

BREBEUF  
AND HIS BRETHREN

E. J. PRATT

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# Brébeuf and His Brethren

BY

E. J. PRATT

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1940

TO

MY FATHER

## BREBEUF AND HIS BRETHREN

### I

The winds of God were blowing over France,  
Kindling the hearths and altars, changing vows  
Of rote into an alphabet of flame.  
The air was charged with song beyond the range  
Of larks, with wings beyond the stretch of eagles.  
Skylines unknown to maps broke from the mists  
And there was laughter on the seas. With sound  
Of bugles from the Roman catacombs,  
The saints came back in their incarnate forms.  
Across the Alps St. Francis of Assisi  
In his brown tunic girt with hempen cord,  
Revisited the plague-infected towns.  
The monks were summoned from their monasteries,  
Nuns from their convents; apostolic hands  
Had touched the priests; foundlings and galley slaves  
Became the charges of Vincent de Paul;  
Francis de Sales put his heroic stamp  
Upon his order of the Visitation.  
Out of Numidia by way of Rome,  
The architect of palaces, unbuilt  
Of hand, again was busy with his plans,  
Reshaping for the world his *City of God*.  
Out of the Netherlands was heard the call  
Of Kempis through the *Imitatio*

To leave the dusty marts and city streets  
And stray along the shores of Galilee.  
The flame had spread across the Pyrenees—  
The visions of Theresa burning through  
The adorations of the Carmelites;  
The very clouds at night to John of the Cross  
Being cruciform—chancel, transept and aisle  
Blazing with light and holy oracle.  
Xavier had risen from his knees to drive  
His dreams full-sail under an ocean compass.  
Loyola, soldier-priest, staggering with wounds  
At Pampeluna, guided by a voice,  
Had travelled to the Montserrat Abbey  
To leave his sword and dagger on an altar  
That he might lead the *Company of Jesus*.

The story of the frontier like a saga  
Sang through the cells and cloisters of the nation,  
Made silver flutes out of the parish spires,  
Troubled the ashes of the canonized  
In the cathedral crypts, soared through the nave  
To stir the foliations on the columns,  
Roll through the belfries, and give deeper tongue  
To the *Magnificat* in Notre Dame.  
It brought to earth the prophets and apostles  
Out of their static shrines in the stained glass.  
It caught the ear of Christ, reined his hands  
And feet, bidding his marble saints to leave  
Their pedestals for chartless seas and coasts  
And the vast blunders of the forest glooms.  
So, in the footsteps of their patrons came  
A group of men asking the hardest tasks  
At the new outposts of the Huron bounds  
Held in the stern hand of the Jesuit Order.

And in Bayeux a neophyte while rapt  
In contemplation saw a bleeding form  
Falling beneath the instrument of death,  
Rising under the quickening of the thongs,  
Stumbling along the Via Dolorosa.  
No play upon the fancy was this scene,  
But the Real Presence to the naked sense.  
The fingers of Brébeuf were at his breast,  
Closing and tightening on a crucifix,  
While voices spoke aloud unto his ear  
And to his heart—*Per ignem et per aquam*.  
Forests and streams and trails thronged through his mind,  
The painted faces of the Iroquois and Huron,  
Nomadic bands and smoking bivouacs  
Along the shores of western inland seas,  
With forts and palisades and fiery stakes.  
The stories of Champlain, Brulé, Viel,  
Sagard and Le Caron had reached his town—  
The stories of those northern boundaries

Where in the winter the white pines could brush  
The Pleiades, and at the equinoxes  
Under the gold and green of the auroras  
Wild geese drove wedges through the zodiac.  
The vows were deep he laid upon his soul.  
"I shall be broken first before I break them."  
He knew by heart the manual that had stirred  
The world—the clarion calling through the notes  
Of the Ignatian preludes. On the prayers,  
The meditations, points and colloquies,  
Was built the soldier and the martyr programme.  
This is the end of man—*Deum laudet*,  
To seek and find the will of God, to act  
Upon it for the ordering of life,  
And for the soul's beatitude. This is  
To do, this not to do. To weigh the sin;  
The interior understanding to be followed  
By the amendment of the deed through grace;  
The abnegation of the evil thought  
And act; the trampling of the body under;  
The daily practice of the counter virtues.  
"In time of desolation to be firm  
And constant in the soul's determination,  
Desire and sense obedient to the reason."

The oath Brébeuf was taking had its root  
Firm in his generations of descent.  
The family name was known to chivalry—  
In the Crusades; at Hastings; through the blood  
Of the English Howards; called out on the rungs  
Of the siege ladders; at the castle breaches;  
Proclaimed by heralds at the lists, and heard  
In Council Halls:—the coat-of-arms a bull  
In black with horns of gold on a silver shield.  
So on that toughened pedigree of fibre  
Were strung the pledges. From the novice stage  
To the vow-day he passed on to the priesthood,  
And on the anniversary of his birth  
He celebrated his first mass at Rouen.

April 26,  
1625

And the first clauses of the Jesuit pledge  
Were honoured when, embarking at Dieppe,  
Brébeuf, Massé and Charles Lalemant  
Travelled three thousand miles of the Atlantic,  
And reached the citadel in seven weeks.  
A month in preparation at Notre Dame  
Des Anges, Brébeuf in company with Daillon  
Moved to Three Rivers to begin the journey.  
Taking both warning and advice from traders,  
They packed into their stores of altar-ware  
And vestments, strings of coloured beads with knives.  
Kettles and awls, domestic gifts to win  
The Hurons' favour or appease their wrath.  
There was a touch of omen in the warning,



For scarcely had they started when the fate  
Of the Franciscan mission was disclosed—  
News of Viel, delivered to Brébeuf,—  
Drowned by the natives in the final league  
Of his return at Sault-au-Récollet!

Back to Quebec by Lalemant's command;  
A year's delay of which Brébeuf made use  
By hardening his body and his will,  
Learning the rudiments of the Huron tongue,  
Mastering the wood-lore, joining in the hunt  
For food, observing habits of speech, the ways  
Of thought, the moods and the long silences.  
Wintering with the Algonquins, he soon knew  
The life that was before him in the cabins—  
The troubled night, branches of fir covering  
The floor of snow; the martyrdom of smoke  
That hourly drove his nostrils to the ground  
To breathe, or offered him the choice of death  
Outside by frost, inside by suffocation;  
The forced companionship of dogs that ate  
From the same platters, slept upon his legs  
Or neck; the nausea from sagamite,  
Unsalted, gritty, and that bloated feeling,  
The February stomach touch when acorns,  
Turk's cap, bog-onion bulbs dug from the snow  
And bulrush roots flavoured with eel skin made  
The menu for his breakfast-dinner-supper.  
Added to this, the instigated taunts  
Common as daily salutations; threats  
Of murderous intent that just escaped  
The deed—the prologue to Huronia!

July 1626

Midsummer and the try again—Brébeuf,  
Daillon, de Nouë just arrived from France;  
Quebec up to Three Rivers; the routine  
Repeated; bargaining with the Indians,  
Axes and beads against the maize and passage;  
The natives' protest when they saw Brébeuf,  
High as a totem-pole. What if he placed  
His foot upon the gunwale, suddenly  
Shifted an ounce of those two hundred pounds  
Off centre at the rapids! They had visions  
Of bodies and bales gyrating round the rocks,  
Plunging like stumps and logs over the falls.  
The Hurons shook their heads: the bidding grew;  
Kettles and porcelain necklaces and knives,  
Till with the last awl thrown upon the heap,  
The ratifying grunt came from the chief.  
Two Indians holding the canoe, Brébeuf,  
Barefooted, cassock pulled up to his knees,  
Planted one foot dead in the middle, then  
The other, then slowly and ticklishly  
Adjusted to the physics of his range

And width, he grasped both sides of the canoe,  
Lowered himself and softly murmuring  
An *Ave*, sat, immobile as a statue.

So the flotilla started—the same route  
Champlain and Le Caron eleven years  
Before had taken to avoid the swarm  
Of hostile Iroquois on the St. Lawrence.  
Eight hundred miles—along the Ottawa  
Through the steep gorges where the river narrowed,  
Through calmer waters where the river widened,  
Skirting the island of the Allumettes,  
Thence to the Mattawa through lakes that led  
To the blue waters of the Nipissing,  
And then southward a hundred tortuous miles  
Down the French River to the Huron shore.  
The record of that trip was for Brébeuf  
A memory several times to be re-lived;  
Of rocks and cataracts and portages,  
Of feet cut by the river stones, of mud  
And stench, of boulders, logs and tangled growths,  
Of summer heat that made him long for night,  
And when he struck his bed of rock—mosquitoes  
That made him doubt if dawn would ever break.  
'Twas thirty days to the Georgian Bay, then south  
One hundred miles threading the labyrinth  
Of islands till he reached the western shore  
That flanked the Bay of Penetanguishene.  
Soon joined by both his fellow priests he followed  
The course of a small stream and reached Toaniché,  
Where for three years he was to make his home  
And turn the first sod of the Jesuit mission.

'Twas ploughing only—for eight years would pass  
Before even the blades appeared. The priests  
Knew well how barren was the task should signs,  
Gestures and inarticulate sounds provide  
The basis of the converse. And the speech  
Was hard. De Nouë set himself to school,  
Unflinching as to his Breviary,  
Through the long evenings of the fall and winter.  
But as light never trickled through a sentence,  
Either the Hurons' or his own, he left  
With the spring's expedition to Quebec,  
Where intermittently for twenty years  
He was to labour with the colonists,  
Travelling between the outposts, and to die  
Snow-blind, caught in the circles of his tracks  
Between Three Rivers and Fort Richelieu.

Daillon migrated to the south and west  
To the country of the Neutrals. There he spent  
The winter, fruitless. Jealousies of trade  
Awoke resentment, fostered calumnies,

Until the priest under a constant threat  
That often issued in assault, returned  
Against his own persuasion to Quebec.

Brébeuf was now alone. He bent his mind  
To the great end. The efficacious rites  
Were hinged as much on mental apprehensions  
As on the disposition of the heart.  
For that the first equipment was the speech.  
He listened to the sounds and gave them letters,  
Arranged their sequences, caught the inflections,  
Extracted nouns from objects, verbs from actions  
And regimented rebel moods and tenses.  
He saw the way the chiefs harangued the clans,  
The torrent of compounded words, the art  
Concealed within the pause, the look, the gesture,  
Lacking all labials, the open mouth  
Performed a double service with the vowels  
Directed like a battery at the hearers.  
With what forebodings did he watch the spell  
Cast on the sick by the Arendiwans:  
The sorcery of the Huron rhetoric  
Extorting bribes for cures, for guarantees  
Against the failure of the crop or hunt!  
The time would come when steel would clash on steel,  
And many a battle would be won or lost  
With weapons from the armoury of words.  
Three years of that apprenticeship had won  
The praise of his Superior and no less  
Evoked the admiration of Champlain.  
That soldier, statesman, navigator, friend,  
Who had combined the brain of Richelieu  
With the red blood of Cartier and Magellan,  
Was at this time reduced to his last keg  
Of powder at the citadel. Blockade,  
The piracy of Kirke on the Atlantic,  
The English occupation of Quebec,

And famine, closed this chapter of the Mission.

