

Canadian Messenger Series

*First Martyrs*

Number 5

E. J. DEVINE, S. J.

# Noël Chabanel

MISSIONARY IN HURONIA

1613-1649



Published by THE CANADIAN MESSENGER, Montreal, Can.

Distributing Agencies:

THE CANADIAN MESSENGER OFFICE, 1075 Rachel Street East, Montreal  
CATHOLIC TRUTH SOCIETY OF CANADA, 67 Bond Street, Toronto, Ontario  
CATHOLIC LITERATURE LEAGUE, 316 LaGauchetière Street West, Montreal  
CATHOLIC TRUTH SOCIETY OF MANITOBA, Columbus Hall, Winnipeg, Man.

And other Canadian and Foreign Catholic Truth Societies.

Price: Five Cents

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*Nihil obstat:*

*26 ianuarii, 1916*

*CAROLUS LECOQ, Censor Delegatus.*

*Imprimatur:*

*Die 27a ianuarii, 1916*

*† PAULUS, Arch. Marianopolitanus.*

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# NOËL CHABANEL

HURON MISSIONARY

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THE diocese of Mende in the department of Lozère, in France, now a restless hive of human industries, presented a very quiet and rustic aspect in the first years of the seventeenth century. Its numerous hills, open to the bright sunshine and balmy air of southern France, were wooded with forests, thick and dark, the undisturbed growth of ages; its valleys furnished pasturage for immense flocks of sheep whose wool formed one of the staple products of the country; its soil was fertile; minerals

**His birth and early years** were found in abundance—in a word, Nature had give Lozère all the resources that made for the peace and happiness of its large peasant population. Unhappily, those good people were still feeling the after effects of the religious wars waged by the Huguenots. A few years previously, those turbulent sectaries had destroyed the splendid cathedral of Mende, which had been built by the Bishop, François de la Rovère, afterwards Pope Urban V; in the name of freedom of conscience they overran the country, invaded private homes, killed the inhabitants and spread desolation throughout the diocese.

Peace, it is true, had been restored between the Catholics and the Huguenots, but the echoes of the former stormy years were still occasionally heard in and around Mende, when Noël Chabanel was born there on February 2, 1613. The name of the town or hamlet where this child first saw the light

**He becomes  
a Jesuit** of day has escaped the chroniclers of his life. The only detail preserved to us of his early years is the fact that he decided to consecrate himself to God in the Society of Jesus; he entered the novitiate at Toulouse, on February 8th, 1630. The Spirit of God had spoken early to this favored soul, for Noël was only a boy of seventeen when the new epoch in his career began. Two full years were given up to the study and practice of the rules and constitutions of his Order and to the cultivation of humility and abnegation of self, two virtues which were to be so conspicuous in his after-life.

Noël Chabanel pronounced his vows and bound himself to God and the Order in 1632. After studying philosophy at Toulouse, he was appointed, in 1634, to teach grammar in the Jesuit college in the same city. He spent five consecutive years in the professor's chair, advancing yearly with his pupils into humanities and rhetoric, until 1639, when he was sent to pursue his theological studies and prepare for the priesthood. After his ordination in 1641, he again taught rhetoric at Rodez, and in 1642 passed through his third year of probation, the final stage in the formation of the members of the Jesuit

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Order. Noël Chabanel had now reached the age of thirty and was ready for any field of labor.

The desire to devote his life to the Canadian missions had evidently haunted him for a long time—

**He starts for New France** or as the Jesuit *Relation* of 1650 puts it, "God gave him a strong vocation for these countries,"<sup>1</sup>—and on May 8th,

1643, he boarded a French vessel for the voyage to Canada, a formidable undertaking which was to last ninety-six days. In this age of ocean greyhounds and floating palaces it would be impossible to conceive the hardships and actual physical sufferings transatlantic travellers had to endure during a three months' voyage in the seventeenth century. The poverty of space on the sailing ships, the huddling together of all classes, the lack of sanitation, the difficulty of securing fresh food and water, were ordeals that only the stout-hearted could face.

