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Voyage of St. Cosme,  
1698-1699

by Jean François Buisson  
de St. Cosme

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## INTRODUCTION

THE seventeenth century had but barely turned into its second half when a group of five young men of religious tendencies met in Paris and formed an ascetic brotherhood, who dwelt together and stimulated one another to noble deeds. From this group sprang the Société des Missions Étrangères—a society still in active existence after two and a half centuries' mission work in foreign lands. One of the group of five was a young nobleman of a great family closely allied to the royal house—François Laval de Montmorency. In his zeal to carry the message of the Gospel to distant lands, he sought the colony of New France, where he became the first Canadian bishop. His experiences in Paris led him to found in Quebec a seminary for the training of priests and missionaries, which was under the auspices of the Paris Seminary, and allied with the movement for foreign missions.

Several years, however, passed before Laval obtained the opportunity he sought to establish Indian missions in the heart of the American continent. The Jesuits had pre-empted the field, and the Sulpitians and Franciscans likewise had entered into a friendly rivalry to effect the conversion of the North American Indians. The discoveries and explorations of La Salle and Tonty had, however, made known a large number of tribes in the lower Mississippi Valley, that were to all appearance of a docile and receptive disposition, and furnished to the eager missionaries a virgin soil to cultivate. Laval thereupon chose three of his Seminary priests to inaugurate the work in the far Southwest, and sent them forth in the summer of 1698 to begin new missions among yet pagan tribes of aborigines.

The expedition of the Seminary mission was very well equipped. It is said that the cost was over 10,000 livres, a large share of which was furnished by the head of the company, François Jolliet de Montigny, whom Laval named vicar-general of the enterprise. Accompanying him were Father Antoine Davion, who had been since 1690 in the Canadian field, and Father Jean François Buisson de St. Cosme, a native of New France who had seen missionary service in Acadia. Another Canadian, Rev. Dominic Thamer de la Source, accompanied them, together with several lay brothers, and the usual complement of voyageurs and engagés.

At Mackinac they were fortunate enough to fall in with Henri Tonty, commandant in the Illinois, whose services to the reverend fathers were inestimable. Leaving the post and mission at the Straits early in September, they made their way along the western shore of Lake Michigan, regretfully abandoned the Fox-Wisconsin route because of the hostile Fox Indians, and after vainly essaying a portage from Root River of Racine to the Fox River of the Illinois, coasted along until the latter part of October brought them to Chicago. There the Seminary fathers were the guests of the Jesuits who had preceded them, and had established at this favorable site a mission for the Miami Indians. Thence, after a few days' rest, the little company of priests and their companions made their way to the Illinois River, and spent some time among the populous villages of the Illinois Indians, lying along the banks of the river of their name.

In these villages Tonty was a welcome and honored guest, and for his sake the priests were received for the most part with courtesy and kindness. Some of the tribesmen deprecated their visits to the Indians of the Mississippi and attempted to place obstacles in their way. The strength of their retinue and the vigor of Tonty's support forbade serious opposition, and the only hindrance was the early formation

of an ice bridge, which after some delay they broke by the impact of wooden canoes.

Once upon the Mississippi, the days were passed in gently drifting down the stream, admiring the wooded bluffs and grassy islands, enjoying the abundance of game that thronged the banks and the new and unknown kinds of fruits that supplied them with abundant food. Strange peoples, too, flocked to the water's edge to see the canoes of the white men pass by. At all the villages Tonty's presentation of the calumet of peace opened the way for an honorable reception.

At the site of the old Kappa village near the mouth of the Arkansas—the village of Marquette's farthest south on his voyage of 1673—the expedition halted. Tonty after visiting his post on the Arkansas River returned at once to the Illinois. The priests, however, remained in order to seek for favorable locations for missions among the tribes still farther southward along the Mississippi.

By the returning party, under Tonty's protection, letters were sent to the Bishop of Quebec, informing him of the success of the enterprise and the plans for further action. Among these letters was that of St. Cosme, which we here present for its vivid detailed description of the inland journey from Michilimackinac of the northern lakes to Arkansas Post on the southwestern rivers.

To follow the fortunes of our travellers farther, we learn that Davion was left among the Tonica tribesmen to begin his mission. They, however, proved so inhospitable that he was soon obliged to retire to the fort at Mobile. In 1704 he returned to his post, and labored among these Indians for eighteen years. Then, worn with age and hardships, he withdrew to New Orleans, and in 1727 returned to die in his native France.

Montigny attempted a mission for the Taensas tribe, but was soon discouraged by their lack of response to his appeals.

In 1700 he returned to France, and after serving as missionary in China for several years, was made director of the Société des Missions Étrangères at Paris, and devoted his later life to the superintendency of all the foreign fields.

For St. Cosme, the simple-hearted Canadian priest, was reserved a sadder fate. He first began his mission work among the Cahokia and Tamarois tribe, located near the site of the present Cahokia in Illinois. A few years later (the exact date is in doubt), on his way down the Mississippi to some of the lower missions, he was set upon and murdered by a disappointed war-party of the Chitimacha Indians. The mission he had founded among the Cahokia was maintained by his colleague Thamer de la Source until about 1721, when it was made over to the Jesuits, and the Seminary missions ceased to exist in the Mississippi Valley.

Iberville, who had in the meanwhile annexed Louisiana to the crown of France, took summary vengeance on the murderers of St. Cosme by a retaliatory expedition against the Chitimacha, and the execution of the guilty chiefs.

