Champlain Judged by His Indian Policy: A Different View of Early Canadian History

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Father of New France, colonizer, administrator, soldier, diplomat, prospector, historian, amateur ethnographer — many are the epithets that have been applied to this key figure in the early history of Canada. Yet, in spite of this, surprisingly little is known about Champlain's life and personal ambitions. So little is certain about him prior to 1603 that romantic writers have felt free to suggest that he was either a convict who had escaped from the gallows or a Spanish agent whose mission was to sabotage the development of New France.[1] More than one historian has expressed doubts about the veracity of his account of a trip to the West Indies between 1599 and 1601 and this has generated further uncertainty about his early career.

In spite of this, Champlain's biographers, and North American historians generally, have treated him with a respect that often verges on adulation.[2] They praise Champlain's resourcefulness as an explorer and his fortitude in struggling to establish a French colony on the St. Lawrence in spite of official indifference and the hostility of fur traders seeking quick profits. There has also been a tendency to endow him an omniscience and a sense of judgment that rarely admits of any failing. Champlain has thus become an archetypal hero in a drama that is filled with heroic figures. In this paper I wish to examine in a more objective fashion his dealings with the Indians of the St. Lawrence lowlands. This is the one aspect of this much-studied man's life-work about which my anthropological training may permit me to make some fresh observations.

It has generally been assumed that because Champlain travelled, hunted and went to war with Indians, he was a man

who understood and got along with them. He has also been praised for his desire to see the French and the Indians intermarry and become one people although, as we shall see, this merely indicates a lack of racial, as opposed to cultural, prejudice. Trudel states that Champlain treated the Indians with great civility, "making them laugh" and "forgiving their offences"[3] and Morris Bishop has argued that because Champlain was horrified by the enslavement of the Indians in the West Indies, he was opposed to using force to convert the Indians of Quebec.[4]

An older generation of historians criticized Champlain's forays against the Iroquois as having given rise to the prolonged struggle between the French and the Five Nations. More recent studies have shown, however, that this pattern of aiding the Algonkians was established prior to Champlain's arrival and was inevitable if the French were to retain for themselves the trade of these tribes. It is also evident that Champlain's early raids did not incur the implacable wrath of the Iroquois, who attempted many times thereafter to make peace with the French.[5] As a result of these studies, Champlain's reputation as an Indian diplomat has been enhanced.

Yet these assessments are based largely on Champlain's activities prior to 1616, when his active explorations ceased, although he continued his work at Quebec until his death in 1635. Since anthropologists have been interested mainly in his descriptions of Indian life, their concern with him generally ceases with his travels. On the other hand, historians who have dealt with the later phases of his career have lacked the ethnographic background necessary to consider his treatment of the Indians from a native point of view. My aim in this paper is to assess Champlain's dealings with the Indians in the St. Lawrence Valley from 1608 to the first seizure of Quebec by the British twenty-one years later. This omits his final brief tenure of office at Quebec, which is of little importance for my purposes and during which relations with the Indians were greatly complicated by events that had taken place during the period of British occupation. It is my hope that this study may shed light on early Indian policy in the fur-rich northern regions of North America and that it may provide clues that are of potential value for understanding Champlain's personality and behaviour. For reasons that will be evident, the

period before 1616 will be treated separately from that which follows.

1608-1616

In the first phase of Champlain's dealings with the Indians he concluded a series of alliances with various tribes, which allowed the French to tap trading networks that ran deep into the interior of the continent. During this period, Champlain worked in effect as the agent of a series of trading companies who maintained a post at Quebec, but who were unable, prior to 1614, to enforce a monopoly over commerce on the upper St. Lawrence. Champlain was not personally responsible for the conduct of trade, but was employed to manage the colony, to explore, to maintain alliances with the Indians and to forge new ones.[6]

The policies that Champlain pursued during this period were ones that had been worked out, at least in general outline, by Pierre Chauvin and possibly by other traders prior to 1603, and which apparently had received royal approval. Their aim was to foster goodwill among the Montagnais and the other Algonkian-speaking tribes with whom the French traded, by providing them with iron weapons and promises of aid in their struggle against the Mohawks.[7] The Mohawks appear to have been attacking these groups in an effort either to acquire trade goods by force of arms or to clear a way for themselves to trade on the lower St. Lawrence.[8] From a French point of view, Algonkian successes were desirable because they served to open the St. Lawrence as an artery of trade into the fur-rich regions north of the Great Lakes.

To our knowledge, Champlain and the *arquebusiers* who accompanied him were the first Frenchmen who attempted to win the respect and confidence of the Algonkians by accompanying them on their expeditions against the Mohawks. In 1609, Champlain paddled up Lake Champlain to the borders of the Mohawk country, where a battle was fought, and in 1610 he helped his allies to defeat a band of Iroquois near the mouth of the Richelieu River. In both campaigns the use of guns, which were unfamiliar to the Mohawks, played an important role in securing easy victories for Champlain and those who were with him.

