

Letter of Father Sébastien Louis Meurin to Monseigneur Briand, Bishop of Quebec.

**M**ONSEIGNEUR,

On the 26th of last august, 1767, I received your first letters, by which you did me the honor of appointing me your vicar-general in This part of your diocese. At the same time, I received your mandates regarding the jubilee and the preface of the holy trinity, etc.

On the 29th of january, 1768, I received your second letters, confirming the first. I would almost wish that my self-esteem might prevent me from telling you, Monseigneur, that I am as unworthy as any one can be of the honor which you confer on me; and more than ever incapable of such an office, of which I know but the name. I have never been acquainted with any jurisprudence, either notarial, pontifical, or any other. I have been too long left to myself, and I barely know the duties of a simple priest. It is no longer possible for me to learn anything else.

My letters of last spring must have omitted to inform you of my age, and of my weakness of body and mind. I retain only a small portion of weak judgment, have no memory, and possess still less firmness. I Need a guide both for the soul and for the body; for my eyes, my ears, and my legs are likewise very feeble. I am no longer good for anything but to be laid in the ground. I trust,

Monseigneur, that you will be good enough to forgive me for having neither carried nor sent your graces and favors to new orleans, according to your letters and instructions,—of which I have thought proper to let even our dear ursulines remain ignorant, lest they might have occasion for sorrow, which they do not deserve.

How would I have been received there after having stated over my own signature (in order to obtain permission to return to the Illinois) that I would always act as vicar of the Reverend Capuchin Fathers,—subject to their visits, their reprimands, and corrections, and to their jurisdiction, etc., which was to be the only one throughout the missisipi country? Although I might have subscribed to all that before Monsieur the procurator-general of the King, solely for such time as the future jurisdiction should be real and established,—compelling them to admit before the magistrate that as yet they possessed it not, and could not convey any portion of it to me,—I would not have been better received. Here is the proof. As soon as they heard, through the voyageurs, that you had honored me with the appointment of vicar-general, a warrant of proscription was issued against me; and it would have been executed had I not, on being warned thereof by a friend in authority, escaped from it by withdrawing to english territory. There, on at once taking the oath of allegiance as a former resident, I secured myself against the spanish prosecutions,—which declare that I am a criminal because I have received jurisdiction from quebec, which is so opposed to the intentions and interests of spain, etc.<sup>3</sup>

There is another instance of opposition to your

letters, Monseigneur, of which I must not allow you to remain in ignorance,—all the more so that I have been assured that a complaint would be made to his excellency, Monsieur de gages, governor-general for his Britannic majesty.<sup>4</sup> About a month ago, having learned that Sieur Jautard (second purchaser of the property of the mission of Ste. Famille among the Kaskias, sold to sieur Lagrange by monsieur Forget, vicar-general of your predecessor, and missionary curate in the said parish, etc.) was bargaining to resell it to an englishman, I went to oppose the sale on behalf of the gentlemen of your Seminary, who claim this property as still belonging to them, through its having been sold, without their power of attorney and without their knowledge, by the person who was but the steward thereof. I also undertook to support by the use of your name, Monseigneur, my contention for the preservation of all property belonging to the Churches for their maintenance and that of the missionaries whom You deign to employ. Mr. Forbés, the commandant (there is no civil government here as yet), asked me for the letters containing my commission; I showed him your letters, and those of Monsieur the superior. As regards the letters conferring the appointment of Vicar-general, he replied that, inasmuch as Monsieur de Gages had given no instructions respecting the episcopacy and the office of vicar-general, he could not take cognizance of them; and that this seemed purely a scheme on your part and mine. He therefore expressly forbade me to use the letters, or to assume the title of vicar-general in any letter, or deed, or in public, until he should receive an answer from his general regarding both your jurisdiction in the country, and

the Kaskias property. He promised me, however, that the latter should not be offered for sale until then. Sieur Jautard goes to Canada, and thence to New York or London, to obtain release from the possession of the said estate. The land at Fort Chartres is also, for the same reason, in danger of being carried away by the river. I have caused to be removed, and conveyed to la prairie du rocher, the [*illegible word in MS.*] of Monsieur Gagnon and Reverend Father Luc, a Recollet, worthy missionaries. This is all I could do.<sup>5</sup>

There is also, in this village of the Kaskias, the property of the Jesuits which was unjustly seized, confiscated, and sold by the French government after the cession of the country to England. If your lordship or Your missionaries in Canada wish to revindicate it. As for myself, I ask nothing: I am too old. But I would always be grieved to see the chapel and Cemetery profaned, being used as a garden and storehouse by the English, who rent them from Sieur Jean Baptiste Bauvais—who, under the decree of confiscation and the contract of sale and purchase of the property, etc., was obliged to demolish the chapel and leave its site and that of the cemetery uncultivated under the debris.<sup>6</sup> He says that the subdelegate, the executor of the decree, has since sold the property to him. By what Right? The presses used for the vestments and sacred vessels are now used in his apartments, as well as the altar-cruets and the floor, etc.