Even a hundred years later, when the French King's vessels had begun to ply regularly between France and Canada, conditions showed little signs of improvement. One of Noël Chabanel's successors, Father Luke Nau, a Jesuit missionary in Canada, writing in 1734, gives us a glimpse of an eighty-day passage from La Rochelle to Quebec in a French man-of-war, *Le Ruby*. "We were packed into the dismal

**Trials met on the voyage** and noisome hold like sardines in a barrel," he writes. "We could make our way to our hammocks only after sustaining sundry bumps and knocks on limbs and

<sup>1</sup> *Jesuit Relations*, Clev. edit., vol. xxxv, p. 157.

head. A sense of delicacy forbade our disrobing, and our clothes, in time, made our backs ache. The rolling and pitching loosened the fastenings of our hammocks and hopelessly entangled them. On one occasion I was pitched out sprawling on a poor officer, and it was quite a time before I could extricate myself from the ropes and covering... Another disagreeable feature was the company we were thrown in with day and night... A third was the stench and vermin. We had on board a hundred soldiers or so, freshly enrolled, each one of whom carried with him a whole regiment of picards (vermin) which in less than a week migrated in all directions..."<sup>1</sup> Father Chabanel suffered all these inconveniences during ninety-six days, and he hailed with evident satisfaction the end of a voyage so long delayed.

The affairs of the colony in 1643 were in a pitiable condition. Supplies were anxiously awaited from the mother country; the season was advancing, and

**Sad state of the colony** the non-arrival of the vessels from across the sea made the colonists fear that a disaster had taken place.

It was not until the middle of August, on the feast of the Assumption, that the welcome news came that ships were seen rounding Point Levis. "As we were about to begin Mass," wrote Father Bartholomew Vimont, in the *Relation* of 1643, "two sails appeared, a league distant from our port. Joy and consolation filled the hearts of the inhabitants, but it was very greatly doubled when a ship's boat put

<sup>1</sup> *The Aulneau Letters*, pp. 22-23.

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off and brought us the news that Father Quentin was on board, with three worthy workers, religious of our Society, Fathers Leonard Garreau, Gabriel Druillettes and Noël Chabanel."<sup>1</sup>

The arrival of these three recruits, men whose names were to live in our annals, was a welcome addition to the missionary forces already at work,

**Welcomed by** for the Jesuits were anxious to carry  
**his brethren** a knowledge of Christianity to fresh fields. Up to this the sedentary

Hurons had absorbed most of their energies, whilst other tribes, notably the Algonquins, were asking for missionaries. Unlike the Hurons, the Algonquins were nomadic; they roamed over the vast territory watered by the Ottawa River and Lake Nipissing. In the seventeenth century they had a few settlements in the valley of the Ottawa, the largest being on the island now known as Allumette Island. The fact that the route to the Hurons lay almost exclusively through the country occupied by those savages brought them in contact with the French missionaries from the first years of the colony, but owing probably to their wandering habits no effort had been made to establish missions among them.

**Hurons and** The time had come, however, to  
**Algonquins** make a move in that direction, and reasons were not wanting why it should be made as soon as possible. While the Algonquins had always lived on more or less friendly terms with the Hurons, they had been for several

<sup>1</sup> *Jesuit Relations*, Clev. edit., vol. xxiii, p. 287.

years looking askance at the growing trade relations between the latter and the French. The Algonquins claimed control of the Ottawa River, and the passing up and down before their very doors of Huron flotillas laden with furs and other supplies, was causing a coolness which might any day develop into open conflict. Eleven years before, in 1633, the Algonquins of Allumette Island did not hide their mistrust of the missionaries whose influence was bringing the French and Hurons together, and they even threatened to do them violence. Years of calm had intervened, but no one knew how long peace would last, and it was evidently in the interests of the Jesuit missionaries to prevent any disturbance which might close the route to their missions on Georgian Bay.

