

This translation is awkwardly
done and omits many passages
found in Sagard's edition
of 1686.

Dorothy G. Wayman
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OSWEGON MICHIGAN

Father Joseph de la Roche Dallion's Letter
to
A Friend in Paris

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"Sir,

"Though far away, it is still permitted to visit our friends by missives which render the absent present. Our Indians were amazed at it, seeing us often write to our Fathers at a distance, and that by our letters they learn our ideas, and what the (same) Indians had done at our residence. After having made some stay in our Canada convent, and communicated with our Fathers and the (Reverend) Jesuit Fathers, I was compelled by a religious affection to visit the sedentary nations, whom we call Hurons, and with me the Rev. Fathers Breteuf and de Noue, Jesuits. Having arrived there with all the hardships that any one may imagine, by reason of the wretched way. Sometimes afterwards I received a letter from our Reverend Father Joseph le Caron, by which he encouraged me to pass on to a nation we call Neutral, of which the interpreter (Brusle) told wonders. Encouraged, then, by so good a Father, and the grand account given me of these people, I started for their country, setting out from the Hurons with this design October 18th, 1626, with men called Grenole and Laveloe, Frenchmen by birth. Passing the Petun nation, I made acquaintance and friendship with an Indian chief, who is in great credit, who promised to guide me to the Neutral nations, and supply Indians to carry our baggage and what little provision we had; for to think to live in these countries as mendicents is self-deceit; these people giving only as far as you oblige them, so that you must often make long stages, and often spend many nights with no shelter but the stars. He fulfilled what he had promised to our satisfaction, and we slept only five nights in the woods, and on the sixth day arrived at the first village, where we were well received, thanks to our Lord, and

then at four other villages, which envied each other in bringing us food,--some venison, others squashes, neinthony, and the best they had.

"All were astonished to see me dressed as I was, and to see that I desired nothing of theirs, except that I invited them (by signs) to lift their eyes to heaven, make the sign of the cross, [and receive the faith of Jesus Christ.] What filled them with wonder was to see me retire at certain hours in the day to pray to God and attend to my spiritual affairs, for they had never seen religious, except towards the Petuneux and Hurons, their neighbors. At last we arrived at the sixth village, where I had been advised to remain. I called a council. Remark by the way, if you please, they call every assembly a council. They hold them as often as it pleases the chiefs. They sit on the ground, in a cabin, or the open field, in profound (very strict) silence, while the chief harangues, and they are inviolable observers of what has once been concluded and resolved.

"There I told them, as well as I could, that I came on behalf of the French to contract alliance and friendship with them, and to invite them to come to trade. I also begged them to allow me to remain in their country to (be able to) instruct them in the law of our God, which is the only means of going to Heaven (Paradise). They accepted all my offers, and showed me that they were very agreeable. Being much consoled at this, I made them a present of what little I had, as little knives and other trifles, and which they esteemed highly. For in this country nothing is done with the Indians without making them some kind of a present. In return they adopted me, as they say -- that is to say, they declared me a citizen and child of the country, and gave me in trust -- mark of great affection -- to Souharissen, who was my father and host; for according to age, they are accustomed to call us cousin, brother, son, uncle, or nephew. This man is the chief of the greatest

credit and authority that has ever been in all these nations; for he is not only chief of this village, but of all those of his nation, composed of (in number) twenty-eight towns, cities and villages, made like those in the Huron country, and also of several little hamlets of seven or eight cabins, built in various parts convenient for fishing, hunting or agriculture. It is unexampled in the other nations to have so absolute a chief. He acquired this honor and power by his courage, and by having been repeatedly at war with seventeen nations, which are their enemies, and taken heads or brought in prisoners from them all. Those who are so valiant are much esteemed among them, and, although they have only the club, bow and arrow, yet they are, nevertheless, very adroit and warlike with these arms.

"After all this cordial welcome our Frenchmen returned, and I remained, the happiest man in the world, hoping to do something there to advance God's glory, or at least to discover the means (which would be no small thing, and to endeavor to discover the mouth of the river of the Iroquois (Niagara), in order to bring them to trade). I did my best to learn their manners and way of living. During my stay I visited them in their cabins to know and instruct them. I found them tractable enough, and I often made the little children, who are very bright, naked and dishevelled, make the sign of the (holy) cross. I remarked that in all the country I met no humpback, one-eyed, or deformed persons.*"

*Here in Savard is the following: "I have always seen them constant in their resolution to go with at least four canoes to the trade, if I would guide them, the whole difficulty being that we did not know the way. Yourquet, an Indian hunter known in those countries, who had come there with twenty of his men hunting for beaver, and who took fully five hundred, would never give us any mark to know the mouth of the river. He and several of the Hurons assured us well that it was only ten days' journey to the trading place; but we were afraid of taking one river for another, and losing our way, or dying of hunger on the land." This was evidently the Niagara river and the route through Lake Ontario. He apparently crossed the river, as he was on the Iroquois frontier. The omission of the passage by Le Clercq was evidently caused by the allusions to trade.

