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THE NATURE OF QUEBEC SOCIETY DURING THE FRENCH REGIME

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SOCIAL HISTORY has always been one of the weak points of early Canadian history. Indeed, it would seem that few countries have had the study of their past so thoroughly monopolized by those interested in politics and military strategy as Canada under the French regime; and few cities have had their social backgrounds so distorted by romantic novelists and sensation-loving travellers as the city of Quebec. If one is to arrive at a fair estimate of Quebec's social conditions, three essential problems must be considered. In the first place, what were the chief characteristics of Quebec society as they became crystallized in the first half of the 18th century, and how much truth lies in the legend of a "Petit Versailles"? Secondly, to what extent were these social characteristics the product of the economic, political, military and religious functions of the town? And finally, how far dare the historian go in taking Quebec society as representative of that in New France?

Founded as a fortress both of God and the King of France, built at the head of ocean navigation in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and at the entrance of the great St. Lawrence-Ottawa river system, the town of Quebec had, by the early eighteenth century, assumed a unique appearance. Travellers of the period described with amazement the narrow, crowded, dirty streets which characterized the Lower Town, especially when contrasted with the broad streets flanked by the handsome grey stone edifices of church and state which were spread out upon the top of the cliff, and the impressive, if unfinished ramparts which crowned the Quebec rock.¹ They spoke, too, of the constant changes which took place in the physical appearance of the town, thanks to fires and wars and the demands of an expanding economy. The very position of the city as capital of church and state, chief port, and judicial, market and financial centre, meant that a medley of officers and officials, traders and farmers, craftsmen and servants, teachers and missionaries, thronged its streets and contributed to its social pattern. Moreover, the newness of the country and the many opportunities for quick fortunes, both legal and illegal, afforded by trade and politics, accentuated the sharp contrast between the rich and poor, and made it perfectly clear that Quebec was far from being a social Utopia. The remarkable thing is that such a diverse society should have been a working unit, especially when we remember the widely different regions and historical backgrounds from which the Quebec settlers had originally been drawn. The explanation lies in the fundamental homogeneity of the people; for whatever their back-

¹Baron de La Hontan, *Nouveaux Voyages dans l'Amerique Septentrionale*, (Paris, 1703), I, 15; P. Kalm, *Voyages in North America*, (ed. A. B. Benson, New York, 1937), II, 430.

ground, the people of Quebec were practically all Roman Catholics and of French blood. They spoke the same language, shared the same basic ideas and were able to work together as a coherent group.

The rapid changes which visitors noticed in the appearance of Quebec typified the amazing fluidity of its social classes. It is practically impossible to divide Quebec society into the conventional castes. Only the Governor, Intendant and Bishop, could be placed with reasonable certainty. As for the other political and judicial officials who might be expected to form the upper class, most of them were actually farmers or merchants, many of whom dabbled in the fur trade or sold goods over the counter. Inter-marriage among Quebec families was so frequent that by 1700 there was scarcely a member of any trade who was not connected with those in almost every other occupation.² Even the division of the Quebec population into the permanent and the temporary residents was difficult to maintain, since so many of the officials and French merchants ended up by making Canada their home. Nor did patents of nobility provide New France with a stable upper class, for they were awarded for achievement rather than for wealth, position, or birth, and generally the recipients of such honours became so conscious of their rank that they ceased to be useful citizens. As the Intendant Champigny remarked, somewhat acidly, "Pride and laziness are the chief faults . . . of the Canadian nobles".³ Not until after 1750 did there appear a rich capitalist class known as the "Grande Société" which proceeded to drain the country of its money and create a millionaire clique whose ostentatious displays and vices have come, very unfairly, to be regarded as typical of Canadian society under the French regime.⁴

What then was the organization of Quebec society? Apart from the three leading officials whose personalities were secondary to their office, the hierarchy of Quebec social classes seems to have been largely a personal one. It was the great wealth and benevolence of Aubert de la Chesnaye which gave him a position of such influence at the end of the seventeenth century; the intellectual acumen of Verrier and the great medical skill of Sarrazin explain the high esteem in which both of these men were held in eighteenth century Quebec. And even during the last decade of the French regime, the men who controlled the town were not representatives of the old families of Quebec; they were unscrupulous adventurers or officers of the army or state who used their brains and cunning to raise themselves to important positions. There was, therefore, no hard and fast rule why men should assume leadership in Quebec society. Some had unexpected, even undeserved, streaks of luck; others had great qualities of mind and heart. The pressure of economic necessity and the constant shifting of population made it certain that the social system of Quebec would remain sufficiently flexible to allow any man of character, intelligence and initiative to climb by his own efforts from the bottom rung to the top of the ladder.