Desrosiers has estimated that in the first decade of the seventeenth century the Mohawks may have lost as many as 250 warriors in their attacks on the St. Lawrence, which would have been a sizeable percentage of their total force.[9] As a result of these losses and the development of European trade in the Hudson Valley, the Mohawks ceased to pose a serious threat along the St. Lawrence prior to 1634. The prestige that Champlain acquired as a result of these campaigns made it possible for him to travel inland in order to conclude alliances with important tribes, although the Indians who lived in the St. Lawrence and Ottawa Valleys had wished to retain the trade with these inner regions for themselves. Only polite resistance was possible against a man to whom they were so indebted. In 1615, Champlain travelled as far as Georgian Bay, where he made a series of alliances with the tribes of the Huron confederacy and accompanied their warriors on a raid against a large Iroquois settlement south of Lake Ontario.

We do not know if Champlain was the first European in this region to conceive of Frenchmen accompanying Indian war parties; nevertheless, this idea was to play an important role in the development of Franco-Indian relations. While the Hurons and Algonkians might have been willing to trade with the French without Champlain's aid, his commitment to assist them with French soldiers helped to bind these tribes permanently to the French cause.[10] These alliances also made it easier to settle the disputes which frequently arose when French and Indians gathered to trade without a proper alliance. Trade was an important feature of the treaties that Champlain concluded, but it was embedded in a matrix of reciprocal military and political obligations and in bonds of hospitality, reciprocity and fictional kinship. When the Indians came to the St. Lawrence to trade each year, entire days were devoted to speeches, feasts and the exchange of valuable presents, before and after the barter. As the negotiator of these alliances, Champlain received the most valuable gifts that the Indians had to offer.[11]

One feature of these alliances was an exchange of children. This was insisted upon by Champlain, but it may also have been an aboriginal custom practised among trading partners who belonged to different tribes. Such an exchange was evidence of

trust and goodwill and provided hostages to ensure against treachery.[12] As a result of these exchanges a number of Huron and Algonkian boys journeyed to France, while young Frenchmen wintered with the Indians. The latter acquired a knowledge of their hosts' languages and ways which permitted them to play an important role as agents or intermediaries in the fur trade in later years.

These alliances were an accomplishment of considerable importance and suggest that, on the surface at least, Champlain was a skillful diplomat who was able to understand the Indians of eastern Canada and to deal with them successfully. Nevertheless, the question remains, Was the personal influence that Champlain exerted on the headman with whom he had dealings the result of special skills and a superior understanding of the situation, or was it merely the result of the military assistance that Champlain was prepared to offer these groups? In terms of their own code of diplomacy, the Indians could probably have asked for no better assurance of Champlain's friendship than his participation in their wars. Because of this, headmen no doubt were willing to overlook most shortcomings in Champlain's dealings with them.

There is considerable evidence that, even in these early days, Champlain was temperamentally incapable of understanding the Indians on their own terms. A relatively unreflective and self-centred man, he automatically used the prejudices he derived from his own culture as a yardstick for measuring other people. From an anthropologist's point of view his chief merit was his ability to observe detail, which perhaps reflects his training as a cartographer. In his willingness or ability to understand an alien way of life he falls far short of Marc Lescarbot, Gabriel Sagard and many of the Jesuits.

Although he spent an entire winter living amongst the Hurons, Champlain was unable to understand how the Indian societies of eastern Canada maintained order, relying only on consent and public opinion and without punitive sanctions being placed in the hands of some publicly-acknowledged authority. To his way of thinking such societies, by their very nature, lacked every vestige of law and government.[13] Champlain was

equally critical of the Hurons' refusal to use corporal punishment to discipline their children and his strong religious convictions led him to deny that they worshipped any god, although he admitted that they might respect the devil. Later, the Jesuits were to note that Huron society managed to function quite well, even though it lacked many European institutions, and their intellectual curiosity was to lead them to enquire how it did so. Champlain, however, lacked such curiosity.

From the first time Champlain met Indians, he believed that it was necessary to civilize them. By this, he meant that it was necessary for the Indians to adopt French habits and ways of thinking.[14] In reporting the speeches of Huron chiefs, he put into their mouths such sentiments as "we shall easily abandon our life and adopt yours, as our life is wretched in comparison with yours."[15] If such a speech was ever made, it was clearly no more than a formal reply in which Champlain's own sentiments were politely being echoed for his own benefit. Later he spoke of the need to put an end to the "filthy habits, loose morals and uncivilized ways" of the Indians and he argued that ultimately compulsion would be needed to make them change their style of life.[16]

Such attitudes may indicate no more than a rather commonplace ethnocentrism and lack of sensitivity on Champlain's part. It is, however, useless to argue that nothing different could be expected at this period, since at least one of Champlain's contemporaries who had been to Canada, Marc Lescarbot, had a much more open and self-questioning approach to native ways of life.[17] Indeed, the ethnographic writings of this early disciple of Montaigne deserve far more careful attention than they have received to date. It is clear that Champlain's attitude not only limited his understanding of the Indians but also adversely affected his ability to work with them.