## II

Four years at home could not abate his zeal.  
Brébeuf, absorbed within his meditations,  
Made ready to complete his early vows.  
Each year in France but served to clarify  
His vision. At Rouen he gauged the height  
Of the Cathedral's central tower in terms  
Of pines and oaks around the Indian lodges.  
He went to Paris. There as worshipper,



His eyes were scaling transepts, but his mind,  
Straying from window patterns where the sun  
Shed rose ellipses on the marble floor,  
Rested on glassless walls of cedar bark.  
To Rennes—the Jesuits' intellectual home,  
Where, in the *Summa* of Aquinas, faith  
Laid hold on God's existence when the last  
Link of the Reason slipped, and where Loyola  
Enforced the high authoritarian scheme  
Of God's vicegerent on the priestly fold.  
Between the two nostalgic fires Brébeuf  
Was swung—between two homes; in one was peace  
Within the holy court, the ecstasy  
Of unmolested prayer before the Virgin,  
The daily and vicarious offering  
On which no hand might dare lay sacrilege:  
But in the other would be broken altars  
And broken bodies of both Host and priest.  
Then of which home, the son? From which the exile?  
With his own blood Brébeuf wrote his last vow—  
"Lord Jesus! You redeemed me with your blood;  
By your most precious death; and this is why  
I make this pledge to serve you all my life  
In the Society of Jesus—never  
To serve another than Thyself. Hereby  
I sign this promise in my blood, ready  
To sacrifice it all as willingly  
As now I give this drop."—Jean de Brébeuf.

Nor did the clamour of the *Thirty Years*,  
The battle-cries at La Rochelle and Fribourg,  
Blow out the flame. Less strident than the names  
Of Richelieu and Mazarin, Condé,  
Turenne, but just as mighty, were the calls  
Of the new apostolate. A century  
Before had Xavier from the Indies summoned  
The world to other colours. Now appeals  
Were ringing through the history of New France.  
Le Jeune, following the example of Biard  
And Charles Lalemant, was capturing souls  
By thousands with the fire of the *Relations*:  
Noble and peasant, layman, priest and nun  
Gave of their wealth and power and personal life.  
Among his new recruits were Chastellain,  
Pijart, Le Mercier, and Isaac Jogues,  
The Lalemants—Jerome and Gabriel—  
Jerome who was to supervise and write,  
With Ragueneau, the drama of the Mission;  
Who told of the survivors reaching France  
When the great act was closed that "all of them  
Still hold their resolution to return  
To the combat at the first sound of the trumpets."  
The other, Gabriel, who would share the crown  
With Jean Brébeuf, pitting the frailest body

Against the hungers of the wilderness,  
The fevers of the lodges and the fires  
That slowly wreathed themselves around a stake.

Then Garnier, comrade of Jogues. The winds  
Had fanned to a white heat the hearth and placed  
Three brothers under vows—the Carmelite,  
The Capuchin, and his, the Jesuit.  
The gentlest of his stock, he had resolved  
To seek and to accept a post that would  
Transmit his nurture through a discipline  
That multiplied the living martyrdoms  
Before the casual incident of death.

To many a vow did Chabanel subject  
His timid nature as the evidence  
Of trial came through the Huronian records.  
He needed every safeguard of the soul  
To fortify the will, for every day  
Would find him fighting, mastering his revolt  
Against the native life and practices.  
Of all the priests he could the least endure  
The sudden transformation from the Chair  
Of College Rhetoric to the heat and drag  
Of portages, from the monastic calm  
To the noise and smoke and vermin of the lodges,  
And the insufferable sights and stinks  
When, at the High Feast of the Dead, the bodies  
Lying for months or years upon the scaffolds  
Were taken down, stripped of their flesh, caressed,  
Strung up along the cabin poles and then  
Cast in a pit for common burial.  
The day would come when in the wilderness,  
The weary hand protesting, he would write  
This final pledge—"I, Noel Chabanel,  
Do vow, in presence of the Sacrament  
Of Thy most precious blood and body, here  
To stay forever with the Huron Mission,  
According to commands of my Superiors.  
Therefore I do beseech Thee to receive me  
As Thy perpetual servant and to make  
Me worthy of so sublime a ministry."

And the same spirit breathed on Chaumonot,  
Making his restless and undisciplined soul  
At first seek channels of renunciation  
In abstinence, ill health and beggary.  
His months of pilgrimages to the shrines  
At Rome and to the Lady of Loretto,  
The static hours upon his knees had sapped  
His strength, turning an introspective mind  
Upon the weary circuit of its thoughts,  
Until one day a letter from Brébeuf  
Would come to burn the torpors of his heart

And galvanize a raw novitiate.

### III

1633

New France restored! Champlain, Massé, Brébeuf  
Were in Quebec, hopes riding high as ever.  
Davost and Daniel soon arrived to join  
The expedition west. Midsummer trade,  
The busiest the Colony had known,  
Was over: forty-three canoes to meet  
The hazards of return; the basic sense  
Of safety, now Champlain was on the scene;  
The joy of the Toaniché Indians  
As they beheld Brébeuf and heard him speak  
In their own tongue, was happy augury.  
But as before upon the eve of starting  
The path was blocked, so now the unforeseen  
Stepped in. A trade and tribal feud long-blown  
Between the Hurons and the Allumettes  
Came to a head when the Algonquin chief  
Forbade the passage of the priests between  
His island and the shore. The Hurons knew  
The roughness of this channel, and complied.

In such delays which might have been construed  
By lesser wills as exits of escape,  
As providential doors on a light latch,  
The Fathers entered deeper preparation.  
They worked incessantly among the tribes  
In the environs of Quebec, took hold  
Of Huron words and beat them into order.  
Davost and Daniel gathered from the store  
Of speech, manners, and customs that Brébeuf  
Had garnered, all the subtleties to make  
The bargain for the journey. The next year  
Seven canoes instead of forty! Fear  
Of Iroquois following a recent raid  
And massacre; growing distrust of priests;  
The sense of risk in having men aboard  
Unskilled in fire-arms, helpless at the paddles  
And on the portages—all these combined  
To sharpen the terms until the treasury  
Was dry of presents and of promises.

1634

The ardours of his trip eight years before  
Fresh in his mind, Brébeuf now set his face  
To graver peril, for the native mood  
Was hostile. On the second week the corn  
Was low, a handful each a day. Sickness  
Had struck the Huron, slowing down the blades,

And turning murmurs into menaces  
Against the Blackrobes and their French companions.  
The first blow hit Davost. Robbed of his books,  
Papers and altar linens, he was left  
At the Island of the Allumettes; Martin[[1a](#)]  
Was put ashore at Nipissing; Baron[[1b](#)]  
And Daniel were deserted, made to take  
Their chances with canoes along the route,  
Yet all in turn, tattered, wasted, with feet  
Bleeding—broken though not in will, rejoined  
Their great companion after he had reached  
The forest shores of the Fresh Water Sea,  
And guided by the sight of smoke had entered  
The village of Ihonatiria.

[1] French assistants.

A year's success flattered the priestly hope  
That on this central field seed would be sown  
On which the yield would be the Huron nation  
Baptized and dedicated to the Faith;  
And that a richer harvest would be gleaned  
Of duskier grain from the same seed on more  
Forbidding ground when the arch-foes themselves  
Would be re-born under the sacred rites.  
For there was promise in the auspices.  
Ihonatiria received Brébeuf  
With joy. Three years he had been there, a friend  
Whose visit to the tribes could not have sprung  
From inspiration rooted in private gain.  
He had not come to stack the arquebuses  
Against the mountains of the beaver pelts.  
He had not come to kill. Between the two—  
Barter and battle—what was left to explain  
A stranger in their midst? The name Echon[[2](#)]  
Had solved the riddle.

[2] *Echon*—he who pulls the heavy load.

So with native help

The Fathers built their mission house—the frame  
Of young elm-poles set solidly in earth;  
Their supple tops bent, lashed and braced to form  
The arched roof overlaid with cedar-bark.  
"No Louvre or palace is this cabin," wrote  
Brébeuf, "no stories, cellar, garret, windows,  
No chimney—only at the top a hole  
To let the smoke escape. Inside, three rooms

With doors of wood alone set it apart  
From the single long-house of the Indians.  
The first is used for storage; in the second  
Our kitchen, bedroom and refectory;  
Our bedstead is the earth; rushes and boughs  
For mattresses and pillows; in the third,  
Which is our chapel, we have placed the altar,  
The images and vessels of the Mass."  
It was the middle room that drew the natives,  
Day after day, to share the sagamite  
And raisins, and to see the marvels brought  
From France—marvels on which the Fathers built  
A basis of persuasion, recognizing  
The potency of awe for natures nurtured  
On charms and spells, invoking kindly spirits  
And exorcising demons. So the natives  
Beheld a mass of iron chips like bees  
Swarm to a lodestone: was it gum that held  
Them fast? They watched the handmill grind the corn;  
Gaped at a lens eleven-faceted  
That multiplied a bead as many times,  
And at a phial where a captive flea  
Looked like a beetle. But the miracle  
Of all, the clock! It showed the hours; it struck  
Or stopped upon command. Le Capitaine  
Du Jour which moved its hands before its face,  
Called up the dawn, saluted noon, rang out  
The sunset, summoned with the count of twelve  
The Fathers to a meal, or sent at four  
The noisy pack of Indians to their cabins.  
"What did it say?" "Yo eiouahaoua—  
Time to put on the cauldron." "And what now?"  
"Time to go home at once and close the door."  
It was alive: an old dwelt inside,  
Peering out through that black hub on the dial.

As great a mystery was writing—how  
A Frenchman fifteen miles away could know  
The meaning of black signs the runner brought.  
Sometimes the marks were made on peel of bark,  
Sometimes on paper—in itself a wonder!  
From what strange tree was it the inside rind?  
What charm was in the ink that transferred thought  
Across such space without a spoken word?

This growing confirmation of belief  
Was speeded by events wherein good fortune  
Waited upon the priestly word and act.

Aug. 27,  
1635

A moon eclipse was due—Brébeuf had known it—  
Had told the Indians of the moment when  
The shadow would be thrown across the face.  
Nor was there wastage in the prayers as night,  
Uncurtained by a single cloud, produced

An orb most perfect. No one knew the lair  
Or nest from which the shadow came; no one  
The home to which it travelled when it passed.  
Only the vague uncertainties were left—  
Was it the dread invasion from the south?  
Such portent was the signal for the braves  
To mass themselves outside the towns and shoot  
Their multitudes of arrows at the sky  
And fling their curses at the Iroquois.  
Like a crow's wing it hovered, broodily  
Brushing the face—five hours from rim to rim  
While midnight darkness stood upon the land.  
This was prediction baffling all their magic.  
Again, when weeks of drought had parched the land  
And burned the corn, when dancing sorcerers  
Brought out their tortoise shells, climbed on the roofs,  
Clanging their invocation to the Bird  
Of Thunder to return, day after day,  
Without avail, the priests formed their processions,  
Put on their surplices above their robes,  
And the Bird of Thunder came with heavy rain,  
Released by the nine masses at Saint Joseph.

