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Memoir

OF

PERE JAMES MARQUETTE

BY JOHN R. BAILEY, M. D.

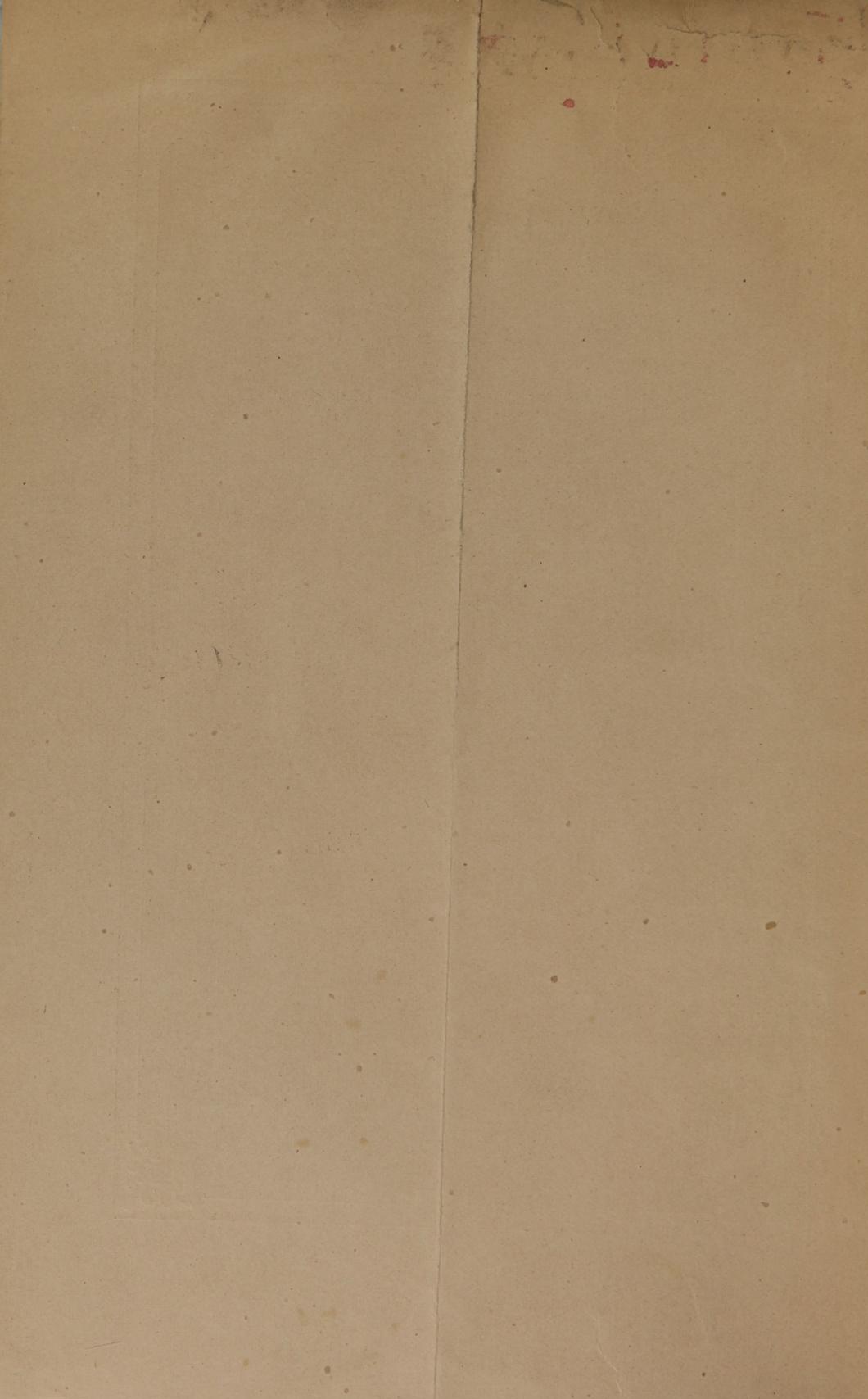
*Published by direction of the Marquette Monument Association,
Mackinac, Mich., July 17th, 1878.*



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OF

PERE JAMES MARQUETTE,

First Explorer of the Mississippi.

This illustrious Christian gentleman was born of an ancient and honorable family, in the city of Laon, in the Department of Aisne, France, in the year 1637. He was allied, through his pious mother, Rose de la Salle, to John Baptist de la Salle, founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, where thousands of poor were instructed free, long before there was any system of public education. During the War of the Revolution three of the Marquettes died here, in the French army. Of the valor of the family there is no doubt.

At the age of 17, in 1654, his pious heart induced him to enter the Society of Jesus; and 12 years he was engaged in study and teaching, and the improvement of himself and fellow-men.

