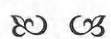


## AMERICAN JOURNEYS COLLECTION



Letter of  
Father Pierre Biard,  
1614

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## INTRODUCTION

ALTHOUGH Spanish interference was greatly feared by the English colonists at Jamestown, Spain was much reduced from its former estate and in no condition to make war upon England. Danger from France, though more removed, was far more real. In 1604 the Sieur de Monts established a French colony on the island of St. Croix in the St. Croix River. The next year the colony was removed to Port Royal (Annapolis). After three years spent in the country, during which time the New England coast was explored as far as Martha's Vineyard, the colonists returned to France. The design, however, was not abandoned. Poutrincourt returned in 1610 and re-established his colony at Port Royal. In 1611 two Jesuit priests, Biard and Massé, came over under the patronage of Madame de Guercheville, and in 1613, being joined by two other Jesuit priests, Quentin and du Thet, they planted a Jesuit station on the island of Mount Desert. The English had not recognized the claims of the French to any part of North America, and Sir Thomas Dale sent Captain Samuel Argall twice from Virginia, and burned all their settlements, — at Mount Desert Island, Isle de Ste. Croix, and Port Royal. The vigorous action of Argall probably saved New England to English colonization. The letter below was first published in a French translation by Father Auguste Carayon, S.J., in a work entitled *Première Mission des Jésuites au Canada* (Paris, 1864). The Latin original is preserved in the archives of the Society of Jesus. An English translation from the French was published by Dr. Alexander Brown in his *Genesis of the United States*, pp. 700–706. The translation printed below is however from the Latin and is taken, with permission, from Dr. R. G. Thwaites's *Jesuit Relations*, III. 5–19.

L. G. T.

LETTER OF FATHER PIERRE BIARD, 1614

TO THE VERY REVEREND FATHER CLAUDE ACQUAVIVA,  
GENERAL OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS, AT ROME,  
MAY 26, 1614

*Very Reverend Father in Christ:*

The peace of Christ be with you.

BOTH affection and duty urge me, fresh from such multiplied and mighty perils, from which I have been rescued by the surpassing favor of the Lord and by the prayers of your Paternity, to send you my greetings; and, in so far as it is possible, I throw myself at your knees and embrace you, assuredly with the utmost gratitude and devotion. And indeed I am bound, as it were, to contemplate myself, both to do penance, as I hope, and to express my gratitude; so great are the perils out of which I now marvel to see myself delivered. But, as it may at this time be wearisome to weave a long story of all these things, and as it is probable that Your Paternity has already learned many of them from Father Enemond Massé, I shall pass over all the rest, and confine myself for the present to this one matter: in what manner, after our violent capture by the English in New France, we were taken from place to place, and at last restored to this our native land.

There were, as Your Paternity knows, only four of our society in New France in the last year, 1613. Then, too, we first began to build in a convenient place a new settlement, a new colony,<sup>1</sup> etc. But most unexpectedly, by some hazard or other (for a hazard it certainly was, and not a premeditated plan),<sup>2</sup> some English from Virginia were driven upon our shores, who attacked our ships with the utmost fury, at a time

<sup>1</sup> At Mt. Desert Island.

<sup>2</sup> This appears to be an error.

when nearly all its defenders were occupied on land. Resistance was nevertheless made for a time, but we were soon obliged to surrender. In the struggle, two of the French were killed, four were wounded; and in addition our brother Gilbert Duthet received a mortal wound. He made a most Christian end, the following day, under my ministration.