The letter that St. Cosme wrote, January 2, 1699, from the Arkansas post to Bishop Laval in Quebec has reposed in the archives of Laval University to this day. There it was discovered about the middle of the nineteenth century by John Gilmary Shea, the Catholic historian, and published by him simultaneously in French and in English. The French version was included in Shea's Cramoisy series under the title, *Relation de la Mission du Mississippi du Séminaire de Québec en 1700* (New York, 1861), the St. Cosme letter being supplemented by shorter letters from Montigny and La Source. The English version was published by Joel Munsell at Albany in the same year, under the title *Early Voyages up and down the Mississippi*. With the letters of the Seminary priests Shea included in this latter volume Jean Cavelier's account of the death of La Salle; a letter from Father Gravier, a Jesuit

missionary ; the voyage of Pierre Charles Le Sueur to discover mines in Minnesota ; and the narrative of Father Guignas, who, in 1728, escaped from Fort Beauharnois among the Sioux. In publishing the letter of St. Cosme, Shea had recourse to a transcript of the original manuscript that had been made for Francis Parkman, of Boston. The transcriber had evidently been inexpert, and unable correctly to decipher the somewhat crabbed and peculiar writing of Father St. Cosme. The original manuscript being accessible in the University of Laval at Quebec, Dr. R. G. Thwaites, about 1898, had a careful transcript made and the translation collated by Col. Crawford Lindsay, official translator for the Quebec province. This translation has been kindly put at our disposal by Dr. M. M. Quaife, the present superintendent of the Wisconsin Historical Society. He has also permitted us to see, and compare with Colonel Lindsay's translation, a photostatic copy of a transcript in the possession of the Chicago Historical Society. Using this, we have made a few minor changes in our text. We believe, therefore, that the translation we here present has been made from a correct text of the original letter, and that it will solve some of the difficulties that have been raised by the text as previously published by Shea. Mgr. A. E. Gosselin, rector of Laval University, has kindly furnished tracings of certain names, in the original manuscript, the reading of which was doubtful.

With this final narrative of our series we are brought to the closing years of the seventeenth century. The era of exploration and adventure now merged in the era of exploitation. For sixty years longer France held the great interior valley of North America. Then it passed into other hands, and at present only a few hamlets and a few French-speaking people remain to remind us of the French régime in the American Northwest.

## THE VOYAGE OF ST. COSME, 1698-1699

*Letter of M. Jean Frs. Buisson de St. Cosme, Priest of the Seminary of Quebec.*

In the Akansças country, this 2nd January 1699.

*My Lord,*

THE last letter that I had the honor of writing to you was from Michilimakinac,<sup>1</sup> whence we started on the fourteenth of September, journeying overland to meet our canoe, which had rounded the Pointe aux Iroquois and had gone to wait for us at the village of the Outaouacs, which village contains about three hundred men.<sup>2</sup> God grant that they may respond to the care taken and the labors performed by the Reverend Jesuit Fathers for their instruction; but they seem less advanced in Christianity than the Illinois, who, we are told, have only recently had missionaries. We left that village on the 15th of September to the number of eight canoes: four for the River of the Miamis under the Sieur de Vincenne;<sup>3</sup> our three canoes and that of Monsieur de Tonty,<sup>4</sup> who, as I have already written you in my last, had resolved to ac-

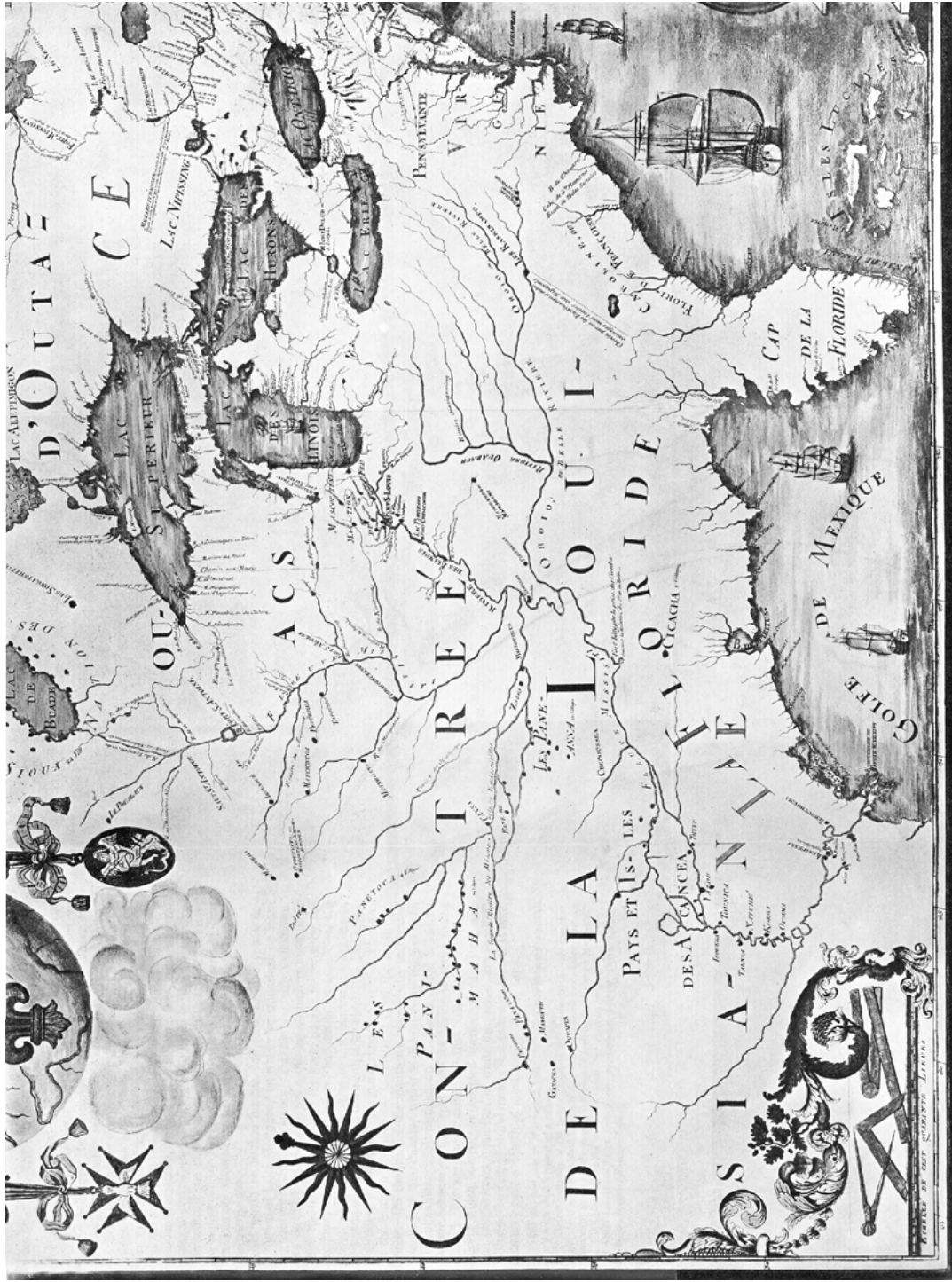
<sup>1</sup> Father Jacques Gravier, who was one of the Jesuit missionaries at Mackinac, writes September 20, 1698: "Father de Careil and myself are charmed with the good judgment, the zeal, and the modesty that Monsieur de Montigny, Monsieur de St. Cosme, and Monsieur Davion have displayed in the conferences that we have had together during the seven days they spent here." *Jesuit Relations*, LXV. 59.

