

formal work, and that her letters are rather documents than history. And it must be admitted that her writings are not, and never will be, French classics, as St. Catherine's are Italian classics to a certain extent, and St. Theresa's are Spanish classics altogether. They are just a little like very good dispatches, and by just so much they miss the saving grace of a native style. They were generally written under great pressure of time, amid many distractions, and partly as reports. So their very nature prevents vivid presentation, and keeps them on the lower literary level of description. The spiritual passages are always excellent; but here the lack of a sustained context and of the trained instinct for the one inevitable word combine to prevent the expression from doing full justice to the ideas. The saint, in fact, was greater than the author.

It is her life, rather than her letters, that is the important point even to-day. And this was of still more importance at the time she came to Canada. For she came as the inheritor of a great tradition, as the third of a trio of nuns who played a great interdependent part in the history of their Church, as the foundress of the first convent, as the first educator of Canadian girls, and as the first white woman to evangelize the Indians. And what heightened the importance of all this was that the French-Canadians were then, as they are now, by tradition, training and consent, the most Roman Catholic community in the world. She had no dire troubles within the Church to strain her heart to death, as St. Catherine had; no challenging Protestants to confute, like St. Theresa. Her spiritual warfare was the universal one against the powers of evil, and her earthly work was against savagery and the forces of nature. In both she was prepared to acquit herself excellently well. And her landing at Quebec was indeed an event of profound significance.

IV.

Quebec was then but a tiny outpost on the edge of an unknown, illimitable wilderness. It had been in precarious existence for only some thirty years. Its founder, the staunch and pious Champlain, had died a little over three years before, leaving it with barely a hundred inhabitants. It had only three small public buildings, Fort St. Louis, the store-house of the *Cent Associés*, and the parish church of Notre Dame de la Recouvrance, from whose belfry he caused the angelus to be rung three times a day—a custom still religiously observed in Quebec. Beyond this one narrow foothold of France, on the mighty river which came from no one knew what vast inland wilds, Canada was little but a name. Only ten years before La Mère Marie arrived, the Kirkes had taken Quebec without a blow; because they had a handful of men to serve the