

**Some Non-Catholic contributions to the
Study of the Canadian American Missions**

By

THOMAS F. O'CONNOR, M.A., PROFESSOR OF HISTORY, SAINT
MICHAEL'S COLLEGE, WINOOSKI PARK, VERMONT.

At the close of the General Preface to the Thwaites Edition of the *Jesuit Relations* the Editor makes acknowledgment of the assistance rendered him in the inauguration of this monumental editorial enterprise. The list of those who offered aid is headed by the name of the late Father Arthur Jones, S.J., long archivist of Saint Mary's College, Montreal, and, in his day, the foremost authority on the materials for the history of Jesuit missionary activity in New France. Thanks is also tendered for the aid supplied by the late Abbé H. A. B. Verreau, of Montreal, by Msgr. T. E. Hamel, late of Quebec, and by the librarians of Georgetown University, of Saint Francis Xavier College, New York, and of Woodstock College, Maryland.

But as the reader proceeds down through the list of acknowledgments he cannot fail to be impressed by the frequency and prominence of the names of non-Catholic scholars, a number of them among the foremost students of their generation in the fields of early American history and of American historiography:

To Wilberforce Eames, librarian of the Lenox Library, and his assistant, Victor H. Paltsits, writes Dr. Thwaites, we owe much; for in their institution the greater part of the transcription is being done, and their daily courtesies and kindnesses materially lighten the task. Superintendent Robbins Little, and Librarian Frederick Saunders, of Astor Library, have also been of much assistance in the conduct of the work. To John Nicholas Brown, of Providence, RI, and to his librarian, Georges Parker Winship, we are indebted for numerous courtesies and suggestions during the copying and photographing of documents in the John Carter Brown Library of Americana.¹

Finally, to this record of assistance rendered by outstanding non-Catholic scholars Thwaites adds the name of Justin Winsor, librarian of Harvard College, and editor of the *Narrative and Critical History of America*.²

We have chosen to introduce the subject of this paper with the foregoing observations drawn from the preface of Thwaites' edition of the *Relations* for two reasons. The preparation and publication of that monumental collection of original narratives was indicative of the change that was slowly and at times almost

¹ Vol. I, pp. xi-xii.

² 8 vols., Boston, 1884-1887.

imperceptibly coming over American historical writing during the last quarter of the nineteenth century towards things Catholic. The labors of Thwaites and his associates in bringing to completion a work of such vast undertaking was in a very real sense the fruition of the labors of a group of scholars, both in Canada and in the United States, who for nearly half a century had been working, for the most part alone and without the assistance of highly developed editorial techniques, but with unwavering devotion to their ideals of historical truth, to set forth the romantic and entrancing story of missionary beginnings in Canada and in the northern portion of the United States.

All of which brings us to the heart of this paper. The story of French missionary endeavor in northeastern North America was first brought to the effective attention of the English-speaking world in part by non-Catholic scholars and in some cases by non-Catholic clergymen.

An acquaintance with the history of the development of the Church in the United States offers a ready explanation of this phenomenon. The paucity of historical scholarship among American Catholics almost until within the memory of living men is accounted for by the economic and social *milieu* in which their lives were passed. During the colonial period Catholics residing within the limits of what is now the United States were few in number and for the greater part of that period lived and died under the shadow of intolerance and at times of persecution. The phenomenal growth of the Church in the United States during the nineteenth century is written in terms of immigration. But the vast majority of these newcomers were poor, and found themselves burdened throughout their lives by the daily struggle for subsistence. They had little opportunity to turn their attention to intellectual or scholarly pursuits. Their clergy, who might have been looked to to gather up the fragments of the historical lore of early days, were weighted down by the exhausting duties of missionary life. They, like the laity, had little opportunity for historical pursuits, even if they had fully appreciated the historical worth of the traditions which they had inherited or of the work which they were themselves doing. In addition to these factors, and encircling them with the fetters of inertia, was the grudging spirit of semi-tolerance with which the Catholic was regarded in many localities long after the federal and, state constitutions had set forth the principles of religious equality for all.

The years brought a gradual lessening of the social and political ostracism to which Catholics had for so long been subjected. But the story of daily grinding toil and of solicitude for the material necessities of life does not change much for several decades. Moreover, there was always a scarcity of priests. New dioceses had to be established, new parishes founded, and additional facilities provided for the education of the young. As a recent writer has said in summary of conditions in this period:

... non-Catholics, by the strong grasp they had on the economic, intellectual, social and political life of the nation were able to keep the Catholics in a state of intellectual lethargy... When Catholics did speak... it was in controversial literature,

i.e., when the pressure of... intolerance became unbearable.³

These conditions continued practically to the close of the nineteenth century. Occasional efforts were the best that could be expected. The nineteenth century was preeminently the "brick and mortar" age of the American Church. The first great name to emerge into the clear, true light of American Catholic historical scholarship was that of John Gilmary Shea.

