

## = JEAN TALON, =

INTENDANT OF NEW FRANCE, 1665-1772.



It has often been said that the French are not a colonising people, nevertheless it was France that, in the 17th century, made the most serious attempt to establish a New France upon a solid and durable foundation, and it is to Colbert that we owe such establishment. Before this time the colony had been conceded to certain companies, who worked it for gain and not to foster colonization, nor for the benefit and welfare of the colonists themselves.

The ideas of this great statesman were broad and elevated. Seeing that New France from its establishment had made no progress, either in the increase of its population or in agriculture and industry, he resolved to remedy this state of things. In the first place he created, in 1663, the Sovereign Council (*Conseil Souverain*) for the supreme administration of justice, having similar powers to the *Parlements* of Paris and of the provinces of France. In 1664 the rights of the *Compagnie des Indes Occidentales* were purchased for an indemnity exceeding one million of francs, and the colony was returned to the Crown domain.

To aid and carry out his designs, Colbert found it necessary to appoint as Intendant a man of the highest capacity, and he selected Jean Talon, then Intendant of Quesnoy in Flanders. Talon belonged to the family of the same name, three of whose members shed such lustre upon the judiciary in the 17th century.

He arrived at Quebec in September, 1665, to enter upon his functions; and about the same time there arrived Governor de Courcelles and Colonel de Salieres of the Carignan Regiment, and the following account of these three personages, is given by Mother Juchereau in her "*Histoire de l'Hotel Dieu*" (p. 176).

"They had all three a handsome figure and a kindly air, which gained for them the respect and friendship of the people; to their outward attractiveness they added great wit, gentleness and good sense, and united perfectly to convey a high idea of the power and majesty of the King."

To these advantages, which he enjoyed in common with the Governor and Colonel, Talon possessed high intellectual culture.

According to the *Journal des Jesuites* (2nd July, 1666), Talon had given fair attention to the study of philosophy, as we may conjecture from the following quotation from the *Journal*.

"The first philosophical discussions are held in the Congregation (chapel) with success. All the dignitaries are present. M. l'Intendant Talon, amongst others, argued well."

Poetry also seems to have charmed the leisure hours of this remarkable man, whose duties were of so grave a nature. Evidence of this is found in the following passage of the "*Histoire de l'Hotel Dieu*" (236). Speaking of Mother Boulié de la Nativite, Mother Juchereau writes:

"She joins to her rare virtues a gay and agreeable mind, charming in conversation, and having an admirable facility of expression in prose and verse. M. Talon, Intendant, who dabbled in poetry sometimes, sent her madrigals and epigrams, to which she answered immediately very wittily, and in the same style, and their pieces were admired by all connoisseurs."

Unhappily, nothing remains to us of this pleasant interchange of poetry between Talon and the good sister.

Mother Juchereau has told us how the three dignitaries, the Governor, the Intendant and the Colonel strove to give the people a high idea of Royal majesty, but in this respect the Marquis de Tracy, then also at Quebec, surpassed them all three in magnificence.

In his quality of Lieutenant-General of the King, Louis XIV., for all the French possessions in America, de Tracy

displayed a pomp which has since been surpassed only by the sumptuousness of Lord Durham when he came to Quebec as High Commissioner in 1838.

"The Viceroy (de Tracy)," says Mother Juchereau, "never walks abroad without being preceded by twenty-four guards and four pages, and followed by six lacqueys, and surrounded by a great number of richly clad officers. The King had given him four companies of infantry, and permitted his guards to wear the Royal colours."

But to return to the Intendant Talon. His high intellectual culture did not exclude a highly practical mind, such as was needed for putting into execution the first instructions given him by Colbert, which were in the following terms:

"The Intendant must acquaint himself with the revenues of the country, how the moneys are spent and the debts already contracted, so that he may set all right. He must particularly observe that the colonists have settled at too great distance one from the other. . . . Henceforth clear-



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ances must be made from neighbour to neighbour. The Intendant must see that some lands are cleared and dwellings erected each year. . . . He will also establish manufactures, and bring in skilled labour for the fabrication of the most necessary articles, the raw materials for which are abundantly found in the country, and thenceforth it will be no longer needful to import at heavy cost linens, cloths, headgear and shoes; and for this the aid of the King may be reckoned on, who is persuaded that he cannot devote to a better object a large sum of money."

