

“APOSTLE TO THE MICMACS”

NORMAN MCLEOD ROGERS

TWO black-robed figures stand out distinctly against the dim background of the twenty years which preceded the expulsion of the Acadians from Nova Scotia in 1755. One of these is Jean Louis Le Loutre, whose character and exploits were such that his biography would form the chronicle of his period in Acadian history. The other is Pierre Maillard, at whose feet Le Loutre learned his first lessons as a missionary,—a teacher of rare talents, whose labours among the Indians earned for him the unique title of “Apostle to the Micmacs”.

Historians have not paid equal tribute to the memory of these two men. The pupil is well remembered. The teacher is almost forgotten. If the reputation of Le Loutre has been distorted by prejudice, that of Maillard has suffered a like injury from our failure to recognize his true stature. Le Loutre was a priest whom nature and circumstance transformed into a soldier and diplomat. In Maillard, a nature happily united to a vocation produced a scholar and teacher who stands foremost in the apostolic succession of the Acadian missions. But a school in the forest could not compete with war and diplomacy as an avenue to fame. The name of Maillard is rarely found in our histories. If he had endured the tortures of the stake, he might have found a place with Brebeuf and Lalemant in the congregation of the saints. As it was, he followed his calling in the forests of Cape Breton, and taught the untutored savages the consolations of the Christian faith, content—if need be—to suffer the common fate of teachers in a martyrdom of oblivion.

But the name of Pierre Maillard was canonized in the hearts of the Indians to whom he devoted a life of remarkable service. When Dr. Silas Rand began his study of the language of the Micmacs about the middle of last century, he found in their possession a number of traditions which threw a considerable light on their history. One of these traditions which refers to Maillard is best given in Dr. Rand's own words:

It is commonly reported among them that the first priest who came among them learned miraculously to speak their language. He was a Frenchman. By means of an interpreter, he informed the Indians what his object was. They readily assisted

in the erection of a chapel, being paid for their labour. They did not refuse to receive baptism. Not that they understood its import—I relate the story substantially as related to me—but they thought it could do them no harm, and "palioltijik" it was capital fun for them. Having finished the chapel, the priest shut himself up alone, and spent the time in prayer. On Sundays, and when the sick or dying required his attention, he came out, attended to these duties, and then immediately shut himself up again. This course he continued all winter until Easter. He then gave notice that if the people would assemble he would preach to them. They did so, and to their utter astonishment he spoke Micmac as well and as fluently as any of them. I was informed by the Indians in Cape Breton that he resided chiefly among them in that island, that he made his prayer-book, taught them what they knew of letters, and that he died in Halifax. It is especially related of him, as a proof of his purity as well as his power, that he had learned no bad words. And it further happened that ignorance in this case answered all the valuable ends of knowledge. For the only reason why he might desire a knowledge of the meaning of bad words was that he might reprove those who used them, and knowing every other word, the moment he heard an individual use a word he did not understand, he knew at once that it was a "bad word" and could take the offender to task accordingly.

Although the identity of the priest is not revealed in this legend, the reference to his death in Halifax is sufficient with collateral evidence to prove that it was Maillard whose linguistic powers left such a deep impression upon the Indians among whom he laboured. But while oral traditions have an undoubted value where the written word is wanting, they need to be scrutinized carefully when they refer to particular facts. The one just quoted is incorrect when it states that Abbé Maillard was the first missionary to come among the Micmacs of Cape Breton. In 1629, more than a hundred years before he began his ministry, two French priests had come to the island with the expedition of Captain Daniel. The mission in Cape Breton had almost a continuous existence from this date, and Maillard himself succeeded M. de St. Vincent as missionary to the Indians of Cape Breton and the adjoining mainland of Nova Scotia. But while he was not the first priest to labour among the Indians in this part of America, the tradition makes it evident that he was distinguished above all others in his gift of tongues, and was remembered by the natives when his predecessors were long forgotten.

It is not a simple task to reconstruct correctly the life of Abbé Maillard from the meagre details that have come down to us. His parentage and date of birth are unknown. Even the date of his death in Halifax was a matter of controversy until it was

definitely established by Father Pacifique, his worthy successor in the present Micmac mission at Restigouche, who is also authority for the statement that Maillard was born in the diocese of Chartres. Of his early life and schooling we know nothing. The first reliable information dates from the year 1735, when he left the Seminary of the Society of Foreign Missions in Paris. During the same year he began his work as a missionary on the island of Cape Breton. That his teachers had already formed a high opinion of his talents, appears from a letter of introduction sent by his Superior in Paris to the Superior of the Seminary in Quebec: *Nous envoyons M. Maillard a l'Ile Royale pour les missions sauvages. On peut dire qu'il a toutes les qualites d'un excellent missionnaire.* Throughout a ministry which lasted for almost thirty years and ended in Halifax in August, 1762, Maillard was to confirm and establish this early estimate of his character and attainments.