Another cogent reason for fostering friendly relations between the Algonquins and the Hurons was the obligation of being prepared to resist the common enemy of both. The relentless Iroquois were terrorizing not only the French but also the savage tribes. In 1642 forty Hurons were overpowered by them on their way down to Quebec; Father Isaac Jogues and his companion, René Goupil, were captured and taken to the cantons on the Mohawk, one to be tortured, the other to be killed. Bands of Iroquois kept incessant watch along the St. Lawrence and the Ottawa Rivers to intercept both Hurons and Algonquins and to slay pitilessly all who fell into their hands. The route to Georgian Bay was practically closed; no flotilla had reached the colony

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in 1643; and the critical state of the missionaries who depended on Quebec for supplies was causing anxiety to the superiors of the Order. Besides, the lives of the missionaries in Huronia might be in danger; letters from them had been intercepted by the Iroquois, and no news had been received from them for over a year. The prospects looked so dark that a council was called by the Governor, de Montmagny, before the return home of the vessels which brought Chabanel from France, and it was decided to ask the mother country to send out military aid in the following spring.

Owing to all these dangers and alarms Chabanel and Garreau were kept in Quebec during the winter

of 1643-1644, preparing themselves  
**He is retained in the colony** for their future arduous labors.

They were fortunate in having with them a veteran in the field, Father John de Brébeuf, who was then in the colony, and whose counsels were invaluable to the young and inexperienced missionaries. Brébeuf had been over sixteen years among the Hurons; he knew their language, their laws, customs, superstitions, the dangers as well as the consolations of the ministry among them, and his frankness on other occasions, for instance, in his admirable letter of instructions to young missionaries, published in the *Relation* of 1637, leads us to surmise that he held nothing back from the two recruits who arrived in 1643.

The winter passed slowly away, and with the opening of navigation in the spring of 1644 an at-

tempt was made to carry succor to the Jesuits in Huronia. Father Joseph Bressani started in April,

**Starts for the Huron country** but the Iroquois were already on the alert; they seized him and hurried him into captivity. Four Huron

flotillas, however, succeeded in running the blockade and reached Quebec safely. Three started back immediately with supplies, but they were captured on the way. Meanwhile the soldiers asked for in the previous autumn had arrived from France, and the fourth flotilla which left the colony later in the summer of 1644, was able to advance westward in safety under military protection. After it had started, Vimont wrote, "The governor gave more than a score of brave soldiers from among those whom the queen has sent over this year to this country. They have gone to the Hurons to winter in their villages and to serve as an escort to them next year when they come down to Kebec."

On their long and lonesome journey to Huronia the strange but picturesque sights which met the eyes of those French soldiers and missionaries at every turn helped them to overlook the intolerable heat of summer, the fatigues of incessant paddling, the trudging over portages, the annoyance of insects and vermin, and the sleeplessness which was the result. The Ottawa route, destined to be famous for a couple of centuries in missionary and fur-trading annals, was still in its primeval wildness. Nature left to herself had covered the banks of the Ottawa and French Rivers and Lake Nipissing with pine and maple, and the only sounds heard echoing through

those thick forests were the splashing of paddles and the chattering of savages—novel scenes surely for eyes and ears fresh from the cities of Old France. The Ottawa valley has changed its face in the past two centuries, and so have the facilities which travellers enjoy who go through it on their way westward to the Great Lakes; in the middle of the seventeenth century conditions were primitive indeed, and the journey from Quebec to Georgian Bay was a formidable undertaking. However, the flotilla arrived safely at Fort Ste. Marie on September 7th; it was accompanied by three missionaries, Father de Brébeuf who had been absent three years and whose return was welcomed by all, Father Leonard Garreau who was to labor among the Algonquins at Endarahy, in the Parry Sound region, and Father Noël Chabanel who was to begin the study of the Algonquin language and prepare himself for work among the members of this tribe who were living among the Hurons.