It may be seen from these last words the King was disposed to make great pecuniary sacrifices to develop the resources of the country, but first it was necessary to think of increasing the population, and to trust for this to a private immigration movement was absolutely useless, as had been shown in the past.

It was for this reason that in sending the Carignan Regiment to New France Colbert had a two-fold object in view, first, to subdue and crush the fierce Iroquois tribe, and secondly, to make of the officers and men so many colonists, and this in fact occurred.

To Talon is due the establishment of the feudal system, its harshness considerably mitigated, the only system at the time fit to build up an agricultural community; with that

object he granted seigniories to the officers of the Carignan Regiment, the soldiers then becoming tenants (*censitaires*) of their officers.

These seigniories were granted along the shore of the St. Lawrence, on the banks of the Richelieu, &c., &c., for, as Paschal has said, rivers are moving highways, and there was not then, as we have to-day, a paternal government ready to open up means of communication by road and rail.

Furthermore, in 1669, there was sent out, at Talon's request, another contingent of troops, comprising six companies of infantry, the officers and soldiers of which were under agreement to settle in the country; in the interval there had also arrived some 500 other colonists, artisans and labourers.

But it now became a serious question to provide wives for the colonists, for it will be readily understood that in the large number of immigrants thus brought into the country the female element was entirely wanting.

To remedy this abnormal state of things and make marriage a possibility, Lou's XIV. sent out to Quebec, in 1665, 100 young girls, and double that number the following year. Talon found this number insufficient, and called for more, and in 1667-1668 a larger number arrived; 150 came in 1669, and the same number the next year. In making his request the Intendant was careful to add certain remarks, as, for instance, to send strong women fitted for field labor, and, as far as possible, those to whom nature had not denied her favours, asking further a small number of young girls of education and good family, that the officers also might be induced to marry.

In his correspondence with the Minister on the subject of women sent out the previous year, Talon writes (*correspondance officielle*, 10th Nov., 1669): "All the girls sent to us in the spring of last year are married, and have had, or are about to have, children, a sign of the astonishing fertility of this country." I leave to Talon, the gallant Intendant, the responsibility of this physiological opinion.

With regard to these marriages, the following interesting particulars are borrowed from a work\* referred to in *L'Union Libérale*, of Quebec, by the well-known bibliophile, Mr. P. Gagnon:

"Before settling the colonists in their future residences, to find for each Jack his Jill (*brocuer sa chacun sa chacune*), celibacy being a real crime against the state in a new colony, the new arrivals are forced to marry on reaching Quebec; and this is arranged in the following manner. Madame Bourdon, directress of the house set apart to receive the women coming from Paris, picks out their future husbands according to her own fancy. Happy the bridegroom to whom she gives a consort sound in mind and body; and she never fails to duly eulogize the bride-elect, in order that the expected husband may face the marriage ceremony without reluctance."

Whence came these young girls?

From Paris and the diocese of Rouen, and the greatest precautions were taken to send only young persons of good moral character, so that French Canadians, descendants of these first marriages, have no reason to blush for their female ancestors.

The question of population and its increase having been thus settled, Talon proceeded without delay to provide for the material welfare and prosperity of the colony; thus, as early as 1666 Father Le Mercier was able to write:

"The first thought of Talon was to apply himself with indefatigable activity to the search for means whereby he might render this country flourishing, whether by making an essay of what the soil could produce or by establishing trade and securing business relations not only with France, but also with the Islands of the Antilles. . . . He was so successful that fisheries of every kind are carried on in our own rivers, which abound with fish of every kind such as salmon, sturgeon, herring and codfish. . . . The trade which Talon proposes to carry on with the West Indies will not be one of Canada's least advantages. . . . He is forwarding this very year to these islands codfish, salt salmon, eels, peas, fish oils, boards, the whole the produce of this country."

\* Les aventures de M. Robert Chevalier dit de Beauchesne capitaine de flibustiers dans la Nouvelle France. Redigées par M. Le Sage, à Maerstrich, 1753, 2 vols., in 120.  
The M. Le Sage in question is the famous author of "Gil Blas."

Les premières disputes de philosophes le font dans la Congregation (chapel) avec succès. Toutes les puissances s'y trouvent. M. l'Intendant Talon entre autres y a argumenté très bien."

\* Le Roi lui avoit donné quatre compagnies d'infanterie et voulu que ses gardes portent les mêmes couleurs que celles de sa Majesté.