²Mère Juchereau de St. Ignace, *Les Annales de l'Hôtel-Dieu de Québec*, (ed. A. Jamet, Que., 1939), xxxiii, Introduction; Public Archives of Quebec, *Registres de Notre-Dame de Québec, 1620-67, 1667-1703*.

³*Bulletin des Recherches Historiques*, (Que., 1917) XXII, 283, Champigny to Minister, Que., May 10, 1691.

⁴*Quebec Archives Report*, (Beauceville, 1925) 1924-5, 197, List of Canadian millionaires with dates and fortunes. Only two of them were residents in Canada before 1749.

Such a society could hardly provide a replica of the social conditions at Versailles. The capital of Canada was a far cry from that of France. The Chateau St. Louis, with its single reception hall, was very different from the great palace of the Sun King, and the drawing rooms of the Quebec ladies bore less resemblance to the salons of Paris than did the gambling which flourished in the first to the intellectual discussions of the second.

Yet, however different their characteristics, we must look beyond these to the factors which influenced them, if the comparison is to be fair and comprehensive. There is, in the first place, the economic factor. Established by Champlain as a fur-trading post and a seaport, Quebec always remained a commercial centre of importance. And the various aspects of its economic life left a very considerable impression upon the social conditions of the town. The ships from France and the French West Indies that filled the Quebec harbour every spring and summer provided the town with an ever-changing population of foreign traders and travellers, soldiers, sailors and sea-captains who kept Quebec closely in touch with news and fashions in Europe and elsewhere. Small wonder that native Quebecers did not have the rustic air of people living in the outlying provinces of France, but could lay claim to "a gay and sprightly behaviour with great sweetness and politeness of manner".⁵ More important, however, was the fact that without her foreign trade, Quebec would have had little opportunity to acquire capital and build up the various industries and occupations by which so many of the people lived. The warehouses and shipyards which crowded the quay, the lumber yards, meat-drying sheds, biscuit factories and flour mills, all depended for their existence upon the demands of the Ile Royale and the French West Indies. And not only did the ships take away the surplus products of Canada's farms and workshops, they also brought a great variety of food and clothes and manufactured goods without which Quebec society could scarcely have survived. Wines and vinegar, olives and soap, guns and string, linen and window-glass were among the assortment provided by La Rochelle merchants. Cod, fish and rope came from Cape Breton; sugar and molasses and tropical delicacies from Martinique and Guadeloupe.⁶ Since stringent regulations kept all imports in Quebec warehouses for one month before they could be distributed to Three Rivers and Montreal,⁷ it was no accident that the standards of living were higher in the capital than elsewhere in the colony: no accident either that Quebec was ahead of all Canada in fashions of food and clothes.⁸

Not only did the ships coming in to Quebec each year bring new ideas and material goods, they also furnished the impetus for the

⁵Public Archives of Canada, Archives des Colonies, Series C11A, LXVII, Anonymous Memoire, 1737; *Que. Arch. Rep.* (Beauceville, 1932) 1931-32, 10, La Pause, Memoire en Canada, 1755-60; F. X. Charlevoix, *Journal of a Voyage to North America*, (ed. J. P. Kellog, Chicago, 1923) 1, 117, Oct. 28, 1720

⁶La Rochelle, Archives de la Charente Inférieure, Amirauté, Numeros Provisoires, XCVIII Rôle d'Equipages des navres, 1679; CI, Rôle d'Equipages, 1684; CLVI, Declaration de la Cargaion, 1747.

⁷P.A.C., AC, Series C11A, XLI, Bégon to Council, Versailles, Oct, 26, 1720.