We may gather from a perusal of the *Relations* that Father Chabanel's first impressions of mission-

**His first  
impressions**

ary life were evidently of a mixed character. He had arrived in Huronia under military guard and amid the alarms of war. He had not yet met the Iroquois, but he knew that they were lying in wait for him and his brethren, and ready at the first opportunity to cleave his head with the tomahawk; it did not need immediate contact with this tribe of savages, whose ferocity and notorious deeds were well known in France, to bring home to his sensitive and timid nature the extent of the sacrifice he had made in

quitting his native land. Besides, the wild aspect of the new country, with its half-naked population, its bark cabins, its poverty and squalor, made a profound impression on him, and we may infer from the story of his life that his heart often travelled back to the peaceful class-rooms in Toulouse and Rodez. As the months rolled by, the prospect of long years among savages came before his mind more vividly; it began to dawn on him that his

**A "bloodless  
martyrdom"**

life henceforward was to be an unbroken chain of cares and disappointments—a "bloodless martyrdom" he himself calls it—but he had put his hand to the plough and, with the help of Him who strengthens the weak, he was resolved not to turn back till he had reached the end of the furrow. The *Relations* do not hide the fact that as a missionary Chabanel had from the very outset many personal drawbacks to contend with. Although gifted with talent, as is evident from the years he successfully occupied the chairs of classics and rhetoric in France, his progress in the study of the barbarous Huron and Algonquin idioms was so slow that at the end of the first winter (1644-1645) he could hardly make himself understood "even in ordinary matters." The winter of 1645-46 passed by with similar non-success, and this to him was a subject of great mortification. It was, in fact, something more than this: it was a serious obstacle to the work he had come to do in Huronia. Without a knowledge of the language he was useless; he could not preach or catechize or enter

in any practical way into communication with the tribe.

But these were not the only crosses Noël Chabanel had to carry. Notwithstanding his evident vocation to live and labor in the Canadian missions, a vocation he himself never questioned, his repugnance to savage life and savage customs grew with the months he spent amongst the natives. So opposed

**Hardships of  
his ministry**

posed was his natural temperament to their gross ways and manners that he saw nothing in them to please him; the very sight of them, their conversation, all that concerned them, was extremely irksome to him; residence in their filthy cabins did such violence to his entire nature that he found therein nothing but the bitterest hardship, without the intermingling of any form of consolation. When the Jesuits visited villages where no permanent churches were established, they had to lead the Indian life and follow Indian customs closely. They slept on the bare ground at night and lived all day in cabins filled with smoke. In summer the conditions were not so bad, for life in the open was a luxury all could enjoy; but during their visits in the winter months they had to dwell in cabins where they suffered from the unbearable heat from the fireplaces in the beginning of the nights, and near the end suffered just as much from the piercing cold. In the mornings they found themselves covered with snow which had drifted in through holes and crevices in the bark walls. Stench and vermin abounded in the Huron cabins; every sense was tormented night and day. Father Cha-

banel could not accustom himself to the food of the country, the best prepared being usually a paste made of Indian corn-meal boiled in water. Though so poorly nourished he worked incessantly at the language even while visiting the villages; but there was no seclusion, no privacy, no room or other apartment where he could retire to study; no spot which was not open all day to the gaze of a mob of curious Hurons; he had no light but that furnished by the smoky fireplaces, and while reading his breviary or writing notes he was surrounded by ten or fifteen persons, children of all ages, who screamed, wept and wrangled.

This is a faithful picture of the missionary life led by Chabanel, and although the *Relation* mentions only casually his physical sufferings and inconveniences, we are left to infer that, had God not strengthened this holy man, his courage would have failed him.

