

Excerpt of a letter from M. l'Abbé Maillard on the Missions of l'Acadie and particularly on the Mi'kmaq Missions, sent to Monsieur de Lalane, grand vicar of Langres et superior of the Missions Étrangères seminary in Paris, in *Les Soirées Canadiennes, Recueil de littérature Nationale* (Québec, Brousseau frères, 1863), p.310-317.

You must know while I am at it, Monsieur, that of all the intoxicating liquors, the brandy of France, or the guildive of the Isles of southern America, are what is considered by the *sauvages* as the dearest thing in the world when they can have some. If I said that I have known and that I still know some who trafficked in their own wives for guildive so that they could drink at their ease and have the charming pleasure of drowning in this liquor as little reason as they have as long as it lasts them, I would not lie. I am not saying this of all of them, but of a good part. In general, they are all extremely fond of brandy, and if the French were not prohibited from providing them with it more rigorously, it would not be possible to control this nation. We must be extremely cautious that there are none in our assemblies, which are sometimes numerous; otherwise, we would only see disorder, tumult, batteries, and knives drawn against each other to stab each other.

That is when we see all the women and girls with the little children fleeing into the depths of the woods and not reappearing until they know that the men's drunkenness has dissipated. There is no more security for the missionary, who is obliged to retire like the others. Here is the peril of women and girls if they remain spectators of the actions of these animals made unreasonable by drunkenness; they would be forced to prostitute themselves with all these wicked and ugly objects, to put down all their clothes, to appear in a state of nudity capable of frightening the boldest eyes; what am I saying, to suffer from these brutal men indignities that I cannot express. That is not all; in these unfortunate circumstances, it happens, and I assure it, that a father will seize his daughter just as well, a brother of his sister, an uncle of his niece, a father-in-law of his daughter-in-law, as of any other daughters or women. It is necessary for these miserable creatures to fall victim to the incontinence of these brutal men; otherwise, they would be stabbed or at least so ill-treated that they could only escape death by a miracle. So, we do all that we can to prevent all these disorders.

Those are the risks run by all missionaries who want to witness what is happening among this herd of drunkards and who then interfere by an impetuous, indiscreet, and immoderate zeal, to lecture deaf people to any remonstrance: at first, they are scoffed at, taunted, teased, and ridiculed, until they have either ceased to speak, or taken up another discourse. Then, some of this elite troop who can still articulate and are good talkers (because there are always some among them, especially on these occasions) come to find the Patriarch and tell him: "You are from heaven, and we are of the earth. You are an angel, and we are men. You are Patriarch, made to teach us, and we are made to listen to you. You are from heaven, yet you are a man like us, don't we know that? But you are from heaven because he who made you Patriarch is truly of it; heaven is his home, and the earth is ours. But you are also on earth and will only leave it like us through death. Yet you are from heaven; we can see it clearly by the horror and disgust you have of our amusements; it says it all, you are not made to act and think like us.

Indeed, do we live in heaven as here below? No. You are an angel, how would you cope with our way of life? How could you live in commerce with women? How would you manage to

reproduce yourself by their means and to leave after you the living and the animated in which you would live? But where are your faculties for that? Don't you say that angels have no bodies? Do you not say that among the angels, no one is marked on one side as male and

on the other as female? They cannot, therefore, reproduce themselves: but as a reward, they do not know death; why would they need organs to engender? O, how wise the Great God is! We die without dying by living beings who come out of us, and in whom we live, after appearing to disappear. But you are an angel, so you do not have a body, so you are not organized like us men to be able to play your role well with those of our servants you see here who would be the most pleasing to you. You are Patriarch; you baptize, you say Mass, you know how to cleanse those who declare to you that they are in the filth of sin; what can't you do! You know what was, what is, what will be; a thousand kinds of writings teach you this; how dissimilar you are from us! Hey! How can we not imagine that you are more than a man?

You are made to teach us, and you teach us indeed; you preach to us, you correct us for our faults, and you show us how we must behave here below to deserve to see the invisible one day. But it is not here that you devote yourself to this work; it is not right for you to do it now; you are too wise not to know how to distinguish the times and the moments when you must open your mouth to instruct us, and above all to condemn in us what you see as reprehensible. But what do you see in us now that is reprehensible? is it because we drink the brandy? It is for us as for all other men. Who brings us this brandy? Are they not men of your nation? You often told us that it was poison for our souls; we are not entirely convinced. Is it for those of your nation? Do you believe that if this liquor were as harmful to us as you assure us, the French, your compatriots, would bring it to us? They are too much our friends to want to harm us by this means. Besides, where do you see that we drink it to excess? Look, Father, we only ever drink one shot at a time, and often one shot is enough; not like the rest of you, who, not satisfied with one shot, also drink another ten, twenty, thirty after the first”.

The reasoner and haranguer *savage* has one of the women closest to him bring a bowl of wood or a bowl of bark that is large enough to contain at least a pint and a half; he has this vase filled with brandy and presents it to the Patriarch, saying to him: 'Do you want, my father, to do like me? This shot is for you, I will take another; you will see that I will only drink this shot and that I will know how to be satisfied with it without thinking of taking another one » He brings the bowl to his mouth and swallows what is inside almost in one gulp; after that, he wants to resume the thread of his reasoning, but soon he no longer knows what he wants to say, he blushes, he turns pale, he foams, he gets up to sing and dance in his fashion, he draws his dagger, and holding it in his hand in the attitude of a madman who wants to rip open the one he sees, he threatens an enemy whom he does not see; it refers mainly to the Englishman, whose heart he wants to eat and whose blood he wants to drink; the other drunkards, applaud him, rise in the same way, and arm themselves with their daggers. Their attitudes towards each other are appalling and freeze the blood of those who look at them.

If they have among them English prisoners, either men, women, girls, boys, big or small, they have them brought to them with their hands tied and seized on the chest, and they

immediately split their head in two with an axe, or else they disembowel them with a dagger or else they have them tied to trees to be shot by the young *savage* boys who use them as blanks. If the missionary is wise, he will then take care not to say the slightest word against all these horrors, for he would not only be doing it gratuitously, but he would at the same time run a great risk of being treated in the same way, or for the least to be outrageously insulted by these drunken barbarians, who are then more ferocious beasts than men. If only he gives them to know, either by word of mouth or by sign, that he disapproves of what they are doing to these unfortunate prisoners, that would be enough for them to regard him as an Englishman, consequently as their sworn enemy, and at the same time make him suffer the same fate. We must, therefore, instead think of sneaking away as soon as we see that this tragic scene is about to begin, and we can do it easily if others notice it by promising that as soon as we have satisfied certain needs, we will come back.

It has been less than twenty years since the *savages* no longer engage frequently in such scenes. However, it happened three times during my service, once on Isle St Jean eighteen years ago, and another time in a place they call Maligaouèche, a small peninsula in Isle Royale east of Louisbourg twenty-two leagues away. There, eleven years ago, the *savages* of my mission encouraged their young people to kill in a similar way five very young English boys that had been with them for a long time and whom I had hoped to make good Catholics afterwards. All because of the brandy that French people, who were wintering around this mission, had sold them for pelts.