

# LE MOYNE the PEACEMAKER

by Alexander M. Stewart

*Chapter I*

THE EARLY YEARS  
IN FRANCE

Bourg-Bonnais, France, Oct. 22, 1604  
Eglise Cap de la-Magdelaine, Quebec,  
1645

A small boy and his mother knelt and stood in alternation in response to the Holy Scriptures of the Mass in Bourg-Bonnais Cathedral in ancient France. The small boy did not keep his eyes closed while kneeling at prayer, but kept looking up in wonder at the immensely high vault of the ceiling over the choir which is the highest in the world. When the boy and his mother were walking home from church, the mother said to her son, "Simon, you must be reverent, you must close your eyes when we pray to God." "Yes, Mother!" said the boy, "but I wanted to see if God was up under the high roof of the church. Was He there? I did not see Him." "Yes," said the mother, "God was there in the cathedral, but you will not see Him. He is a Spirit. He is in other places too." "Oh, Mother! I so much want to see Him. When I am a man I am going to those other places and I will see Him."

Fifty years later, Simon Le Moyne, scarred and worn with the tolls of the American wilderness, was again praying with his eyes open. The smell of human flesh burning in torture was in his nostrils. Around him raged the wild, frenzied Mohawk Indians. He was looking anxiously and hoping to see some way of saving the surviving French captives from the Mohawks. "O God! Holy Father in Heaven," he prayed, "grant that I may see those poor captives and take them back safely to Montreal or with them, let me share death here, so that now I may go to the place where I may see Thee face to face."

For a moment he thought of his mother and of that day in Bourg-Bonnais Cathedral when the unceasing hunger for food had to be satisfied. Sometimes gradually as outward events keep pace with the inner unfolding of mind and soul and sometimes suddenly as a blinding blaze of light as when a curtain springs back admitting the full glare of the noonday sun, some men come to that decision by which they say, "Come what may, I am going with God here and in all eternity. Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him. There shall be no turning back."

Little do we know of Father Le Moyne's early life, but we do know that the way of the soul of man in its approach or its rejection of God has not changed despite rates of travel greatly accelerated by mechanical inventions. Anyone who has made a reconnaissance for God is very close to the soul of Simon Le Moyne when influenced Divine and human led him to think of entering the Society of Jesus whose members are usually called Jesuits.

One of these influences must have been the great Bourg-Bonnais Cathedral. In the neighborhood now is the north wall of Bourg-Bonnais Cathedral of Bourg-Bonnais, France. The Bourg-Bonnais Cathedral was built in 1604. The Bourg-Bonnais Cathedral was built in 1604. The Bourg-Bonnais Cathedral was built in 1604. The Bourg-Bonnais Cathedral was built in 1604. The Bourg-Bonnais Cathedral was built in 1604.



Father Le Moyne was instructor at Rouen College in 1627-1632 and in 1636-37. Rouen was to be the birth place of Robert de la Salle, America's explorer, and here studied and taught Father Rene Menard who was at Cayuga Lake, New York, in 1656-1658. The burning of Joan of Arc in Rouen in an earlier century by our British ancestors should remind us that we are brothers "under the skin" of the Iroquois Indians who appear in this story as the burners of captives. And lest we condemn these Iroquois, let us remember that it is over 150 years since Iroquois Indians burned captives in the United States within the last ten years. The work of Father Le Moyne and his colleagues in the Iroquois missions had much to do, even before Indians had adopted the restraints of modern civilization in saving captives alive.

*Chapter II*

BOUND FOR  
CANADA

In an old French sailing vessel, the pride of some French ship carpenter of that day, which, nevertheless, was not much larger than our clumsy old Erie Canal boats Father Simon Le Moyne started for Canada in the spring of 1638, so that this writing in May 1938 is the tercentenary celebration of his voyage.

In the same year and probably in the same ship two other devoted and venturesome young Jesuit missionaries Jerome Lalemant and Francis Du Peron came to New France to test the regenerating power of the Christian spirit on some of the fiercest savages in the world. The voyage itself had always the thrill of danger. Transatlantic travel in those days had not lost its interesting hazards. No such boredom of safety had been introduced as exists today where the Atlantic liners have to carry swimming pools to keep the passengers from jumping overboard from sheer lack of excitement.

After many days of sea and sky the ship began to coast along the rocky and mountainous north shore of the St. Lawrence River which in its lower reaches is too wide to see across. At Tadoussac where the Saguenay River enters the St. Lawrence through a terrific canon, Father Le Moyne turned from watching the play of the white porpoises out in the harbor to look with intense interest on those Indians who had come by way of the Saguenay from the far north in their little birch bark canoes. He asked himself would he be permitted to satisfy the aspirations of the League of Prayer of Clermont by the conversion of such men.