While Champlain wished to travel with the Indians in the hope of exploring new territory and was willing to fight alongside them, he does not appear to have relished living even with the most sedentary and prosperous tribes. The only time that he did so was in the winter of 1615-16, but this was an accident occasioned by the refusal of the Hurons to return him to Quebec once their foray against the Iroquois was over. Bishop is probably

correct in his belief that the Huron did this because they feared that if Champlain were to travel down the St. Lawrence he might fall into the hands of the Iroquois or that he might even be planning to visit them.[18] Only a few years before, various rumours about Champlain's dealings with the Iroquois had been current among the tribes that were allied with the French.[19] At first, Champlain was afraid that the Hurons were ill-disposed towards him, but later he concluded, with characteristic lack of modesty, that they were keeping him with them over the winter to defend their villages against Iroquois reprisals.[20]

When he described the raids that he accompanied, Champlain frequently criticized the indiscipline of the Indians and their inability or refusal to carry out his orders. On his first campaign he regretted that he was unable to give orders to the Indians in their own language,[21] but thereafter he took no account that his instructions may have been badly translated or totally incomprehensible.[22] He assumed that a European's knowledge of warfare was inevitably superior to that of the Indians and that this gave him the natural right to lead them and to censure any conduct of which he did not approve.

Champlain made no effort to understand the nature of Indian warfare or even to determine why particular wars were being fought. He apparently assumed that raids were made for the same reasons that wars were fought in Europe and that differences were entirely the result of the technological and tactical inferiority of the Indians. He was especially abusive to the Indians concerning the torture, though not necessarily the killing, of prisoners, not realizing that this practice had important ritual implications. Because of his lack of understanding of Indian warfare, Champlain seriously misjudged the aims of the Huron expedition that he accompanied against one of the central Iroquois tribes in 1615 and he therefore failed to comprehend the role he was expected to play in it. For Champlain, the object was to destroy a large Iroquois village; for the Huron, it was almost certainly a traditional raid, with blood revenge as the primary goal. Champlain was furious when the Huron failed to press the attack as he had directed. The Huron, on the other hand, appear to have been interested only in forcing the warriors of the village to come out and fight with them. In Champlain's estimation the expedition was a total failure, the

more so because he himself had been wounded. Yet, reading between the lines of his description, one can see that the Hurons did not regard it as a failure at all.[23]

Champlain never believed that it was necessary for him to learn to speak an Indian language and his insensitivity about linguistic matters produced numerous misunderstandings in his dealings with the Indians. Champlain recounts how, on his first voyage to Canada in 1603, he harangued the Montagnais headman Anadabijou through an interpreter on the tenets of the Christian religion.[24] He was apparently unaware that much of the Christian terminology he was using had no equivalent in Algonkian and that therefore much of what he was saying was meaningless without detailed explanations. The irony of his behaviour was not lost on Lescarbot, who singled out this address for special ridicule.[25] Sagard reports that in 1627 an assembly of headmen reproved Champlain for never having taken the trouble to learn their language so that he could take part in their councils and communicate with them without an interpreter.[26]

Champlain was not the best judge of character, whether he was dealing with Frenchmen or Indians. On at least one occasion, he appears to have been seriously hoodwinked because he failed to take Indian policies into account and underestimated the ability of Indian leaders to devise stratagems for deceiving him. This occurred in 1613, when he travelled up the Ottawa River with Nicolas de Vignau, who had spent the winter of 1611-12 living with the Kichesipirini, or Islander Algonkins.[27] Vignau claimed to have journeyed with the Indians as far as a "Northern Sea", where he had seen the wreck of an English boat. This story appears partly authentic, because we know that the Nipissing tribe, who lived just north of the Kichesipirini, travelled as far as James Bay each year and that Henry Hudson had been cast adrift and his rebellious crew attacked by Eskimo in Hudson Bay in 1611. Therefore, even if Vignau had not reached the "Northern Sea" in person, as Trudel believes he may have,[28] he might have obtained his information from a reliable source. Champlain aimed to visit the "Northern Sea" himself, but such a trip was not to the liking of the Kichesipirini, who did not wish him to conclude alliances with tribes to the north whose trade was passing through their hands. Under extreme pressure from the Kichesipirini, Vignau was

compelled to retract the whole story. Champlain, unaware of the coercion, denounced Vignau as a liar who had been planning to murder him. The Kichesipirini, for their part, expressed the desire to kill Vignau. The wretched man was ordered not to return to the French posts and disappears from the pages of history. Champlain returned downriver describing Tessouat, the wily headman of the Kichesipirini, as a "kind old chief".[29]

Champlain also seems to have been deceived, and to have overestimated his importance, when he was asked to mediate a violent quarrel that broke out between the Ahrendarrhonon Hurons and some Algonkins of the Petite Nation who were spending the winter near the Ahrendarrhonon village of Cahiague.[30] The Huron informed Champlain that if this dispute were not settled they would be unable in future to travel downriver to trade with the French. No doubt because Champlain was a friendly ally of both parties his services as a mediator were valued but, considering the close alliance that existed between the Ahrendarrhonons and the Petite Nation, it seems clear that this dispute inevitably would have settled itself. The main reason Champlain was asked to mediate appears to have been to prevent him from joining the Nipissings, whom he had persuaded to take him north with them. Both the Hurons and the Petite Nation had a vested interest in preventing this from happening and their dispute was a useful excuse to persuade Champlain that he had to remain in Huronia.

Thus, in these early years, we see Champlain pursuing a successful policy, but with less understanding of Indian ways and less sympathy for them than many historians have claimed. His attitude was, in fact, one of notable ethnocentrism and personal inflexibility. His successes therefore appear to be attributable more to the situation than to the man. In the next section we shall see how, as the situation changed, Champlain's personal weaknesses became more apparent.