<sup>2</sup> Now called Point St. Ignace. For a map of this period showing the location of the Ottawa (Outaouac) village, see R. G. Thwaites (ed.), *Lahontan's New Voyages* (Chicago, 1905), I. 36.

<sup>3</sup> This is one of the earliest notices of Jean Baptiste Bissot, sieur de Vincennes, the founder of the French post among the Miami Indians. Vincennes was an officer in the regiment of Carignan that came to New France in 1665. Early in the eighteenth century he was dwelling in the Miami village on the site of the present Fort Wayne, Indiana, and there in 1719 he died. His nephew founded the Indiana city of Vincennes. The river of the Miami was the present St. Joseph River, Michigan.

<sup>4</sup> For this officer, see Introduction to his *Memoir*, pp. 283-285, *ante*.





A PORTION OF FRANKLIN'S MAP OF THE UNITED STATES BY J. H. ROBERTSON

From a copy in the Library of Congress

company us to the Acansças.<sup>1</sup> I cannot sufficiently express, my lord, the obligations we owe him. He conducted us to the Acansças; he procured us much pleasure during the voyage; he greatly facilitated our passage through many nations, securing us the friendship of some and intimidating others—I mean the nations who through jealousy or the desire to pillage us sought to oppose our passage. He not only did his duty as a brave man but he also performed those of a zealous missionary, entering into all our views, exhorting the savages everywhere to pray and to listen to the missionaries. He soothed the minds of our servants in their petty whims; he supported by his example the devotional exercises that the journey allowed us to perform and frequently attended the sacraments.

It would be useless for me, my lord, to give you a description of Lake Mietpgan,<sup>2</sup> on which we embarked on leaving the fort of the Outaouacs. This route is fairly well known. We should have gone by the south side, which is much finer than the north, but as it is the route usually followed by the Iroquois, who, not long before, had made an attack on the soldiers and savages proceeding to the country of the Miamis, this compelled us to take the north side, which is not so agreeable nor so well stocked with game, though it is easier, I believe, in the autumn because one is sheltered from the northwest winds. On the 21st of the month we reached the traverse of the Bay of the Puants,<sup>3</sup> which is distant forty leagues from Michilimakinac. We camped on an island called L'Isle du Détour because at that spot the lake begins to trend to the south.<sup>4</sup> We were windbound on that island for six days, during which our people occupied themselves in setting nets and caught great quantities of white fish, which are excellent eating and a very plentiful manna that fails not along that lake, where there is a dearth of meat almost all the time.

<sup>1</sup> For this post, see p. 308, note 2, *ante*. In 1689 Tonty gave a site at this post for the establishment of a mission.

<sup>2</sup> The orthography of the proper names in this document is very peculiar. It may be due to a crabbed hand-writing, which is difficult to decipher; but the manuscript seems clearly to give this form of spelling for the word Michigan.

<sup>3</sup> The place where the mouth of Green Bay must be crossed.

<sup>4</sup> Still known as Point Detour, the southeastern end of Delta County, Michigan, opposite Summer Island.

On the 28th we crossed from island to island. The Bay of the Puants is about twenty or thirty leagues long. One passes on the right hand another small bay called that of the Noquest.<sup>1</sup> The Bay of the Puants is inhabited by several savage tribes: the Noquest, the Folles Avoine, the Renards, the Poûtoûatamis and the Saki.<sup>2</sup> The Jesuit Fathers have a mission at the bottom of that bay.<sup>3</sup> We should have liked very much to pass by the bottom of that bay and it would have greatly shortened our journey. A small river has to be ascended wherein there are only three leagues of rapids and which is about sixty leagues long; then by means of a short portage one reaches the River Ouiskonsin, which is a very fine one, and by going down it one takes only two days to reach the Miçissippi. In truth there is a distance of two hundred leagues from the spot where this river falls into the Missigipi to the place where the River of the Illinois discharges into the same Miçissippi; the current however is so strong that the distance is sooner passed. But the Renards, who live on that little river that one ascends on leaving the bay to reach Ouiskonsin, will not allow any persons to pass lest they might go to the Sioux, with whom they are at war, and consequently have already pillaged several Frenchmen who tried to go that way. This compelled us to take the route by way of Chikagou.

On the 29th of September we arrived at the village of the Poûs, distant about twenty leagues from the crossing of the bay.<sup>4</sup> There had formerly been a very large village here, but after the death of the chief a portion of the savages had gone to live in the bay and the remainder were preparing to go there when we passed. We stopped in that village. On the 30th we purchased some provisions which we needed. We started on the 31st<sup>5</sup> and on the 4th of October we came upon

<sup>1</sup> Both Big and Little Bay de Noquet are northern arms of Green Bay in Delta County, Michigan. The city of Escanaba lies on the latter bay.

<sup>2</sup> The Noquet, Menominee, Fox, Potawatomi, and Sauk Indians.

<sup>3</sup> The mission of St. François Xavier at De Pere, Wisconsin, for which see the Introduction to Allouez's Journal, p. 97.

<sup>4</sup> The site of this Potawatomi (Poûs) village has not been positively determined. It was on the Lake Michigan side of the Door County peninsula; the distances would seem to indicate that it was not far from the present Kewaunee, Wisconsin.

<sup>5</sup> *Sic.*

another small village of Poûx, on a small river, where Reverend Father Marais had spent the winter with some Frenchmen and had planted a cross.<sup>1</sup> We stayed there for the remainder of the day. We left on the 5th and after being windbound for two days we started and after two days of heavy wind we reached Milouakik on the 9th.<sup>2</sup> This is a river where there is a village which has been a large one, consisting of Mascoutins, of Renards, and also of some Poux. We stayed there two days, partly on account of the wind and partly to recruit our men a little, because there is an abundance of duck and teal in the river.