The best available survey of the Micmac missions at this period in their history is given in a letter written by Le Loutre in 1738. Three missions were established at that time in Cape Breton and on the neighboring territories. The first of these was called Maligaoueche. It was located in Cape Breton, twenty-three leagues distant from Louisbourg, and comprised not only the island itself, but the district of Natkitgoneiche¹ on the mainland of Nova Scotia. This was Abbé Maillard's territory. The second was at Malpek² on Prince Edward Island, twenty-five leagues from Port La Joye³, embracing five or six neighboring villages. The third was at Chigabenakady⁴, which ministered to all the Indians of Acadia except those who were included in the territory of Maillard. This last mission came subsequently under the care of Le Loutre.

Having described the territory comprised in the various missions, the letter goes on to explain some of the difficulties which confronted the missionaries in carrying on their work among the Indians. The first difficulty lay in the lack of presbyteries and churches. That of Maligaoueche, according to Le Loutre, was so far in ruins that it was impossible to winter there again, and Abbé Maillard was forced to spend the winter at Natkitgoneiche where the church was also threatened with ruin. There had never been either church or presbytery at Malpek. Only at Chigabenakady was the accommodation satisfactory. Another obstacle was the laziness and inconstancy of the Indians, combined with the trade which they were in the habit of carrying on with the

1. Antigonish
2. Malpeque

3. Charlottetown
4. Shubenacadie

French. In spite of repeated prohibitions and a heavy fine of five hundred *livres*, brandy was being sold to them, some of those suspected being the very men who ought to have enforced the laws against the illicit trade. This traffic in liquor is blamed for all the crimes committed by the Indians, and it is suggested that a remedy for the evil would be to induce them to settle and clear lands. Only in this way could the missionaries protect them from the corrupting influence of the garrison at Louisbourg.

From his mission at Maligaouche, not far from the present location of Whycocomagh, Maillard was accustomed to visit the savages in their encampments in Cape Breton and Prince Edward Island, and also on the mainland of Nova Scotia, until Le Loutre was assigned to the mission at Shubenacadie in 1738. During these three years the whole burden of the Micmac missions was laid on his shoulders, and one can well imagine his gratitude when he obtained an assistant to share such arduous labours. It was only by his own solicitation that Le Loutre entered upon the work as his colleague. It had been intended that the latter should go to Port Royal to relieve M. de St. Poncey, but Maillard interceded with the Governor at Louisbourg and was successful in having him assigned to the Micmac missions.

It was not long before the Abbé gained recognition both in Paris and in Quebec. In 1740 he was appointed Vicar-General of Ile Royale by the Bishop of Quebec. This was a worthy reward for his services, but owing to jealousies which developed among the clergy at Louisbourg it almost led to his recall. It had formerly been the custom to confer this title on the Superior of the Recollets who resided at Louisbourg. This dignitary was unwilling to give precedence to an obscure missionary, and his protests were seconded by Duquesnal and Bigot, of infamous memory, who was then an official at Louisbourg. On the strong recommendation of Abbé De Combe, Superior of the Seminary at Paris, the recall of Maillard was suspended for a year, at the expiration of which an amicable arrangement was arrived at for the division of his powers with the Superior of the Recollets.

In 1745 he suffered the only serious interruption in his work during his long period of service. In that year, Louisbourg fell before the expedition from New England under Warren and Pepperell, and the Indians of Cape Breton took refuge in Nova Scotia and Quebec. Bourgeois in *Les Anciens Missionnaires de l'Acadie* reports that, in 1746, Maillard set out temporarily from Cape Breton to take the place in the Indian mission at Shubenacadie of the Abbé Le Loutre who was then in Europe, and while there