Nor were the village warriors slow to see  
The value of the Frenchmen's strategy  
In war. Returning from the eastern towns,  
They told how soldiers had rebuilt the forts,  
And strengthened them with corner bastions  
Where through the embrasures enfilading fire  
Might flank the Iroquois bridging the ditches,  
And scaling ramparts. Here was argument  
That pierced the thickest prejudice of brain  
And heart, allaying panic ever present,  
When with the first news of the hated foe  
From scouts and hunters, women with their young  
Fled to the dubious refuge of the forest  
From terror blacker than a pestilence.  
On such a soil tilled by those skilful hands  
Those passion flowers and lilies of the East,  
The *Aves* and the *Paternosters* bloomed.  
The *Credos* and the *Thou-shalt-nots* were turned  
By Daniel into simple Huron rhymes  
And taught to children, and when points of faith  
Were driven hard against resistant rock,  
The Fathers found the softer crevices  
Through deeds which readily the Indian mind  
Could grasp—where hands were never put to blows  
Nor the swift tongues used for recrimination.

Acceptance of the common lot was part  
Of the original vows. But that the priests  
Who were to come should not misread the text,  
Brébeuf prepared a sermon on the theme  
Of Patience:—"Fathers, Brothers, under call

Of God! Take care that you foresee the perils,  
Labours and hardships of this Holy Mission.  
You must sincerely love the savages  
As brothers ransomed by the blood of Christ.  
All things must be endured. To win their hearts  
You must perform the smallest services.  
Provide a tinder-box or burning mirror  
To light their fires. Fetch wood and water for them;  
And when embarking never let them wait  
For you; tuck up your habits, keep them dry  
To avoid water and sand in their canoes. Carry  
Your load on portages. Always appear  
Cheerful—their memories are good for faults.  
Constrain yourselves to eat their sagamite  
The way that they prepare it, tasteless, dirty."

And by the priests upon the ground all dots  
And commas were observed. They suffered smoke  
That billowed from the back-draughts at the roof,  
Smothered the cabin, seared the eyes; the fire  
That broiled the face, while frost congealed the spine;  
The food from unwashed platters where refusal  
Was an offence; the rasp of speech maintained  
All day by men who never learned to talk  
In quiet tones; the drums of the Diviners  
Blasting the night—all this without complaint!  
And more—whatever sleep was possible  
To snatch from the occasional lull of cries  
Was broken by uncovenanted fleas  
That fastened on the priestly flesh like hornets.  
Carving the curves of favour on the lips,  
Tailoring the man into the Jesuit coat,  
Wrapping the smiles round inward maledictions,  
And sublimating hoary Gallic oaths  
Into the *Benedicite* when dogs  
And squaws and reeking children violated  
The hours of rest, were penances unnamed  
Within the iron code of good Ignatius.  
Was there a limit of obedience  
Outside the jurisdiction of this Saint?  
How often did the hand go up to lower  
The flag? How often by some ringing order  
Was it arrested at the halliard touch?  
How often did Brébeuf seal up his ears  
When blows and insults woke ancestral fifes  
Within his brain, blood-cells, and viscera,  
Is not explicit in the written story.

But never could the Indians infer  
Self-gain or anything but simple courage  
Inspired by a zeal beyond reproof,  
As when the smallpox spreading like a flame  
Destroying hundreds, scarifying thousands,  
The Fathers took their chances of contagion,



Their broad hats warped by rain, their moccasins  
Worn to the kibes, that they might reach the huts,  
Share with the sick their dwindled stock of food—  
A sup of partridge broth or raisin juice,  
Inscribe the sacred sign of the cross, and place  
A touch of moisture from the Holy Water  
Upon the forehead of a dying child.

Before the year was gone the priests were shown  
The way the Hurons could prepare for death  
A captive foe. The warriors had surprised  
A band of Iroquois and had reserved  
The one survivor for a fiery pageant.  
No cunning of an ancient Roman triumph,  
Nor torment of a Medici confession  
Surpassed the subtle savagery of art  
Which made the dressing for the sacrifice  
A ritual of mockery for the victim.  
What visions of the past came to Brébeuf,  
And what forebodings of the days to come,  
As he beheld this weird compound of life  
In jest and intent taking place before  
His eyes—the crude unconscious variants  
Of reed and sceptre, robe and cross, brier  
And crown! Might not one day baptismal drops  
Be turned against him in a rain of death?  
Whatever the appeals made by the priests,  
They could not break the immemorial usage  
Or vary one detail. The prisoner  
Was made to sing his death-song, was embraced.  
Hailed with ironic greetings, forced to state  
His willingness to die.

"See how your hands  
Are crushed. You cannot thus desire to live.

No.

Then be of good courage—you shall die.

True!—What shall be the manner of my death?

By fire."

When shall it be?

Tonight.

What hour?

At sunset.

All is well."

Eleven fires

Were lit along the whole length of the cabin.  
His body smeared with pitch and bound with belts  
Of bark, the Iroquois was forced to run  
The fires, stopped at each end by the young braves,  
And swiftly driven back, and when he swooned,  
They carried him outside to the night air,  
Laid him on fresh damp moss, poured cooling water  
Into his mouth, and to his burns applied

The soothing balsams. With resuscitation  
They lavished on him all the courtesies  
Of speech and gesture, gave him food and drink,  
Compassionately spoke of his wounds and pain.  
The ordeal every hour was resumed  
And halted, but, with each recurrence, blows  
Were added to the burns and gibes gave place  
To yells until the sacrificial dawn,  
Lighting the scaffold, dimming the red glow  
Of the hatchet collar, closed the festival.

Brébeuf had seen the worst. He knew that when  
A winter pack of wolves brought down a stag  
There was no waste of time between the leap  
And the business click upon the jugular,  
Such was the forthright honesty in death  
Among the brutes. They had not learned the sport  
Of dallying around the nerves to halt  
A quick despatch. A human art was torture,  
Where Reason crept into the veins, mixed tar  
With blood and brewed its own intoxicant.  
Brébeuf had pleaded for the captive's life,  
But as the night wore on, would not his heart,  
Colliding with his mind, have wished for death?  
The plea refused, he gave the Iroquois  
The only consolation in his power.  
He went back to his cabin, heavy in heart.  
To stem that viscous melanotic current  
Demanded labour, time, and sacrifice.  
Those passions were not altered over-night.  
Two plans were in his mind—the one concerned  
The seminary started in Quebec.  
The children could be sent there to be trained  
In Christian precepts, weaned from superstition  
And from the savage spectacle of death.  
He saw the way the women and their broods  
Danced round the scaffold in their exaltation.  
How much of this was habit and how much  
Example? Curiously Brébeuf revolved  
The facets of the Indian character.  
A fighting courage equal to the French—  
It could be lifted to crusading heights  
By a battle speech. Endurance was a code  
Among the braves, and impassivity.  
Their women wailing at the Feast of Death,  
The men sat silent, heads bowed to the knees.  
"Never in nine years with but one exception,"  
Wrote Ragueneau, "did I see an Indian weep  
For grief." Only the fires evoked the cries,  
And these like scalps were triumphs for the captors.  
But then their charity and gentleness  
To one another and to strangers gave  
A balance to the picture. Fugitives  
From villages destroyed found instant welcome

To the last communal share of food and land.  
Brébeuf's stay at Toanché gave him proof  
Of how the Huron nature could respond  
To kindness. But last night upon that scaffold!  
Could that be scoured from the heart? Why not  
Try out the nurture plan upon the children  
And send the boys east, shepherded by Daniel?

The other need was urgent—labourers!  
The villages were numerous and were spread  
Through such a vast expanse of wilderness  
And shore. Only a bell with a bronze throat  
Must summon missionaries to these fields.  
With the last cry of the captive in his ears,  
Brébeuf strode from his cabin to the woods  
To be alone. He found his tabernacle  
Within a grove, picked up a stone flat-faced,  
And going to a cedar-crotch, he jammed  
It in, and on this table wrote his letter.  
"Herein I show you what you have to suffer.  
I shall say nothing of the voyage—that  
You know already. If you have the courage  
To try it, that is only the beginning,  
For when after a month of river travel  
You reach our village, we can offer you  
The shelter of a cabin lowlier  
Than any hovel you have seen in France.  
As tired as you may be, only a mat  
Laid on the ground will be your bed. Your food  
May be for weeks a gruel of crushed corn  
That has the look and smell of mortar paste.  
This country is the breeding place of vermin.  
Sandflies, mosquitoes haunt the summer months.  
In France you may have been a theologian,  
A scholar, master, preacher, but out here  
You must attend a savage school; for months  
Will pass before you learn even to lisp  
The language. Here barbarians shall be  
Your Aristotle and Saint Thomas. Mute  
Before those teachers you shall take your lessons.

What of the winter? Half the year is winter.  
Inside your cabins will be smoke so thick  
You may not read your Breviary for days.  
Around your fireplace at mealtime arrive  
The uninvited guests with whom you share  
Your stint of food. And in the fall and winter,  
You tramp unbeaten trails to reach the missions,  
Carrying your luggage on your back. Your life  
Hangs by a thread. Of all calamities  
You are the cause—the scarcity of game,  
A fire, famine or an epidemic.  
There are no natural reasons for a drought  
And for the earth's sterility. You are

The reasons, and at any time a savage  
May burn your cabin down or split your head.  
I tell you of the enemies that live  
Among our Huron friends. I have not told  
You of the Iroquois our constant foes.  
Only a week ago in open fight  
They killed twelve of our men at Contarca,  
A day's march from the village where we live.  
Treacherous and stealthy in their ambushades,  
They terrorize the country, for the Hurons  
Are very slothful in defence, never  
On guard and always seeking flight for safety.

"Wherein the gain, you ask, of this acceptance?  
There is no gain but this—that what you suffer  
Shall be of God: your loneliness in travel  
Will be relieved by angels overhead;  
Your silence will be sweet for you will learn  
How to commune with God; rapids and rocks  
Are easier than the steeps of Calvary.  
There is a consolation in your hunger  
And in abandonment upon the road,  
For once there was a greater loneliness  
And deeper hunger. As regards the soul  
There are no dangers here, with means of grace  
At every turn, for if we go outside  
Our cabin, is not heaven over us?  
No buildings block the clouds. We say our prayers  
Freely before a noble oratory.  
Here is the place to practise faith and hope  
And charity where human art has brought  
No comforts, where we strive to bring to God  
A race so unlike men that we must live  
Daily expecting murder at their hands,  
Did we not open up the skies or close  
Them at command, giving them sun or rain.  
So if despite these trials you are ready  
To share our labours, come; for you will find  
A consolation in the cross that far outweighs  
Its burdens. Though in many an hour your soul  
Will echo—'Why hast Thou forsaken me,'  
Yet evening will descend upon you when,  
Your heart too full of holy exultation,  
You call like Xavier—'Enough, O Lord!'"