My continual reproaches to him on that score have kept him away from me and from the sacraments for three years. I beg you to give me a decision on this, and to say whether, in case of his presenting

himself to me or to another, he can be granted absolution and be dispensed from handing over the said articles to the parish church. That is my only request; for I believe that he bought the remainder in good faith — but not the chapel and its furniture, which, according to the decree, were to be destroyed and burned. I beg you to decide as judge or supreme authority.

During the four years while I have ministered to these english parishes, I have received no tithes therefrom: I have received naught but what was given me out of charity by some, and the fees for masses. I have always exhorted them to pay the Tithes to the fabrique,<sup>7</sup> for the support of the Churches and of the missionary, when one comes. They, I mean the rich ones, have always claimed that they owe nothing when there is no resident pastor. I beg you to decide the Case; otherwise, three missionaries would be unable to live in a suitable manner, or would be compelled to leave some villages abandoned. I shall soon be unable to do anything more. Threatened beforehand, as I am, with being cast out when others come, I wish all the more ardently for them. I have always had the poor on my side. Priests will be at least as charitable as they, and God will assist me through them; or, if he prefer,—and that would be more advantageous for me,—he will cause me to share his abandonment. If you deem advisable, you will assign me a place or a corner in one of the clergy-houses of the country, for which I tender you in advance my most humble thanks,—happy if I can have the consolation of Christians, dying with Jesus Christ in the hands of one of his ministers.



This is on the supposition that the government would suffer my presence there; for Father harding, the superior in philadelphia,<sup>8</sup> wrote me last autumn that there were warnings and signs that the jesuits were about to be treated in england as in france, spain, portugal, and prussia, and he bade me farewell, fearing that he would have no other opportunity of doing so. Why am I not a great enough enemy of the devil to deserve such a treatment for the 3rd time? I forgot last year to ask you whether in the public prayers, at the benediction, etc., The orison *pro rege*, etc., is said, and the *Te deum*, if occasion arise. The question is asked Whether,—this has not hitherto happened,—when oaths are administered, roman catholics can swear on the protestant bible, owing to the falsities in it, etc. The protestants are often present at our holy mysteries, masses, and benedictions, standing during the time of the adoration, Elevation, and Benediction of the blessed sacrament, and also when it is carried to the sick, etc. The first two commandants, Messieurs Sterling and farmar,<sup>9</sup> [illegible word in MS.] prayer, had forbidden their people to attend our prayers,—at least, unless they were willing to do as the roman catholics did. You can perhaps obtain the same order from the government. Our last two commandants in no wise resemble the first two. They forbade me to marry any one without a license, for which Mr. Reed charged 6 piasters,—five being for him, and one for his secretary. The present one charges only for the secretary. Is it the custom in Canada not to marry Catholics without the permission of the magistrate, or of the commandant who fills his office?

Since the english have taken possession of this

country, there has been as yet no procession of the blessed sacrament (*[illegible words in MS.]* on the other side french, Spanish, and english). This year, at the request of the habitants, I asked messieurs the commandants to allow the militia to turn out under arms, as is the custom among roman catholics, to escort the blessed sacrament. This they refused. The weather was not settled; I was indisposed and fatigued, through having had a procession very early on the other Side, at ste. gennevieve. Here I had one only in the church, and likewise on the day of the octave. Is it the custom in canada to parade under arms for that feast, and could you obtain this for us? I have on several occasions been puzzled with reference to the quebec calendar, and the transfer of feasts, as I have found no one who could instruct me on this point. The only answer Monsieur forget could give us in our difficulties was, that he knew nothing about it, and that Monseigneur the bishop had often been at fault in the matter.

1st. Do feasts transferred to a sunday retain a double, which is marked therefor? 2nd. Do those which have an octave retain it entire, commencing from the day to which the feast is transferred? or is The octave transferred with the feast? If the feast of st. john be transferred to the 27th of june, and its octave come concurrently with the octave of the apostles, which is to have the preference? There are several other difficulties, which I cannot recollect at the moment, but which, as they have been experienced in canada more than here, have already given you an opportunity to decide them. I beg you to communicate your decision to us. I am also ignorant in what Consists the solemnity of the feast

whereof the office cannot be celebrated owing to another solemn feast. On a passion sunday can the White vestments be worn for st. Joseph? etc. In what does the solemnity of st. thomas consist, on the sunday before christmas? etc. Monsieur forget assured us that the solemnity consisted not only in abstaining from work, but perhaps also in the vestments, lights, sermons, and other things which he did not know. I beg you to decide for us these matters explicitly; for I am very Obtuse and Short-sighted, to say the least, and am quite overcome by the too heavy burden that you have placed on my shoulders. I assure you that I am and will ever be, with the most profound Respect and devotedness, most dutifully of your lordship,

Monseigneur,

The most humble and  
obedient servant,

S. L. MEURIN,

of the society of Jesus.<sup>10</sup>

At Kaskias, June 11, 1768.