On the eleventh of October we started early in the morning from the fort of Milouakik, and at an early hour we reached Kipikaoui, about eight leagues farther.<sup>3</sup> Here we separated from Monsieur de Vincenne's party, which continued on its route to the Miamis. Some savages had led us to hope that we could ascend this river and after a portage of about two leagues might descend by another river called Pesioui<sup>4</sup> which falls into the River of the Illinois about 25 or 30 leagues from Chikagou, and that we should thereby avoid all the portages that had to be made by the Chikagou route. We passed by this river [Root] which is about ten leagues in length to the portage<sup>5</sup> and flows through agreeable prairies, but as there was no water in it we judged that there would not be any in the Peschoui either, and that instead of shortening our journey we should have been obliged to go over forty leagues of portage roads; this compelled us to take the route by way of Chikagou which is distant about twenty leagues.

<sup>1</sup> This appears to have been on the site of the present Manitowoc, Wisconsin. The priest was probably Father Gabriel Marest of the Jesuit order, who came to Canada in 1694. His first service was as chaplain to Iberville's expedition of 1695 to Hudson Bay, where Marest was captured by the English. As soon as he was exchanged he returned to New France, and was sent to the Illinois mission, where he remained until his death in 1714.

<sup>2</sup> Milwaukee.

<sup>3</sup> The present site of Racine, Wisconsin, at the mouth of Root River.

<sup>4</sup> The present Fox River of Illinois, which was called on Franquelin's map of 1684 the Pestekouy. One of its affluents is still known as Lake Pistakee, in Lake County, Illinois.

<sup>5</sup> The portage is from the upper waters of Root River to Muskego Lake in the southeastern part of Waukesha County, Wisconsin, thence by its outlet into Fox River.



We remained five days at Kipikaoui, leaving on the 17th and after being windbound on the 18th and 19th we camped on the 20th at a place five leagues from Chikagou. We should have arrived there early on the 21st but the wind which suddenly arose on the lake compelled us to land half a league from Chikagou. We had considerable difficulty in landing and in saving our canoes; we all had to jump into the water. One must be very careful along the lakes, and especially Lake Mixcigan, whose shores are very low, to take to the land as soon as possible when the waves rise on the lake, for the rollers become so high in so short a time that one runs the risk of breaking his canoe and of losing all it contains. Many travellers have already been wrecked there. We, Monsieur de Montigny, Davion, and myself, went by land to the house of the Reverend Jesuit Fathers while our people remained behind.<sup>1</sup> We found there Reverend Father Pinet and Reverend Father Binneteau,<sup>2</sup> who had recently arrived from the Illinois country and was slightly ill.

I cannot describe to you, my lord, with what cordiality and manifestations of friendship these Reverend Fathers received and embraced us while we had the consolation of residing with them. Their house is built on the bank of a small river, with the lake on one side and a fine and vast prairie on the other. The village of the savages contains over a hundred and fifty cabins, and a league up the river is still another village almost as large. They are all Miamis. Reverend Father Pinet usually resides there except in winter, when the savages are all engaged in hunting, and then he goes to the Illinois. We saw no savages there; they had already started for their

<sup>1</sup> For the Jesuit mission at Chicago, known as that of the Guardian Angel, see M. M. Quaife, *Chicago and the Old Northwest* (Chicago, 1913), pp. 40-42.

<sup>2</sup> Pierre François Pinet was born at Périgueux, France, November 11, 1660. He entered the Jesuit order in 1682 and was sent to Canada twelve years later. He was first stationed at Mackinac, and in 1696 founded the mission at Chicago. He was obliged to leave in 1697, but returned the following year. In 1700 he abandoned the Chicago mission and settled among the Tamarois Illinois, where he died in 1704. Some authorities state that he died at Chicago July 16, 1704.

Julien Binneteau came as missionary to Canada in 1691. He was two years at an Acadian mission, went West in 1695, and the next year was sent to the Illinois mission, where his death, December 24, 1699, was due to an illness contracted while following his neophytes in their hunting expeditions.

hunt. If one may judge of the future from the short time that Reverend Father Pinet has passed in this mission, we may believe that if God will bless the labors and the zeal of that holy missionary there will be a great number of good and fervent Christians. It is true that but slight results are obtained with reference to the older persons, who are hardened in profligacy, but all the children are baptized, and the jugglers even, who are the most opposed to Christianity, allow their children to be baptized. They are also very glad to let them be instructed. Several girls of a certain age and also many young boys have already been and are being instructed, so that we may hope that when the old stock dies off, they will be a new and entirely Christian people.

On the 24th of October the wind fell and we sent for our canoes with all our effects, and finding that the water was extraordinarily low, we made a cache in the ground with some of them and took only what was absolutely necessary for our journey, intending to send for the remainder in the spring. We left Brother Alexandre in charge thereof, as he agreed to remain there with Father Pinet's man. We started from Chikagou on the 29th, and slept about two leagues from it on the little river<sup>1</sup> that afterward loses itself in the prairies. On the following day we began the portage, which is about three leagues in length when the waters are low, and is only one-fourth of a league in the spring, for then one can embark on a small lake<sup>2</sup> that discharges into a branch of the river of the Illinois, and when the waters are low a portage has to be made to that branch. On that day we got over half our portage, and would have gone still further, when we perceived that a little boy given us by Monsieur de Muis,<sup>3</sup> and who had set out alone although he was told to wait, was lost. We had not noticed it because all our people were busy. We were obliged to stop to look for him; everybody went and

<sup>1</sup> The south fork of Chicago River.

<sup>2</sup> Mud or Portage Lake. For an early map of this region, see *Wis. Hist. Coll.*, XVIII. 146.