"During three months I had every reason in the world to be satisfied with my people; but the Hurons, having discovered that I talked of leading them to trade, spread in all the villages where we passed very bad reports about me; that I was a great magician; that I had tainted the air of their country and poisoned many; that if they did not kill me soon that I would set fire to their villages and kill all their children. In fine, I was, as they said, a great atatanite-- that is their word to mean him who performs sorceries, whom they hold in great horror. And now, by the way, that there are a great many sorcerers, who pretend to heal diseases by mummeries and other fancies. In a word, the Hurons told them so much evil of us, to prevent their going to trade; that the French were unapproachably rude, sad, melancholy people, who live only on snakes and poison; that we eat thunder, which they imagine to be an unparelled chimera, relating a thousand strange stories about it; that we all had a tail like animals; that the women had only one nipple in the centre of the breast; that they bare five or six children at a time; adding a thousand other absurdities to make us hated by them, [and prevent their trading with us, so that they might have the trade with these nations themselves exclusively, which is very profitable to them.] In fact, these good people, who are very easy to persuade, grew very suspicious of me. As soon as any one fell sick, they came to ask me whether it was not true that I had poisoned him, and that they would surely kill me if I did not cure him. I had great difficulty in excusing and defending myself. At last ten men of the last village, called Quaroronon, one day's journey from the Iroquois, their relatives and friends, coming to trade at our village, came to visit me, and invited me to come and see them in their village. I promised to do so without fail when the snow ceased (melted), and to give them all some little presents (trifles), with which they seemed satisfied. Thereupon they left the cabin where I was living, always

concealing their evil designs against me. Seeing that it was growing late, they came back after me, and abruptly began a quarrel without provocation. One knocked me down with a blow of his fist; another took an axe and tried to split my head. God averted his hand; the blow fell on a bar (post) near me. I also received much other ill-treatment; but that is what we came to seek in this country. Becoming somewhat appeased, they vented their wrath on what little goods were left us; they took our writing-desk, blanket, breviary, and bag, which contained some knives, needles, awls, and other small objects of the kind. And having thus stripped me, they went off all that night, full of joy at their exploit. On arriving at the village and examining the spoil, touched, perhaps by repentance coming from the Most High, they sent me back our breviary, compass, desk, blanket and bag--empty, however. When they arrived in my village, called Ounontisaston, there were only women there. The men had gone to hunt stags. On their return they declared they were much grieved at the misfortune that had befallen me (after which no more was said about it).

"The report at once spread to the Hurons that I had been killed. On this the good Fathers Breteuf and de None, who remained there, sent Grenole to me at once to learn the truth, with orders to bring me back if I was still alive. The letter they wrote me (with the pen of their good will) also invited me to do so. I did not wish to gainsay them, as this was their advice, and that of all the Frenchmen, who feared more misfortune than profit by my death. I accordingly returned to the Huron country, where I now am, all admiring the divine effects of Heaven. The country of this Neutral nation is incomparably larger, more beautiful, and better than any other of all these countries. There is an incredible number of stags, great abundance of moose or elk, beaver, wild cats, and black squirrels larger than the French; a great quantity of wild geese, turkeys, cranes, and other animals, which are

there all winter, which is not long and rigorous as in Canada. No snow had fallen by the 22nd of November, and it never was over two feet deep, and began to melt on the 26th January. On the 8th of March there was none at all in the open places, though there was a little indeed still left in the low grounds (woods). A stay there is quite recreating and convenient; the rivers furnish much excellent fish; the earth gives good grain, more than is needed. They have squashes, beans, and other vegetables in abundance, and very good oil, which they call Atourenton (a Touronten), so that I have no hesitation in saying that we should settle there rather than elsewhere. Undoubtedly with a longer stay there would be hope of advancing God's glory, which should be more sought after than anything else, and their conversion to the faith is more to be hoped for than that of the Hurons. Their real business is hunting and war. Out of that they are very lazy, and you see them, like beggars in France, when they have their fill, lying on their belly in the sun. Their life, like that of the Hurons, is very impure, and their manners and customs are quite the same. Their language is different, however, yet they understand each other, as the Algonquins and Montagnais do.

"They say two new Fathers have come to us from France, named Father Daniel Coursier and Father Francis de Binville, who had been promised us last year. If this is so, I beg of you, in addition to all the trouble you take for us, to let me have by a safe hand a habit that is sent me. It is all I ask (for there is no cloth made here, ours being all worn out. I cannot do without one). The poor religious of St. Francis, having food and raiment, have all their earthly portion. We hope Heaven from God's goodness (by the favor of our good God), and for it most willingly serve in the salvation of these blinded nations; we risk our lives in order that it may please Him, if He accepts our efforts, to make Christianity to bud forth in these countries. God

permits martyrdom to those who deserve it. I regret that I am not in a fit state, and, nevertheless, am not ignorant that to be recognized as a true child of God, we must expose ourselves for our brethren. Let pain and toil come bravely then; all difficulties and death itself will be agreeable to me, if God's grace is with me, which I beg by the means of the prayers of all our good friends over there, of whom, and of you, sir, I am,

"The most humble servant in our Lord,

"Joseph De La Roche Dallion."

"Dated at Tonachin (Toanchain), Huron
Village, this 18th July, 1627."