Then being invested with the order of priesthood, his religious zeal induced him to seek a mission among the savages who knew not God. Sailing for Canada in 1666, he landed at Quebec September 20th, buoyant with health, to labor where his superiors should send him.

Francis de Laval was Bishop of Petrea and Vicar Apostolic of New France. The war with the Iroquois had ended, and peace reigned throughout the Canadas.

Ménard embarked in 1660 to raise the cross at the Ottawa Mission of Sault St. Mary's, which Jogues and Raymbault had

planted twenty years before. He tried to reach the Sioux on the Upper Mississippi, but died in the woods of famine or by the hatchet of the roving Indian.

On the 15th of October Marquette started for Three Rivers, to study the Montagnais, key language of the various tribes, also Algonquin, with Father Gabriel Druilletes, and remained there until April, 1668, when he was ordered to the Ottawa Mission of Lake Superior.

Alloüez reports that in 1666 and 1667 the Hurons and Ottawa nomads roamed the desert north of Lake Superior. From Lac des Illinois (Michigan) came the Pottawatomies, worshipers of the sun; also the Sacs and Foxes and the Illinois, to Alloüez, at the mission, to rehearse their joys and sorrows, and receive Christian consolation and advice.

At the west end of Lake Superior Alloüez met the warlike Sioux, who dwelt, says Bancroft, "in a land of prairies, with wild rice for food, and skins of beasts, instead of bark, for roofs to their cabins, on the banks of the Great River, of which Alloüez reported the name to be 'Messipi.' In 1667 Alloüez returned to Quebec."

Alloüez, Claude Dablon and Pere James Marquette established the Chippeway Mission of St. Mary, in 1668, the first settlement of Europeans in Michigan.

1669, Bancroft says: "The purpose of discovering the Mississippi, of which the tales of the natives had published the magnificence, sprang from Marquette himself." He was ready for the journey in the fall of 1669, but was delayed at Chegoi-me-gon, where he learned from a young Illinois the dialect of that tribe in 1669 and 1670. The project of Marquette was favored by Talon, intendant of New France, who desired the French to descend the "Messipi," and plant their flag on the Pacific and the Mexican Gulf, by the side of that of Spain.

May, 1671, there was a congress of many Indian tribes at Sault Ste. Marie, where they were formally placed under the protection of the French king, Louis XIV.

"In the same year Marquette gathered the wandering remains of one branch of the Huron nation round a chapel at

Point St. Ignace, on the continent north of the peninsula of Michigan." "Here, also, Marquette once more gained a place among the founders of Michigan." Here he remained until 1673, maturing his plans for his voyage of discovery, and ministering to the Indians—their "Guardian Angel of the Mission"—whilst Alotiez and Dablon bore the cross through Eastern Wisconsin and the north of Illinois.

The Pottawatomies "heard with wonder" Marquette's "daring proposal. They said these distant nations never spare the strangers; their mutual wars fill their borders with bands of warriors; the Great River abounds in monsters, which devour both men and canoes; the excessive heats occasion death." The good father replied: "I shall gladly lay down my life for the salvation of souls;" and the docile Indians joined in prayer.

May 17, 1673, Marquette, M. Joliet, and five men, set out in two bark canoes, from the mission of St. Ignatius, at Michilimackinac, to conquer or die in their glorious enterprise. Indian corn and dried meats were their only provisions.

Their voyage from Point St. Ignace, in frail birch bark canoes, over the unexplored Lac des Illinois, through the Baie des Puants (Bay of the Fetid—Green Bay), was dangerous, novel and fascinating. Leaving the bay they enter Fox River, about 260 miles long, where were many birds feeding on wild oats. Advancing up the river, they passed the rapids and approached Maskoutens, where they arrived June 7, 1673.

June 10th, taking two Algonquin guides, they started for a river, the "Miskousing" (Wisconsin), three leagues off, that emptied into the Mississippi. The guides took them safely to a portage, twenty-seven hundred paces long, and helped to transport their canoes to the river, and returned home. Before embarking, they paid their devotions to the Most High God, as they always did on important occasions.

They sailed down the broad Wisconsin, past alternate prairies and hill-sides, towards the great river Mississippi, which they entered June 17th, with a joy that could not be expressed. Here the two birch bark canoes raised their happy sails to

unknown breezes and floated down the ocean stream, through prairies and forests, often meeting with the wild Illinois, Shawnees, Sioux and Chickasas (Marquette carrying the cross before him), frequently stopping to smoke the calumet, and always striving to convert those strange people to the worship of the true Manitou and the Catholic faith.