1616-1629

Champlain never again attempted to explore new regions or to accompany his Indian allies to war. At first, he offered various

excuses for his inactivity and gradually the Indians came to accept the change. Champlain was now about fifty years old and may not have been as energetic as he had been previously, but one cannot escape the suspicion that his reluctance to venture forth was a reaction to his enforced sojourn among the Hurons. Henceforth, while priests and *coureurs de bois* served as his emissaries to distant tribes, Champlain remained at Quebec.

Champlain's altered behaviour also appears to be linked to a growing tendency to view himself as a colonizer and a vice-regal official, rather than as the employee of a trading company. Henceforth he was to denounce the traders for their failure to provide settlers and adequate defences for Quebec; a failure which is only too easy to understand considering the insecure conditions under which the trading monopolies were held. Champlain had risen in rank from being a cartographer serving on other men's expeditions to being in charge of a colony which was undeveloped, but which he nevertheless dreamed might lie astride an immensely profitable trade route to the Orient. No longer young, Champlain must have seen his future closely linked to that of his colony, which he was anxious to see developed as quickly as possible. It is little wonder, under these circumstances, that fur traders who could think only of their short term profits soon became his enemies.[31]

Henceforth, the only Indians with whom Champlain was in regular contact were those who lived in the general vicinity of Tadoussac and Quebec. Other tribes are referred to in his writings only in so far as they interacted with these groups. We see Champlain seeking to utilize these groups in his schemes to develop the colony and, later, finding them a growing hindrance to his plans. In the following sections, we shall examine Champlain's policies with reference to law, subsistence patterns, political organization, intertribal and interpersonal relations.

Law

For over fifty years, the Montagnais who lived in the vicinity of Tadoussac had been trading with the Europeans. During this period they had become dependent on many imported items, including French biscuits and dried vegetables, which they

purchased with their surplus furs. Sagard informs us that by 1623 they had ceased to manufacture stone tools and birch-bark cooking vessels and that they no longer made fire by rubbing sticks together. Instead of travelling down the St. Lawrence in their frail canoes, they were buying French shallops for this purpose.[32].

The Montagnais were noted for being not only active but also clever traders. Before the monopoly was enforced, they were in the habit of driving down prices by forcing the Europeans to wait until a number of rival ships had arrived before they began trading.[33] At first, they welcomed the establishment of a permanent trading post at Quebec, as this provided them with additional protection against the Iroquois and a source of food when hunting was unproductive.[34] However, when the price of trade goods started to rise after 1614, as a result of the trading monopoly being enforced, the Montagnais began to have reservations about the French presence at Quebec.[35] Their resentment was fanned by clandestine traders who continued to offer the Montagnais goods at cheaper prices and who, as early as 1620, were selling them guns and ammunition, to the horror of the residents of Quebec.[36]

While the Montagnais recognized that certain benefits accrued from having a French settlement in their midst, it is not surprising that their resentment concerning the monopoly gave rise to occasional outbursts of individual and collective violence. In 1623, Erouachy,[37] who was the headman of one of the Montagnais bands in the Tadoussac area, ordered his followers to seize the cargo of a French vessel and to give only what they wished in return to the French. He apparently did this because he was angered by the small present that the French traders had given him. Fearing an incident, the French stood quietly to one side while their ship was plundered. That evening, the Indians judged what they had done to be impolitic and made a large reparations present to assure that the French would return the following year.[38]

In 1617, a Montagnais, apparently a man named Cherououny,[39] was attacked and beaten by a French locksmith and his companions while he was visiting the settlement at Quebec.[40] We do not know what motivated this attack, although the Indians'

habit of carrying off goods that the French left lying about in the open (and which the French interpreted as theft, although the Indians did not) frequently gave rise to quarrels. In any case, Cherououny was very angry and with the support of another Indian he resolved to kill the locksmith. When the locksmith and a friend went hunting they were both slain, although they had guns and their assailants had not, and their bodies were weighted down and thrown into the St. Lawrence.

While the motive for these killings was clearly personal, it must be observed that such murders did not occur among the Hurons, who had no alternative source of trade goods and who therefore highly valued their alliance with the French. While we must allow for Montagnais society being more loosely structured, it seems unlikely that Cherououny would have felt free to kill these men if the Montagnais as a whole had not been annoyed with the French. Champlain reports that in 1624 the Montagnais were boasting that if they killed all the French at Quebec, other vessels would come and they would get their goods more cheaply.[41]

In the spring of 1618, the bodies of the locksmith and his friend were cast up in the spring flood, and the French realized for the first time that their missing companions had been slain. Seeing the French arming themselves, the Montagnais feared blood revenge and withdrew from Quebec. Sagard says they gathered at Three Rivers, where they plotted to annihilate the French.[42] More likely they had clustered together to protect themselves until the murders were settled in the manner traditional among the tribes of eastern Canada, through the payment of blood money. This system did not inflict direct punishment on the murderer for fear that the latter's kin might decide that this action also required retribution. Yet, by requiring his relatives or tribesmen to pay out a substantial amount, these settlements imposed a burden that the murderer and his relatives would be anxious to avoid in the future. As the Jesuits were to discover, such payments constituted a highly effective form of legal sanction.