⁸Kalm, *Voyages*, II, 403, 446-7; *B.R.H.* (Que., 1933) XXXVIII, 634-5, Memoire of La Pause, 1756.

functioning of Quebec society throughout the summer months. From the arrival of the first ship in early May to the departure of the last one in October, social life in Quebec was one mad whirl which helped to earn for the town the title of "Le Petit Versailles". Frequently, the incoming ships had on board some high-ranking official whose arrival called for processions of welcome and a great round of receptions, dinners and calls. Frequently too, letters from France contained pieces of good news which warranted enthusiastic celebrations and long nights of feasting and dancing.⁹ As the departure of the ships became imminent, the tempo increased. Officials from Montreal and Three Rivers came to Quebec to send off their letters; traders and shopkeepers from all parts of Canada congregated in the town bringing furs and other products for export. "From the first of September," Montcalm reported, "the town of Quebec has a commercial appearance and a most excited atmosphere".¹⁰ Then, with the departure of the ships, an exhausted tranquility descended upon Quebec, as the inhabitants prepared for the isolation and cold of the oncoming winter.

The fur trade, also, left its mark upon Quebec society. Although by the end of the 17th century, Montreal, rather than Quebec, was the principal centre of the Indian trade, it was through the port of Quebec that all the goods bound for the up-country had to pass, as well as all the pelts exported legally from the colony. Quebec may have lacked the boisterous quality of Montreal, with its voyageurs and coureurs-de-bois, but the uncertain and dangerous element was apparent even more. To the very end of the French regime, Indians from the Jesuit Missions at Jeune and Ancien Lorette and St. François de Sales and Abenakis and Montagnais came annually to Quebec with furs and strings of wampum, to trade and work out peace treaties.¹¹ And, although the coureurs-de-bois naturally preferred to keep far away from the official atmosphere of Quebec, this was not so oppressive as to prevent some of the most notorious of them from coming openly to the town.¹² Thus the fur trade provided Quebec with some of its excitement and contributed towards making it less stable and more adventurous.

The second important influence upon Quebec society stemmed from the town's position as the capital of New France. The presence of the Governor, Intendant and Sovereign Council gave it prestige and provided it with an official upper class not dependent on wealth and birth. State officials, by virtue of their positions, were obliged to act as hosts at government receptions whose size and brilliance, while not equal to those of the French court, were none-the-less calculated to

⁹Kalm, *Voyages*, II, 464-5, Reception of La Jonquière; J. B., *Travels in New France*, (Pennsylvania Historical Society Publication, Harrisburg, 1941) 17-8, Birth of the Duke of Burgundy; P.A.C., AC, Series C11A, XLVIII, Beauharnois to Minister, Que. Oct. 1, 1726, Marriage of Louis XV.

¹⁰(Ed.) H. R. Casgrain, Marquis de Montcalm, *Journal des Campagnes en Canada*, (Quebec 1893) 306, Autumn, 1757.

¹¹(Ed.) R. G. Thwaites, *Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, (Cleveland, 1896-1901) LXVI, 157, D'Avagour to Father Germain, Lorette, Oct. 9, 1710; LXVII, 94, Rasles to nephew, Nanrantsouak, Oct. 15, 1722.

¹²P.A.C., AC, Series C11A, XXXIV, Neret & Gayot to Minister, La Rochelle, 1714; XXXVII, De Monseignat to Council, Que., Nov. 4, 1717.

impress even visitors from Europe. During the last five years of the French regime, under the leadership of the Intendant Bigot and the Chevalier de Levis, these festivities became particularly numerous and extravagant and have been remembered by succeeding generations largely because they set such a thoroughly bad example of gambling, over-drinking and immorality.¹³ On the other hand, it may be pointed out that the example and patronage of government officials also promoted the development of culture in Quebec. It was under the protection of the Governor that amateur theatricals had flourished at the end of the seventeenth century and that libraries consisting of several hundreds of volumes were built up in the eighteenth.¹⁴ Thanks also to this group of educated Frenchmen, the philosophical and religious ideas prevalent in contemporary France, at the risk of incurring the wrath of the religious authorities, were introduced into the colony.¹⁵

The impact of Quebec's official position was seen, too, in other spheres. Because Quebec was the capital of New France, there came to it a steady stream of Indian ambassadors, English envoys and foreign visitors, who helped to keep the inhabitants more closely in touch with the political affairs of the western hemisphere. Thanks to the location in Quebec of the Sovereign Council and the Prévôté Court the town enjoyed the benefits of law and order to a degree found nowhere else in New France. Although occasional brawls did break out in the taverns, it is astonishing how few threats to the maintenance of peace are found in the Quebec records. Rioting, robbery, house-breaking and even malicious gossip were summarily dealt with by the Quebec Prévôté by use of fines, the wooden horse, the whip and the pillory; and the serious crimes of murder, rape and large-scaled theft were punished by the Council with hanging, branding or deportation.¹⁶ Consequently, it is not surprising that life and property enjoyed a most enviable security in Quebec during the eighteenth century, or that the citizens of Quebec who occupied positions in the various law courts gained a well earned respect for their integrity and energy in the enforcement of the law.

