

L'abbé LeLoutre

THERE is a very general impression that l'abbé LeLoutre was a disloyal man, the burner of Beaubasin, the sworn enemy of the English and an accomplice in the assassination of Howe. Moreover it is stated that he exercised tyrannical power over the Acadians.

It is not my purpose in this short article to advance my own views but rather to quote from authoritative men of his time and from reliable historians, to show that such accusations have no foundation.

These calumnies were made by Pichon : a notorious French writer, who held traitorous correspondence with British officers. Later this correspondence was mercilessly commented upon by Rev. Mr. Brown, a Protestant clergyman, after having made a thorough analysis of it.

Yet we find our American historian, Parkman, quoting Pichon very often. But more reliable historians such as Haliburton, Murdoch and Chandler disdain to make use of such evidence, and show in their writing that the charges against LeLoutre are groundless.

LeLoutre is accused of being disloyal because he tried to persuade the Acadians to go out of the peninsula across the Isthmus of Chignecto, while he himself was under the British flag.

The fact is l'abbé LeLoutre lived for about twenty years among the Micmac Indians along the Shubenacadie river in what is now Nova Scotia, but he never did anything to destroy peace. When he resolved to persuade the Acadians to migrate to the French territory across the Isthmus of Chignecto, he himself, also, migrated with his Indians and settled on Bay

Verte, which territory was recognized as a French possession.

It was when Gov. Cornwallis made a proclamation that all the Acadians residing in the English territory should take the oath of allegiance to the British Crown, without any conditions, that l'abbe LeLoutre became enthusiastic for the cause of his fellow-men. For once they had taken the oath, they would be obliged to fight against their own blood, if England and France should ever war against each other.

If l'abbe LeLoutre could have averted the catastrophe of 1755, by removing them into the French territory across the Isthmus, as he tried to do, he could hardly be called their tyrant as some historians call him, nor could he be called disloyal since he worked for his own people. For it was expressed in the 14th clause of the treaty of Utretcht "that the French, residing in the British territory, could go out, within one year if not willing to remain under the British rule. But every time that they attempted it they were impeded or stopped by the authorities.

He is accused, also, of having ordered the Indians to set fire to the village of Beaubasin and of setting fire to the church of this village with his own hands.

But we fail to see the confirmation of this in Gov. Cornwallis' letter to Hopson, which reads as follows : "As soon as the vessels were in sight, he, (Lacorn) set fire to Beaubasin and carried off the inhabitants . . ." —(N.S. Archives Vol. 10.) And in Haliburton's History chapter four, volume one : "In the spring of 1750, the Governor despatched Lawrence, with a few men to reduce the inhabitants of Chignecto to obedience. At his approach, they burned the town to ashes . . ." Where do we see the hand of LeLoutre in this ?

Again some historians tell us that in his zeal for

France and his hatred of the English he forgot his duties as a priest.

If he had hated the English to such an extent, as some say, he would hardly have saved the lives of many English officers as he did. Captain Hamilton, who witnessed some of his kind-favors held him in high esteem.

In l'abbe Maillard's letters,—(Unpublished Doc. on Acadia, Can. Fr. and following)—Maillard, whose moral authority has never been questioned, writes in a most eulogizing manner of l'abbe LeLoutre: "From every point of view, he writes, he is a very intelligent and learned man, a man of resource and of great character".

The great argument put forth to show that he hated the English is that on a certain occasion he was with the Indians, when these were on their war path against the English. It is true that he was with them on certain occasions, but after having employed all persuasive means to turn them back from their treacherous attacks, he went with them to stop them as much as possible from their inhuman butchery.

It is related in la Valiere's Journal, that l'abbe LeLoutre, one day, went over, with all possible haste, to an English ship which was wrecked on the shore below Fort Beausejour, when he learned that some of English who had been captured by the savages were in danger. On embarking he quickly ransomed the prisoners with his own money, made himself their guardian, and remained on the ship for two days till they were led safe and sound to Fort Lawrence. Who will, now, say that he was the sworn enemy of the English?

But the greatest, the most base and inhuman calumny, brought against l'abbe LeLoutre by biased historians, is that he was an accomplice in the murder

of Howe. This was fabricated by Pichon, of course, whose only ambition was to calumniate this priest, as much as possible, in order to receive favor from the enemy, Captain Hussey speaking of Pichon says: "Traitors are never cordially believed. They have broken the holiest obligations, how is it possible to bind them by ordinary ties?"—(Criticism on Pichou by Hussey).

Now, Pichon speaking of the murder says: "What is not a wicked priest capable of doing? He clothed an Indian, named Cope, with an officer's uniform and after having placed his Indians in ambush near the fort, he sent this Cope who held a white handkerchief in his hand, a usual signal with the French whenever they wanted to gain access to the English Fort to discuss business with the commandant. The major of the fort (Edward Howe) a man of merit, cherished by the French officers, came to meet him with his usual politeness. But he had hardly appeared when the Indians fired and killed him."—(page 195 volume of the Archives.)

In Cornwallis' letter to the Lords of Trade, speaking of the murder of Howe, he does not mention Le Loutre as being an accomplice. He says: "One day Lacorn sent one of his officers with a white flag to the side of the little river which separated his men from our troops. Captain Howe and the officer conversed for some time from one shore to the other. Howe had hardly taken leave of the French officer, when a party which was hiding fired and shot him through the heart. (G.F.N.S. Vol. 11.)

Remark that this quotation of Governor Cornwallis' letter who is an authority on the matter does not agree with that of Pichon-Parkman. Cornwallis does not say that l'abbé LeLoutre clothed an Indian in

guise of an officer, but he says that Lacorn sent an officer. Moreover, he does not say that Howe was killed on his way down to the river, but he says that Howe conversed for a while with the officer and then took leave.

In a word, the so-called proofs, brought forward to brand LeLoutre as an accomplice of the crime, had no other foundation than the sayings of Pichon, who, when that event took place and for two years afterwards was at Louisburg. On the other hand we have the testimonies of Prevost, Food Commissioner at Louisburg, confirming l'abbe Maillard's statement that Howe had been warned by l'abbe LeLoutre of the danger in which he was exposing himself by trusting the Savages too much.

LaValiere accuses Etienne le Batard, an Indian, of having committed the murder.

Thus we have the testimonies of Maillard, Prevost, LaValiere and Cornwallis, that is, of a distinguished priest, two officers and a governor—crushing testimonials, indeed, against Parkman who sought to impose upon the people.

First, Parkman does not want to give Pichon's name as his authority, but he cites him under another name, namely: a French Catholic contemporary. He is wrong in saying that Pichon was a Catholic. He was rather an apostate. Parkman knew well that his readers would not likely believe the statement he was advancing by quoting a traitor as his authority. Therefore, it was expedient for him to cite Pichon under a different name. And after having made a solid false impression in his readers' minds, he comes out and reveals Pichon's character.

So, it is not at all surprising that there are so