Under such conditions it is not altogether surprising that when the entrancing story of French missionary beginnings first came to be transmitted to the English-speaking world it should be done by historically minded non-Catholics. But that a number of these early workers should have been non-Catholic clergymen is somewhat unusual and lends an unique interest to the study of this segment of American historiography.

By way of introduction attention should be called to the labors of Francis Parkman. The works of this foremost of American literary historians are well known on both sides of the international boundary. Suffice it to say here that his *The Jesuits in North America in the Seventeenth Century*⁴ has, until within the last two decades, done more to translate the story of Catholic missionary beginnings in North America into an idiom comprehensible to the vast English-speaking world, than any other one work. But Parkman, devoted researcher though he was, failed generally to appreciate in anything like adequate measure the true spirit motivating the lives and labors of these pioneer missionaries. In setting forth the reality and all-pervading nature of these spiritual motives he was much less satisfactory than some of the authors whom we propose to treat in this paper.

Surveying the whole field of literature treating of the history of French missionary enterprise in North America one is left with little choice but to acknowledge the preeminence, on the score of magnitude and of service to scholarship, of the editorial labors of Reuben Gold Thwaites, editor of the well-known edition of the *Jesuit Relations* which bears his name.

Born in Massachusetts, the son of English parents, and himself successively farm worker, country school teacher, and newspaper editor, Thwaites became connected, in 1876, with the *Wisconsin State Journal*. Once settled in Madison as managing editor of this paper, he began to indulge his partiality for history by visiting the library of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. The Society's affairs were then directed by Lyman C. Draper, indefatigable collector of the sources of western history. From Draper more than from any other man, his subsequent activities in behalf of history received both incentive and direction. Upon Draper's retirement as secretary of the Society, Thwaites was elected to succeed him, entering upon his duties at the beginning of 1887.

³ Adrian T. English, O.P., "The Historiography of American Catholic History (1785-1884)," in *Catholic Historical Review*, New Series, Vol. V (January, 1926), pp. 561-598.

⁴ Various editions.

While engaged in the study of French beginnings in Wisconsin, he became convinced of the need of a new and more complete edition of the *Relations*. In his general preface to the series Thwaites set forth the objectives and limitations proposed for the new collection:

We cannot promise for this series the entire body of existing Jesuit documents, either printed or in manuscript, which illustrate the history of New France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This would carry us, even were they all available, far beyond the necessary limits of this series; for the fathers were profuse writers, and their papers are in many archives. It is of necessity a matter of selection. We shall, however, reissue all of the documents usually designated as *Relations*. — the Cramoisy, the Quebec reissue, the Shea and O'Callaghan. reprints; and to these will be added a very considerable collection of miscellaneous papers of importance, from printed sources and from manuscripts, in order to fill the chronological gaps and round out and complete the story. It is the purpose of the Editor... to furnish such scholarly helps as will tend to render it more available than hitherto for daily use by students of American history... At the end of each volume will appear such notes as seem necessary to the elucidation of the text. The closing volume of the series will contain — and probably will be wholly devoted to — an exhaustive analytical Index, a feature without which the work would lose much of its value.⁵

The editorial policy so succinctly laid down in the first volume of the series, was adhered to with admirable constancy to the close of the last volume of the edition. With the aid of a competent staff of assistants the seventy-three volumes of the *Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents* were issued between 1896 and 1901.

Despite other exhausting editorial enterprises, Thwaites later found time to enrich the literature of American Catholic history by an edition of Hennepin's *New Discovery*⁶ and a brief biography, *Father Marquette*.⁷

Thwaites, both as editor and author, had his limitations. Some of these arose from conditions entirely apart from himself, as, for instance, the difficulty of obtaining access to documents; others followed from his own lack of technical training in the mechanics of editorial procedures. A large amount of additional material has come to light in the years that have elapsed since the publication of his edition of the *Relations*. His critical abilities pertained very largely to external rather than to internal criticism. Yet despite these shortcomings, his contribution to American Catholic history was epochal; his name merits an enduring place in American Catholic historiography.⁸

⁵ Vol. I, pp. vii-x.

⁶ Chicago, 1903

⁷ Chicago, 1902.

⁸ A brief biographical sketch of Thwaites, by Louise P. Kellogg, will be found in the *Dictionary of American Biography*, s. v. See also F. J. Turner, *Reuben Gold Thwaites, a Memorial Address*, Madison (1914), which contains a bibliography of his writings

Another, and in some respects perhaps, a more anomalous worker in this field, was the Rt. Rev. William Ingram Kip, clergyman of the Protestant Episcopal Church, and later first bishop of that Church in California.