Closely connected with the administrative side of Quebec's existence was the military. As the key to the St. Lawrence and one of the two towns in French North America boasting of European fortifications, Quebec was inevitably the most important garrison city of New France. The impact of the resident garrison upon the social life of any town is well known. Instability and immorality are results common to any age and any country, and the contributions made by

¹³Comte de Malartic, *Journal des Campagnes au Canada de 1755 à 1760*, (Paris, c. 1880) 92-3, Jan. 3, 1757; *Canadian Archives Report*, (Ottawa, (1929) 1929, Appendix A, 56, Montcalm to his wife, Montreal, April 16, 1757; (ed.) H. R. Casgrain, Montcalm, *Lettres au Chevalier de Levis*, (Quebec, 1893) 155, Montcalm to Levis, Que., Jan. 1759.

¹⁴*Que. Arch. Rep.* (Beauceville, 1922) 1921-2, 243-56, Inventory of Vaudreuil's furniture, 1726; *B.R.H.* (Que. 1935) Inventory of Library of Gaillard, Councillor, Jan. 11, 1730.

¹⁵P.A.C., AC, Series C11A, CXIV, Inventory of Cugnet's furnishings, 1742; Montcalm, *Journal*, 189, Jan. 12, 1758.

¹⁶P.A.C., AC, Series C11A, XXXIV, D'Auteuil to Minister, France, 1714; LXIII, Hocquart to Minister, Que. Oct. 10, 1732.

the gay French officers and soldiers who flooded Quebec during the winters of 1756, '57 and '58 merely accentuated conditions which had existed since the building of Fort St. Louis. But the garrison of the fort did make some useful contributions to the town. For one thing, it helped to solve the ever-acute labour shortage, since men in the *Troupes de la Marine* were permitted to hire themselves out as workmen or craftsmen, and thus earn a little extra cash. Some of them became so interested in their new jobs and new wives that they left the military service to swell the ranks of employed civilians, a transfer which the king was glad to sanction in the interests of the colonial population." Further, the soldiers and officers of the garrison did much to help in the social activities of Quebec. With a considerable proportion of the male population absent on commercial ventures or fur-trading expeditions, the picnics, dances and sleighing parties which entertained the Quebec ladies during the winter months would have been sorry affairs indeed without the help of the troops." Although the spectacular landing of over 1200 troops of the Carignan-Salières regiment was not repeated until 1756, there came every year to Quebec a steady stream of French soldiers. Many of them spent only a few hours in the capital before being sent off to defend frontier posts or to man other garrison towns. But the influence of these constant arrivals and departures must have done much to increase the instability, the prestige and the excitement of Quebec. As for the great bales of military supplies which came to the Quebec storehouses every year, their unloading and distribution provided employment for dozens of Quebec citizens and dishonest fortunes for a few rogues who knew how to profit by the king's gullibility and his officials' mistakes."

Only one influence upon Quebec social conditions remains to be considered, that of the church. Although the church was at no time the dominating element in the life of the town, its influence upon the people was profound and many-sided. The very fact that Quebec was the official residence of the Bishop and the headquarters of the Jesuits added to the prestige which it already enjoyed as the chief port, military and administrative centre. The close contact which Quebec citizens had with prelates, priests and nuns, must have had a very great influence upon their attitude to the church. With five chapels and a cathedral in which to worship, with examples of holiness always before their eyes, it is not strange that many of the people of Quebec were exceptionally devout. And yet, there is evidence to show that there were definite limits to their devotion and obedience. When the Superior of the Jesuit Order twice in one season refrained from preaching in the parish church of Quebec because the congregation was not large enough to make the effort worthwhile, when a