**He resolves to  
persevere**

Grace from heaven as well as a strong human will was required to give stability to the resolution of a man of culture like Chabanel to live and die amid the conditions we have here described. Heaviest cross of all, God hid His presence now and then from him and left the missionary not merely a prey to all the repugnances of nature but overpowered with desolation of spirit. These are trials too severe for ordinary virtue, and the love of God must be intense in a human heart that can rise above them; supernatural courage must be strong, indeed, not to fail utterly amid such spiritual abandonment. And yet we know that God never withdrew His presence

from Father Chabanel for a long period. Consoling graces were showered upon him to strengthen him and make him realize that he was not working alone, that the Supreme Consoler was watching him and would be his exceeding great reward. Amid all this Chabanel felt his own unworthiness and his failure as a worker in the vineyard, but he was inspired by the example of his fellow-missionaries. He persevered in the ungrateful task of trying to learn an Indian language and to assimilate Indian ways and customs, and left to God and His own good time the task of lightening the crosses which were bearing heavily on him.

Meanwhile he witnessed the beginning of a new era. In September, 1644, Paul Ragueneau replaced Jerome Lalemant as superior of the Huron mission. The letter received from the General of the Order,

**Changes among missionaries** in Rome, sanctioning this change, had been intercepted by the Iroquois, but an unofficial communication from

Quebec had reached Fort Ste. Marie informing Lalemant that he had been promoted to the superior generalship of all the Canadian missions, while Ragueneau was to replace him in Huronia. The latter took up his burden immediately, but the season was advanced and, as no opportunity offered for a passage to Quebec in 1644, Jerome Lalemant had to wait a whole year before he could return to the colony to assume the new and more important duties imposed upon him.

This change of superiors did not affect the rank and file of the missionary forces in Huronia. The

visits to the Indian villages went on as usual, the savages were instructed, the number of converts increased, the Fathers were as steadily employed in summer as in winter, village missions became residences, chapels were enlarged, cemeteries blessed, processions were held, interments made according

**Rapid progress everywhere**

to the rites of the Church, crosses were set up and solemnly venerated. The progress of the work was extremely consoling. "Of the seven churches in Huronia," wrote Jerome Lalemant, May 15th, 1645, "there are six with residences attached; the first at Ste. Marie; the five others at the five principal towns of the Hurons, namely, the Conception, St. Joseph, St. Michael, St. Ignace and St. John Baptist. The seventh church, that of the Holy Ghost, is made up of Algonquins who this year, together with a number of other nations, winter about twenty-five leagues from us on the great lake of the Hurons." Three missionaries, Claude Pijart and René Ménard, in 1642, and Leonard Garreau, in 1644, visited the Algonquins, and for months at a time they followed this homeless people "in the woods and on the rivers, over rocks and across lakes, having for shelter but a bark hut, nothing for a floor but the damp earth or the surface of some rough rock which served as table, chair, bed, room, kitchen, cellar, garret, chapel, and all."<sup>1</sup>

Noël Chabanel was also engaged with the same

<sup>1</sup> *Jesuit Relations*, Clev. edit., vol. xxviii, p. 47.



tribe in 1644, but some difficulty is experienced in following his career in the years of 1465, 1646, and 1647. While Jerome Lalemant was superior in Huronia he was a faithful chronicler of events; in his *Relations* he gave names of the men and the places they visited and made easy the work of following the movements of the missionaries; but his successor, Paul Raguenau, was not so considerate for posterity. Although as assiduous as his predecessor in recording details of the work done in the vineyard, he rarely gave the names of the workers. For this reason we are left to conjecture the whereabouts of Noël Chabanel in the years just mentioned. It is presumed, however,

**Lives with the  
Algonquins**

that he continued his labors among those Algonquins who selected a site close to the Hurons of Fort Ste. Marie in order to profit by the protection the French could give them against the Iroquois. We find traces of him in the winter of 1647, when, after a short stay at Ossossane with Father Simon LeMoyne, he returned to the Algonquins and remained with them till the spring of 1648, when they dispersed to their summer haunts.