Kip's ancestry gave little promise of his future work in the field of Catholic missionary history. Born in New York City, October 3, 1811, he was the son of French Protestant parents whose ancestors had come to America during the colonial period. After graduating from Yale, in 1831, he took up the study of law, but after a time abandoned it and turned to theology, which he pursued at the General Theological Seminary in New York City. Taking Orders in the Episcopal Church in 1835, he was successively pastor of a number of churches in the eastern United States. In 1853 he was elected missionary bishop of California, where he spent the last years of his life. A scholar of the old type, Bishop Kip was the possessor of social qualities which won him a position of influence in the circles in which he moved.

Kip's interest had been stimulated, during his early years in the ministry, in the story of Catholic missionary labors in early North America. In 1846 he published the first edition of his *The Early Jesuit Missions in North America*, and in 1875 his *Historical Scenes in the Old Jesuit Missions*. Long since superseded by other works, the first of these volumes still possesses an appreciable value, even if now chiefly as an example of a stage in the development of American Catholic historiography. In its day of popularity, despite its faults and short-comings, it did much to bring the story which it recounts to the attention of English-speaking non-Catholics, both in America and abroad.⁹

Still another of these pioneer laborers, whose work is less widely known, but whose influence was considerable a half century ago among a restricted group of eastern students, was the Rev. Charles Hawley, a clergyman of the Presbyterian Church.

Born September 10, 1872, of old New England stock, Charles Hawley was by descent and inherited characteristics a Puritan of the Puritans. His childhood was spent in a Puritan home, the father of which was an elder of the Presbyterian Church. Entering Williams College in 1836, he graduated with the class of 1840. His years at Williams were years in which revivalism swept periodically over many New England colleges, and during one of these revivals his religious life seems to have been intensified and a direction given to his future course of life. Giving up an earlier idea of studying law, he entered the Union Theological Seminary in New York City, and was graduated in 1844. His first ministry was in the City of Montreal, but after a few months in Canada he moved to New York State, where he held pastorates in various cities up to the time of his death in 1885. His last years were spent as pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Auburn, New York, and it was in this city and while pastor of this church that his chief historical work was carried on.

Auburn is situated in the midst of the Finger Lakes country of Central New

⁹ For a biographical account see the *Dictionary of American Biography*, s. v.

York, a region celebrated in the history of French missionary work among the Iroquois. Hawley's residence in this locality probably gave him the first effective stimulus to devote his leisure moments to the study of the New York missions. But an additional and very important stimulus arose from his acquaintance, formed during summer vacations in the Catskills, with Mr. James Lenox, bibliophile and persevering collector of editions of the *Jesuit Relations*. Lenox opened to Hawley the facilities of his large collection of missionary source material which he had gathered under the direction of Edmund Bailey O'allaghan, John Gilmary Shea, and others. From these sources Hawley extracted probably the major part of the materials for his works on the Jesuit missions of Central New York.

Dr. Hawley's chief works on American Catholic missionary history are three in number: *Early Chapters of Cayuga History*; *Early Chapters of Senaca History*; and *Early Chapters of Mohawk History*.¹⁰ Upon close acquaintance with Hawley's works it will be seen that they consist essentially in translations of relevant sections of the *Relations*, together with such amplification and explanation as he felt necessary to enlist the interest of his readers. In the preparation of the volumes he had the assistance of the able local cartographer, General John S. Clark, whose location of the sites of the early Jesuit missions of the region has been accepted with little revision down to the present time.

That Hawley's works exerted a limited but wholesome influence cannot be gainsaid. John Gilmary Shea, among others, acknowledged the aid he had received from these studies. As the speaker at the public memorial meeting held shortly after Hawley's death pointed out,

His most important historical work consisted in calling attention to the history of the Iroquois tribes, and to the work of the Jesuit missionaries among them... circumstances led him to the investigations which ultimately proved so fruitful that the son of the Puritans became the historian of the Jesuits.¹¹

It would not be difficult to expand this list of early non-Catholic contributors to the study of the Canadian and American missions. We might speak, for instance, of the eccentric James Lenox, founder of the Lenox Library in the City of New York, whose collection of the various editions of the *Relations* facilitated the work of Thwaites and of other scholars. And we might refer to the late Rev. William M. Beauchamp, clergyman of the Protestant Episcopal Church, whose works on many phases of Iroquoian history are indispensable to students of the history of the early missionary activities among the Five Nations. But we must desist with the few that we have mentioned. Their work was part of an important phase in the development of American Catholic historiography.

¹⁰ These three studies appeared in the *Cayuga Country Historical Society Collections*, the Cayuga volume in 1879, the Senaca in 1881 and the Mohawk some years after Hawley's death.

¹¹ The memorial address, together with a sketch of Hawley's life, by the Rev. Willis J. Beecher, D.D., was published in the *Cayuga Country Historical Society Collections*, No. 4 (1887), pp. 25-75.