

**TWO MISSIONARY PRIESTS AT MACKINAC: A  
LECTURE DELIVERED AT THE VILLAGE OF  
MACKINAC FOR THE BENEFIT OF ST. ANNE'S  
MISSION IN AUGUST 1888; THE PARISH REGISTER  
OF THE MISSION OF MICHILIMACKINAC: A  
PAPER READ BEFORE THE CHICAGO LITERARY  
CLUB IN MARCH, 1889**

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**EDWARD OSGOOD BROWN**

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## TWO MISSIONARY PRIESTS AT MACKINAC.

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MOST of us, I suppose, who come to Mackinac are induced to do so chiefly, and perhaps altogether, by its natural characteristics. The invigorating air, the extended and beautiful land and water view, the iron in these northern hills, the health that is borne upon the breeze, the pines, those "trees of healing," these are the things that draw us from the crowded market place or forum, from the cities' dust and cinders, and keep us lingering here delighted, until duty relentlessly calls us home again.

But for all that, I venture to think that there is hardly one of us who does not consciously or unconsciously feel the power of that human sympathy which—as Ruskin has in one of his papers beautifully set forth—glorifies the Alps and the Rhine and makes them to the traveler far surpassing in interest and attraction the Sierras and the Amazon. And here in Mackinac, to those who know and are touched by the interest of its history, we may and must feel keenly this sympathy. As I walk on the bluffs and look out on the beautiful panorama spread out before me, this fairy isle itself, and the whole fair country around about, once known as Michilimackinac, the winding shores and the heavy woods of the Northern and Southern Peninsulas, the silver straits between, and the low-

lying islands near, my thoughts fly back from the natural beauties around me to the distant past, and

“Visions of the days departed, shadowy phantoms fill my brain,  
They who live in history only, seem to walk the earth again.”

For Michilimackinac was two hundred years ago the centre of human effort, as grand, as noble, and to my mind as interesting and romantic, too, as ever can be associated with Swiss mountain or German river.

It is not my purpose in this paper to enter into any general description or panegyric of the Jesuit missions in North America. I only want to remind you that even before the Mayflower entered Massachusetts Bay, the Priests of the Society had carried, not with a blare of trumpets but with the solemn tones of the Gregorian chant, the cross and the *fleur de lis* together into the wilderness of Maine and Canada. In all this great North Western country never a river nor an inland sea was explored, never a cape nor a headland turned or doubled but it was a black-gowned Jesuit father, in his birch canoe armed with his crucifix and his breviary, who led the way. In these later days, repairing the neglect of two hundred years, historians like Dr. Shea and Mr. Parkman have told this story so often and so well, that these men have received the honor so justly their due, and have obtained perchance what they never sought, an earthly immortality.

For although these priests were explorers, adventurers and discoverers, heroes in many a physical danger and many a hairbreadth escape, it was no earthly glory they coveted. They came, devoted, eager, intense, with but one great object before their hearts and eyes, to snatch from everlasting misery, the poor and ignorant and wicked; to set before those who



were in darkness a great light; to break to those who were in the shadow of death the bread of life eternal.

They received, so far as this world went, the reward of their virtual martyrdom in life, their actual martyrdom often, in their deaths, by seeing the foundations laid, as they believed, of a Christian Empire of the Huron and Algonquin peoples; by hearing hymns to the Virgin sung in tongues unknown to civilization; by bestowing upon the humblest savage neophyte in the sacred wafer, all that the Church could give to the mightiest kings of Europe.

Was not this bloodless crusade worthy all the adornments of historic art in literature or painting?

But it is not alone with the Jesuit Missions that the romance in the history of Michilimackinac is connected.

A little later it was from the neighborhood of this region here, as the centre in the north, as from Kaskaskia and old Fort Chartres, on the Mississippi, in the south, that the dominion of France in the New World radiated. It was from here that the great king was, by his viceroys and commanders, to sit in power and do justice and equity throughout this fair northern lake country.

There came a time when "bigots and lackeys and panders, the fortunes of France had undone," when this power, in the beginning so great, promising so much for the glory of France, nay, for civilization and humanity, was met, opposed and in the providence of God, overcome, by the less promising, the more material, the harder and less attractive English civilization from the eastern coast.

We most of us at least rejoice in the result, but we can none of us I think forbear sympathy with or withhold our interest from

the vanquished, nor can we fail to recognize that nobler minds and aims seemed to rule those who declared in the name of Louis XIV. that "His majesty could annex no country to his crown, without making it his chief care to establish the Christian religion therein;" than those who could with cold calculation, like some of the Governors of Massachusetts Bay and Virginia, declare themselves opposed to the civilization and education of the Indians on the ground that it might injure the trade and material interests of the colonies.

On June 14, 1671, at the Sault Saint Marie, from here not fifty miles to the north as the crow flies, while representatives of fourteen tribes of Indians looked on in wonder, and four Jesuit Fathers led the French men-at-arms in the singing of the Vexilla Regis, the Sieur de Saint Lussou, commanding in this region for the king, set up side by side a great wooden cross, and a pillar to which were attached the royal arms of France. Then drawing his sword and raising it towards Heaven, he exclaimed:

"In the name of the Most High, Mighty and Redoubted Monarch, Louis, Fourteenth of that name, most Christian King of France and of Navarre, I take possession of this place Sainte Marie du Sault, as also of lakes Huron and Superior, the island of Manitoulin, and all the countries, rivers, lakes and streams contiguous and adjacent thereunto, both those which have been discovered, and those which may be discovered hereafter, in all their length and breadth, bounded on the one side by the seas of the north and west and on the others by the south sea, declaring to the natives thereof that from this time forth they are the vassals of his Majesty, bound to obey his laws and follow his customs, promising them on his part all succor

and protection against the intrusions and invasions of their enemies, declaring to all other potentates, princes, sovereigns, states and republics, to them and their subjects, that they cannot and are not to seize or settle upon any parts of the aforesaid countries save only under the good pleasure of His Most Christian Majesty and of him who will govern in his behalf, and this on pain of incurring the resentment and the efforts of his arms. Long live the King !”

These were high-sounding words indeed, but when spoken, they were no idle ones. Not only the power of the greatest kingdom on earth was pledged to make them effective, but the Holy Church herself, the Mother of Kings, seemed to stand behind them in blessing and confirmation.

We know what remains of it all. But it adds to the charm of life at Mackinac to me, that inevitably my thoughts are carried back to that June day and its pageant, two hundred years ago, when I hear upon the lips of some wandering half-breed, still lingering the accents of France; and when at the Mission of St. Anne the gospel is read in French as well as in English, and I am reminded that Holy Church has not forgotten her part of the duty then assumed, although performed now for so few of her lowliest children.

And even here does not end the charm of the historical association which hovers about Mackinac.

A half century and more after the dominion of France in this new world had waned, flickered and gone out, these Straits of Michilimackinac were still the scene of romantic and absorbing adventure. Hither thronged still the Indian tribes of the West, no longer untouched by the greed for gain or the vices of civilization, but from far and near, seeking at Michili-