

## PREFACE

The purpose of this work is to present in a scholarly, documented, but readable fashion, the story of the Spiritans in North America during a period which largely coincides with the gradual conquest of the French colonies on this continent and, somewhat later, with the after-effects of the French Revolution. Although church history often has a reputation for dull reading, we flatter ourselves with the perhaps idle thought that the story here presented for the first time to the English-speaking world will not confirm this notion.

It is said that when the Chinese want to curse an enemy, they do so by paying him an apparent compliment: "May you have an interesting history." Although I cannot guarantee the authenticity of this saying, it may usefully serve here to introduce this work. Because several Spiritan priests played a prominent role in the desperate and protracted struggle between Catholic France and Protestant England for the undisputed possession of the New World's northern continent, the Chinese curse fell upon them with unremitting regularity, to an extent that a few of them have remained very controversial figures, decried by some as utterly depraved knaves and exalted by others as shining knights. It is this controversy which has given rise to the title of this book.

It would be folly to think this work will end forever two centuries of disagreement. No historical study, unless it is one concerned with an arid subject long forgotten which touches no sensitive chords of sympathy or aversion, ever does. It may happen in the case of some long-forgotten struggle between two nations which both have long since disappeared from the scene of history; but it could never be so of such as the titanic battle between Catholic France and Protestant England for the possession of the New World. One need only compare Emile Lauvrière's monumental work, *La tragédie d'un peuple* with the Acadian chapters of volumes five and six of Lawrence Henry Gipson's massive opus, *The British Empire Before the American Revolution*, to become convinced of this truth.

Thus the title of this book, *Knaves or Knights*, ends with a question mark. Yet, after examining all available evidence, it appears that their knightly character far outshines the many dark deeds attributed to these "rascally priests," a judgment shared, incidentally, by an increasing number of contemporary historians who now have full access to extant records of the time.

Wherever the importance of the subject matter demanded it (and especially in the chapter covering the Acadian struggle) we have used original sources. In matters of less moment and where no primary sources were available we have often relied upon the works of authoritative historians and specialists. The extensive studies of Albert David, C.S.Sp., proved particularly useful, although they did not adequately cover the whole period described in this book.

( The publication of this new book offered an opportunity also to correct a few minor errors concerning the period covered here which had crept into the first volume of the *Spiritan Series*.)

It is hardly necessary to point out that the pages concerned with Acadia should not be viewed as an attempt to stir up ancient animosities among our Canadian neighbors. The author is convinced that the subsequent history of this great country reveals a doubly curious paradox: after the British conquest of Canada, the loyal allegiance of its Catholic people contributed mightily to saving the country for the British during the American War of Independence and, on the other hand, this conquest saved the Canadian Catholics from all the evils which befell their fellow religionists in France from the Revolution of 1792 to the persecutions of Combes in the beginning of the present century. Thus both groups appear to have many reasons to appreciate the good that has flown the course taken by history.

There remains only the pleasant duty of acknowledging a debt of gratitude to the many people who have aided in the preparation of this book. Although they are too numerous to be named individually, special mention must be made of Mr. James P. Beymer who has devoted a great deal of time and trouble to improving the literary character of this work; of Miss Eleanor McCann,

Duquesne University Librarian and her staff, whose ever-ready assistance has been invaluable in our research; and of the personnel of the various archives of Ottawa, Quebec, Baltimore, London, Rome and France, who with unfailing courtesy have assisted us in many ways.

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*Henry J. Koren, C.S.Sp.*

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