¹⁷*B.R.H.* (Que. 1916) XXII, 217, *Memoire of La Potherie, 1701*; P.A.C., AC, Series C11A, LXVII, *Memoire re. Canada, anon., 1737*; Paris, *Archives Nationales, Colonies, Series A, XXI, King to La Jonquière, Versailles, April 10, 1750.*

¹⁸(Ed.) W. B. Lindsay, *Edits, Arrêts, Ordonnances Royaux, (Que. 1854), II, 398, Ordinance of Bigot, Dec. 24, 1748*; Paris, AN, *Archives de la Guerre, Series A1, vol. 3417, Duchet to Chatel, Carillon, July 15, 1756.*

¹⁹P.A.C., AC, Series B, XV, *Supplies sent to Canada, March 8, 1688*; Series C11A, XXXVI, *Vaudreuil to Duke of Orleans, Feb. 1716*; *La Jonquière Le Chef d'Escadre, Marquis de la Jonquière, (Paris, 1889) 269, Appendix II, King to La Jonquière, Versailles, April 30, 1749.*

number of Quebecers had to be compelled by the Council to furnish their quota of communion bread, when it took the full force of episcopal authority to prevent the performance of Molière's "Tartuffe", it would seem that the religious authorities did not possess that stranglehold on public thought with which they are usually credited. This became particularly noticeable during the eighteenth century when the rationalist ideas prevalent in Europe began to filter into the colony through the writings of Voltaire, Locke and the Jansenists, and a few Huguenot clerks and traders began to impair the complete religious homogeneity of the Quebec citizens.²⁰ Moreover, in spite of the battles waged by Bishops Laval and St. Vallier, the church had failed to enforce clerical standards of morality and modesty in the colony. The ladies continued to wear their low-necked dresses and the gentlemen to race their horses on Sunday; gambling, drinking and prostitution continued in spite of clerical fury; brandy was still sold to the Indians; and books, which could not possibly have met with clerical approval, found their way into the libraries of the councillors. Hence, long before the fall of Quebec, the church of New France had abandoned all pretensions to the control of non-ecclesiastical affairs. It still sang *Te Deums* for events of political or military significance; it still tried, though somewhat vainly, to impose the discipline of good behaviour on those attending the church service, but it no longer interfered successfully in general or important matters of state or society.²¹

Yet the influence of the church upon Quebec society remained strong owing to its control of the two vital social services, the hospitals and the schools. It was only natural that these two important organizations should have been in the hands of the religious orders, for they alone possessed the financial resources needed to erect suitable buildings, the skilled professional training, the stability and permanence requisite for such large-scaled undertakings. The records of the early eighteenth century are themselves a tribute to the Hôtel-Dieu of Quebec, in whose crowded wards the sisters of the Augustinian Order battled with ship-fever, smallpox, influenza and countless other diseases.²² The high standards of cleanliness, the careful study of drugs and medicines, and the successful experiments in complicated surgery which characterized the Hôtel-Dieu and later the Hôpital-Général of Quebec, are a revelation to those who are accustomed to think of eighteenth century hospitals in terms of butchery and filth. Naturally, the nursing sisters made the most of their opportunities and preached their religious faith as they distributed drugs and care. More than one Huguenot soldier imbibed Catholic doctrine along with his

²⁰P.A.C., AC, Series C11A, LXXV, Beauharnois & Hocquart to Minister, Que., Sept. 18, 1741; CXIV, Inventory of Cugnet's possessions, 1742.

²¹*Jugements et Délibérations*, V, 167, Oct. 12, 1705; VI, 665, Aug. 14, 1713; (eds.) H. Têtu, Horace and C. O. Gagnon, *Mandements, Lettres Pastorales et Circulaires des Evêques de Québec*, 1659-1876, (Que. 1889) 1,540, Ordinance of Chartier de Lotbinière, Feb. 10, 1732; II, 101-4, Mandement of Pontbriand, Aug. 20, 1756.

²²Paris, AN, Archives de la Marine, Series B2, CXXIV, Minister to Munitionnaires Généraux, Versailles, Feb. 13, 1687; CCXIV, Minister to De Couron, Versailles, July 31, 1709; AN, Series T, LXXVIII-IX, Mme. Duplessis de Ste. Hélène to Mme. Hecquet, Que., Oct. 18, 1733.

medicines.²³ But such religious activity did not in any way impair the tremendous contribution made by the nurses to the health of Quebec's population.