This letter was to loom in history,  
For like a bulletin it would be read  
In France, and men whose bones were bound for dust  
Would find that on those jagged characters  
Their names would rise from their oblivion  
To flame on an eternal Calendar.  
Already to the field two young recruits  
Had come—Pijart, Le Mercier; on their way  
Were Chastellain with Garnier and Jogues

Followed by Ragueneau and Du Peron.

On many a night in lonely intervals,  
The priest would wander to the pines and build  
His oratory where celestial visions  
Sustained his soul. As unto Paul and John  
Of Patmos and the martyr multitude  
The signs were given—voices from the clouds,  
Forms that illumined darkness, stabbed despair,  
Turned dungeons into temples and a brand  
Of shame into the ultimate boast of time—  
So to Brébeuf had Christ appeared and Mary.  
One night at prayer he heard a voice command—  
"Rise, Read!" Opening the *Imitatio Christi*,  
His eyes "without design" fell on the chapter,  
*Concerning the royal way of the Holy Cross*,  
Which placed upon his spirit "a great peace".  
And then, day having come, he wrote his vow—  
"My God, my Saviour, I take from your hand  
The cup of your sufferings. I invoke your name;  
I vow never to fail you in the grace  
Of martyrdom, if by your infinite mercy  
You offer it to me. I bind myself,  
And when I have received the stroke of death,  
I will accept it from your gracious hand  
With all pleasure and with joy in my heart;  
To you my blood, my body and my life."

#### IV

The labourers were soon put to their tasks,—  
The speech, the founding of new posts, the sick:  
Ihonatiria, a phantom town,  
Through plague and flight abandoned as a base,  
The Fathers chose the site—Teanaostayé,  
To be the second mission of St. Joseph.  
But the prime hope was on Ossossané,  
A central town of fifty cabins built  
On the east shore of Nottawasaga Bay.  
The native council had approved the plans.  
The presence of the priests with their lay help  
Would be defence against the Iroquois.  
Under the supervision of Pijart  
The place was fortified, ramparts were strengthened,  
And towers of heavy posts set at the angles.  
And in the following year the artisans  
And labourers from Quebec with Du Peron,  
Using broad-axe and whipsaw built a church,  
The first one in the whole Huronian venture  
To be of wood. Close to their lodge, the priests

Dug up the soil and harrowed it to plant  
A mere handful of wheat from which they raised  
A half a bushel for the altar bread.  
From the wild grapes they made a cask of wine  
For the Holy Sacrifice. But of all work  
The hardest was instruction. It was easy  
To strike the Huron sense with sound and colour—  
The ringing of a bell; the litanies  
And chants; the surplices worn on the cassocks;  
The burnished ornaments around the altar;  
The pageant of the ceremonial.  
But to drive home the ethics taxed the brain  
To the limit of its ingenuity.  
Brébeuf had felt the need to vivify  
His three main themes of God and Paradise  
And Hell. The Indian mind had let the cold  
Abstractions fall: the allegories failed  
To quicken up the logic. Garnier  
Proposed the colours for the homilies.  
The closest student of the Huron mind,  
He had observed the fears and prejudices  
Haunting the shadows of their racial past;  
Had seen the flaws in Brébeuf's *points*; had heard  
The Indian comments on the moral law  
And on the Christian scheme of Paradise.  
Would Iroquois be there? Yes, if baptized.  
Would there be hunting of the deer and beaver?  
No. Then starvation. War? And Feasts? Tobacco?  
No. Garnier saw disgust upon their faces,  
And sent appeals to France for pictures—one  
*Only* of souls in bliss: of *âmes damnées*  
Many and various—the horned Satan,  
His mastiff jaws champing the head of Judas;  
The plummet fall of the unbaptized pursued  
By demons with their fiery forks; the lick  
Of flames upon a naked Saracen;  
Dragons with scarlet tongues and writhing serpents  
In ambush by the charcoal avenues  
Just ready at the Judgment word to wreak  
Vengeance upon the unregenerate.  
The negative unapprehended forms  
Of Heaven lost in the dim canvas oils  
Gave way to glows from brazier pitch that lit  
The visual affirmatives of Hell.

Despite the sorcerers who laid the blame  
Upon the French for all their ills—the plague,  
The drought, the Iroquois—the Fathers counted  
Baptisms by the hundreds, infants, children  
And aged at the point of death. Adults  
In health were more intractable, but here  
The spade had entered soil in the conversion  
Of a Huron in full bloom and high in power  
And counsel, Tsiouendaentaha

Whose Christian name—to aid the tongue—was Peter.  
Being the first, he was the Rock on which  
The priests would build their Church. He was baptized  
With all the pomp transferable from France  
Across four thousand miles combined with what  
A sky and lake could offer, and a forest  
Strung to the *aubade* of the orioles.  
The wooden chapel was their Rheims Cathedral.  
In stole and surplice Lalemant intoned—  
"If therefore thou wilt enter into life,  
Keep the commandments. Thou shalt love the Lord  
Thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul,  
With all thy might, and thy neighbour as thyself."  
With salt and water and the holy chrism,  
And through the signs made on his breast and forehead  
The Huron was exorcised, sanctified,  
And made the temple of the Living God.

The holy rite was followed by the Mass  
Before the motliest auditory known  
In the annals of worship. Oblates from Quebec,  
Blackrobes, mechanics, soldiers, labourers,  
With almost half the village packed inside,  
Or jammed with craning necks outside the door.  
The warriors lean, lithe, and elemental,  
"As naked as your hand"<sup>[1]</sup> but for a skin  
Thrown loosely on their shoulders, with their hair  
Erect, boar-brushed, matted, glued with the oil  
Of sunflower larded thickly with bear's grease;  
Papooses yawling on their mothers' backs,  
The squatting hags, suspicion in their eyes,  
Their nebulous minds relating in some way  
The smoke and aromatics of the censer,  
The candles, crucifix and Latin murmurs  
With vapours, sounds and colours of the Judgment.

[1] Lalemant's phrase.

## V

### *(The Founding of Fort Sainte Marie)*

1639

The migrant habits of the Indians  
With their desertion of the villages  
Through pressure of attack or want of food  
Called for a central site where, undisturbed  
The priests with their attendants might pursue  
Their culture, gather strength from their devotions,  
Map out the territory, plot the routes,



Collate their weekly notes and write their letters.  
The roll was growing—priests and colonists,  
Lay brothers offering services for life.  
For on the ground or on their way to place  
Themselves at the command of Lalemant,  
Superior, were Claude Pijart, Poncet,  
Le Moyne, Charles Raymbault, René Menard  
And Joseph Chaumonot: as oblates came  
Le Coq, Christophe Reynaut, Charles Boivin,  
Couture and Jean Guérin. And so to house  
Them all the Residence—Fort Sainte Marie!  
Strategic as a base for trade or war  
The site received the approval of Quebec,  
Was ratified by Richelieu who saw  
Commerce and exploration pushing west,  
Fulfilling the long vision of Champlain—  
"Greater New France beyond those inland seas."  
The fort was built, two hundred feet by ninety,  
Upon the right bank of the River Wye:  
Its north and eastern sides of masonry,  
Its south and west of double palisades,  
And skirted by a moat, ran parallel  
To stream and lake. Square bastions at the corners,  
Watch-towers with magazines and sleeping posts,  
Commanded forest edges and canoes  
That furtively came up the Matchedash,  
And on each bastion was placed a cross.  
Inside, the Fathers built their dwelling house,  
No longer the bark cabin with the smoke  
Ill-trained to work its exit through the roof,  
But plank and timber—at each end a chimney  
Of lime and granite field-stone. Rude it was  
But clean, capacious, full of twilight calm.  
Across the south canal fed by the river,  
Ringed by another palisade were buildings  
Offering retreat to Indian fugitives  
Whenever war and famine scourged the land.

The plans were supervised by Lalemant,  
Assigning zones of work to every priest.  
He made a census of the Huron nation;  
Some thirty villages—twelve thousand persons.  
Nor was this all: the horizon opened out  
On larger fields. To south and west were spread  
The unknown tribes—the Petuns and the Neutrals.

## VI

*(The mission to the Petuns and Neutrals)*

In late November Jogues and Garnier  
 Set out on snow-obliterated trails  
 Towards the Blue Hills south of the Nottawasaga,  
 A thirty mile journey through a forest  
 Without a guide. They carried on their backs  
 A blanket with the burden of the altar.  
 All day confronting swamps with fallen logs,  
 Tangles of tamarack and juniper,  
 They made detours to avoid the deep ravines  
 And swollen creeks. Retreating and advancing,  
 Ever in hope their tread was towards the south,  
 Until, "surprised by night in a fir grove",  
 They took an hour with flint and steel to nurse  
 A fire from twigs, birch rind and needles of pine;  
 And flinging down some branches on the snow,  
 They offered thanks to God, lay down and slept.  
 Morning—the packs reshouldered and the tramp  
 Resumed, the stumble over mouldering trunks  
 Of pine and oak, the hopeless search for trails,  
 Till after dusk with cassocks torn and "nothing  
 To eat all day save each a morsel of bread",  
 They saw the smoke of the first Indian village.

And now began a labour which for faith  
 And triumph of the spirit over failure  
 Was unsurpassed in records of the mission.  
 Famine and pest had struck the Neutral tribes,  
 And fleeing squaws and children had invaded  
 The Petun villages for bread and refuge,  
 Inflicting on the cabins further pest  
 And further famine. When the priests arrived,  
 They found that their black cassocks had become  
 The symbols of the scourge. Children exclaimed—  
 "Disease and famine are outside." The women  
 Called to their young and fled to forest shelters,  
 Or hid them in the shadows of the cabins.  
 The men broke through a never-broken custom,  
 Denying the strangers right to food and rest.  
 Observing the two priests at prayer, the chief  
 Called out in *council voice*—"What are these demons  
 Who take such unknown postures, what are they  
 But spells to make us die—to finish those  
 Disease had failed to kill inside our cabins?"

Driven from town to town with all doors barred,  
 Pursued by storms of threats and flying hatchets,  
 The priests sought refuge through the forest darkness  
 Back to the palisades of Sainte Marie.

As bleak an outlook faced Brébeuf when he  
 And Chaumonot took their November tramp—  
 Five forest days—to the north shores of Erie,  
 Where the most savage of the tribes—the Neutrals  
 Packed their twelve thousand into forty towns.

