

FATHER HENNEPIN'S LATER YEARS

THE INTERPLAY of French and English designs in Hudson Bay, in the Illinois country, in Carolina, and at the mouth of the Mississippi in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries has never been clearly envisaged. It was not mere coincidence that Father Louis Hennepin was concerned with two of these areas; that D'Iberville operated in two such distant regions as Hudson Bay and Louisiana; and that William Blathwayt, a member of the board of trade and plantations, fought for British control of Hudson Bay in the negotiations in the Low Countries preceding the treaty of Ryswick in 1697, backed a mining venture in Carolina, sponsored Father Hennepin in England, and assisted Dr. Daniel Coxe, who planned English colonies in the Illinois country and at the mouth of the Mississippi and who was the chief exponent of British control in North America. What seems to be coincidence is explainable on other grounds, notably on the fact that a group of men in France and a similar group in England had both the business acumen to see the value of the three regions for investments and the funds and initiative to begin activities in them. It was natural, moreover, that the two groups came eventually into conflict.

Father Hennepin's career from 1698 to 1701 is connected with the purposes of both Blathwayt and Coxe. His books, published in 1697 and 1698 in Utrecht and London, are the result of that connection.¹ This fact, too, explains the claim set forth in them that he had discovered the mouth of the Mississippi two years before La Salle reached the gulf.

¹ *Nouvelle découverte d'un très grand pays situé dans l'Amérique* (Utrecht, 1697); *Nouvelle voyage d'un país plus grand que l'Europe* (Utrecht, 1698); *A New Discovery of a Vast Country in America* (London, 1698). For some appreciation of Coxe's and Blathwayt's connections with Hennepin, see Verner W. Crane, *The Southern Frontier, 1670-1732*, ch. 3 (Durham, North Carolina, 1928).

There was no use for Great Britain to settle Louisiana unless it had at least a plausible claim to discovery of the area before any Frenchman had been there and claimed it for France.

So Hennepin found himself in Holland in 1698, where M. Dusson de Bonrepaus, a former member of the French commission provided by the treaty of neutrality of 1686 to settle the ownership of the Hudson Bay area between France and England, was the new French ambassador, and where Blathwayt was serving William III. Blathwayt, it may be recalled, had drawn up for the Hudson's Bay Company a reply to the French claim to the bay that was used by the English commissioners in the parleys of 1687.²

On June 26, 1698, Bonrepaus wrote to Pontchartrain, the French minister of state:³

You know, Monsieur, who Father Hennepin is — the Recollect and former missionary in Canada. He wrote an account of Louisiana, then returned to his native Spanish Flanders, where his restless spirit took him to the English and Dutch in his endeavor to find a way to get back to North America. The king of England received his proposals favorably and has been supporting him in Utrecht, where he has written two volumes on the discovery of the Mississippi. He has dedicated his book to the King of England along with dedicatory letters that are illuminating and extremely curious, coming from a religious. Now he is printing a third volume of discoveries which he claims to have made in that part of the world; but the same restless spirit which made him leave France now causes him to want to return to it. He has come to me with his proposal, and I have told him only that I should have the honor of writing about it to you, Monsieur. I now do so, not because I believe that this man can be very useful to you for advancing the North American colonies, but because I believe

² Minute book, A/1/9, June 24, 1687, Hudson's Bay Company Archives, London. This document was consulted through the kindness of the governor and committee of the Hudson's Bay Company.

³ The correspondence of Bonrepaus and Pontchartrain is in *Monuments historiques*, K 1349, IX Negotiations, Holland, Archives nationales, Paris. The item here quoted is number 75. Henri Froidevaux has printed excerpts from the original French document and of some of the following letters in his "Un épisode ignoré de la vie du P. Hennepin," in *Journal de la Société des Américanistes de Paris*, 2: 281-287 (Paris, 1905). They may also be found in J.-Edmund Roy, *Rapport sur les archives de France relatives à l'histoire du Canada*, 59-62 (Ottawa, 1911).

that you would not be averse to getting him out of that country and to sending him to Quebec, where there are a number of his order. There Count Frontenac could hold him on some pretext of using him in the Quebec missions and thus prevent him from returning to that country to urge the English and Dutch to make new establishments in the south of North America. I will await your instructions in this matter, but I will keep the secret that you have confided to me and which I find necessary to keep.

Pontchartrain replied on July 2, 1698 :

I reported to His Majesty what you wrote me about Father Hennepin, Recollect, and I will write you his pleasure in the matter.

He wrote again on the ninth :

I have reported to the King what you wrote me about Father Hennepin. His Majesty wishes that he be permitted to return to France and will grant him permission to return to North America as he wishes.

Bonrepaus wrote again on July 17, 1698 :

Since I had the honor of writing you, Monsieur, on the subject of Father Hennepin, he has come to see me and has shown me letters written to him from England, from which it appears that a company is being formed there for the Mississippi, and that he has been asked for memoirs on the subject. But as he is very restless, he confided to me his desire to make a turn in Italy, and he has found an opportunity through the captain of a great Tuscan vessel now at Amsterdam, who offers to take him as chaplain of his vessel. I did not think it necessary to turn him from this project, since he is not necessary in Canada, my idea being only to get him out of the country and away from a chance to incite the English to make new colonies in North America. However, he has told me that he will go back to France and so to Canada as soon as I indicate that you wish that step to be made, and he has left me his address. But this man knows nothing of that country which you cannot better learn from the memoirs of the late M. de la Sale and from other persons who are still in the service and who assisted in that discovery.