<sup>3</sup> Nicolas Daneaux, sieur de Muy, came to Canada in 1685 and served with distinction in King William's War (1689-1697). After the commencement of the colony of Louisiana, he was in 1707 chosen governor, but died on his way to assume his post.

several gun-shots were fired, but he could not be found. It was a rather unfortunate accident; we were pressed for time, owing to the lateness of the season, and the waters being very low, we saw quite well, that as we were obliged to carry our baggage and our canoe, it would take a long time to reach the Illinois. This compelled us to separate. Messieurs de Montigny, de Tonty, and Davion continued the portage on the following day, while I with four other men went back to look for the little boy. While retracing my steps I met Fathers Pinet and Binneteau, who were on the way to the Illinois with two Frenchmen and a savage. We looked for the boy during the whole of that day also, without finding him. As it was the day before the feast of All Saints,<sup>1</sup> I was compelled to go to Chikagou for the night with our people. After they had heard mass and performed their devotions early in the morning, they spent the whole of that day also looking for the little boy without getting sight of him. It was very difficult to find him in the long grass, for this country consists of nothing but prairies with a few groves of trees. We were afraid to set fire to the long grass lest we might burn the boy. Monsieur de Montigny had told me to remain only one day, because the cold weather pressed us, and this compelled me to proceed, after giving orders to Brother Alexandre to seek him and to take some Frenchmen who were at Chikagou.<sup>2</sup>

I started in the afternoon of the 2nd of November. I crossed the portage and passed the night at the river or branch<sup>3</sup> of the River of the Illinois. We descended the river as far as an island. During the night we were surprised to see a slight fall of snow, and on the following day the river was frozen over in several places. We had therefore to break the ice and haul the canoe, because there was no open water. This compelled us to leave our canoe and go by land to seek Monsieur de Montigny, whom we met on the following day, the 5th of the month, at the Isle aux Cerfs. They had already gone over two leagues of portage. We still had four

<sup>1</sup> All Saints' Day is November 1.

<sup>2</sup> The boy came in to the mission house thirteen days after he was lost. He was utterly exhausted and out of his mind. See letter of Thamer de la Source in Shea, *Early Voyages* (Albany, 1861), p. 85.

<sup>3</sup> The River Des Plaines.

leagues to do, as far as Mont Joliet. This took us three days, and we arrived on the 8th of the month.

From the Isle à la Cache to the said Mont Joliet, a distance of seven leagues, everything has to be portaged, as there is no water in the river except in the spring. The banks of this river are very agreeable; they consist of prairies bounded by small hills and very fine thickets; there are numbers of deer in them and along the river are great quantities of game of all kinds, so that after crossing the portage one of our men, while taking a walk, procured enough to provide us with an abundant supper as well as breakfast on the following day. Mont Joliet is a very fine mound of earth in the prairie to the right, descending a little. It is about thirty feet high. The savages say that at the time of the great deluge one of their ancestors escaped, and that this small mountain is his canoe which he upset there.

On leaving Mont Joliet we proceeded about two leagues by water. We remained two whole days at our short portage, about a quarter of a league in length. As one of our men named Charbonneau had killed several turkeys and bustards in the morning, together with a deer, we were very glad to give our people a good meal and to let them rest for a day. On the tenth we made the short portage and found half a league of water, after which two men carried the canoe for about a league, the others walking behind, each carrying his load; and we then embarked for a league and a half. We slept at a short portage, five or six arpents in length. On the eleventh, after making the short portage, we came to the river Teatiki,<sup>1</sup> which is the true river of the Illinois, that which we descended being only a distant branch. We put all our baggage in the canoe, which two men paddled, while Monsieur de Tonty and ourselves, with the remainder of our men, proceeded by land, walking all the time through fine prairies. We came to the village of the Peangichias,<sup>2</sup> Miamis who formerly dwelt at the falls of the Micipi and who have for some years been settled at this place. There was no one in

<sup>1</sup> The present Kankakee River.

<sup>2</sup> This tribe was known to American settlers as the Piankeshaw. It was a branch of the Miami that later removed to the lower Wabash, and settled in the neighborhood of Vincennes.



the village, for all had gone hunting. That day we slept near Massane,<sup>1</sup> a small river which falls into the River of the Illinois. On that day we began to see oxen, and on the morrow two of our men killed four; but as these animals are in poor condition at this season we contented ourselves with taking the tongues only. These oxen seem to me to be larger than ours; they have a hump on their backs; their legs are very short; the head is very large and so covered with long hair that it is said a bullet cannot penetrate it. We afterward saw some nearly every day during our journey as far as the Acansças.

After experiencing considerable difficulty during three days in carrying and hauling our baggage in the canoe, owing to the river being rapid, low, and full of rocks, we arrived on the 15th of November at the place called the Old Fort. This is a rock on the bank of the river, about a hundred feet high, whereon Monsieur de la Salle had caused a fort to be built, which has been abandoned,<sup>2</sup> because the savages went to reside about twenty-five leagues further down. We slept a league above it, where we found two cabins of savages; we were consoled on finding a woman who was a thoroughly good Christian. The distance between Chicagou and the fort is considered to be about thirty leagues. There we commenced the navigation, that continues to be always good as far as the fort of Permetaoui,<sup>3</sup> where the savages now are and which we reached on the 19th of November. We found there Reverend Father Binetot and Reverend Father Marais who, owing to their not being laden when they left Chigaou, had arrived six or seven days before us. We also saw Reverend Father Pinet there. All the Reverend Jesuit Fathers gave us the best possible reception. Their sole regret was to see us compelled to leave so soon on account of the frost. We took there a Frenchman who had lived three years with the Acansças and who knows a little of their language.

This mission of the Illinois seems to me the finest that the Reverend Jesuit Fathers have up here, for without counting

<sup>1</sup> Now known as Mazon Creek in Grundy County, Illinois.

<sup>2</sup> Fort St. Louis on the rock called Le Rocher. See Tonty's *Narrative*, p. 290, note 4, *ante*.

<sup>3</sup> This post was on Peoria Lake, whose early name was Pimetoui.

all the children who are baptized, a number of adults have abandoned all their superstitions and live as thoroughly good Christians; they frequently attend the sacraments and are married in church. We had not the consolation of seeing all these good Christians often, for they were all scattered down the bank of the river for the purpose of hunting. We saw only some women savages married to Frenchmen, who edified us by their modesty and their assiduity in going to prayer several times a day in the chapel. We chanted high mass in it, with deacon and sub-deacon, on the feast of the Presentation of the most Blessed Virgin,<sup>1</sup> and after commending our voyage to her and having placed ourselves under her protection we left the Illinois on the 22nd of November—we had to break the ice for two or three arpents to get out of Lake Pemsteoui. We had four canoes: that of Monsieur de Tonty, our two, and another belonging to five young voyageurs who were glad to accompany us, partly on account of Monsieur de Tonty, who is universally beloved by all the voyageurs, and partly also to see the country. Reverend Fathers Binneteau and Pinet also came with us a part of the way, as they wished to go and spend the whole winter with their savages.