Evil report had reached the settlements  
By faster routes, for when upon the eve  
Of the new mission Chaumonot had stated  
The purpose of the journey, Huron chiefs,  
Convinced by their own sorcerers that Brébeuf  
Had laid the epidemic on the land,  
Resolved to make the Neutral leaders agents  
Of their revenge: for it was on Brébeuf,  
The chieftain of the robes, that hate was centred.  
They had the reason why the drums had failed  
The hunt, why moose and deer had left the forest,  
And why the Manitou who sends the sun  
And rain upon the corn, lures to the trap  
The beaver, trains the arrow on the goose,  
Had not responded to the chants and cries.  
The magic of the "breathings" had not cured  
The sick and dying. Was it not the prayers  
To the new God which cast malignant spells?  
The rosary against the amulet?  
The Blackrobes with that water-rite performed  
Upon their children—with that new sign  
Of wood or iron held up before the eyes  
Of the stricken? Did the Indian not behold  
Death following hard upon the offered Host?  
Was not *Echon* Brébeuf the evil one?

Still, all attempts to kill him were forestalled,  
For awe and fear had mitigated fury:  
His massive stature, courage never questioned,  
His steady glance, the firmness of his voice,  
And that strange nimbus of authority,  
In some dim way related to their gods,  
Had kept the bowstrings of the Hurons taut  
At the arrow feathers, and the javelin poised  
And hesitant. But now cunning might do  
What fear forbade. A brace of Huron runners  
Were sped to the Neutral country with rich bribes  
To put the priests to death. And so Brébeuf  
And his companion entered the first town  
With famine in their cheeks only to find  
Worse than the Petun greetings—corn refused,  
Whispers of death and screams of panic, flight  
From incarnated plague, and while the chiefs  
In closest council on the Huron terms  
Voted for life or death, the younger men  
Outside drew nearer to the priests, cursed them,  
Spat at them while convulsive hands were clutching  
At hatchet helms, waiting impatiently  
The issue of that strident rhetoric  
Shaking the cabin bark. The council ended,  
The feeling strong for death but ruled by fears,  
For if those foreign spirits had the power  
To spread the blight upon the land, what could  
Their further vengeance not exact? Besides,

What lay behind those regimental colours  
And those new drums reported from Quebec?  
The older men had qualified the sentence—  
The priests at once must leave the Neutral land,  
All cabins to be barred against admission,  
No food, no shelter, and return immediate.  
Defying threats, the Fathers spent four months,  
Four winter months, besieging half the towns  
In their pursuit of souls, for days their food  
Boiled lichens, ground-nuts, star-grass bulbs and roots  
Of the wild columbine. Met at the doors  
By screams and blows, they would betake themselves  
To the evergreens for shelter over-night.  
And often, when the body strength was sapped  
By the day's toil and there were streaks of blood  
Inside the moccasins, when the last lodge  
Rejected them as lepers and the welts  
Hung on their shoulders, then the Fathers sought  
The balm that never failed. Under the stars,  
Along an incandescent avenue  
The visions trembled, tender, placid, pure,  
More beautiful than the doorway of Rheims  
And sweeter than the Galilean fields.  
For what was hunger and the burn of wounds  
In those assuaging, healing moments when  
The clearing mists revealed the face of Mary  
And the lips of Jesus breathing benedictions?

At dawn they came back to the huts to get  
The same rebuff of speech and club. A brave  
Repulsed them at the palisade with axe  
Uplifted—"I have had enough," he said,  
"Of the dark flesh of my enemies. I mean  
To kill and eat the white flesh of the priests."  
So close to death starvation and assault  
Had led them and so meagre of result  
Were all their ministrations that they thought  
This was the finish of the enterprise.  
The winter ended in futility.  
And on their journey home the Fathers took  
A final blow when March leagued with the natives  
Unleashed a northern storm, piled up the snow-drifts,  
Broke on the ice the shoulder of Brébeuf,  
And stumbled them for weeks before she sent  
Them limping through the postern of the fort.  
Upon his bed that night Brébeuf related  
A vision he had seen—a moving cross,  
Its upright beam arising from the south—  
The country of the Iroquois: the shape  
Advanced along the sky until its arms  
Cast shadows on the Huron territory,  
"And huge enough to crucify us all".

## VII

*(The story of Jogues)*

Bad days had fallen on Huronia.  
A blight of harvest, followed by a winter  
In which unusual snowfall had thinned out  
The hunting and reduced the settlements  
To destitution, struck its hardest blow  
At Sainte Marie. The last recourse in need,  
The fort had been a common granary  
And now the bins were empty. Altar-ware,  
Vessels, linens, pictures lost or damaged;  
Vestments were ragged, writing paper spent.  
The Eucharist requiring bread and wine,  
Quebec eight hundred miles away, a war  
Freshly renewed—the Iroquois (Dutch-armed  
And seething with the memories of Champlain)  
Arrayed against the French and Huron allies.  
The priests assessed the perils of the journey,

1642

And the lot fell on Jogues to lead it. He,  
Next to Brébeuf, had borne the heaviest brunt—  
The Petun mission, then the following year,  
The Ojibway where, after a hundred leagues,  
Canoe and trail, accompanied by Raymbault,  
He reached the shores of Lake Superior,  
"And planted a great cross, facing it west".  
The soundest of them all in legs, he gathered  
A band of Huron traders and set out,  
His task made double by the care of Raymbault  
Whose health was broken mortally. He reached  
Quebec with every day of the five weeks  
A miracle of escape. A few days there,  
With churches, hospitals, the Indian school  
At Sillery, pageant and ritual,  
Making their due impression on the minds  
Of the Huron guides, Jogues with his band of forty  
Packed the canoes and started back. Mohawks,  
Enraged that on the east-bound trip the party  
Had slipped their hands, awaited them, ambushed  
Within the grass and reeds along the shore.

*(The account of Jogues' capture and enslavement by  
the Mohawks as taken from his letter to his Provincial,  
Jean Filleau, dated August 5, 1643.)*

"Unskilled in speech, in knowledge and not knowing  
The precious hour of my visitation,  
I beg you, if this letter chance to come  
Unto your hands that in your charity

You aid me with your Holy Sacrifices  
And with the earnest prayers of the whole Province,  
As being among a people barbarous  
In birth and manners, for I know that when  
You will have heard this story you will see  
The obligation under which I am  
To God and my deep need of spiritual help.  
Our business finished at Quebec, the feast  
Of Saint Ignatius celebrated, we  
Embarked for the Hurons. On the second day  
Our men discovered on the shore fresh tracks  
Thought by Eustache, experienced in war,  
To be the footprints of our enemies.  
A mile beyond we met them, twelve canoes  
And seventy men. Abandoning the boats,  
Most of the Hurons fled to a thick wood,  
Leaving but twelve to put up the best front  
We could, but seeing further Iroquois  
Paddling so swiftly from the other shore,  
We ceased from our defence and fled to cover  
Of tree and bulrush. Watching from my shelter  
The capture of Goupil and Indian converts,  
I could not find it in my mind to leave them;  
But as I was their comrade on the journey,  
And should be made their comrade in the perils,  
I gave myself as prisoner to the guard.  
Likewise Eustache, always devoted, valiant,  
Returned, exclaiming 'I praise God that He  
Has granted me my prayer—that I should live  
And die with you.' And then Guillaume Couture  
Who, young and fleet, having outstripped his foe,  
But finding flight intolerable came back  
Of his free will, saying 'I cannot leave  
My father in the hands of enemies.'  
On him the Iroquois let loose their first  
Assault for in the skirmish he had slain  
A chief. They stripped him naked; with their teeth  
They macerated his finger tips, tore off  
The nails and pierced his right hand with a spear,  
Couture taking the pain without a cry.  
Then turning on Goupil and me they beat  
Us to the ground under a flurry of fists  
And knotted clubs, dragging us up half-dead  
To agonize us with the finger torture.  
And this was just the foretaste of our trials:  
Dividing up as spoils of war our food,  
Our clothes and books and vessels for the church,  
They led or drove us on our six weeks' journey.  
Our wounds festering under the summer sun.  
At night we were the objects of their sport—  
They mocked us by the plucking of our hair  
From head and beard. And on the eighth day meeting  
A band of warriors from the tribe on march  
To attack the Richelieu fort, they celebrated

By disembarking all the captives, making  
Us run the line beneath a rain of clubs.  
And following that they placed us on the scaffolds,  
Dancing around us hurling jests and insults.  
Each one of us attempted to sustain  
The other in his courage by no cry  
Or sign of our infirmities. Eustache,  
His thumbs wrenched off, withstood unconquerably  
The probing of a stick which like a skewer  
Beginning with the freshness of a wound  
On the left hand was pushed up to the elbow.  
And yet next day they put us on the route  
Again—three days on foot and without food.  
Through village after village we were led  
In triumph with our backs shedding the skin  
Under the sun—by day upon the scaffolds,  
By night brought to the cabins where, cord-bound,  
We lay on the bare earth while fiery coals  
Were thrown upon our bodies. A long time  
Indeed and cruelly have the wicked wrought  
Upon my back with sticks and iron rods.  
But though at times when left alone I wept,  
Yet I thank Him who always giveth strength  
To the weary (I will glory in the things  
Concerning my infirmity, being made  
A spectacle to God and to the angels,  
A sport and a contempt to the barbarians)  
That I was thus permitted to console  
And animate the French and Huron converts,  
Placing before their minds the thought of Him  
Who bore against Himself the contradiction  
Of sinners. Weak through hanging by my wrists  
Between two poles, my feet not touching ground,  
I managed through His help to reach the stage,  
And with the dew from leaves of Turkish corn  
Two of the prisoners I baptized. I called  
To them that in their torment they should fix  
Their eyes on me as I bestowed the sign  
Of the last absolution. With the spirit  
Of Christ, Eustache then in the fire entreated  
His Huron friends to let no thought of vengeance  
Arising from this anguish at the stake  
Injure the French hope for an Iroquois peace.  
Onnonhoaraton, a youthful captive,  
They killed—the one who seeing me prepared  
For torture interposed, offering himself  
A sacrifice for me who had in bonds  
Begotten him for Christ. Couture was seized  
And dragged off as a slave. René Goupil,  
While placing on a child's forehead the sign  
Of the Cross was murdered by a sorcerer,  
And then, a rope tied to his neck, was dragged  
Through the whole village and flung in the River."