Our ships having been captured and everything pillaged, it was a great concession to us, — that is, to us priests and Jesuits, — that we were not killed. And yet this sparing of our lives, if considered in itself only, would have been worse than any death. For what were we to do in an absolutely desert and barren region, despoiled and destitute of everything? The savages, indeed, used to come to us stealthily and by night; and with great generosity and devotion commiserated our misfortune, and promised us whatever they could. Truly the condition of things was such that either death itself, or a more calamitous misfortune, everywhere threatened us. There were in all thirty of us in these distressing circumstances. One consideration rendered the English less severe, namely, that one of our boats had escaped, in spite of their watchfulness; and as they had no doubt that it would bear witness to the violence done us, they were obliged to spare our lives, for they feared reprisals and dreaded our king. Therefore they finally offered (a great favor, forsooth) to leave for our thirty survivors a single boat, in which we might coast along the seashore, on the chance of finding some French vessel to take us back to our own country. It was shown that this boat could not hold over fifteen men; but nothing further could be obtained, even from among our own boats. To be brief: in this perplexity each of us took counsel as he could. Father Enemond Massé embarked with fourteen companions in the boat I have mentioned, and the Lord favored him, as Your Paternity has already learned. I went to the English captain and obtained a promise from him that I and Father Jacques Quentin, my companion, and also John Dixon — who had been admitted into the Society — and one servant, should be transported to the neighboring islands where the English usually fish, and that we

should there be recommended to these English fishermen; so that, having been carried by them to England, we might easily return thence into France. I obtained, as I say, a promise to this effect, but there was no good faith in this promise. For they carried us off, together with the Frenchmen who remained, fifteen in all, straight to their own country, Virginia, distant from the place in which we had been captured at least two hundred and fifty leagues. In Virginia however a new peril arose; for the governor there<sup>1</sup> wished to hang us all, and especially the Jesuits. But the captain who had taken us resisted, alleging his promise to us. Finally this promise, or their fear of our king, prevailed.

After this episode the captain who had taken us was commissioned to return to that part of New France where he had plundered us, and to plunder any French ships he might find, and burn all the houses and settlements. There remained two French settlements there, that of Sainte Croix and that of Port Royal, where I had remained for two years. Three ships were equipped for this expedition, — two which they had taken from us, and a third and larger one, the man-of-war, as they call it, which had taken us. So eight of us Frenchmen were taken in this vessel, in view of any opportunity that might arise of sending us back to our own country. These vessels returned first to the place<sup>2</sup> where we had been captured, and all the crosses that we had set up they overthrew. But not unavenged! On the same spot, before our departure, they hanged one of their number whom they had apprehended in some plot. Thus one cross took the place of many.

Here a new peril arose. The English, as I have previously stated, wished to go to the settlement of Sainte Croix, although it had at this time no inhabitants. Some salt, however, had been left there. No one except myself knew the way; and the English knew that I had been there formerly. They accordingly demand that I lead them. I do all I can to evade and refuse

<sup>1</sup> Sir Thomas Gates was governor, but Sir Thomas Dale, who was marshal, had charge of the prisoners and threatened to hang them.

<sup>2</sup> St. Sauveur, on Mt. Desert Island.

this proposal; but it avails me nothing. They perceive clearly that I am unwilling to obey. At this the captain grows very angry, and my peril becomes imminent; when suddenly they find the place without my help, and plunder and burn it. They moreover on this occasion captured a savage, who guided them to Port Royal. Although this had delivered me from one great danger, it nevertheless involved me in another greater one. For after they had plundered and burnt Port Royal (which by some inexplicable chance they had found abandoned by its inhabitants), some Frenchman, one of those very men who had deserted Port Royal, brought an accusation against me, which was nothing less than this: that I was a genuine, native Spaniard; and that, on account of certain crimes committed in France, I dared not return there. Hereupon the captain, already incensed against me, having found a fine pretext for his wrath, asked his followers whether they did not think it would be just to cast me forth on the shore and abandon me there. The opinion of the majority prevailed, who thought it better to take me back to Virginia, and there to return me to that unlucky tree which, in accordance with law and justice, I had escaped. Thus I escaped death for the moment: and so we soon after started on our return voyage to Virginia. But two days later so fearful a tempest arose that the ships were separated, and none of us knew what became of the others. The captain of our ship, after he had endured the storm for three weeks, and had begun to run short of various necessities, particularly of fresh water, concluding that there was no hope of getting back to Virginia for a long time, decided to run to the Portuguese islands called Terceras [Azores]. Through this decision I, who appeared to have escaped from the death by hanging that awaited me, again found myself in a greater peril; greater I may truly call it, since I had here companions in my danger. The sixteen Englishmen, on approaching these islands, began to reflect that they were lost if we priests and Jesuits appeared, for we would be set at liberty on the instant by these Portuguese Catholics, and they, on the contrary, would be punished as pirates and persecutors of