On the first day after our departure we came to the cabin of Rouenssas, the most notable of the Illinois chiefs and a very good Christian.<sup>2</sup> He received us with the politeness, not of a savage but of a well-bred Frenchman. He led us to his cabin and made us sleep there. He presented us with three deer, one of which he gave to Monsieur [de Tonty], another to the Father, and the third to us. We learned from him that the Chaouanons, the Chikachas, and the Kakinanpols<sup>3</sup> had attacked the Kaoukias,<sup>4</sup> an Illinois tribe about five or six leagues below the mouth of the river of the Illinois along the M<sup>i</sup>çissippi, and that they had killed ten men and taken nearly one hundred slaves, both women and children. As this Rouensa is very quick-witted, we thought we should give

<sup>1</sup> November 21.

<sup>2</sup> This chief, usually called Rouensa or Roinsac, was head of the Kaskaskia branch of the Illinois. He removed about the beginning of the eighteenth century to the Kaskaskia River, where the village was frequently called Rouensac.

<sup>3</sup> The Shawnee, the Chickasaw, and possibly the Kickapoo.

<sup>4</sup> The Cahokia, a branch of the Illinois, who lived in the bottom lands opposite the site of St. Louis.

him some presents, to induce him to facilitate our passage through the Illinois tribes, not so much for this first voyage as for the others, when we should not be so strong; for all these nations up here are very suspicious and easily become jealous when we go to other nations. We therefore presented him with a collar,<sup>1</sup> to show him that we formed an alliance with him and with all his nation, and that as he was a Christian he should have no greater pleasure than in seeing the other nations participate in the happiness he enjoyed, and for that reason he was obliged to facilitate as much as he could the designs of the missionaries who were going to instruct them. We afterward gave them a small present of powder.

On the 28th, after saying our masses, when Roüensas and his family received communion at Monsieur de Montigny's, we left and came to a small village of savages, on disembarking at which the chief, named L'Ours,<sup>2</sup> told us that it was not advisable that we should go into the Mijissippi country. But Monsieur won him over or intimidated him by his words, telling him that we were sent by the Master of Life and the great Master of Prayer to instruct the savages whither we were going, and that he was hired by the Governor to accompany us, so that if he molested us he attacked the very person of our Governor. The chief made no answer to these words. We embarked and on the 24th we slept at another village of several cabins where we found one Tiret, a chief who was formerly famous in his nation but who has since been abandoned by nearly all his people. He made several complaints to Monsieur de Tonty, who reproached him, saying that it was his evil conduct that earned him the hatred of his people; that he had long before told him to give up his jugglery—for he is a famous sorcerer—and to pray; but that he had not yet done so. He afterward went to the prayers, and the savage promised him that he would be instructed on the following day.

On the 25th of the month we parted from Father Pinet, who remains in this village to spend the winter, for there are a good many savages here who pray, and on the 26th we came

<sup>1</sup> "Collar" was the French term for the belt of wampum beads, with which the Indians sealed alliances and treaties with the whites and with other tribes.

<sup>2</sup> The Bear.

to a village whose chief was away hunting with all the young men. Some old men came to meet us, weeping for the death of their people killed by the Chaouanons. We went to their cabins, and they told us that we ought not to pass by the Chaouchias with the Chaouanons, to whom, they said, Monsieur de Tonty had given arms and who had attacked them. Monsieur de Tonty replied that he had left the Illinois country more than three years before and could not have seen the Chaouanons to give them arms. But the savages persisted in saying several things without reason, and we saw very well that they were evil-minded, and that we should leave as soon as possible, before the arrival of the young men who were to return the following morning. Therefore we went out abruptly, and when Monsieur de Tonty told them he feared not the men, they said that they pitied our young men, who would all be killed. Monsieur de Tonty replied that they had seen him with the Iroquois and knew what he could do and how many men he could kill.<sup>1</sup> It must be confessed that all these savages have a very high esteem for him. He had only to be in one's company to prevent any insult being offered. We embarked at once, and went to sleep at a place five or six leagues from that village.

On the following day we were detained for some hours, owing to quantities of ice drifting down the river, and on the 28th we landed at a village consisting of about twenty cabins, where we saw the woman chief. This woman enjoys great repute in her nation, owing to her wit and her great liberality and because, as she has many sons and sons-in-law who are good hunters, she often gives feasts, which is the way to acquire the esteem of the savages and of all their nations in a short time. We said mass in this village in the cabin of a soldier named La Viollette, who was married to a savage and whose child Monsieur de Montigny baptized. Monsieur de Tonty related to the woman chief what had been said to us in the last village. She disapproved of it all, and told him that the whole of her tribe were greatly rejoiced at seeing him once more, as well as us, but that they regretted that they could not be sure of seeing him again and of having him longer with them.

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 291-294, *ante*, for Tonty's experiences among the Iroquois.

We left this village and travelled about eight leagues between the 29th of November and the 3rd of December. We were detained at the same place by the ice, which completely barred the river. During that time we had an abundance of provisions, for no one need fast on that river, so great is the quantity of game of all kinds: swans, bustards, or duck. The river is bordered by a belt of very fine timber, which is not very wide, so that one soon reaches beautiful prairies, containing numbers of deer. Charbonneau killed several while we were detained, and others killed some also. Navigation is not very easy on this river when the water is low. We were sometimes obliged to walk with a portion of our people, while the others propelled the canoes, not without trouble, for they were often obliged to get into the water, which was already very cold. While we were detained, Reverend Father Binnetost, whom we had left at the village of the woman chief, came to see us, and after spending a day with us he returned to the village for the feast of St. Xavier.<sup>1</sup> On that day a heavy gale broke up a portion of the ice and we proceeded about a league. On the following day we obtained some wooden canoes, at a place where there were five cabins of savages, and after breaking with them about three or four arpents of ice that barred the river, that was as much as four fingers thick and could bear a man's weight, we afterward had free navigation to the Miçissippi, which we reached on the 5th of December after journeying about eighty leagues from the fort of Pemiteouit.

The Miçissippi is a fine, large river flowing from the north. It divides into several channels at the spot where the River of the Illinois falls into it, forming very beautiful islands. It winds several times, but seems always to keep its course to the south as far as the Acansças. It is bordered by very fine woods. The banks on both sides seem about thirty feet high, which does not prevent its overflowing them far into the woods in the spring, when the waters are high, with the exception of some hills or very high places that are sometimes met with. All along the river are numbers of oxen, bears, deer, and also a great many turkeys. We were always so well supplied with meat, while descending the river as far as the Acansças, that

<sup>1</sup> December 3.

we passed many herds of oxen without attempting to fire at them.

