicitous for their own private interest than for the public good, were but too remiss in relieving and comforting these poor people. This, at length, indisposed them so, that after very pathetic remonstrances on the hardship of their case, and the motives upon which they thus suffered, great numbers of them began to listen seriously to the proposals made them by the English, to return upon very inviting terms to the settlements they had quitted. In short, it required the upmost art of the missionaries, and even a kind of coercion from the military power, to keep them from accepting the English offers. For when they presented a petition to Mons. de Vergor, for leave to return to the English district, this commander, after having remonstrated to them that he could not grant their request, nor decide any thing of himself in a matter of that importance, was forced, at length, to declare to them, that he would shoot any man who should attempt to go over to the English. Thus these poor people remained under this deplorable dilemma. Some of them too, had not even habitations to go back if they would: they had been forced into the measure of deserting their country, and passing over to the French side, by the violence of the Abbot de Loutre, who had not only preached them into this spirit, but ordered the savages, whom he had at his disposal, to set fire to their habitations, barns, etc. particularly at Mirtigueesh.

In the mean time the French did not spare, at least, the consolation of words

and promises to these distressed Refugee-acadians. They were assured, that they would infallibly be relieved on the regulation of the limits taking place, which was then on the point of being settled, by commissaries, between the two crowns. This hope, in some sort, pacified them; and they lived as well as they could in the expectation of a final decision, which was not so soon to come.

Yet even this example of the sufferings of these people, purely on account of their attachment to the French government, could not out-balance with the French Acadians, who remained in the English district, the assiduous applications of our priests to keep them firm in the French interest. They never ceased giving every mark in their power of their preference of our government to that, under which the treaty of Utrecht had put them. The English, however, at length finding that, neither by fair nor foul means, could they reclaim or win them over to their purpose, so as that they might in future depend upon them, came at once to a violent resolution. They surprized and seized every French Acadian-man they could lay their hands on, (the women they knew would follow of course) and, to clear the country effectually of them, dispersed them into the remotest parts of their other settlements in North America, where they thought they could do the least mischief to them. Some were shipped off for England: the priests shared the same fate, and were conveyed to Europe. With this evacuation, the very existence of the French Acadians may be said to have ended; for in Acadia there are scarce any traces of them left, few or none having escaped this general seizure and transportation, for the necessity of which, the English were perhaps more to be pitied than blamed.

In the mean time our government had so far succeeded, as to force the English thus to deprive themselves of such a number of subjects, who, but for the reasons above deduced, might have been very valuable ones, and a great strengthening of their new colony. Hitherto then our neighbourhood has made it almost as irksome, and uncomfortable to them, as we could wish; and this fine spot of dominion does not nigh produce to them the advantages that might otherwise naturally be expected from it. Numbers of themselves begin to exclaim against it, as if its value and importance had been overrated; not considering, that it is on the circumstances of their possession, and not on the nature of the possession itself, that their complaints and murmurings should fall. It is very likely, that whenever we get it back again, we shall know very well what to do with it. They have begun to teach us the value of what we thus inadvertently parted with to them; and it will be hard, indeed, on recovering it, if we do not improve upon their lessons.

In the mean time you in Europe are cruelly mistaken, if you do not annex an idea of the highest consequence and value, to the matters of dominion now in dispute, between the crowns of France and Great Britain, between whom the war is in a matter begun, by the capture of the Alcides and Lys, and which, even without that circumstance, was inevitable. I know that our (French) government, is indeed fully sensible of the capital importance to it of its interest in

these parts, and has proceeded in consequence. But it is not so, I find by your letters, and the reports of others, with numbers in Europe, who do not conceive, that the present object of the war is so considerable as it really is.

To say nothing of the vast extent of country that falls under the claim of the English to Acadia (Nova Scotia) which alone would form an immense mass of dominion, greatly improveable in a number of points, its situation is yet of greater weight. By the English possessing it, Canada itself would be so strengthened, so liable to harrassment, and especially to the comptrol of its navigation, that it would scarce be tenable, and surely not worth the expence of keeping. The country pretended to have been ceded is far preferable to it; and the masters of it would be equally masters of the sea all over North-America. Halifax, for example, according to which of the nation's hands it should be in, may be equally an effectual check on Quebec, or Boston.

You will then allow, than was there even nothing more in dispute that the limits of the cession of Acadia, or Nova Scotia, together with its necessary dependence, that alone would form such a considerable object, as not easily to be given up on either side. The commissaries appointed by both crowns, then failing of coming to any agreement or regulation, it is no wonder to see the appeal lodged with the sword, especially when there is another point yet remains, of perhaps equal, if not superior, importance, depending on the issue of the war: and that is, the western inland frontiers of the English colonies. Should we ever command the navigation of the lakes and rivers, behind their settlements, you can easily figure to yourself, not only the vast advantages of preserving that communication of Canada, with New Orleans and the Mississippi, so absolutely essential to both these our colonies, but the facility it will give us on all occasions of distressing the English, where neither their Marine-force can succor them, nor can they be able to resist the attack, since we may make it wherever ever we please, and effectually dodge any land-force they might assemble in any one or two parts to oppose us. We may then carry the war into the quarter most convenient, and most safe for us, if we should ever have the whole navigation of the lakes so far at our disposal, as to prevent their constructing any material number vessels to dispute it with us. Thus we can penetrate into the heart of any of their colonies, that may best suit us, especially with the concurrent aid of the savages, whom we have found means to attach so strongly to us, and on whom we can greatly depend for the effectual harassment of, especially, the back-plantations of the English.

You see then, Sir, by this summary sketch of the points in contest, that the war being once engaged, it will not be so easy a matter, as many in Europe imagine, to adjust the pretensions, so various and so important, of the respective nations, so as to be able to procure a peace. Some of the points appear to me absolutely untreatable. You may observe too, that I do not so much as touch upon the dispute about Tabago, Santa-Lucia, or any of the Leeward islands, which are not, however, of small consequence. In short, the war must, in all

human probability, be a much longer one, than is commonly believed. Neither nation can materially relax of its claims, without such a thorough sacrifice of its interest in America, as nothing but the last extremities of weakness can compel.

Long as this letter is, I cannot yet close it without mentioning to you a singular phenomenon of nature, in the island of St. John. You know it is a flat, level island, chiefly formed out of the congestion of sand and soil from the sea. Tradition, experience, and authentic public acts (*Procès verbaux*) concur to attest that every seven years, it is visited by swarms either of locusts, or of field-mice, alternately, never together; without its being possible to discover hitherto either the reason, or the origin of these two species, which thus in their turns, at the end of every seventh year, pour out all of a sudden in amazing numbers; and having committed their ravages on all the fruits of the earth, precipitate themselves into the sea. Neither has any preventive remedy for this evil been yet discovered. It is well known how they perish, but, once more, how they are produced no one, that I could learn, has as yet been able to trace. The field-mice are undoubtedly something in the nature of those swarms of the fable-mice, that sometimes overrun Lapland and Norway, though I do not know that these return so regularly and at such stated periods, as those of this island.