They reached the Mou-in-gou-e-na (Des Moines), where Marquette stayed six days, and published to the Illinois the true God, their Creator. Their great chief hung around Marquette the sacred calumet, which was the amulet of peace to all savage nations.

The little group proceeded onwards. "I did not fear death," says Marquette. "I should have esteemed it the greatest happiness to have died for the glory of God."

They passed the Missouri, and in less than forty leagues floated past the Ohio to latitude 33°, where, on the west bank of the "Great River, stood the village of Mitchigamea, where Marquette asked the aid of God. The next day, ten men, in a wooden canoe, escorted the discoverers ten leagues to the village of Akanseas, below the Arkansas river, the end of their voyage. Here the good Marquette spoke of God and the mysteries of the Catholic faith." Marquette and Joliet left Akanseas July 17th, 1673, and ascended the Mississippi.

At latitude 30° they entered the river Illinois. The tribe of Illinois entreated Marquette to reside with them, and a young chief conducted the party, by way of Chicago, to lake Michigan. In September all were safe in Green Bay.

Joliet returned to Quebec and announced the discovery, whilst Marquette remained to preach the gospel to the Indians. Being often sick with dysentery, and in feeble health, he remained at the Green Bay Mission until October 25th, 1674, when he sailed for Chicago. Reaching this river, after suffering from much sickness and delays, "he was received as an angel from heaven." Here he remained only a few months, imparting the gospel to the red men. May 18th, 1675, his strength failing, he resolved to sail to the Mission of St. Ignatius, Michilimackinac, and recruit his health in that salubrious

clime. On the route, he entered a little river in Michigan, and Bancroft says, "Erecting an altar, he said mass after the rites of the Catholic church; then, begging the men who conducted his canoe to leave him alone for a half hour:

" 'In the darkling wood,
Amidst cool and silence he knelt down,
And offered to the Mightiest, solemn thanks
And supplication.'

"At the end of the half hour they went to seek him and he was no more. The good missionary, discoverer of a world, had fallen asleep on the margin of the stream that bears his name. Near its mouth the canoemen dug his grave in the sand. Ever after, the forest rangers if in danger, on Lake Michigan, would invoke his name. The people of the West will build his monument."

Thus at the age of 38, May 19th, 1675, in the height of his fame and glory, was the good priest taken away from earth to fill a brighter sphere in some celestial space. He was 21 years in the Society of Jesus—12 in France and 9 in America.

God did not suffer the remains of Marquette to be forgotten. Two years later, on the anniversary of his death, the "Kiskakon" Indians (Algonquins) and a number of Iroquois repaired to the spot and disinterred his body. Cleaning the bones, they placed them in a neat box of birch bark and conveyed them to Point St. Ignace.

The convoy consisted of thirty canoes. As they approached the mission of St. Ignace, "Missilimakinac," Fathers Nouvel and Pierson met them and intoned the "De Profundis," in the sight of all the people, before landing. The body remained in state, in the church, all day Whitsun-Monday, June 8th, 1677, and the next day was deposited with funeral honors in a little vault under the church, "where he now reposes," the "guardian angel of the Ottawa missions," opposite the beautiful island of Mackinac, the home of the "Great Manitou" and of the "spirits" whom the Indians delighted to worship.

In 1671 Marquette had a log chapel built at St. Ignace, and in 1674 a church, surrounded by palisades twenty feet high,

situated near a point of land opposite the island of Michilimackinac. The mission was abandoned and the church set fire to about 1706. Another was erected, but has long since disappeared. Last year the foundations of the old church were discovered, on lot No. 19, Mr. David Murray's place, at Point St. Ignace, and the remains of Marquette, in the vault, inclosed in the bark casket described.

Marquette made a map of his voyage, to accompany his journal, showing the course of the river "De la Conception" (Mississippi) from about 43 deg. 30 min. to 34 deg. north latitude; also the adjacent lakes and countries. This map was published in Paris in 1681, the year before the discoveries of La Salle on the Mississippi.

It is pleasant to verify, from historical records, the fact that while the march of the early Spanish explorers, in the southern part of America, was invariably marked by cruelty and bloodshed, in the course of the early French missionaries and explorers no blood was shed but that of their own martyred brethren, blackened by no crime or injury to the aboriginal people, and herein, aside from Marquette's saintly life and romantic end, may be found the reason why the name of the Great River's first explorer has taken such a hold on the affections of the people of the Northwest, herein the father of the thought which inspired Bancroft's prophecy, uttered a quarter of a century ago, that the West will erect his monument.

Now let the people of America and Europe unite, without distinction of race, creed, or sect, and build a shapely monument to the great and good missionary, whose fame and Christian virtues we can only emulate.

MACKINAC, MICH., July 17th, 1878.

