

Ville-Marie after Three Hundred Years

(Address delivered at the Annual Banquet)

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To-day, I am asked to interpret briefly in English the present position of Montreal in the world after three hundred years, i.e., from 1642 to 1942.

Has the Ville-Marie of 1642 been a success before God and Man?

To answer this may I invite you to stand with me at a hallowed spot behind the Catholic Sailors' Club between McGill Street on the West, the Waterfront on the South, and Place Royale on the East? This is Place d'Youville, where there was until recently the Colonists Memorial. This marked the site of the first Ville-Marie, the first Mass and the first Château. It is May 17th, 1642. Around an Altar prepared for Mass stand a group of less than sixty, — mostly pioneers from France sent over by the Company of Montreal through Jérôme le Royer de la Dauversière of La Flèche in Anjou, and Jean Jacques Olier, the founder of the Sulpicians. There are also Jeanne Mance, the founder of the Hôtel-Dieu Hospital, Paul de Chomedey de Maisonneuve, the Governor of Ville-Marie, some soldier-colonists, a few women, and some visitors from Quebec, including the Governor of New France, Monsieur le Chevalier de Montmagny, and Père Barthelemy Vimont, the Superior of the Jesuit Missions of New France.

The latter eye-witness was the writer of the Jesuit Relation of 1642 and the first historian of the foundation of Ville-Marie. Here is his account, copied with its 17th-century spellings from the original printed *Relation* of 1642 as displayed in the recent exhibition on Mount Royal.

"Le dix-septième de May de la présente année 1642, Monsieur le Gouverneur mit le sieur de Maison-neuf en possession de cette Isle, au nom de Messieurs de Montréal, pour y commencer les premiers bastiments; le R. P. Vimont fit chanter le Veni Creator; dist la sainte Messe, exposa la Saint Sacrement, pour l'impêtrer du ciel, un heureux commencement à cet ouvrage: l'on met incontinent après les hommes en besogne; on fait un réduit de gros pieux, pour se tenir à couvert contre les ennemis."

Père Vimont does not mention that he preached the short *sermon de circonstance*, but other witnesses present, such as Jeanne Mance, probably told the grain of mustard story to Dollier de Casson who, thirty years afterwards, wrote them in a manuscript "Histoire de Montréal" to his Sulpician Brethren in Paris. The manuscripts were not discovered till 1844 by Margry; a copy was made for the Lower Canada Parliament in 1845 at the request of Louis Joseph Papineau, then in Paris, but the manuscripts

were not printed till last century and then by the Historical Society of Montreal, in 1868.

Here is the famous prophecy as Englished first by me in 1914 – 28 years ago.

"What you see, Messieurs, is but a grain of mustard seed, but it is sown by hands so pious and so animated with faith and religion, that it must be that Heaven has great designs for it since it makes use of such tillers (ouvriers). I have no doubt but that this little grain may produce a great tree, achieve wonders and some day be multiplied and stretch out to all parts".

This famous prediction of the mustard seed becoming a great tree has been reproduced sympathetically in all English accounts of the Great Growth of the City of Montreal: the pious part is omitted and a vague phrase inserted "and the smile of God is upon you".

Certainly the smile of God has been upon Ville-Marie. The little camp of 1642 with its small population has developed into Greater Montreal and District with their nearly one and a half millions inhabitants; the little harbour chosen by Champlain in 1611 which sheltered the small craft of the pilgrims has become one of the greatest inland harbours of the world and the shipping of the world is seen here, The city of today is a metropolis and cosmopolis so that the peoples of many nations are sheltered by the branches of the mustard tree. It is the greatest city of Canada, the headquarters of our Canadian Banks, Industries, and Financial Houses.

It is one of the Great Cities of the world. The little French settlement of 1642 has become the second largest French-speaking city in the world. Verily the great tree has grown up: Ville-Marie has become a world city. It has been the home of great discoverers, religious founders, missionaries – pioneers of civilization and captains of industry. Its fame is world-wide and it has still a greater future before it – if it is true to the intentions of its founders.

But has Vimont's prophecy of Ville-Marie as foreseen by him and the founders of Montreal been realized?

Again Yes! a thousand fold.

Père Vimont was not contemplating the worldly glory of the future Montreal. He knew the motives of the founder of the Montreal venture, Dauversière, his old associate at the Jesuit College of La Flèche; he knew those of Jean Jacques Olier and the other members of the Société de Notre Dame de Montreal. Their only desire was according to Olier "L'établissement d'une nouvelle église où l'on va bâtir une ville chrétienne qui est une oeuvre d'une merveilleuse importance." At Quebec Père Vimont had received a communication of how the associates in February, 1642, in the Church of Notre Dame de Paris, had dedicated the isle to the Holy Family of Our Lord, Jesus, Mary and Joseph, under the particular protection of the Blessed Virgin.