On the 6th of December we embarked on the Micissippi, and after proceeding about six leagues we came to the great River of the Myssouries, which flows from the west, and is so muddy that it dirties the waters of the Micissippi, which until they meet that river are very clear. It is reported that there are great numbers of savages on the upper part of that river. Three or four leagues lower down we saw, on the left bank, a rock on which some figures are painted and for which the savages are said to have a certain veneration.<sup>1</sup> They are now nearly effaced. We camped that day at the Kaouchias, who were still in grief in consequence of the attack made upon them by the Chikachas and the Chaouanons. On our arrival they all began to weep. They did not seem to us to be so evil-intentioned or so wicked as some Illinois savages had sought to make us believe. The poor people excited our pity more than our fears.

On the following day about noon we reached the Tamarois. These savages had received timely warning of our arrival through some of the Kaoukias, who carried the news to them, and as a year before they had molested Monsieur de Tonty's men, they were afraid and all the children and women fled from the village. The chief came with some of his people to receive us on the water's edge and to invite us to their village, but we did not go, because we wished to prepare for the feast of the Conception. We camped on the other side of the river on the right bank. Monsieur de Tonty went to the village, and after re-assuring them to some extent, he brought the chief, who begged us to go and see him in his village. We promised to do so and on the following day, the feast of the Conception,<sup>2</sup> after saying our masses, we went with Monsieur de Tonty and seven of our men well armed. They came to meet us and led us to the chief's cabin. All the women and children were there, and no sooner had we entered the cabin than the young men and the women broke away a portion of it to see us. They had never seen black gowns, except for a few days Reverend Father Gravier, who

<sup>1</sup> See p. 249, note 1, *ante*.

<sup>2</sup> December 8.



had made a journey to their country. They gave us food and we gave them a small present, as we had done to the Kaouchias. We told them that it was to show them that our hearts were without guile, and that we wished to effect an alliance with them, so that they might give a good reception to our people who would pass there and supply them with food. They received the gift with many thanks and after that we returned to our camp.

The Tamarois were camped on an island about [*blank in MS.*] lower than the village, probably in order to obtain wood more easily than in their village, which is on the edge of a prairie and some distance away, probably through fear of their enemies. We were unable to ascertain whether they were very numerous; there seemed to be a great many of them, although the majority of their people were away hunting. There would be enough for a rather fine mission, by bringing to it the Kaouchias, who live quite near, and the Mechigamias, who live a little lower down the Miçissippi, and who are said to be pretty numerous. We did not see them because they had gone into the interior to hunt. The three villages speak the Illinois languages.

We left the Tamarois in the afternoon of the 8th of December. On the 10th we saw a hill at a distance of about three arpents from the Miçissippi, on the right side going down. After being detained for some time on the 11th by rain, we arrived early on the 12th at Cap St. Antoine,<sup>1</sup> where we spent the remainder of the day and the whole of the next, collecting gum which we needed. There are many pines between Cap St. Antoine and a river lower down, and this is the only place where I saw any between Chikagou and the Acansças. Cap St. Antoine is a rocky bluff on the left bank going down. Some arpents below it is another rock on the right bank, which projects into the river and towards an island or rather a rock about one hundred feet high, which makes the river turn very short and narrows the channel,

<sup>1</sup> Cape St. Antoine appears to have been just above the Grand Eddy in Perry County, Missouri. The present name of the creek entering at this point—Cape Cinq Homme Creek—is a corruption of the name St. Cosme, by which it appears on early maps. It seems, therefore, to have been named for our narrator.

causing a whirlpool in which it is said canoes are lost during the high waters. On one occasion fourteen Miamis perished there. This has caused the spot to be dreaded by the savages, who are in the habit of offering sacrifices to that rock when they pass there. We saw none of the figures that we were told we should find there. We ascended this island or rock with some difficulty by a hill and we planted a fine cross on it, chanting the hymn *Vexilla Regis*,<sup>1</sup> while our people fired three discharges from their guns. God grant that the Cross, that has never yet been known in this place, may triumph here, and that our Lord may abundantly spread the merits of His Holy Passion, so that all these savages may know and serve him. Canes begin to be seen at Cap St. Antoine. There is also a kind of a tree, as large as and similar to the linden, which exudes a sort of sweet-scented gum. Along the Miçissippi also grow a number of fruit-trees unknown in Canada, some of whose fruit we still found occasionally on the trees. I forgot to state that as soon as we were on the Micissippi we no longer perceived that it was the winter season, and the further we descended the river the greater we found the heat. The nights however are cool.

We left Cap St. Antoine on the 14th of December and on the 15th we slept a league above the Ouabache.<sup>2</sup> This is a large and fine river on the left of the Miçissippi, which flows from the north; it is said to be five hundred leagues in length and to take its source near the Sonontouans.<sup>3</sup> By this river one goes to the country of the Chaouanons who trade with the English.<sup>4</sup> On the 16th we left the Ouabache, and nothing particular happened to us nor did we observe anything remarkable until we reached the Akansças, except that we killed a certain bird almost as large as a swan, with a beak about a foot long and a throat of extraordinary size. Some are said to have throats large enough to hold a bushel of corn. The one we killed was small and its throat could easily have contained half a bushel of corn. It is said that this bird

<sup>1</sup> See p. 218, note 1, *ante*.

<sup>2</sup> Ohio; see p. 250, note 1.

<sup>3</sup> The habitat of the Seneca (Sonontouans) was on the headwaters of the Allegheny River.

<sup>4</sup> The present Cumberland River was formerly known as the Shawnee (Chaouanon) River.



places itself in a current and by opening its great beak it catches the fish which it stuffs into its throat.<sup>1</sup> Our French called this bird Chietek. On the 22nd we came to a small river<sup>2</sup> on the left going down, which is said to be the road leading to the Chikachas, a numerous tribe. It is believed that the distance from this small river to their villages is not great.