As for education, it was traditionally the province of the church and the children of Quebec were highly fortunate in the provisions made for them. The Jesuits had a wide and well-deserved reputation as the best schoolmasters of Europe, and it was to them that the boys of the town went for both primary and secondary education. At the bottom of the educational pyramid there was the elementary class where the traditional "three R's" were reinforced with large doses of catechism. At the age of ten the boys entered the Jesuit College where for five years they concentrated upon the study of languages, mathematics and the humanities, assisted at all times by the most modern educational methods. A staff of five full-time professors had the responsibility for carrying out this curriculum, but all the Jesuits who happened to be in residence at Quebec were expected to do their share of teaching in the College. Since many of them were men of exceptional intelligence, it is not hard to understand why the standards of the Jesuit school remained so high.²⁴ Indeed, it is scarcely possible to over-estimate the tremendous contribution made by it to the education of the men of Quebec over a period of one hundred and twenty years. One needs only to read the list of Jesuit pupils, the Lotbinières, the Repentignys, and the Vaudreuil, to see what a profound influence the Jesuits must have had upon the leading families of the colony.

Assisting the Jesuits in the education of Quebec boys was the Seminary. Although its chief work lay in providing priests for Canadian parishes and missionaries for far-off fields, the Seminary was soon forced to expand its interests in education. It was clear that it was impossible to take young men from the farms and workshops of the colony and turn them into clerics in three years. Hence, in 1668, there was founded the Petit Séminaire with the object of introducing boys to the life and ideals of the priesthood, and of teaching them the elements of theology and philosophy. An arrangement with the Jesuit College provided further studies in the humanities, languages and mathematics. When the students graduated, after five years in the Petit Séminaire, they had the chance, if they wished it, of continuing further theological studies in the Grand Séminaire to qualify them for ordination, but only about one-eighth availed themselves of this opportunity. All the others went back to the secular life of the colony, but thanks to the combined efforts of the Petit Séminaire and the Jesuit College, they went back as fairly well-educated men.²⁵

²³Juchereau, *Annales de l'Hôtel-Dieu*, 343, Diary of 1709; *B.R.H.* (Que., 1905) XI, Abjurations of heresy, 1740.

²⁴A. Gosselin, *L'Instruction au Canada sous le Régime Français*, (Que. 1911) 281-306; C. Rochemonteix, *Les Jésuites et la Nouvelle France au XVII^e. siècle*, (Paris, 1896) III, 374; Thwaites, *Jes. Rel.* XLV, 274, Revenues of Jesuits in Canada, 1701; Paris, AN, Colonies, Series C11E, XI, Beauharnois & Hocquart to Minister, Que. Oct. 22, 1741.

²⁵*Edits et Ordonnances*, I, 34, Establishment of Quebec Seminary, March 26, 1663; *Que. Arch. Rep.* 1939-40, 202, Laval to Cardinals, Que., Nov. 6, 1665; Thwaites, *Jes. Rel.* LII, 46-8, Relation of 1667-8; La Potherie, *Histoire de l'Amérique Septentrionale*, I, 238.

For those who did not wish a purely intellectual education, both the Seminary and the College provided a certain amount of technical and scientific training. Although the farm and craft school at St. Joachim was of short duration, the Seminary continued to support its theory of learning by doing, and each student was required to learn and practice a trade in the workshops of Quebec. The Jesuits furnished the intellectual counterpart of this craft training for under their auspices, with the support of the king, a variety of classes on navigation, hydrography and mathematics were held for those wishing to become navigators or surveyors.²⁶ The real weakness of Quebec education for boys lay in the elementary schools. Until 1699, the only alternative to the Jesuit school in the Upper Town was attendance at the class of one of the itinerant teachers who wandered through the streets by the docks. In that year, however, this deplorable situation was righted by the opening of an elementary class under a Seminary priest, in the basement of the Lower Town church. By the mid eighteenth century, three teachers were kept busy providing the foundation on which all secondary and technical education could be based.²⁷