served as chaplain in the expedition of Ramezey and De Villiers against Grand Pré. No authorities are quoted for this statement, but it is certain that he crossed to the mainland of Nova Scotia not long after the fall of Louisbourg, and from this time until the peace of Aix-La-Chapelle in 1748 his influence over the Indians was employed in the various projects for the recovery of Louisbourg and Port Royal. In the month of October, 1746, he was at Beaubassin, which was used as a base of operations against Port Royal and Grand Pré. A year later he was at Tatamagouche, where he ministered to a number of refugees from Cape Breton, and made at least one journey to Prince Edward Island in an effort to induce the Indians there to join in an expedition planned against Louisbourg. This expedition under the command of M. Marin was organized later at Beaubassin. It reached the outlying posts of Louisbourg just as news arrived that hostilities between England and France had ceased. Under the terms of the Treaty of Aix-La-Chapelle, Cape Breton was retroceded to France. Shortly afterwards, Maillard returned to his old mission under a passport granted him by Governor Cornwallis of Nova Scotia.

For a period of ten years he continued his work without further disturbance. Across the Strait of Canso, Le Loutre was bending every effort to induce the Acadian peasants to retire from Nova Scotia and settle on Prince Edward Island or on the territory north of the Missequash which was still claimed by France. The arrival of Cornwallis and the founding of an English settlement at Halifax in 1749 gave a new impetus to the conflict, and events moved forward to their tragic culmination in the expulsion of the Acadians. During all this feverish activity there is no evidence that Maillard played any important part in the transactions which occurred on the peninsula. That he sympathized with the efforts being made to retain the Acadians in their allegiance to France is very likely, for he maintained cordial relations with Le Loutre throughout his entire life. But the temperament of the scholar revolted from the clamour of arms. He chose rather to complete his studies during these critical years, and devoted himself wholly to the work of his mission. In 1750 he was granted a pension of eight hundred *livres* a year. Still later he was reimbursed for expenses defrayed by him for the construction of a new church and presbytery. It seems likely that these were built on the Isle de Sainte Famille in the Bras D'Or Lake, now called Chapel Island and situated not far from St. Peters. Here, in his isle of Patmos, Maillard wrote of the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter, until in 1758 his literary labours came to

a close with the fall of Louisbourg. His later movements cannot be followed with accuracy. The last two years of his life were spent in Halifax, where he died in the month of August, 1762.

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Having briefly reviewed the career of Maillard, it is natural to enquire upon what grounds he is entitled to precedence in the long procession of distinguished missionaries who have ministered to the Micmacs of these provinces during a period of more than three hundred years. The answer to such a question is to be found in the tradition reported by Dr. Rand, in the detailed information of his work given by Le Loutre, in the esteem in which his memory is still held by the Indians, and finally in the services he rendered as a peacemaker during his residence in Halifax.

The testimony of Le Loutre, combined with the ancient tradition related by Dr. Rand, shows clearly that Maillard was a linguist of rare powers. It suggests also that it was he who constructed the first grammar and dictionary of the Micmac language; that he was the first to teach the Indians to read and write by the use of hieroglyphics; and that he gave them a number of other writings, containing their catechisms and prayers. There is no doubt that it was this missionary who supplied the first grammar and dictionary of the Micmac tongue. The letter from Le Loutre has already been cited, in which he expresses the opinion that if M. Maillard should be spared for another ten years, he would complete his study of the language. This letter was written in 1738. That its prophecy was fulfilled, appears in a reference to Maillard contained in a letter written in 1749 by the Abbé de L'Ile Dieu, director of missions in the colonies of France. “M. Maillard is a very deserving priest, who is the author of a dictionary and a grammar in the Mikmak tongue, to help the missionaries who later will devote themselves to this mission.” It is difficult at this date to appreciate fully the labour involved in this task. It must be remembered that the Micmac was not a literary language. Until this time the missionaries were obliged to learn entirely by imitation, without any guide either to pronunciation or to construction of sentences. Although some of his predecessors had gained a considerable proficiency in speaking the language by this primitive method, Maillard was the first to find his way through its labyrinthine forms and to reveal the theory behind its development. So perfect was his work that he left instructions to his successors to follow his rules with confidence. If they should find an Indian using a pronunciation or construction differing from

that given in his texts, they might be certain that the Indian and not the book was in error. This work has survived to our own day. A manuscript copy of his grammar, transcribed from his own notes, is in the custody of Father Pacifique in the Micmac mission at Ste. Anne de Ristigouche.

