

NEW FRANCE, A CROWN COLONY

TO HER SON
Quebec, 1663

My very dear son:

A vessel that has just arrived and is making ready for a prompt return obliges me to write you a word, although I have not received news from you or from any of our monasteries in France. I believe you know that the King [Louis xiv] is now master of this country. When the Gentlemen of the Company [of One Hundred Associates] learned he had the intention of taking it from them, they voluntarily offered it to him. He took them at their word and promised to indemnify them, and so the change took place without a great deal of difficulty.

The King's ships have brought back Monseigneur our Prelate [Laval], who we are told had a great deal of contention in France about the liquors that are given to the Savages and have almost destroyed this new Church. He made the voyage in the company of a new Governor [Augustin de Saffray de Mézy], whom His Majesty has sent us, his predecessor [Davaugour], who had been here only two years, having departed before his arrival.

With them the King has also sent an Intendant, who since his arrival has regulated all the affairs of the country. He has set up officers to administer justice according to the prescription of the law. He has also established regulations to take care of trade and maintain civil society. All the inhabitants of the country without exception have rendered faith and homage to him, declaring themselves dependent upon the King because of his château at Quebec. In the regulations that have been set up, Quebec is named a city and New France a province or kingdom. A mayor and aldermen have been elected; and without exception all the officers, who are people of honour and probity, have been chosen by election. A great unity between them all is noted. Monseigneur the Bishop and Monsieur the Governor have been named heads of the Council. There is talk of building a palace for the administering of justice and prisons for criminals, the premises used for this purpose being too small and inconvenient.

Monsieur our Governor, whose name is Monsieur de Mézy, is a very pious and upright gentleman from Normandy, an intimate friend of the late Monsieur de Bernières, who in his lifetime did not a little to win him to God.

The levy of tithes has likewise been established, this money being assigned for the maintenance of a seminary founded by our Bishop, who must by its means have churches built wherever necessary and support priests to serve in them. These churches will be parishes, but those that preside in them will be called, instead of curés, superiors, of which the Bishop will be the chief. The surplus tithes are to go towards the relief of the poor. The worthy prelate has already had a house built, to serve as bishop's residence and to lodge the greater part of the seminary.

In a word, all this has an impressive sound and is beginning well, but only God sees what will be the issues, experience having shown us that the outcome is often very different from the ideas conceived.

The dreadful earthquakes experienced throughout Canada contribute greatly to the unity of persons, for, as they kept everyone in fear and humiliation, everyone also dwells in peace. It

would be impossible to believe the great number of conversions God has wrought—both among infidels, who have embraced the Faith, and among Christians, who have abandoned their wicked lives. One would have said that, even while God shook the mountains and marble rocks of these regions, he took pleasure in shaking consciences. The days of carnival were changed into days of penitence and sadness; public prayers, processions, and pilgrimages were continual, fasts on bread and water very frequent, and general confessions more sincere than they would have been in the extremity of sickness.

A single ecclesiastic, who administers the parish of Château-Richer, assured us that he alone heard more than eight hundred general confessions. I leave you to imagine how many were heard by the Reverend Fathers, who were in the confessional day and night. I do not believe there was a single inhabitant of the whole country that did not make a general confession. Some inveterate sinners, to satisfy their conscience, began theirs over again more than three times. Wonderful reconciliations were seen, enemies kneeling before one another to ask pardon, with so much grief that it was easy to see these transformations were bolts of heaven and God's mercy rather than of his justice.

At Fort St François-Xavier, which is in the parish of Sillery, there was a soldier of the garrison, come from France in the King's ships, who was the most wicked and abominable man alive. He boasted impudently of his crimes as another man might of an action worthy of praise.

When the earthquake began, he was seized with such utter fear that he cried out before everyone, 'Don't search for any other cause of what you see. This is God wishing to punish my crimes.'

He then began to confess his sins in a loud voice, being unaware of anything but God's justice, which was about, so he believed, to precipitate him into hell. The fort is a quarter of a league from Sillery, and he had to be borne there prostrate to make his confession, fear having made him almost paralysed. God made so happy and so entire a conversion in him that today he is a model of virtue and good works.

This, then, is the state of Canada, as regards both spiritual and temporal matters. To this I shall add that the King has not sent us troops, as he had permitted us to hope, to destroy the Iroquois. We are informed that this is because of his contentions in Italy. Instead he has sent a hundred families, which are five hundred persons. He is defraying their expenses for a year so they can easily establish themselves and subsist afterwards without inconvenience. For when one can have a year paid in advance in this country, one can clear the land and make oneself a foundation for the years to come.