To these various schools for boys must be added those operated by the Ursulines and the Sisters of the Congregation for the girls of the district. It would be natural to suppose that in a colonial society where life was hard and practical, little attention would be given to the education of women. Yet such was not the case in Quebec where, as early as 1642, the Ursuline nuns had opened a boarding and day school to educate both Indian and French-Canadian girls. So efficiently did they work, and so popular was their convent, that by 1664 Marie de l'Incarnation boasted proudly that not a girl in the town of Quebec had failed to pass through her hands.²⁸ Gradually, however, as standards of living in the colony continued to rise, the cost of sending girls to the Ursuline convent became prohibitive to many and the school developed a distinctly bourgeois atmosphere. The education which the Ursulines offered the girls of Quebec was somewhat different from that offered to the boys. The three staples of reading, writing and arithmetic, along with smatterings of history and geography and plentiful doses of catechism completed the intellectual side of the programme. But, in addition, the Ursuline pupils were provided with all the practical accomplishments of French ladies. They learned to sew, gild and embroider, to sing and play the violin, and even to dance. Hence, when they graduated from the Ursuline school, the girls of Quebec were equipped to take their place in colonial society.²⁹

²⁶P.A.C., AC, Series C11A, XVIII, Callières and Champigny to Minister, Que., Oct. 18, 1700; LXXV, Hocquart to Minister, Que., Oct. 19, 1744.

²⁷Archives du Séminaire de Québec, "Paroisse", No. 126, Fondation des Ecoles, Jan. 22, 1699, notarial document by Chambalon; L. Groulx, *L'Enseignement Français au Canada*, (Montreal), 1934, 1, 20.

²⁸Marie de l'Incarnation, *Lettres Historiques*, II, 285, Marie de l'Incarnation to an Ursuline of Tours, Que., Aug. 19, 1664.

²⁹(Ed.) A. Jamet, Marie de l'Incarnation, *Ecrits Spirituels et Historiques*, (Quebec, 1929-39) III, 167, Mère Anne de Sté. Claire to Ursulines of Paris, Que., Sept. 2, 1640; Charlevoix, *Journal*, I, 110; *Que. Arch. Rep.* 1934-5, 26, Mme. Bégon to her son, Montreal, Jan. 9, 1749.

As for the Sisters of the Congregation, their large house in the Lower Town provided the complement to the aristocratic training of the Ursuline convent, for there a hundred day pupils learned the fundamental subjects along with the practical arts of housekeeping and went back to do their share in running their homes and managing their husbands' business.⁹⁰

As a result of these many schools for boys and girls, it is probable that by the eighteenth century there was as high a standard of education in Quebec as in most of the provincial cities of France. If the figures given in the records of the various Orders are correct, after 1700 almost all the children of Quebec went to School for a few years and acquired at least the rudiments of an education. This then, was the most far-reaching contribution of the church to Quebec social conditions; for thanks to the schools which flourished under the religious Orders, literacy and culture, shallow though they may have been, were widespread. It was Charlevoix, the Jesuit professor, who best described the practical results of Quebec education. "The people of Quebec," he wrote in 1721, "reason like politicians on what is past and form conjectures on what is likely to happen; the sciences and arts have also their part, so that conversation never flags for want of matter . . . Our language is nowhere more purely spoken . . . and the least rusticity in language or behaviour is utterly unknown."⁹¹

It was the combination of these economic, political, military and religious factors that made the social conditions of Quebec unique in French North America. Montreal might be a great trading centre, and the home of fine schools and convents, but it lacked the close economic and political contacts with Europe which Quebec enjoyed. New Orleans might enjoy the benefits of a seaport and a seat of government, but it could not boast of European fortifications nor of an active place in the vital fur trade. Louisbourg represented the armed might of the King of France, and its harbour was crowded with ships from far and near, but it was simply an isolated outpost without the great trading hinterland and administrative and judicial influence of the capital of New France. Quebec was an unparalleled combination of all these various characteristics. And yet it was scarcely more than a small town, even by eighteenth century standards. Perhaps, indeed, because of its size not one of the various elements in its composition was able to dominate the others; all combined to make Quebec, not a "Petit Versailles", where glitter and pomp covered a rotten and corrupt society, but a practical, hardworking colonial town, whose prestige and reputation depended on its own unrivalled importance within the colony of New France.

⁹⁰A. Gosselin, *L'Instruction au Canada*, 187-93.