(The later account)

A family of the Wolf Clan having lost  
A son in battle, Jogues as substitute  
Was taken in, half-son, half-slave, his work  
The drudgery of the village, bearing water,  
Lighting the fires, and clad in tatters made  
To join the winter hunt, bear heavy packs  
On scarred and naked shoulders in the trade  
Between the villages. His readiness  
To execute his tasks, un murmuring,  
His courage when he plunged into a river  
To save a woman and a child who stumbled  
Crossing a bridge made by a fallen tree,  
Had softened for a time his master's harshness.  
It gained him scattered hours of leisure when  
He set his mind to work upon the language  
To make concrete the articles of Faith.  
At intervals he stole into the woods  
To pray and meditate and carve the Name  
Upon the bark. Out of the Mohawk spoils  
At the first battle he had found and hid  
Two books—*The Following of Christ* and one  
Of Paul's *Epistles*, and with these when "weary  
Even of life and pressed beyond all measure  
Above his strength" he followed the "running waters"  
To quench his thirst. But often would the hate  
Of the Mohawk foes flame out anew when Jogues  
Was on his knees muttering the magic words,  
And when a hunting party empty-handed  
Returned or some reverse was met in battle,  
Here was the victim ready at their door.  
Believing that a band of warriors  
Had been destroyed, they seized the priest and set  
His day of death, but at the eleventh hour,  
With the arrival of a group of captives,  
The larger festival of torture gave  
Him momentary reprieve. Yet when he saw  
The holocaust and rushed into the flames  
To save a child, a heavy weight laid hold  
Upon his spirit lasting many days—  
"My life wasted with grief, my years with sighs;  
Oh wherefore was I born that I should see  
The ruin of my people! Woe is me!  
But by His favour I shall overcome  
Until my change is made and He appear."

This story of enslavement had been brought  
To Montmagny, the Governor of Quebec,  
And to the outpost of the Dutch, Fort Orange.  
Quebec was far away and, short of men,  
Could never cope with the massed Iroquois,  
Besides, Jogues' letter begged the Governor  
That no measures "to save a single life"

Should hurt the cause of France. To the Provincial  
He wrote—"Who in my absence would console  
The captives? Who absolve the penitent?  
Encourage them in torments? Who baptize  
The dying? On this cross to which our Lord  
Has nailed me with Himself am I resolved  
To live and die."

And when the commandant  
Of the Dutch fort sent notice that a ship  
At anchor in the Hudson would provide  
Asylum, Jogues delayed that he might seek  
Counsel of God and satisfy his conscience,  
Lest some intruding self-preserving thought  
Conflict with duty. Death was certain soon.  
He knew it—for that mounting tide of hate  
Could not be checked: it had engulfed his friends;  
'Twould take him next. How close to suicide  
Would be refusal? Not as if escape  
Meant dereliction: no, his early vows  
Were still inviolate—he would return.  
He pledged himself to God there on his knees  
Before two bark-strips fashioned as a cross  
Under the forest trees—his oratory.  
And so, one night, the Indians asleep,  
Jogues left the house, fumbling his darkened way,  
Half-walk, half-crawl, a lacerated leg  
Making the journey of one-half a mile  
The toil of half a night. By dawn he found  
The shore, and, single-handed, pushed a boat,  
Stranded by ebb-tide, down the slope of sand  
To the river's edge and rowed out to the ship,  
Where he was lifted up the side by sailors  
Who, fearful of the risk of harbouring  
A fugitive, carried him to the hatch  
And hid him with the cargo in the hold.  
The outcry in the morning could be heard  
Aboard the ship as Indians combed the cabins,  
Threatened the guards and scoured the neighbouring woods,  
And then with strong suspicion of the vessel  
Demanded of the officers their captive.  
After two days Jogues with his own consent  
Was taken to the fort and hid again  
Behind the barrels of a store. For weeks  
He saw and heard the Mohawks as they passed,  
Examining cordage, prying into casks,  
At times touching his clothes, but missing him  
As he lay crouched in darkness motionless.  
With evidence that he was in the fort,  
The Dutch abetting the escape, the chiefs  
Approached the commandant—"The prisoner  
Is ours. He is not of your race or speech.  
The Dutch are friends: the Frenchmen are our foes.  
Deliver up this priest into our hands."  
The cries were countered by the officer—

"He is like us in blood if not in tongue.  
The Frenchman here is under our protection.  
He is our guest. We treat him as you treat  
The strangers in your cabins, for you feed  
And shelter them. That also is our law,  
The custom of our nation." Argument  
Of no avail, a ransom price was offered,  
Refused, but running up the bargain scale,  
It caught the Mohawks at three hundred livres,  
And Jogues at last was safely on the Hudson.

The tale of Jogues' first mission to the Hurons  
Ends on a sequel briefly sung but keyed  
To the tune of the story, for the stretch  
Home was across a wilderness, his bed  
A coil of rope on a ship's open deck  
Swept by December surge. The voyage closed  
At Falmouth where, robbed by a pirate gang,  
He wandered destitute until picked up  
By a French crew who offered him tramp fare.  
He landed on the shore of Brittany  
On Christmas Eve, and by New Year he reached  
The Jesuit establishment at Rennes.

The trumpets blew once more, and Jogues returned  
With the spring expedition to Quebec.  
Honoured by Montmagny, he took the post  
Of peace ambassador to hostile tribes,  
And then the orders came from Lalemant  
That he should open up again the cause  
Among the Mohawks at Ossernenon.  
Jogues knew that he was travelling to his death,  
And though each hour of that former mission  
Burned at his finger stumps, the wayward flesh  
Obeyed the summons. Lalemant as well  
Had known the peril—had he not re-named  
Ossernenon, the Mission of the Martyrs?  
So Jogues, accompanied by his friend Lalande  
Departed for the village—his last letter  
To his Superior read: "I will return  
Cost it a thousand lives. I know full well  
That I shall not survive, but He who helped  
Me by His grace before will never fail me  
Now when I go to do His holy will."  
And to the final consonant the vow  
Was kept, for two days after they had struck  
The town, their heads were on the palisades,

And their dragged bodies flung into the Mohawk.

## VIII

(*Bressani*)

The western missions waiting Jogues' return  
Were held together by a scarlet thread.  
The forays of the Iroquois had sent  
The fugitive survivors to the fort.  
Three years had passed—and where was Jogues? The scant  
Supplies of sagamite could never feed  
The inflow from the stricken villages.  
The sparse reports had filtered to Quebec,  
And the command was given to Bressani  
To lead the rescue band to Sainte Marie.  
Leaving Three Rivers in the spring when ice  
Was on the current, he was caught like Jogues,  
With his six Hurons and a French oblate,  
A boy of twelve; transferred to Iroquois'  
Canoes and carried up the Richelieu;  
Disbarked and driven through the forest trails  
To Lake Champlain; across it; and from there  
Around the rocks and marshes to the Hudson.  
And every time a camp was built and fires  
Were laid the torment was renewed; in all  
The towns the squaws and children were regaled  
With evening festivals upon the scaffolds.  
Bressani wrote one day when vigilance  
Relaxed and his split hand was partly healed—  
"I do not know if your Paternity  
Will recognize this writing for the letter  
Is soiled. Only one finger of the hand  
Is left unburned. The blood has stained the paper.  
My writing table is the earth; the ink  
Gunpowder mixed with water." And again—  
This time to his Superior—"I could  
Not have believed it to be possible  
That a man's body was so hard to kill."  
The earlier fate of Jogues was his—enslaved,  
But ransomed at Fort Orange by the Dutch;  
Restored to partial health; sent to Rochelle  
In the autumn, but in April back again  
And under orders for the Huron mission,  
Where he arrived this time unscathed to take  
A loyal welcome from his priestly comrades.

Bressani's presence stimulated faith  
Within the souls of priests and neophytes.  
The stories burned like fuel of the faggots—  
Jogues' capture and his rock stability,  
And the no less triumphant stand Eustache  
Had made showing the world that native metal  
Could take the test as nobly as the French.  
And Ragueneau's letter to his General stated—  
"Bressani ill-equipped to speak the Huron

Has speech more eloquent to capture souls:  
It is his scars, his mutilated hands.  
'Only show us,' the neophytes exclaim,  
'The wounds, for they teach better than our tongues  
Your faith, for you have come again to face  
The dangers. Only thus we know that you  
Believe the truth and would have us believe it.'"

## IX

In those three years since Jogues' departure doubts  
Though unexpressed had visited the mission.  
For death had come to several in the fold—  
Raymbault, Goupil, Eustache, and worse than death  
To Jogues, and winter nights were bleaker, darker  
Without the company of Brébeuf. Lion  
Of limb and heart, he had entrenched the faith,  
Was like a triple palisade himself.  
But as his broken shoulder had not healed,  
And ordered to Quebec by Lalemant,  
He took the leave that seven years of work  
Deserved. The city hailed him with delight.  
For more than any other did he seem  
The very incarnation of the age—  
Champlain the symbol of exploring France,  
Tracking the rivers to their lairs, Brébeuf  
The token of a nobler chivalry.  
He went the rounds of the stations, saw the gains  
The East had made in converts—Sillery  
For Indians and Notre Dame des Anges  
For the French colonists; convents and schools  
Flourished. Why should the West not have the same  
Yield for the sowing? It was labourers  
They needed with supplies and adequate  
Defence. St. Lawrence and the Ottawa  
Infested by the Iroquois were traps  
Of death. Three bands of Hurons had been caught  
That summer. Montmagny had warned the priest  
Against the risk of unprotected journeys.  
So when the reinforcements came from France,  
Brébeuf set out under a guard of soldiers  
Taking with him two young recruits—Garreau  
And Chabanel—arriving at the fort  
In the late fall. The soldiers wintered there  
And supervised defensive strategy.  
Replaced the forlorn feelings with fresh hopes,  
And for two years the mission enterprise  
Renewed its lease of life. Rumours of treaties  
Between the French and Mohawks stirred belief  
That peace was in the air, that other tribes

Inside the Iroquois Confederacy  
Might enter—with the Hurons sharing terms.  
This was the pipe-dream—was it credible?  
The ranks of missionaries were filling up:  
At Sainte Marie, Brébeuf and Ragueneau,  
Le Mercier, Chastellain and Chabanel;  
St. Joseph—Garnier and René Menard;  
St. Michel—Chaumonot and Du Peron;  
The others—Claude Pijart, Le Moyne, Garreau  
And Daniel.

What validity the dream  
Possessed was given by the seasonal  
Uninterrupted visits of the priests  
To their loved home, both fort and residence.  
Here they discussed their plans, and added up  
In smiling rivalry their tolls of converts:  
They loitered at the shelves, fondled the books,  
Running their fingers down the mellowed pages  
As if they were the faces of their friends.  
They stood for hours before the saints or knelt  
Before the Virgin and the crucifix  
In mute transfiguration. These were hours  
That put the bandages upon their hurts,  
Making their spirits proof against all ills  
That had assailed or could assail the flesh,  
Turned winter into spring and made return  
To their far mission posts an exaltation.  
The bell each morning called the neophytes  
To Mass, again at evening, and the tones  
Lured back the memories across the seas.  
And often in the summer hours of twilight  
When Norman chimes were ringing, would the priests  
Forsake the fort and wander to the shore  
To sing the *Gloria* while hermit thrushes  
Rivalled the rapture of the nightingales.