However, when Erouachy arrived at Quebec under a flag of truce, he found the French unwilling to accept the proffered reparation as a settlement for the murders. The Recollet priests were particularly insistent that, as they put it, a Christian life should not be sold for pelts. They argued that a group of people

could not accept responsibility for the actions of individuals and that to agree to such a settlement would be to legalize murder.[43] The French were, however, too few in number to enforce the death penalty. It was therefore agreed that the reparations payment should be accepted as a deposit and children required as hostages, while the final settlement of the dispute was to be deferred until Champlain returned from France that summer. When Champlain did return, he and the other French present decided not to imperil the fur trade or the lives of Frenchmen who were living among the Indians by attempting to seize and execute the murderers. The matter was thus dropped and Cherououny, although apparently provisionally pardoned, was warned never again to come to Quebec.

Because the French were unable to enforce their concept of law and unwilling to accept that of the Indians, the matter of retribution for murders could not be resolved in a manner that satisfied either group. Cherououny's reputation was enhanced because he had been able to kill two Frenchmen without his band having to pay formal reparation. The Montagnais as a whole not only disliked, but now felt able to despise, the French. Champlain was obviously unhappy about this blow to French pride and noted with bitterness that because of these killings, Cherououny had been made headman of his band.[44] Champlain's attitude towards Cherououny was one of undisguised abhorrence.

Champlain's behaviour succeeded only in fanning Cherououny's ill-will and increasing his prestige among the Montagnais. In 1622, Champlain demanded that Cherououny and his father be expelled from an important feast that he was providing for the Indians. When the other chiefs refused to ask him to leave, Champlain grew angry and threatened to shoot Cherououny if he did not depart.[45] He also snubbed Cherououny at the peace talks that were held with the Iroquois at Three Rivers soon afterwards.[46] In the summer of the following year, Erouachy informed the French that Cherououny had won the support of a majority of the Montagnais, who were planning to attack Tadoussac and Quebec.[47] Whether this story was true or was merely a rumour told to frighten the French, it had its effect. On July 30th, when the tribes had gathered to trade, Emery de Caën, who had apparently discussed the case with the King the previous

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winter, gave Cherououny an official pardon and distributed presents among the tribes to win their friendship. As a symbol of this pardon, the French threw a sword into the river. Champlain complained that this pardon would be interpreted as further evidence of the weakness of the French.[48] He appears to have been correct, for the following winter even the far-off Huron were joking that it cost little to kill a Frenchman.[49] Yet, because he failed to understand Indian justice, Champlain was unable to offer an alternative solution. Had he appreciated that accepting a reparations payment was not the same as selling a man's life, a solution might have been worked out that would both have been practical and restrained further attacks. Failing this, Champlain was bound to be frustrated and angered in his attempts to deal with Cherououny. A year later, he was describing the Montagnais as his worst enemies.

That Champlain learned very little from these first efforts to settle a legal dispute with the Indians is shown by his handling of another pair of murders committed in 1627. In October of that year, two Frenchmen were slain by Indians while they were driving cattle back to Quebec from the grazing land at Cape Tourmente. This killing was apparently the result of a quarrel between an Indian and a French baker who refused him a crust of bread. Because it was the eel-fishing season, Indians from many distant points had gathered in the vicinity of Quebec. The French were short of food and ammunition and thus fearful of any action that might lead to full-scale war with these Indians. In spite of such fears, Champlain demanded that the murderer be produced. Being informed of the probable identity of the man by Chomina,[50] a Montagnais headman much given to alcohol and possibly because of this unusually obliging to the French, Champlain demanded three children as hostages until he was produced. One child was the accused's son, the others were the sons of important headmen. He also ordered all the French to go about fully armed and to shoot any Indian who came near them without permission.[51]

The following spring, Erouachy came with the accused man to Quebec. Erouachy protested the man's innocence and hinted that he should be dealt with lightly by pointing out that many Montagnais suspected that the French had been slaying Indians

by witchcraft. This story appears to have arisen when an Indian named Mecabou died of food poisoning after being fed by Father Massé.[52] Champlain dismissed this accusation as a lie learned from Protestant traders and insisted on arresting the man and holding him for trial.[53] Such behaviour appeared especially cruel and unwarranted to the Indians, who did not imprison people and regarded such a practice with abhorrence.[54] Unused to confinment or to a French diet, the prisoner became ill and by the next spring he was unable to walk.

Erouachy alternated between threats and blandishments to try to secure the prisoner's release or to induce the French at least to treat him better.[55] No supply ships came through in 1628 and the French were desperately short of food. Therefore, when the autumn fishing was over, the Indians decided to seek the prisoner's release and to retaliate for the high prices that the French had charged them for many years, by agreeing to sell them only a small number of eels at the exorbitant price of one beaver skin for every ten eels.[56] In this manner they forced the French to pay out 120 beaver skins from their storehouse. When Champlain remained adamant about the prisoner, the Montagnais held another council and agreed to supply no food whatever to the French until the man was released. Only the obsequious Chomina, no doubt overcome in part by his thirst for alcohol, broke this agreement. When the spring came and once again no ships arrived from France, Champlain decided that it was best to release the prisoner.[57] Even so, he made an effort to get the Montagnais to agree to numerous demands that they supply food and obey his orders. In spite of their headmen's formal acceptance of these demands, Champlain doubted that they had any intention of fulfilling them. Once again, Champlain's efforts to impose French law on the Montagnais had failed.