Four years had now passed away in Huronia, and Father Chabanel's slow progress in acquiring a knowledge of the Indian tongue had placed him at such a disadvantage, and had been such an obstacle to his success as a missionary, that none felt his position more keenly than he. He began to feel that he was a worthless member of the community—a drone among busy men; and his fidelity to his vo-

cation for the savages was put to a severe test. His deep sense of his uselessness overpowered him so completely that the temptation came to him to abandon the field and return to France. The arch-enemy of souls represented to him that by going back to his native land he would have the comforts and the satisfaction which he formerly enjoyed, and would there find employment better suited to his talents and character, employment in which so many saintly souls were practising the virtues of charity and zeal and spending their lives for the salvation of their fellow-men. Why could he not do in France what so many others were doing? Why spend his life fruitlessly in a barbarous land? The reasons were plausible and the temptation was strong; but Noël Chabanel had nailed himself to the Cross and he would not now ask God to take him down from it. In order to link himself to Huronia without hope of recall and to forestall similar temptations in the future, he bound himself by the following vow, on the feast of Corpus Christi, 1647, to remain in the Canadian missions until death:

"Jesus Christ, my Saviour, who by a wonderful dispensation of Thy paternal Providence, hast willed that I, though altogether unworthy, should be a fellow-helper of Thy holy apostles in this vineyard of the Hurons; impelled by the desire  
**Makes a vow of stability** to obey the will of the Holy Spirit regarding me, that I should help forward the conversion to the faith of the barbarians of this Huron country; I, Noël Chabanel, being

in the presence of the Most Blessed Sacrament of Thy body and Thy Precious Blood which is the tabernacle of God among men, make a vow of perpetual stability in this mission of the Hurons; understanding all things as the Superiors of the Society shall explain them and as they choose to dispose of me. I conjure Thee, therefore, oh my Saviour, to be pleased to receive me as a perpetual servant of this mission and to make me worthy of so lofty a ministry. Amen."

The heroic act was done and it was irrevocable; Chabanel had burned his ships behind him; and though rebellious nature continued to tax his virtue, grace prevailed. We shall see that God granted him the perseverance he so ardently desired.

The continual inroads of the Iroquois had obliged the Jesuits to abandon their isolated residences for more populous settlements where they should be better able to defend themselves. One of the residences thus affected was St. Ignace which was transferred to within two leagues of Fort Ste. Marie.

**Is ordered to  
the Petuns**

Chabanel aided Brébeuf in this work in the spring of 1648, and became his companion and assistant at the neighboring hamlet of St. Louis. In February, 1649, having received an order to quit St. Ignace and proceed of the Petun nation, he was succeeded by Gabriel Lalemant who, a month later, was seized, cruelly tortured for eighteen hours and then put to death.

This opportunity of suffering for Christ, so near at hand and so quickly lost, was keenly felt by Father

Chabanel. In a letter to his brother Pierre, a Jesuit in France, he revealed his humility, his holy desire to suffer, and his disappointment that another had wrenched from him the martyr's crown. "Judging from human appearances," he wrote, "Your Rev-

**He writes to  
his brother**

erence came very near to possessing a brother a martyr; but, alas! in the mind of God, the honor of martyrdom requires virtues of another stamp than mine. The Reverend Father Gabriel Lalemant, one of the three whom our *Relation* mentions as having suffered for Jesus Christ, had taken my place in the village of St. Louis, a month before his death, while I, being more robust of body, was sent upon a mission more remote and more laborious, but not so fruitful in palms and crowns as that of which my cowardice has, in the sight of God, rendered me unworthy. It will be when it shall please the Divine goodness, provided I strive to realize in my person *martyrem in umbra et martyrium sine sanguine*. The ravages of the Iroquois in this country will perhaps some day supply what is wanting, through the merits of those saints with whom I have the consolation of living so peaceful an existence in the midst of turmoil and continual danger." The holy man would not have long to wait for the crown he sighed for. Before the year 1649 was ended the opportunity to suffer for Christ would come; the glorious destiny he envied Father Gabriel Lalemant would also be his own.