The native register was rich in name  
And number. Earlier years had shown results  
Mainly among the young and sick and aged,  
Where little proof was given of the root  
Of faith, but now the Fathers told of deeds  
That flowered from the stems. Had not Eustache  
Bequeathed his record like a Testament?  
The sturdiest warriors and chiefs had vied  
Among themselves within the martyr ranks:—  
Stories of captives led to sacrifice,  
Accepting scaffold fires under the rites,  
Enduring to the end, had taken grip  
Of towns and clans. St. Joseph had its record  
For Garnier reported that Totiri,  
A native of high rank, while visiting  
St. Ignace when a torture was in progress,  
Had emulated Jogues by plunging through  
The flaming torches that he might apply

The Holy Water to an Iroquois.  
Garreau and Pijart added lists of names  
From the Algonquins and the Nipissings,  
And others told of Pentecostal meetings  
In cabins by the Manitoulin shores.

Not only was the faith sustained by hopes  
Nourished within the bosom of their home  
And by the wish-engendered talk of peace,  
But there outside the fort was evidence  
Of tenure for the future. Acres rich  
In soil extended to the forest fringe.  
Each year they felled the trees and burned the stumps,  
Pushing the frontier back, clearing the land,  
Spading, hoeing. The stomach's noisy protest  
At sagamite and wild rice found a rest  
With bread from wheat, fresh cabbages and pease,  
And squashes which when roasted had the taste  
Of Norman apples. Strawberries in July,  
October bechnuts, pepper roots for spice,  
And at the bottom of a spring that flowed  
Into a pond shaded by silver birches  
And ringed by marigolds was water-cress  
In chilled abundance. So, was this the West?  
The Wilderness? That flight of tanagers;  
Those linguals from the bobolinks; those beeches,  
Roses and water-lilies; at the pools  
Those bottle-gentians! For a time the fields  
Could hypnotize the mind to scenes of France.  
Within five years the change was wrought. The cocks  
Were crowing in the yards, and in the pasture  
Were sheep and cows and pigs that had been brought  
As sucklings that immense eight hundred miles  
In sacks—canoed, and portaged on the shoulders.  
The traders, like the soldiers, too, had heard  
Of a great ocean larger than the Huron.  
Was it the western gateway to Cathay?  
The Passage? Master-theme of song and ballad;  
The *myth* at last resolved into the *fact*!  
Along that route, it was believed, French craft  
Freighted with jewels, spices, tapestries,  
Would sail to swell the coffers of the Bourbons.  
Such was the dream though only buffalo roamed  
The West and autumn slept upon the prairies.

This dream was at its brightest now, Quebec  
Was building up a western citadel  
In Sainte Marie. With sixty Frenchmen there,  
The eastern capital itself had known  
Years less auspicious. Might the fort not be  
The bastion to one-half the continent,  
New France expanding till the longitudes  
Staggered the daring of the navigators?  
The priests were breathless with another space

Beyond the measure of the astrolabe—  
A different empire built upon the pulses,  
Where even the sun and moon and stars revolved  
Around a Life and a redemptive Death.  
They pushed their missions to the north and west  
Further into Algonquin territories,  
Among the Ottawas at Manitoulin,  
And towards the Ojibways at Sault Sainte Marie.  
New village groups were organized in stations—  
St. Magdalen, St. Jean, and St. Matthias.  
Had Chabanel, ecstatic with success,  
Not named one fort the Village of Believers?  
Brébeuf was writing to his General—  
"Peace, union and tranquility are here  
Between the members of our Order. We need  
More workers for the apostolic field,  
Which more than ever whitens for the harvest."  
And to this call came Gabriel Lalemant,  
Bonin, Daran, Greslon, besides a score  
Of labourers and soldiers. In one year  
Twelve hundred converts, churches over-crowded,  
With Mass conducted in the open air!

And so the seasons passed. When the wild ducks  
Forsook the Huron marshes for the south,  
It was the signal for the priests to pack  
Their blankets. Not until the juncos came,  
And flickers tapped the crevices of bark,  
And the bloodroot was pushing through the leaf-mould,  
Would they reset their faces towards their home.

## X

But while Ragueneau's *Relations* were being sent  
Homeward, picturing the promise of the west,  
The thunder clouds were massing in the east  
Under the pounding drums. The treaty signed  
Between the Iroquois and Montmagny  
Was broken by the murder of Lalande  
And Jogues. The news had drifted to the fort—  
The prelude only to the heavier blows  
And deeper treachery. The Iroquois,  
Infesting lake and stream, forest and shore,  
Were trapping soldiers, traders, Huron guides:  
The whole confederacy was on the march.  
Both waterways were blocked, the quicker route—  
St. Lawrence, and the arduous Ottawa.  
They caught the Hurons at their camps, surprised  
Canoe-fleets from the reeds and river bends  
And robbed them, killed them on the portages.



So widespread were their forays, they encountered  
Bands of Algonquins on the hunt, slew them,  
Dispersed them from their villages and sent  
Survivors to the northern wilderness.  
So keen their lust for slaughter, they enticed  
The Huron chieftains under pledge of truce  
And closed negotiations with their scalps.

As the months passed the pressure of attack  
Moved grimly towards the west, making complete  
The isolation of Huronia.

No commerce with Quebec—no traveller  
For a whole year came to the Residence.  
But constant was the stream of fugitives  
From smaller undefended villages,  
Fleeing west and ever west. The larger towns,  
The deluge breaking down their walls, drove on  
The surplus to their neighbours which, in turn,  
Urged on the panic herd to Sainte Marie.  
This mother of the missions felt the strain  
As one by one the buffers were destroyed,  
And the flocks came nearer for their pasturage.  
There could be only one conclusion when  
The priests saw the migration of the missions  
That of St. Jean four times abandoning  
Its stations and four times establishing  
New centres with more improved defence;  
That of St. Ignace where a double raid  
That slaughtered hundreds, lifted bodily  
Both town and mission, driving to their last  
Refuge the ragged remnants. Yet Ragueneau  
Was writing—"We are here as yet intact  
But all determined to shed blood and life  
If need be. In this Residence still reigns  
The peace and love of Heaven. Here the sick  
Will find a hospital, the travellers  
A place of rest, the fugitives, asylum.  
During the year more than three thousand persons  
Have sought and found shelter under our roof.  
We have dispensed the Bread of Life to all  
And we have fed their bodies, though our fare  
Is down to one food only, crushed corn boiled  
And seasoned with the powder of smoked fish."

Despite the perils, Sainte Marie was sending  
Her missionaries afield, revisiting  
The older sites, establishing the new,  
With that same measure of success and failure  
Which tested courage or confirmed a faith.  
Garreau, sick and expecting death, was brought  
By Fijart and a French assistant back  
From the Algonquin wastes, for thirteen days  
Borne by a canoe and by his comrades' shoulders.  
Recovering even after the last rites

Had been administered, he faced the task  
Again. Fresh visits to the Petun tribes  
Had little yield but cold and starving days,  
Unsheltered nights, the same fare at the doors,  
Savoured by Jogues and Garnier seven years  
Before. And everywhere the labourers worked  
Under a double threat—the Iroquois,  
And the Huron curse inspired by sorcerers  
Who saw black magic in the Jesuit robes  
And linked disaster with their ritual.  
Between the hammer and the anvil now  
Huronian was laid and the first priest  
To take the blow was Daniel.

Fourteen years

This priest had laboured at the Huron mission.  
Following a week of rest at Sainte Marie  
He had returned to his last post, St. Joseph,  
Where he had built his church and for the year  
Just gone had added to his charge the hundreds  
Swarming from villages stormed by the foe.  
And now in that inexorable order,  
Station by station, town by town, it was  
St. Joseph's turn. Aware that the main force  
Of Huron warriors had left the town,  
The Iroquois had breached the palisade  
And, overwhelming the defenders, sacked  
And burned the cabins. Mass had just been offered,  
When the war yells were heard and Daniel came  
Outside. Seeing the panic, fully knowing  
Extinction faced the town with this invasion,  
And that ten precious minutes of delay  
Might give his flock the refuge of the woods,  
He faced the vanguard of the Iroquois,  
And walked with firm selective dignity  
As in the manner of a parley. Fear  
And wonder checked the Indians at the sight  
Of a single dark-robed, unarmed challenger  
Against arrows, muskets, spears and tomahawks.  
That momentary pause had saved the lives  
Of hundreds as they fled into the forest,  
But not the life of Daniel. Though afraid  
At first to cross a charmed circumference  
To take a struggle hand-to-hand, they drove  
Their arrows through him, then in frenzied rush  
Mastering their awe, they hurled themselves upon  
The body, stripped it of its clothes and flung it  
Into the burning church. By noon nothing  
Remained but ashes of the town, the fort,

The cabins and their seven hundred dead.

## XI

Ragueneau was distraught. He was shepherd-priest.  
Daniel was first to die under his care,  
And nigh a score of missionaries were lost  
In unprotected towns. Besides, he knew  
He could not, if he would, resist that mob  
That clamoured at the stockades, day by day.  
His moral supervision was bound up  
With charity that fed and warmed and healed.  
And through the winter following Daniel's death  
Six thousand Indians sought shelter there.  
The season's crops to the last grain were garnered  
And shared. "Through the kind Providence of God,  
We managed, as it were, to draw both oil  
And honey from the very stones around us.  
The obedience, patience of our missionaries  
Excel reward—all with one heart and soul  
Infused with the high spirit of our Order;  
The servants, boys, and soldiers day and night  
Working beyond their strength! Here is the service  
Of joy, that we will take whatever God  
Ordains for us whether it be life or death."  
The challenge was accepted, for the spring  
Opened upon the hardest tragic blows  
The iron in the human soul could stand.

St. Louis and St. Ignace still remained  
The flying buttresses of Sainte Marie.  
From them the Residence received reports  
Daily of movements of the Iroquois.  
Much labour had been spent on their defence.  
Ramparts of pine fifteen feet high enclosed  
St. Louis. On three sides a steep ravine  
Topped by the stakes made nigh impregnable  
St. Ignace, as the palisaded fourth,  
Subject alone to a surprise assault,  
Could rally the main body of defenders.  
The Iroquois, alert as eagles, knew  
The weakness of the Hurons, the effect  
On the morale of unexpected raids  
Committing towns to fire and pushing back  
The eastern ramparts. Piece by piece, the rim  
Was being cracked and fissures driven down  
The bowl: and stroke by stroke the strategy  
Pointed to Sainte Marie. Were once the fort  
Now garrisoned by forty Frenchmen taken,  
No power predicted from Quebec could save  
The Huron nation from its doom. St. Ignace  
Lay in the path but during the eight months  
After St. Joseph's fall the enemy  
Had leisurely prepared their plans. Their scouts  
Reported that one-half of the town's strength  
Was lost by flight and that an apathy,

In spite of all the priests could do to stem it,  
Had seized the invaded tribes. They knew that when  
The warriors were hunting in the forest  
This weaker palisade was scalable.  
And the day came in March when the whole fate  
That overtook St. Joseph in July  
Swept on St. Ignace—sudden and complete.  
The Mohawks and the Senecas uniting,  
A thousand strong, the town bereft of fighters,  
Four hundred old and young inside the stakes,  
The assault was made two hours before the dawn.  
But half-aroused from sleep, many were killed  
Within their cabins. Of the four hundred three  
Alone managed to reach the woods to scream  
The alarm to the drowsed village of St. Louis.