Both of these cases demonstrate Champlain's basic inability, or his unwillingness, either to comprehend Indian customs or to accept the realities of the situation in which he found himself. In view of the fundamental differences between French and Montagnais procedures for dealing with murders, the French could only have hoped to impose their views by brute force. Yet, the Indians vastly outnumbered the French at Quebec and, moreover, had contact with independent European traders downriver. Thus,

by failing to accept the validity of Indian law, Champlain ruled out the possibility of a legal settlement which the Indians would have respected and which would have served to restrain their behaviour in the future. The result was that on two occasions, the French, after behaving in a manner that was cruel and incomprehensible to the Indians, finally dropped their claims in a manner that elicited contempt.

Subsistence Patterns

In 1615, at Champlain's request, four Recollet missionaries arrived at Quebec. Although receiving only the most grudging support from the trading company, the Recollets persevered in their work until 1629. On almost every issue, including Indian policy, Champlain and the Recollets found themselves united in opposition to the fur traders. Since the Recollets' policy towards the Indians appears to have been established already in the first year they were in Canada, one wonders to what degree Champlain had a hand in formulating this policy or whether he sought Recollet support because their preconceived ideas were in line with his own.

The Recollets assumed that a hunting and gathering way of life was incompatible with the discipline required to be good Christians. It was therefore necessary to compel wandering tribes to settle down and adopt French ways before it was possible to convert them. Finally, it was only possible to teach the Indians how to live like Frenchmen once they were settled in the midst of French colonists, who would provide a model for them and support the priests in their efforts to maintain discipline.[58] Even Sagard argued, in his later semi-official writings, that it was impractical to expect priests to accompany small bands of Indians into the bush and that it was easier to have the Indians learn French than to have priests master a multitude of native languages.[59] He also maintained that experience elsewhere had shown that Frenchmen who went to live among the Indians soon became savages, whereas the aim of the missionaries was to civilize the Indians.[60] The traders neither welcomed further pressure on them to bring settlers from France nor did they relish the idea of the Montagnais being encouraged to abandon hunting and take up

agriculture. Some of these traders informed the Recollets that if the latter attempted to settle any Montagnais near Quebec they would use force to drive these Indians away.[61]

Champlain believed that much practical good could be derived from the Recollets' policies. One of his major concerns was with the failure of the colony to be agriculturally self-sufficient; the Recollets argued that both French settlers and Indians should till the soil. Champlain also maintained that sedentary Indians could be controlled more easily and thus would be more trustworthy than they were at present. They would also be more willing to help the French to explore the interior than were those who were trying to maintain a monopoly over trade with that region. Finally, as hostages, they would assure the safety of Frenchmen who went to live among related groups that continued to hunt and fish.[62] Champlain had no scruples about using compulsion to put an end to native customs of which he did not approve, but he argued that force could only be applied successfully once the Indians had been made to settle amongst the French.[63]

In spite of Champlain's enthusiastic endorsement of Recollet policy, he made only a few tentative efforts to persuade the Indians to settle down. When Anadabijou's grandson Miristou sought Champlain's support for the leadership of his band in 1622, Champlain suggested that in return Miristou should agree that he and his followers, who numbered about thirty people, would settle near Quebec and grow corn for their own use.[64] Although these Indians were hunters and gatherers, agriculture played a marginal role in the subsistence patterns of the Algonkian-speaking tribes who lived farther up the St. Lawrence Valley and along the Ottawa River. Once the Iroquois menace had ceased, the Indians living near Three Rivers appear to have cleared land and planted crops on their own initiative.[65] Hence it is not improbable that the Montagnais had some knowledge of a rudimentary form of agriculture, even if it had played little or no role in their subsistence patterns prior to this time. Miristou and his companions cleared about seven acres of land and eventually they sowed a test plot with corn, but the experiment appears to have come to nothing. Henceforth, the missionaries attempted to persuade individual Montagnais to become farmers, but with no lasting success. The main motive that the Indians had for settling down temporarily was

their need or desire to receive material assistance. Neither Champlain nor the Recollets had the resources to provide much assistance, and because game was still relatively abundant, few Indians were willing to pay the price of even superficial conformity to demands that they should change their way of life. Moreover, the hostility of the French traders was all too evident and the Indians were ultimately far more dependent on them than they were on Champlain or the priests.[66]

Political Organization

Champlain suffered his most severe setback in his efforts to extend his influence over Montagnais politics. This was largely because he insisted on interpreting Montagnais political behaviour in terms of his own understanding of European government and thus failed to comprehend its true nature. Champlain saw power as being delegated from above and conferring authority upon office holders to exercise control over those beneath them. Champlain believed that his own authority as a vice-regal official extended by right over the Indians who were allied with the French, and in particular over the Montagnais, who lived near Quebec. In attempting to exercise this imagined authority, he assumed that the Montagnais headmen had a European type of control over their followers and hence could be held responsible for their actions.