On July 23, Pontchartrain replied, stating that it did not matter whether Hennepin went to Italy or to Canada, since he was unable to give as reliable information on Louisiana as others.⁴

On May 27, 1699, the king wrote to Louis Hector de

⁴ Bonrepaus-Pontchartrain correspondence, numbers 85, 88, 89, 90.

Callières and Jean Bochart, Marquis de Champigny, governor and intendant, respectively, of Canada :⁵

His Majesty has been informed that Father Hennepin, the Flemish Recollect formerly in Canada, would like to return there. As His Majesty is not satisfied with the conduct of this religious, he wishes you to seize him if he returns there and to inform the intendant at Rochefort, to whom His Majesty has signaled his wishes in the matter.

At that very time the English company's colonists and a French contingent under D'Iberville's brother, Sieur de Bienville, were meeting on the Mississippi. D'Iberville recognized in Captain William Bond of the English vessel an old rival in Hudson Bay.⁶ Northern air must have stimulated British fighting blood, for D'Iberville had not had his way unchallenged in the bay. Now there was no fighting. The English yielded and Coxe's plan for a larger Britain in Louisiana went for naught. Louisiana became a French colony.

Was the friar with the English colonists? There is a possibility that he was. The evidence lies in the correspondence of two French savants, Jean-Baptiste Dubos and Nicolas Thoynard, now preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. On July 13, 1699, Dubos wrote to Thoynard:⁷

I send you hearty thanks for your full and learned account of Monsieur D'Iberville's voyage. I have no doubt that aid will soon be sent to his new colony. You are at hand to warn against arrival in the

⁵ Vol. 20, series B, folio 199, Archives des colonies, Paris.

⁶ Crane, *Southern Frontier*, 56, 57. William Bond was a captain in the service of the Hudson's Bay Company. For data on him consult the Hudson's Bay Company Archives; J. B. Tyrrell, ed., *Documents Relating to the Early History of Hudson Bay*, 400 (Toronto, 1931); memorandum of March 23, 1687, in Robert Boyle Papers, XXI, science 2, number 59, Royal Society, London; and an affidavit of Bond, May 20, 1687, C. O. 134/1/205, Public Record Office, London.

⁷ Dubos (1670-1742), the author of the excerpts herewith printed, was a savant, historian, critic, and numismatist of the seventeenth century. He was secretary of the Académie Française and corresponded with many of the savants of his period. Geography and voyages inter-

Gulf of Mexico in the period of the northern and northwestern winds, which prevail in certain months of the year, and of which Dampiere, who knows the regions so well (having spent two or three years on Trinidad) discusses so learnedly.⁸ If Father Hennepin had not hidden himself already, he would have to do so on the appearance of this authentic description of the mouth of the Mississippi, so totally different from what he says that he saw. Until now I have sought news of him in vain.

The important reference, however, from the American point of view, is in Dubos' letter from Brussels, dated September 4, 1699:

Until now I have forgotten to inform you that I was lodged at Utrecht with Michelet, the author of the letter to the Recollects at Valencia, which was written to get more definite news regarding Father Hennepin. It is about a year ago that he left Utrecht to go to England to embark, so it was believed, for America.

It is perfectly possible that Hennepin was with the English and French Protestant colonists who were turned back by D'Iberville. If so, he returned to Europe, for Dubos wrote from Rome on March 1, 1701:⁹

ested him particularly, and it was he who introduced the ideas of his friend, John Locke, to France. Thoynard, or Thoinard (1629-1706), to whom the letters of Dubos were written, was born at Orléans, the son of Nicolas Thoynard and Anne de Beauharnois (Beauharnais in modern spelling). He was related to Charles de Beauharnois, the governor of Canada, for whom a fort in Minnesota was named. He was also related to Pontchartrain. There are many letters from the Beauharnois family in Thoynard's correspondence, which fills four volumes in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (Nouvelle acquisitions, vols. 560-563). It is replete with interest for American and Canadian history. In it one finds data on Abbé la Gallinée, La Salle, D'Iberville, Le Sueur, and other explorers, for, like Dubos, Thoynard was interested in geography and exploration. Father Francis J. Schaefer used the Dubos-Thoynard correspondence concerning Hennepin, or some work based thereon, in the preparation of his article on "Hennepin, the Discoverer of the Falls of St. Anthony," in *Acta et Dicta*, 6: 54-85 (October, 1933). For the present letter, see Thoynard Papers, vol. 560, folio 299.

⁸ William Dampier (1652-1715) was an English captain, buccaneer, pirate, and hydrographer, whose *Voyages and Description* (1699) contains "A Discourse of Winds" that is notable among early essays on meteorological geography and is still worth study. He also published in 1699 his *Voyage round the World*.

⁹ For the letters quoted, see Thoynard Papers, vol. 560, folios 311, 312, 357, 358.

Apropos of the Mississippi — Father Hennepin is here, lodged at the Convent of L'Ara Cœli.¹⁰ We have tried to see each other, but thus far in vain. However, tomorrow I shall go to see him so early that I shall not miss him. I am told that he bamboozled [*emberluquoqué*] Cardinal Spada¹¹ into supplying him with funds for a new mission in the Mississippi country. I shall tell you all about that in my next letter.

Unfortunately, the letter was not preserved with the rest of the correspondence, if it was written and delivered. No information about the remainder of Father Hennepin's life has been found. Probably he died shortly in Rome, for he was already an old man.

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¹⁰ The church of Santa Maria in Ara Cœli, on the capitol in Rome, was from 1250 the general's residence of the Franciscans.

¹¹ Fabrizio Spada, a member of an Italian family that gave four cardinals to the church in one century, was born on March 18, 1643, and died on June 15, 1717. After being archbishop and papal nuncio, he became a cardinal in 1675.



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