At nine o'clock that morning—such the speed  
Of the pursuit—a guard upon the hill  
Behind the Residence was watching whiffs  
Of smoke to the south, but a league away.  
Bush fires? Not with this season's depth of snow.  
The Huron bivouacs? The settlements  
Too close for that. Camps of the Iroquois?  
Not while cunning and stealth controlled their tactics.  
The smoke was in the town. The morning air,  
Clearing, could leave no doubt of that, and just  
As little that the darkening pall could spring  
Out of the vent-holes from the cabin roofs.  
Ragueneau rushed to the hill at the guard's call;  
Summoned Bressani; sheets and tongues of flame  
Leaping some fifty feet above the smoke  
Meant to their eyes the capture and the torch—  
St. Louis with Brébeuf and Lalemant!

Less than two hours it took the Iroquois  
To capture, sack and garrison St. Ignace,  
And start then for St. Louis. The alarm  
Sounded, five hundred of the natives fled  
To the mother fort only to be pursued  
And massacred in the snow. The eighty braves  
That manned the stockades perished at the breaches;  
And what was seen by Ragueneau and the guard  
Was smoke from the massed fire of cabin bark.

Brébeuf and Lalemant were not numbered  
In the five hundred of the fugitives.  
They had remained, infusing nerve and will  
In the defenders, rushing through the cabins  
Baptizing and absolving those who were  
Too old, too young, too sick to join the flight.  
And when, resistance crushed, the Iroquois  
Took all they had not slain back to St. Ignace,  
The vanguard of the prisoners were the priests.

Three miles from town to town over the snow,

Naked, laden with pillage from the lodges,  
The captives filed like wounded beasts of burden,  
Three hours on the march, and those that fell  
Or slowed their steps were killed.

Three days before

Brébeuf had celebrated his last mass.  
And he had known it was to be the last.  
There was prophetic meaning as he took  
The cord and tied the alb around his waist,  
Attached the maniple to his left arm  
And drew the seamless purple chasuble  
With the large cross over his head and shoulders,  
Draping his body: every vestment held  
An immediate holy symbol as he whispered—  
"Upon my head the helmet of Salvation.  
So purify my heart and make me white;  
With this cincture of purity gird me,  
O Lord.

May I deserve this maniple  
Of sorrow and of penance.

Unto me

Restore the stole of immortality.  
My yoke is sweet, my burden light.

Grant that

I may so bear it as to merit Thy grace."

Entering, he knelt before as rude an altar  
As ever was reared within a sanctuary,  
But hallowed as that chancel where the notes  
Of Palaestrina's score had often pealed  
The *Assumpta est Maria* through Saint Peter's.  
For, covered in the centre of the table,  
Recessed and sealed, a hollowed stone contained  
A relic of a charred or broken body  
Which perhaps a thousand years ago or more  
Was offered as a sacrifice to Him  
Whose crucifix stood there between the candles.  
And on the morrow would this prayer be answered:—  
"Eternal Father, I unite myself  
With the affections and the purposes  
Of Our Lady of Sorrows on Calvary.  
And now I offer Thee the sacrifice  
Which Thy Beloved Son made of Himself  
Upon the Cross and now renews on this,  
His holy altar...

Graciously receive  
My life for His life as he gave His life  
For mine...

This is my body.

In like manner

Take ye and drink—the chalice of my blood."

## XII

No doubt in the mind of Brébeuf that this was the last  
Journey—three miles over the snow. He knew  
That the margins as thin as they were by which he escaped  
From death through the eighteen years of his mission toil  
Did not belong to this chapter: not by his pen  
Would this be told. He knew his place in the line,  
For the blaze of the trail that was cut on the bark by Jogues  
Shone still. He had heard the story as told by writ  
And word of survivors—of how a captive slave  
Of the hunters, the skin of his thighs cracked with the frost,  
He would steal from the tents to the birches, make a rough cross  
From two branches, set it in snow and on the peel  
Inscribe his vows and dedicate to the Name  
In "litanies of love" what fragments were left  
From the wrack of his flesh; of his escape from the tribes;  
Of his journey to France where he knocked at the door of the College  
Of Rennes, was gathered in as a mendicant friar,  
Nameless, unknown, till he gave for proof to the priest  
His scarred credentials of faith, the nail-less hands  
And withered arms—the signs of the Mohawk fury.  
Nor yet was the story finished—he had come again  
Back to his mission to get the second death.  
And the comrades of Jogues—Goupil, Eustache and Couture,  
Had been stripped and made to run the double files  
And take the blows—one hundred clubs to each line—  
And this as the prelude to torture, leisured, minute,  
Where thorns on the quick, scallop shells to the joints of the thumbs,  
Provided the sport for children and squaws till the end.  
And adding salt to the blood of Brébeuf was the thought  
Of Daniel—was it months or a week ago?  
So far, so near, it seemed in time, so close  
In leagues—just over there to the south it was  
He faced the arrows and died in front of his church.

But winding into the greater artery  
Of thought that bore upon the coming passion  
Were little tributaries of wayward wish  
And reminiscence. Paris with its vespers  
Was folded in the mind of Lalemant,  
And the soft Gothic lights and traceries  
Were shading down the ridges of his vows.  
But two years past at Bourges he had walked the cloisters,  
Companioned by Saint Augustine and Francis,  
And wrapped in quiet holy mists. Brébeuf,  
His mind a moment throwing back the curtain  
Of eighteen years, could see the orchard lands,  
The *cidreries*, the peasants at the Fairs,  
The undulating miles of wheat and barley,  
Gardens and pastures rolling like a sea  
From Lisieux to Le Havre. Just now the surf

Was pounding on the limestone Norman beaches  
And on the reefs of Calvados. Had dawn  
This very day not flung her surplices  
Around the headlands and with golden fire  
Consumed the silken argosies that made  
For Rouen from the estuary of the Seine?  
A moment only for that veil to lift—  
A moment only for those bells to die  
That rang their matins at Condé-sur-Vire.

By noon St. Ignace! The arrival there  
The signal for the battle-cries of triumph,  
The gauntlet of the clubs. The stakes were set  
And the ordeal of Jogues was re-enacted  
Upon the priests—even with wilder fury,  
For here at last was trapped their greatest victim,  
*Echon*. The Iroquois had waited long  
For this event. Their hatred for the Hurons  
Fused with their hatred for the French and priests  
Was to be vented on this sacrifice,  
And to that camp had come apostate Hurons,  
United with their foes in common hate  
To settle up their reckoning with *Echon*.

. . . . .

Now three o'clock, and capping the height of the passion,  
Confusing the sacraments under the pines of the forest,  
Under the incense of balsam, under the smoke  
Of the pitch, was offered the rite of the font. On the head,  
The breast, the loins and the legs, the boiling water!  
While the mocking paraphrase of the symbols was hurled  
At their faces like shards of flint from the arrow heads—  
"We baptize thee with water...

That thou mayest be led

To Heaven..

To that end we do anoint thee.

We treat thee as a friend: we are the cause  
Of thy happiness; we are thy priests; the more  
Thou sufferest, the more thy God will reward thee,  
So give us thanks for our kind offices."

The fury of taunt was followed by fury of blow.  
Why did not the flesh of Brébeuf cringe to the scourge,  
Respond to the heat, for rarely the Iroquois found  
A victim that would not cry out in such pain—yet here  
The fire was on the wrong fuel. Whenever he spoke,  
It was to rally the soul of his friend whose turn  
Was to come through the night while the eyes were uplifted in prayer,  
Imploring the Lady of Sorrows, the mother of Christ,  
As pain brimmed over the cup and the will was called  
To stand the test of the coals. And sometimes the speech  
Of Brébeuf struck out, thundering reproof to his foes,  
Half-rebuke, half-defiance, giving them roar for roar.  
Was it because the chancel became the arena,

Brébeuf a lion at bay, not a lamb on the altar,  
As if the might of a Roman were joined to the cause  
Of Judaea? Speech they could stop for they girdled his lips,  
But never a moan could they get. Where was the source  
Of his strength, the home of his courage that topped the best  
Of their braves and even out-fabled the lore of their legends?  
In the bunch of his shoulders which often had carried a load  
Extorting the envy of guides at an Ottawa portage?  
The heat of the hatchets was finding a path to that source.  
In the thews of his thighs which had mastered the trails of the Neutrals?  
They would gash and beribbon those muscles. Was it the blood?  
They would draw it fresh from its fountain. Was it the heart?  
They dug for it, fought for the scraps in the way of the wolves.  
But not in these was the valour or stamina lodged;  
Nor in the symbol of Richelieu's robes or the seals  
Of Mazarin's charters, nor in the stir of the *lilies*  
Upon the Imperial folds; nor yet in the words  
Loyola wrote on a table of lava-stone  
In the cave of Manresa—not in these the source—  
But in the sound of invisible trumpets blowing  
Around two slabs of board, right-angled, hammered  
By Roman nails and hung on a Jewish hill.

The wheel had come full circle with the visions  
In France of Brébeuf poured through the mould of St. Ignace.  
Lalemant died in the morning at nine, in the flame  
Of the pitch belts. Flushed with the sight of the bodies, the foes  
Gathered their clans and moved back to the north and west  
To join in the fight against the tribes of the Petuns,  
And, with the attack to be made on Sainte Marie,  
Secure no less than the death of the Huron tribes.

Garnier was at the mission of St. Jean,  
Covering again the ground which he and Jogues  
Had pioneered nine years before. The town  
Under the impact of the Iroquois  
Broke like St. Joseph and the fate of Daniel  
Became the fate of Garnier. Chabanel,  
Ordered by his Superior to return  
From St. Matthias was the last to add  
His name to the great roll when in the woods,  
Exhausted on his knees, he was discovered  
And murdered through the treachery of a Huron.

Within a year dispersion was complete.  
The nation perished with its priests. Ragueneau,  
To avoid the capture of the fort, applied  
The torch himself. "Inside an hour," he wrote,  
"We saw the fruit of ten years' labour end  
In smoke. We took a last look at the fields,  
Put our belongings on a raft of logs,  
And made our way to the Island of St. Joseph."  
But even there the old tale was retold—  
Of hunger and the search for roots and acorns,



Of cold, of persecution unto death  
By Iroquois, of Jesuit will and courage  
As Ragueneau and Chaumonot led back  
The remnant of a nation to Quebec.

\* \* \* \*

Three hundred years have gone, but the voices that led  
The martyrs through death unto life are heard again  
In the pines and elms by the great Fresh Water Sea.  
The Mission sites have returned to the fold of the Order.  
Near to the ground where the cross broke under the hatchet,  
And went with it into the soil to come back at the turn  
Of the spade with the carbon and calcium char of the bodies,  
The shrines and altars are built anew; the *Aves*  
And prayers ascend and the Holy Bread is broken.

[End of *Brébeuf and His Brethren*, by E. J. Pratt]