The Petuns, whither he was to be sent, occupied the large territory, now so peaceful and prosperous,

known as Nottawasaga township. Three missions, St. John, St. Mathias and St. Matthew, had been

**He starts out  
for the Petuns** already established there, the largest being St. John, at Etharita. This village had a population of five or

six hundred families and Father Chabanel was named to supplement the labors of the zealous Charles Garnier. While he was still at Fort Ste. Marie preparing for his departure, numerous and well defined presentiments began to crowd in upon him that God's designs in his regard were on the eve of fulfilment. When bidding farewell to Father Chastellain, his confessor, he remarked to him, "My dear Father, may it be for good and all this time that I give myself to God! May I belong to Him!" These words uttered with emphasis and with a countenance beaming with true sanctity, made such an impression on Chastellain that he was visibly affected, and happening at that hour to meet a third person he could not refrain from exclaiming, "Truly I am deeply moved. Father Chabanel has just now spoken to me with the voice of a victim who is about to be immolated. I know not what may be God's designs, but I see that in this Father, He is fashioning a great saint." And

**Presentiments  
of the end** Chabanel himself remarked to one of his intimate friends, "I do not know

what is going on within me or what God wishes to do with me, but in one respect I feel entirely changed. I am naturally very timid, but now that I am going to a dangerous post, and it seems to me that death is not far off, I no longer

have any fear; and yet this frame of mind does not come from myself."

Obedience had undoubtedly allotted a dangerous post to this holy man; God was leading him to the sacrifice. Events were developing so rapidly that his words, written to his brother in France, a few months before, began to assume a prophetic meaning that could be easily understood, "I entreat Your Reverence to remember me at the holy altar as a victim doomed, it may be to the fire of the Iroquois,

**Asks prayers  
for himself**

that, with the help of the saints, I may obtain a victory worthy of the struggle." Time and circumstances showed that this was not an idle request. Fifteen Huron villages had already been devastated and the inhabitants dispersed in thickets and forests, on lakes and streams, and on islands unknown to the enemy. Many of them had sought refuge even among the Petuns. Only Fort Ste. Marie was left standing in the terror-stricken region; but as this "home of peace" was no longer a refuge, the Jesuits resolved to destroy it also, so that it should not fall into the hands of the Iroquois, and then seek elsewhere a safer and more advantageous shelter. On May 15th, the whole establishment was given over to the flames by the missionaries themselves; a month later they built rafts and crossed over to St. Joseph's Island where three hundred Huron families, refugees from the enemy, were already settled.

The Iroquois had roamed on the outskirts of the Petun territory all through the winter of 1648-49; they were threatening the villages of the nation dur-

ing the following spring and summer. The Petuns, however, owing to their isolation from the Hurons proper, hoped that the enemy would pass them by. But this hope was vain; Huron captives had assured Father Ragueneau that the Iroquois were on the

**The Iroquois  
massacre**

point of attaching the Petun villages. This information excited his fears; the prudent superior felt that, in the crisis at which the affairs of the mission had arrived,

it would be unwise to expose the lives of the two Fathers, Garnier and Chabanel, at Etharita, and he sent an order to the latter to return at once to St. Joseph's Island. He set out early on December 5th; two days later the Iroquois swooped down on Etharita while the main body of the Petun warriors were absent; they slaughtered Father Garnier and most of the inhabitants, and reduced the town to ashes. Evidently unaware of this catastrophe, the heroic Chabanel continued his own journey. While passing through St. Mathias he remarked to Father Gar-