That it was Maillard who provided the first grammar and dictionary of the Micmac language, is beyond dispute. He has also been credited with the invention of the Micmac hieroglyphics. Since the language was not a written language, the missionaries were confronted with the difficulty of preserving the prayers and chants in some permanent form. How to do this was a perplexing problem, for our phonetic alphabet conveyed nothing to the minds of the Indians. It was finally solved by the invention of a system of hieroglyphics or ideograms. By this means it was found possible to construct a number of characters each of which represented a distinct idea, these in turn suggesting the appropriate word or phrase in their own tongue. The whole subject of the Micmac hieroglyphics raises questions to which it is impossible to give a decisive answer. It seems clearly established in the first place that the honour of their first invention belongs not to Maillard, but to Christian Leclercq who laboured among the Micmacs of Gaspé more than sixty years before Maillard arrived in Cape Breton. In 1687 Leclercq returned to France, and four years later he published in Paris his *Relation des Gaspésians*. In this he refers to the invention of the hieroglyphics, stating that the idea came to him when he saw some children draw rude signs on birch bark with charcoal in their attempt to memorize the prayers he was teaching them. Since ten years elapsed from the time of their invention in 1677 to the date of his return to France, it may be surmised that the hieroglyphics were in use during the whole of this period, and also that they received a considerable development. It is also reasonable to suppose that they would have been communicated by Leclercq to other missionaries who laboured in the same field, as well as to his own successor at Gaspé. Yet this supposition is difficult to reconcile with the testimony of Le Loutre and Maillard with regard to the system of hieroglyphics introduced by the latter in Cape Breton. Both of these missionaries refer to this system as though it were an entirely new expedient. That Le Loutre was positive on this point, appears from the letter quoted above. "M. Maillard, this winter, undertook to remedy this evil, and brought out a plan which he had been meditating for some time. They are hieroglyphic signs, to which he has given a meaning, and by means of these our Indians, after having learned their meanings,

like children who learn the letters of the alphabet, read in their copy-books as well as the French do in their books." It is also apparent that they were not known to the teachers of the Seminary of the Society of Foreign Missions in Paris, for Le Loutre's letter was written to his former Superior at the Seminary, and he refers to the likelihood that Maillard would send him the books in order to acquaint him with his system. This Maillard evidently did some time afterwards, and a copy of the letter explaining them was sent later to Madame de Drucourt, of which the following is an extract:—"To make them (the Indians) learn more quickly and easily than formerly the prayers, chants, and instructions which we wish them to know, we give them copy-books on which we have traced for them in hieroglyphics, which we have invented ourselves, all the words of which the prayers, the chants and instructions are composed. By the aid of these different characters, they learn in a very little while all that they wish to learn, and when after a short time they understand the meaning of the various characters, they read with astonishing facility everything that is written in their copy-books. We make them read from left to right as we do ourselves, all the hieroglyphics being placed horizontally on a straight line, and separated the one from the other by a little horizontal stroke." There is no suggestion in this letter that Maillard was indebted to Leclercq for his hieroglyphics. On the contrary, the only inference that can be drawn from his own testimony and that of Le Loutre is that he developed his own plan without any knowledge of the work of his predecessor. What seems more probable is that Maillard found some of the characters invented by Leclercq still in use among the Indians, and taking these as a basis, without knowing their origin, developed the system which has survived to our own day. That the characters now in use are those prepared by him, is established beyond reasonable doubt. Moreover, Dr. Ganong who has edited Leclercq's *Relation des Gaspesiens*, has reached the conclusion that only about one half of the characters on a small specimen attributed to Leclercq are identical with those which make up the present collection. It is true, therefore, that even if Maillard knew of the characters of Leclercq, he so extended them that the system may almost be called his own. At his death the number of hieroglyphics had grown to about five thousand. In 1866 these were collected in Cape Breton by Father Kauder who had a number of volumes printed in Vienna, some of which are still to be found among the Indians. They are still used occasionally for singing and in connection with religious services, though for most purposes their

place has been taken by a phonetic alphabet like our own, consisting however of only twelve letters.