On the 24th we camped early, in order that our people might prepare for the great festival of Christmas. We erected a small chapel and chanted a high mass at midnight, at which all our French performed their devotions. Christmas Day was spent in saying our masses, all of which were attended by our people, and in the afternoon we chanted vespers. We were greatly surprised to see the earth tremble about one o'clock in the afternoon, and though the earthquake did not last long it was severe enough and was easily felt by everybody.<sup>3</sup>

On the following day we started at a somewhat late hour, because we were obliged to wait for a little savage whom Monsieur de Tonty had brought with him, and who on the previous day had gone to the woods to look for fruit and had lost himself. We thought he might have been captured by some Chicachas or Acansças warriors; this compelled us to watch and be on guard all night. But we were greatly rejoiced when we saw him return next day. We started and slept at the place where the Kappas, a tribe of the Acansças, formerly dwelt.

On St. John's day,<sup>4</sup> after travelling about five leagues, we observed some wooden canoes and a savage at the water's edge. As we were near and feared that he would take to flight on seeing us, one of our men took the calumet and sang. He was heard in the village, which was close by. Some fled, while the others brought the calumet and came to receive us at the water's edge. On approaching us they rubbed us and then rubbed themselves, which is a mark of attention among sav-

<sup>1</sup> This is the pelican (*pelecanus erythrorhynchos*).

<sup>2</sup> The present Wolf River of Tennessee, at whose mouth stands Memphis. This was known to the French explorers as Rivière à Margot.

<sup>3</sup> This was the region of the great earthquake of 1811.

<sup>4</sup> December 27.

ages. They took us on their shoulders and carried us into the cabin of a chief. A hill of heavy soil had to be ascended, and as he who carried me was sinking under the burden, I feared that he would let me fall, so I got down in spite of him and walked up the hill. But as soon as I reached the top I was compelled to get on his back to be carried to the cabin. The young men brought all our things into the same cabin. Some time afterward they came to sing the calumet for us, and in the evening of the following day they carried us to another cabin, where they made Monsieur de Tonty and the three of us sit on bear-skins; four chiefs each took a calumet that they had placed before us, and the others began to sing and beat drums made of earthenware jars over which a skin is stretched. Each holds in his hand a gourd containing seeds that make a noise, and as they sing in accord with the sound of the drum and the rattle of the gourds, the result is a music that is not the most agreeable. During this harmony a savage who stood behind us bleated. We were soon tired of this ceremony, which they perform for all strangers to whom they wish to show consideration, and it must be endured unless one wishes to be deemed evil-hearted or as harboring wicked designs. After remaining a certain time, we put some of our people in our place, and they had the pleasure of hearing the lullaby throughout the night. On the following day they made us a present of a little slave and of some skins, for which we paid with a present of knives and other things that they prize highly.

We were greatly consoled at seeing ourselves at the seat of our missions, but we were deeply afflicted at finding this nation of the Acansças, formerly so numerous, entirely destroyed by war and by disease. Not a month had elapsed since they had rid themselves of smallpox, which had carried off most of them. In the village are now nothing but graves, in which they were buried two together, and we estimated that not a hundred men were left. All the children had died, and a great many women. These savages seem to be of a very kind disposition. We were invited at every moment to feasts. Their honesty is extraordinary. They transported all our effects to a cabin where they remained two days without anybody taking a thing, and even without a single article

being lost. One of our people forgot his knife in a cabin and a savage at once took it to him. Polygamy is not common among them. We saw however in the village of the Kappas one of those wretches who from their youth dress as girls and pander to the most shameful of all vices. But this infamous man was not of their nation; he belonged to the Illinois, among whom the practice is quite common. The savages have an abundance of corn, of beans, and of pumpkins. As to meat, though they are in a country teeming with game, we found none in their villages, owing to the fact that they were weakened by disease and in continual dread of their enemies. They make houses like the Hurons, making use of great earthenware pots instead of kettles, and of very well made jars for holding water. I have not yet seen savages so well formed. They are quite naked except that when they go out they wear a buffalo robe. The women and girls are partly naked, as among the Illinois. They wear a deer-skin hung over one shoulder.

We remained two days and a half in this village, and after planting a Cross in it, which we told the savages was to be the sign of our union, we left on the 30th of November [December] for their other village, about nine leagues distant from this one. We were deeply grieved to have to part from Monsieur de Tonty, who was unable to come with us for various reasons. He would greatly have liked to accompany us to the other nations whither we were going, but his affairs compelled him to return as soon as possible to the Illinois country. He is the man who best knows these regions; he has twice gone down to the sea; he has been far inland to the most remote tribes, and is beloved and feared everywhere. If it be desired to have discoveries made in this country, I do not think the task could be confided to a more experienced man than he. I have no doubt, my lord, that your Grace will deem it a pleasure to acknowledge the obligations we owe him.

We slept at the mouth of the river of the Acansças,<sup>1</sup> which is a fine one and distant two hundred and fifty or three hundred leagues from that of the Illinois. On the following day we reached the village at an early hour. Six savages came to meet us with the calumet, and led us to the village with the

<sup>1</sup> The present Arkansas River.

same ceremonies as those observed at the first one. We passed two days there. This village seemed to be more populous than the first; there were more children in it. We told them that we were going further down, to their neighbors and friends; that they would see us often; that they would do well to live together, and that they would thereby more easily resist their enemies. They agreed to everything and promised that they would try to bring with them the Osages,<sup>1</sup> who had come from the River of the Missouri and were on the upper portion of this river. We started on the 2nd of January<sup>2</sup> and camped at the mouth of the river, where the French who were returning would allow us but one day for writing. I thought I should have more time to do so, as I hoped to go up from the Acansas to the Illinois, but, as we are going much further down, I am afraid the letters we shall write after this will not be received this year, for the persons by whom we wished to send them will have left before we can reach the Illinois. I therefore beg your Grace to excuse me if this one be somewhat badly expressed, as I am so greatly pressed for time that I cannot even write to one of our gentlemen, to whom I beg you to allow me to send greetings, and to commend myself to their holy prayers. I trust your Grace will be pleased to grant me the same favor, and to remember before our Lord him who remains, with very profound respect,

My lord,

Your Grace's very humble and very obedient servant,  
J. F. BUISSON ST. COSME,  
*Priest, unworthy Missionary.*

I have not time to reread this letter.

<sup>1</sup> For this tribe see p. 313, note 1, *ante*.

<sup>2</sup> 1699.