In fact, the Montagnais were made up of a number of small patrilineal bands, each of which recognized a headman whose position frequently was passed from father to son, but only with the approval of the band. Because of their outstanding qualities, some of these headmen exercised considerable influence over the Montagnais as a whole; however, there was no official sanction for such leadership. A headman was appointed and obeyed because of his ability as a hunter, warrior or diplomat and he retained his office only as long as he continued to command the respect of his followers. No headman had the power to compel other men to obey him; instead, he had to rely on public opinion and personal consent as each new issue arose.

Champlain's first excursion into Montagnais politics occurred in 1622 when Miristou, whose father had died recently, sought

Champlain's support to become headman of his band.[67] Champlain states that several men were competing for the office. Whether or not this was so, comparative data suggest that Champlain's support alone would not have secured Miristou's election. Because headmen handled relations with other bands, it was normal for any group appointing a new leader to seek the approval of other headmen before he was installed in office. To refuse such support was to meddle in the internal business of another band; hence, under normal circumstances, approval was given as a matter of course. The rituals associated with the asking and giving of such approval served to reaffirm alliances among the groups involved. Many years later, when the Hurons asked the Jesuits to name a new headman to fill an office largely concerned with dealings with the French, the Jesuits realized that this offer was a purely formal one and returned the choice, with thanks, to the clan involved. Champlain, however, chose to interpret Miristou's request for support as evidence of his own leadership in Indian affairs. He decided to use the occasion to extract various promises from Miristou and to demand that the Montagnais recognize his right to appoint new headmen to rule over them. These promises included the one to clear land and settle down, noted above. Miristou must have been surprised at such a request, but felt that Champlain's goodwill was worth cultivating, since his father and grandfather had prided themselves on maintaining good relations between the French and the Montagnais. Champlain gave a feast at which he explained why Miristou should be appointed. Miristou and his brother were presented with swords, and it was explained to them that henceforth they were required to bear these arms in support of the French. Champlain assumed that this ceremony demonstrated his right to appoint new headmen and that he had now acquired a "certain control" over the Montagnais. The Montagnais probably viewed it as the normal sort of feast that was given by an ally to celebrate the appointment of a headman. Incomprehension must have robbed Champlain's pretensions of all significance in the eyes of the Montagnais and simultaneously averted the consequences of his folly.

Champlain did, however, push matters too far early in 1629. With a British attack imminent and without previously consulting

the Indians, Champlain demanded that a council of headmen be established, which henceforth was to regulate affairs between the French and their Algonkian-speaking allies. The Indian that Champlain insisted be appointed head of this council was Chomina,[68] the man who had obliged Champlain in 1627 by revealing the identity of the two Frenchmen's murderer and the following year, by supplying food to the French in spite of the Montagnais ban. Chomina had once been more aloof in his dealings with the French and even in 1627 had opposed the baptism of one of his children.[69] Yet Chomina and his equally alcoholic brother Negabamat were the only Indians to rush to Quebec to help defend the settlement when the British had sailed upriver the previous year.[70] Champlain no doubt hoped that by conspicuously rewarding Chomina's loyalty he would encourage other Indians to emulate him. By this time, however, most of the Montagnais had lost all respect for either Chomina or Champlain.

The other members of the council included Erouachy from Tadoussac, Batiscan from Three Rivers and Tessouat, the leader of the Kichesipirini.[71] All were highly respected headmen, who while maintaining a friendly relationship with the French, had always put the interests of their own people first. Champlain's proposal to make Chomina head of this council was an insult to them. These headmen were angered further when Champlain made their acceptance of this council and of Chomina's position on it a condition for releasing the murderer, who by now was almost dead as a result of his confinement. The headmen agreed to Chomina's appointment with the ironic comment "you have made others chiefs — so shall you make this one."[72] The Indians made little effort to conceal their resentment of Champlain. The latter had hoped to inaugurate this council formally when the ships arrived from France. As the summer wore on, only Chomina and his relatives remained at Quebec and continued to aid the French. The rest were at Tadoussac celebrating the arrival of their British liberators.

Intertribal Relations

After 1616, Champlain's interventions into intertribal affairs tended to be responses to events beyond French control rather

than new initiatives, and in later years an increasingly unrealistic element began to enter into his thinking about such matters. Champlain's main goal was to preserve peace on the St. Lawrence so that trade and contact with the interior was not interrupted. Although LeClercq mentions an Iroquois foray against Quebec in 1622,[73] the Mohawks appear to have caused little trouble on the St. Lawrence after 1610. They even abandoned their attacks along the Ottawa River once Frenchmen armed with guns began to travel to and from Huronia.[74] Desrosiers attributed this decline to losses they had suffered at the hands of the Algonkians prior to 1610 and to further defeats in skirmishes with the Susquehannocks between 1605 and 1615.[75] By 1622, the Mohawks had begun to explore seriously the possibility of a formal peace treaty with the Algonkian-speaking allies of the French.