The use of hieroglyphics made it possible for Maillard to leave the written word among the Indians in a form which they could read and understand. This was still in existence more than a century after the death of the missionary. It is only fair to state, at this point, that there is also another claimant for the honour accorded to Maillard for his various writings in the Micmac tongue. This is the Abbé Thury, who in 1698 established a Micmac mission near the Basin of Minas on the banks of the river Piziquid. According to Casgrain in *Les Sulpiciens en Acadie*, the Abbé Thury had consecrated a part of his labours to his writings on the Indian languages which unfortunately have not been preserved. "He had in particular, translated into Micmac the principal liturgical offices which he had taught the savages to chant in church. This translation has been attributed to Abbé Maillard, but it is probable that this missionary had profited from the works of his predecessor which had existed for a long time." Against this opinion expressed by Casgrain there may be set the following extract from the preface to the *Traite de la Langue des Mikmaques* in the archives of the mission at Ristigouche: "It is certain that it is to him (Maillard) that the Indians owe several volumes very well written, containing their catechisms, long and short, and their prayers, comprising their plain chant, all of which is the composition of this respectable missionary."

Maillard's title to our honour and respect would rest on secure foundation if no further achievements could be added to those already reviewed. But in his last years his notable services in the cause of peace with the Indians give him still another claim to our gratitude. The fall of Louisbourg in 1758 was an omen of which he understood the full significance. The power of France in the New World was at an end. Henceforth the Indians must accept their new masters, or inevitably be exterminated in their struggle to maintain their independence. So valuable were the services rendered by Maillard at this period that he was paid a pension of two hundred pounds by the government of the province. The precise date of his arrival in Halifax is not known, but from this time until his death he used every effort to bring about a lasting peace between his Micmacs and the government of Nova Scotia. In the archives of the province there is preserved the record of a treaty of peace and friendship concluded by the Hon. Jonathan Belcher with Francis Mius, chief of the La Have tribe of Indians at Halifax. This treaty is witnessed by P. Maillard, missionary

to the Indians on Nov. 9th, 1761. Fifty years later in writing to Sir John Sherbrooke, then Governor of Nova Scotia, the Abbé Sigogne of Clare tells an interesting anecdote which illustrates the part taken by Maillard in the negotiation of this treaty. The anecdote is as follows:

I will take the liberty to relate about this treaty an anecdote not much known, which I have from an Acadian eye-witness, friend to M. Maillard, who signed the Treaty and seems to have written the name of the Indian chief and been interpreter between the parties. This M. Maillard was much respected. This anecdote will show what was the general opinion of the Indians. At the conclusion of the Treaty, according to their custom, the Indians had their Peace-Dance and ceremony of burying war weapons. The Priest was present, with some Acadians and many English people. A hole being dug, the Chief at the head of his warriors began the Dance with the "Casse Tete" in their hands. They made more rounds than customary, and the chief showed some reluctance. He had much talk that was not understood by the bystanders, but by the Priest who came nearer and whispered to the Chief to fling his Hatchet in the hole. The Chief observed that perhaps they would be oppressed, and could not afterwards make war again. The Priest then told him that if any wrong was done they might take their arms again. Then the Indians flung down instantly their weapons which were soon covered with earth.

To spend his last days in the shadow of the citadel at Halifax, far from his friends of former years, and among an alien people, was a strange sequel to the career begun at Louisbourg almost thirty years before. But the life of Maillard had not been without its vicissitudes. Like the apostle of old, his time had been spent "in journeyings often, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the wilderness, in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." Nor was the evening of his life without its consolations. In 1760 his appointment to the position of Vicar-General was renewed by the Bishop of Quebec. Two years later he received the high honour of being elected Superior of the Seminary of Quebec, an appointment he was unable to accept owing to the refusal of Governor Murray to confirm it on the ground that it had been proposed by the Superior of the parent Seminary in Paris. This last honour came to him in the very year in which he died. The circumstances surrounding his death are veiled in obscurity, but a curious account of his funeral has come down to us from an eye-witness in Halifax. "In August last died Mons. Maillard, a French priest, who had the title of Vicar-General of Quebec, and has resided here for some years as a missionary to the French and Indians, who stood in

so much awe of him that it was judged necessary to allow him a salary from our government . . . He was buried in the Churchyard by order of the Lieut. Governor, and his pall was supported by the President of the Council, the Speaker of the House of Assembly and four other gentlemen, and Mr. Wood performed the Office of Burial according to our form in the French, in presence of almost all the gentlemen of Halifax, and a very numerous assembly of French and Indians."

So passed Abbé Maillard, Apostle to the Micmacs, and in his passing was almost forgotten. No stone or tablet has been erected to his memory in the city where he died. But among the Indians the name of "Mosi Meial" is remembered with reverence. In their encampments the story is still told that when he died, bushes bearing beautiful flowers sprang up over his grave, testifying to his virtues and his worth.