He had questioned the Montreal group on arriving at Quebec and he had seen that their venture was not a colonization scheme such as was the original foundation of Quebec. Ville-Marie was a "folle entreprise" to establish a missionary centre in the heart of the Iroquois lairs. Consequently, the mustard tree as seen by Vimont was to become a great missionary tree, harbouring many missionary ventures.

The object of the Société de Montréal was to create a Christian civilization in the new world.

This can be seen by consulting a book published in Paris in the following year, 1643, "Les Véritables Motifs" de Messieurs et Dames de la Société de Montréal pour la conversion des Sauvages de la nouvelle France. In this work, the Associates of the Company of Montreal clearly prove that their object was not to establish a trading centre (in opposition to the Company of One Hundred Associates or to rival Quebec), but a purely missionary settlement – as they said "a christian Metropolis for the Nations around ignorant of the message of the Redeemer". That same year, 1642, in a letter to Pope Urbain VIII the Associates also give their motive thus:

"To spread the faith among the nations of New France, our Society has chosen the Island of Montreal placed at 45° latitude and what is for eighty barbarous nations, a centre of attraction on account of the rivers which flow thither from all parts. It is moreover, a very convenient spot whence to go to preach the faith because of the celebrated river St. Lawrence which has 300 leagues of water courses".

They further inform His Holiness that the enterprise is entered upon solely for the Glory of God, and not for any gain. Indeed, the Associates proposed to carry out the project at their own expense, without being a charge on the King, the clergy or the people and without any profit to themselves. They proposed to build a fortified town to be called Ville-Marie, which they would people with fervent spirits, and they would invite the savages to live with them. They wished this future city to be a boulevard of Catholicism in the new world, and a rampart and safeguard against the Iroquois for the colony. They hoped that once the city was established, its people could extend to other lands of our new colonies, as well for the convenience of the country as for the conversion of the savages. And in order to give stability to religion they desired to erect there an Episcopal See.

The letter to Pope Urbain is to-day more than verified. Since 1886 there has been a metropolitan archiepiscopal See of Marionapolis (Ville-Marie), with its 78 religious communities, 118 parishes and 200,000 Catholics. The cross on Mount Royal dominating a great commercial metropolis proves that the Ville-Marie of today is a Christian Mother-City. Jeanne Mance's humble waterfront dispensary is the grandiose Hôtel-Dieu on the slopes of Mount Royal. The wonderful missionary Apotheosis recently held in the Great Shrine on Mount Royal is a proof of Montreal

not only being a boulevard of Catholicism in the new world, but a gateway through which have poured numerous thousands of her devoted sons and daughters to the far off missions fields of the world, carrying out the message of the Redeemer to races of all colours and climes.

If Montreal were to lose its commercial supremacy, if the St. Lawrence should become dry, if hostile aggressors battered our buildings, even our Churches and Shrine, to rubble and dust, and blotted us out, the name of Montreal would still be known internationally as a missionary mother city of the world.

As his Excellency Archbishop Charbonneau recently pointed out: "Ville-Marie est née d'une pensée de foi et d'apostolat" – Our ancestors have only received the gift of faith to transmit it in turn to other peoples. After three centuries "notre ville est devenue un des premiers centres missionnaires du monde".

And as Monsigneur Edgar La Rochelle has said:

"Les missionnaires ont jeté plus de gloire sur Montréal que tous les hommes des affaires, dont le nom est à jamais éteint".

May I add: "Quaenam regio in terris nostrum non plena laborum".

Montreal is known internationally as great before Man and God. Its missionary history unfolded by the promoters of the exhibition on Mount Royal has verified the prophecy of the mustard tree. They have unfolded the best chapter of the story of Ville-Marie's success.

In conclusion, on behalf of the English-speaking members of the Canadian Catholic Historical Society, may I congratulate our French-speaking historians and writers for the splendid historical publicity given recently during this tercentenary year, for the Glory of Ville-Marie and its French and Catholic Culture. Their works have been recently exposed at the Convention of the Canadian Author's Society. A speaker there said: "Canada has her great French heritage. France's civilization will never die as long as there are French writers in Canada to take up the pen".

May I then salute Les Ecrivains Canadiens and in particular the members of La Société Canadienne d'histoire de l'église Catholique.

I would like to pay tribute more personally but there are many here at this convention and at these tables whose names and personalities and writings are well known, and in paying honour to them, we are paying tribute to the multitude of others absent but not unknown.

MERCI! THANK YOU!