priests. This anxiety troubled them. But what were they to do? Should they throw us overboard, or would it suffice to conceal us? In this embarrassment and uncertainty, the captain sent for me, and laid the matter before me. I said to him that death itself was not a greater evil, in my estimation, than to be the occasion of misfortune to others. I promised, in case he chose to conceal us, that I would lend myself to this scheme in good faith. With what idea did God inspire him, to make him believe me? I know not, truly; but this I know — that if he had foreseen the dangers into which he subsequently fell, he would not have trusted me. Accordingly he hid us in the hold of the vessel; during three weeks we did not behold the sun; but the captain encountered so many difficulties in the port of the island of Faal,<sup>1</sup> and the vessel was visited so frequently during this space of three weeks, that it seems marvellous that we escaped detection. But this also God purposed for the greater glory of the Society; for the English clearly saw that if we had wished to show ourselves, and to expose them, it would frequently have been in our power to do so. They themselves afterwards, when in England, often eulogized our good faith in the presence of their ministers, and to the admiration even of the enemies of truth. Escaping from these perils, our captors decided to return to England rather than to Virginia, which was so much farther distant, and which was to be reached only by a long voyage, for which they lacked all the necessaries. Accordingly we set sail for England. Our voyage was a long one, and was marked by many vicissitudes: finally, losing our bearings in the fog and the cloudy weather, we deviated from the right course and were carried to Wales; not far from Ireland. In Wales our captain, having landed near the town of Pembroke to lay in provisions, was seized and detained as a pirate, because of certain appearances pointing that way. He, however, to recover his liberty, denied being a pirate; and, as a proof of his innocence, he adduced the fact that he had in his vessel

<sup>1</sup> Fayal.



two Jesuits from whose own lips they could learn the truth, if they pleased to summon them. Oh skillful hand of divine Providence! Winter was then fully upon us, and in the ship we were in want of everything. Thus, had we not been provided for, we should have died of cold and hardships. But what need of a long story? The Jesuits are at once summoned, and, gazed at by all, are led into the town. We are ordered to give our evidence. We, of course, attest what was perfectly true, — that our captain was a royal officer and not a pirate, and that what he had done to us had been done in obedience to orders, rather than from his own free will. Accordingly, our captain was set at liberty; and in company with him we were detained in the town, and very well used, while awaiting orders from London. These were long delayed; and in the interval we frequently engaged in arguments with the ministers, and more frequently still with others, for nearly every one was permitted to have access to us, although we were not allowed to go out. In every other respect, as I have said, we were very kindly treated. Finally we received orders to sail from Pembroke to London. But the voyage proved a long one. Protracted delays intervened; to avoid a long enumeration of these, let it suffice to say that by order of the English king we were landed at Dover, and thence sent to Calais in France. At Calais we were hospitably received by the governor and the dean of the city, and rested three days; thence we came to Amiens, where we now are.

We remained in captivity during nine months and a half. We were in the ship all the time, except when we landed at Pembroke, as related. There were three months during which we daily received only about two ounces of bread, and a small quantity of salt fish, with water that was nearly always fetid; so that we marvel at not having fallen sick. Few of the English escaped illness, and some of them even died as the result. But God doubtless watched over us in answer to the prayer of Your Paternity and of all our Society; may He grant in his goodness that it result to his own greater glory and in my salvation and better life. This I hope for, through the prayers

and the blessing of Your Paternity, which, with all possible humility and affection, I solicit on my knees. May the Lord Jesus ever watch over Your Paternity and may our Father with utmost goodness and favor increasingly bestow upon you his Most Holy grace.

Your Paternity's

Obedient son and unworthy servant,

PIERRE BIARD.

*Amiens*, May 26, 1614.