

THE KING'S GIRLS

TO HER SON

Quebec, 29 October 1665

My very dear son:

If all the letters I have written to you this year have reached you, this should be the fifth you receive from me.¹ But I am very uncertain as to whether the great many I wrote to divers cities in France have arrived there, because the vice-flagship of the King's fleet, in which were our most essential letters and the papers for our most important concerns, was shipwrecked two hundred leagues from here. All we know for certain about this mishap is that the vessel was not yet beyond the land when it was broken upon some rocks. Everyone was nevertheless saved, except for one sailor.² A good part of the baggage was likewise saved, which leaves me some hope that our letters and our memoranda have escaped the shipwreck.

This mishap took place during the night, when everyone was in bed and at rest except the pilots, and the ship sank suddenly to the bottom between two rocks. There were three worthy ladies that were going to France for their affairs; they had to be drawn from peril by pulleys attached to the top of the mast, then removed by means of ropes with utmost difficulty onto some rocks.

They have all retired to the Notre-Dame Mountains, the most sterile and coldest place in America, with food for no more than twelve days, which they saved from the wreckage. Monsieur de Tracy ordered three of the King's vessels, which have already left, to take all these people on board as they pass or, if they cannot approach and it is necessary to leave them to spend the winter on the rocks, to send them food for eight months. He has also sent people to give them help. None of these has yet returned and we are still waiting for news.³

We have been afflicted by this mishap but not surprised, because never since we have been in this country have there been such great tempests on the ocean and the great river as this year. The twelve vessels that arrived almost perished. The thirteenth, which was Monsieur de Tracy's frigate, sank to the bottom at the entrance to the river, where it was seen. All its men, all his provisions, and all baggage were lost, which set his affairs back a little because of the great expenses he was obliged to make and the large retinue he had to maintain.⁴ Such, my very dear son, are the misadventures of human life, which teach us that there is nothing assured in the world and that we should attach our hearts only to the goods of eternity.

Money, which was rare in this country, is now very common, these gentlemen having brought a great deal with them. They pay for everything they buy with money, both their food and their other necessities, which suits our habitants very well.

The hundred girls that the King sent this year have just arrived and already almost all of them are married. He will send two hundred more next year and still others in proportion in the years to come. He is also sending men to supply the needs of the marriages and this year fully five hundred have come, not to speak of the men that make up the army. In consequence, it is an

astonishing thing to see how the country becomes peopled and multiplies. It is said that His Majesty intends to spare nothing, being urged to this by the seigneurs that are here, who find the country and living here delightful in comparison with the West Indies whence they come, where the heat is so extreme one can scarcely live. Those countries are rich because of the sugar and tobacco taken from them, but it is impossible to grow wheat there, and their bread is made of a certain root that necessity forces them to subsist on. But here wheat, vegetables, and all sorts of cereals grow in abundance. The soil is excellent for wheat and, the more the woods are stripped from it, the more fertile and bounteous it becomes. Its fertility was very apparent this year because, the army's flour having spoiled on the ocean, enough wheat was found here to supply their needs without harming the provision of the habitants.

However this bounteousness does not prevent there being a great many poor folk here; the reason is that, when a family commences to make a habitation, it needs two or three years before it has enough to feed itself, not to speak of clothing, furniture, and an infinite number of little things necessary for the maintenance of a house; but when these first difficulties are past, they begin to live comfortably and, if they have guidance, they become rich with time—or as much so as is possible in a new country such as this. In the beginning they live on their cereals and vegetables and on wild game, which is plentiful in winter. To obtain clothing and other household utensils, they make roofing planks and cut timber, which they sell at a high price. When they have thus obtained all their necessities, they begin to trade and in this way advance little by little. . . .

I told you in another letter that part of the army has gone on ahead to get control of the river of the Iroquois [Richelieu] and build forts on its banks in the most advantageous places.⁵ To this I shall add that our Christian Algonkins have gone to camp with their families under protection of the forts and those that guard them. They are hunting where their enemies were accustomed to do so and obtain the greater part of their pelts. Their hunt is so bounteous that it is said they take more than a hundred beaver each day, not to speak of moose and other wild beasts.

In this the French and the Savages help one another. The French defend the Savages, and the Savages provide food for the French by the flesh of the beasts they kill, after they have removed the skins, which they take to the storehouses of the country. Monsieur de Tracy told me a few days ago that he had informed the King of all this and also the other advantages there are in making war upon the sworn enemy of our Faith.

Join your prayers to ours, that God may pour his benedictions upon an enterprise so advantageous to his glory.