**Chabanel quits  
Etharita**

reau, "I know not why obedience calls me back, or whether I shall be permitted to return to my post; but whether or no, I shall persevere and serve God even unto death." Accompanied by six or seven Christian Hurons, he quitted St. Mathias on the morning of December 7th, and travelled six long leagues over a difficult road. He was overtaken that night in the thick of a forest, and while his fellow-travellers were asleep and resting, Chabanel remained awake and prayed. Towards midnight he heard a noise, accompanied by songs and shoutings, which evidently

proceeded from a party of Iroquois jubilant over their great victory at Etharita and from the Petun captives who were singing their customary war-songs. Father Chabanel aroused his companions who fled at once into the forest or returned quickly to one of the Petun missions. Later they reported that the holy man had accompanied them a certain distance, but then, undoubtedly through sheer exhaustion, he fell on his knees, remarking to one of them, "It matters not whether I live or die; this life is of small consideration. The Iroquois cannot rob me of the joys of heaven."

Here the thread of events is broken. Nothing further is known of the missionary's movements. He probably rested a short time and started again at

**But is waylaid  
and slain** daybreak, December 8th, to continue his journey to St. Joseph's Island.

A Huron who met him on the bank of the Nottawasaga River gave out the news later that Father Chabanel, in order to make his walking easier, had thrown away his hat, blanket and the bag containing his writings.

The holy missionary was no longer seen alive. At first it was uncertain whether he had fallen a victim to the Iroquois who had slain thirty persons in the neighborhood, or whether he had lost his way and perished from cold and hunger in the December snow. "After all," says the *Relation* of 1650, "it seems to us most probable that he was murdered by the Huron who was the last to see him alive." Suspicion fell on this savage who was well known as an apostate of Etharita; it was surmised that after he had killed the



missionary and robbed him, he threw his body into the little river. Sufficient evidence, however, could not be obtained to convict the assassin, and in the general misery of the moment the Jesuits judged it wise to smother their suspicions. If the Huron were guilty it was enough to know that God's purposes had been served and that He would avenge His servant in His own good time.

This was the story of the disappearance of Father Chabanel as given in the annual *Relation* of 1650. After it was written and sent to France for publication, Paul Ragueneau received information that the apostate Huron, Louis Honareannhak, the man on whom suspicion rested, had really done away with Father Chabanel. The assassin himself confessed

**The assassin confesses** his crime and added that he did it out of hatred of the faith, seeing that he and his family had met with all kinds of misfortunes and adversities from the moment they embraced the Christian religion. This information is given in Ragueneau's own handwriting in a document compiled in 1652, which is still unpublished and kept in the archives of St. Mary's College, Montreal.

God did not allow the death of his faithful servant to go unpunished. Misfortunes still greater than those referred to by himself soon overpowered the unfortunate Huron apostate. His mother Geneviève, once a fervent Christian, became an impious wretch and followed her son's footsteps in crime and devilry. The whole family fled southward to the Neutral

nation where, in less than two years, they were destroyed by the Iroquois. Some perished by fire, others by the tomahawk, while others were carried into captivity. And thus God avenged his heroic servant who in season and out of season, in trials and tribulations, kept his vow of stability and persevered to the end.

Chabanel is one of the six names which always stands out prominently when we recall the heroic age of the Canadian missions. He was only thirty-six years of age when he died, and had spent six years among the savages. The "shadow of martyrdom" followed him closely during those years, but the reality overtook him at last.

**A cherished  
memory**

His assassination, perpetrated out of hatred for the faith, according to the testimony of the criminal responsible for it, is our strongest motive for trying to keep his memory green until the Infallible Church puts a final seal to the reputation for sanctity that this servant of God has enjoyed amongst us for over two centuries and a half. "Chabanel's death," wrote Charlevoix, the historian of New France, "while less striking in the eyes of man, was not less precious in the eyes of God, who judges us according to the disposition of our heart, and who keeps as strict an account of what we would like to have done as of what we have really done and suffered."

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