The city of Quebec, when Father Le Moyne arrived there, was then only thirty years old. Champlain, its founder, had been dead not three years. Already the infant city had been taken and held by the English Admiral, David Kirk, and then restored to the French. Small log houses for sheltering boats and canoes and warehouses for fish and fur lined the waterfront giving forth sweet forest and wild stenchy animal odors. The ship was moored where bales of fur, representing the winter's trapping by far-away tribes, were ready to be loaded for France. Indians from some remote place where the waters flow toward Hudson Bay looked in stolid wonder for the first time on the white man's big white-winged canoe. Already more than twenty ordained Jesuits were resident in Canada. Most of these were absent in the Huron Mission, but members of the Society who were resident, met the newcomers with such emotion as could only come between brothers whose duties must always keep them far from their French homeland.

As Father Le Moyne and his ship companions walked up the hill from the waterfront to the house of the

inferior. In fact, the results of this period were among the best schoolmasters of Europe. After Rouen came studies in Clermont and at La Fleche. While he was at Clermont, he was an active member of the League of Prayer for Canadian missions to which belonged Paul Le Jeune, the two Lalemants (and others who pioneered in American forests).

It was a league of brilliant young men of vision, but not visionary, who met to pray for the extension of the Gospel and for the conversion of the American Indians. This league of prayer in Clermont, France in 1625 might be explained to Protestant readers of this story as being very similar to the famous Haystack Prayer meeting of Williams College in 1810. This

latter was a meeting of several devout students who found retreat at night for prayer for missions at a haystack on the edge of the college grounds. The Haystack monument in Williams town, Massachusetts marks the site of this instance of history repeating itself in both instances the meetings for prayer had very far distant and far reaching effects.

PREFACE

A good preface should always be a post-script written after the other writing, when the author has an airplane view of all the facts. Father Le Moyne's peace embassies to the canons of the powerful Iroquois League of Indians, contributed in the largest measure toward saving New France from being made impossible by these Iroquois, at a time when the French settlements on the St. Lawrence River were in a state of military defenselessness.

New France began with a major diplomatic error in dealing with Indians. Champlain, the founder of Canada, started the disastrous though chivalrous policy of defending the Huron and Algonquin tribes against their age-old enemies the Iroquois.

After the Iroquois in 1650 had utterly defeated the Hurons and Algonquians, and when remnants of these tribes took refuge under the protection of the French by placing their villages on the St. Lawrence River close to French settlements, thereby exposing the French as well as these Indian refugees to the wrath and the raids of the Iroquois war parties, Father Le Moyne began his hazardous work for peace, by going to the council-houses of those same Iroquois with the result that at the time of his death, four of five Iroquois tribes had signed a peace treaty with the French without a single soldier being sent against them, and the fifth tribe, the Mohawks, already partly persuaded, yielded easily without defending their villages, when the Tracy and Courcelles expeditions came against them in 1666.

Owing to the work of Father Le Moyne previous to these expeditions, many of the Mohawks already desired that peace with the French which was now made. Eighteen years of peace followed the French and the Iroquois followed the embassies of Father Le Moyne. A century of French influence over the Iroquois with variations in intensity and with three military expeditions (De La Barre—1684; De Nonville—1687; Frontenac—1696) began with Father Le Moyne's peace councils. This century of diplomatic and military relations between the French and

drawn from modern Little Falls New York on the Mohawk River to Athens, Pennsylvania, on the Susquehanna River. Inasmuch as the boundaries of New York State west of Albany were predetermined by the lands of the Iroquois League this said imaginary line might have become the western boundary of New York State with profound effects upon the subsequent history of Western New York, and adjoining Canada. Whatever might have happened by a change of the cause of our state and national history is speculation, but by such speculation it is shown that what did happen was caused in part by Father Le Moyne and by the French influence over the Iroquois to which he gave a beginning.

This sudden occupation of a near frontier after a century of exclusion is the sine qua non of understanding the origin of American character and of teaching American history. No American historians can omit men of Father Le Moyne's character and influence without making an indictment against their own open-mindedness and their own historical judgment.

Father Le Moyne's work resulted also in the founding of the temporary French colony on Onondaga Lake, near modern Syracuse, N. Y., in 1656-1658. This was the first settlement of Europeans in the country between the lower Mohawk Valley and the Mississippi Valley. While this colony did not last, nevertheless it marked the beginning of a new era for that vast territory. It is a part of American history which is excluded from being taught because of the religious motives of the colony.

The studies of French-American history presented in the *Courier* are intended to furnish the information upon which such an unbiased patriotic view of our 17th Century history may be built. To treat any part of the story of our locality as a skeleton in the closet which must not be shown to children is a millstone offense against childhood.

A. M. Stewart,  
Member of the New York  
State Historical Association.

(Continued on Page 6)