These negotiations preceeded by only two years the outbreak of war between the Mohawks and the Mahicans, whose tribal territory surrounded the Dutch trading post at Fort Orange. It is generally assumed that this war began because the Mohawk wished to eliminate the Mahican, who were impeding or seeking to control their trade with the Dutch. There is, however, little evidence to support such a conclusion.[76]

Nevertheless, we do know that about this time the Dutch were seeking to persuade the Montagnais and the Algonkins from the Ottawa Valley to trade with them rather than with the French. To do this, they appear to have been exploiting the friendship that existed between these tribes and the Mahicans, with whom the Dutch traders had an alliance. The Dutch also controlled the sources of wampum along Long Island Sound and their ability to provide these much-desired beads served to lure the northern tribes to their posts.[77]

From a Mohawk point of view, the possibility of an alliance between the fur-rich tribes of the north, with whom they had long been at war, and the Dutch, on whom they were dependent for their trade goods, must have been extremely alarming. The Mohawks had fewer and less valuable furs to offer the Dutch and it was clear that the latter, who until that time had regarded them as being of little importance, were prepared to resort to violence if the Mohawks attempted to interfere with their plans to expand their trade northward.

Under these circumstances, the Mohawks, who had already suffered greatly in their efforts to secure a fair share of European goods, must have decided that the only course open to them was to drive the Mahicans out of the Hudson Valley. Thus, they could take control of the territory around the Dutch trading post and compel the traders, who were few in number, to make an alliance on their terms. In this manner, they would prevent the Dutch from concluding trading alliances with the northern tribes. However much the Dutch might object, this was a trade which the Mohawks would either control as middlemen or prefer to see diverted to the French.

In order to prepare for war with the Mahicans, it was obviously in the Mohawks' interest to seek peace with their other enemies, particularly those to the north. Such a peace would secure their northern flank, open up trade with the French in competition to that with the Dutch, allow an exchange of prisoners and permit hunting in the no-man's land between the Mohawk villages and the St. Lawrence River. This zone, which had long been dangerous to hunt in, was at that time overflowing with game.

Champlain was much in favour of peace with the Iroquois; this he felt would ensure the peaceful use of the St. Lawrence, open up new opportunities for the French to trade and explore in the interior, make territory safe to hunt in and possibly provide an opportunity to win the Mohawks over to the French.[78] Champlain sent presents to the Mohawk headmen as tokens of his goodwill and used his influence and that of the traders to restrain Montagnais war parties.[79] A formal peace treaty was ratified according to Indian custom in 1624, the year that war broke out between the Mohawks and the Mahicans.[80]

In 1627, however, things began to go wrong for the French. Champlain discovered that some of the Indians from Canada who had been visiting New Holland had accepted presents from the Dutch to break their peace treaty with the Mohawks. Certain headmen were inciting their followers to join the Dutch and the Mahicans in an attack on a Mohawk village.[81] At this point, Champlain became very angry and threatened to provide military assistance to the Iroquois if war should break out.[82] Many of the Algonkian chiefs were opposed to a renewal of war at this time

and Champlain and the French traders were well on the way to putting an end to the scheme when a party of young warriors treacherously captured two Mohawks who had gone fishing and began to torture them. Champlain persuaded the Algonkians to release these prisoners and to reaffirm their peace with the Mohawk.[83] A party made up of Pierre Magnan,[84] Cherououny and several others set out to do this, but were slain when they reached a Mohawk village, possibly because a Kichesipirini who disliked Cherououny informed the Mohawks that he was coming only to spy on them.[85] By this time, Mohawk fears probably had been fanned by news of the negotiations going on between the Canadian Algonkians and the Dutch.

While Champlain's official policy of promoting peace with the Iroquois had suffered an irreparable setback, he ultimately expressed few regrets about what had happened. It had probably become clear to him and to the French traders that peace with the Iroquois lessened the value of a French alliance in the eyes of the Montagnais and the other Algonkian tribes. This, in turn, encouraged them to make contact with rival European traders to the south. On the other hand, the Mohawk victory of 1628 temporarily eliminated the possibility of the Indians of the St. Lawrence Valley being able to play French and Dutch traders off against one another and thereby to lower the price of trade goods. The hostility between the tribes that were allied with the Dutch and those who were allied with the French long served to eliminate alternative sources of trade goods for each group and thus kept the prices of furs low, to the benefit of the European traders.[86]

Comforting as the new *status quo* must have been to the fur traders, Champlain was henceforth to view the Iroquois, however harmless they were to the French at the moment, as a potential threat to communications and exploration and as allies of colonial powers that menaced the existence of New France. Thus, after 1627, Champlain consistently advocated the extermination of the Iroquois. In the disastrous winter of 1628-29, he even considered that if no help came the following spring, he would go with fifty or sixty men and seize an Iroquois village. The French would then reinforce it against counter-attack and live there on the corn

they had captured until the following spring.[87] Such a dream was obviously a fantasy of desperation.

It was not a fantasy that was easily forgotten, however. When Champlain returned to New France in 1633, he was hoping to form an army of 120 French soldiers, armed with explosives, and several thousand Indian allies and to use this army to conquer the Iroquois and "impose our laws on them, giving them what laws and customs we should desire".[88] In terms of geopolitics this was not a bad plan and it was often suggested, and occasionally attempted, in later times. The failure of the plan, even when New France was many times more populous than it was in 1633, clearly shows, however, how unrealistic was Champlain's understanding of the enemy he was preparing to fight. The logic of the trader was more suited than that of the soldier to the conditions that existed at the time.

Interpersonal Relations

Champlain's final shortcoming is evident in his personal dealings with the Montagnais. In late January 1628, a band of Indians who were hard-pressed by hunger came to Quebec to seek relief, in return for which they offered to leave with the French three girls aged eleven to fifteen.[89] The priests, who had grown pessimistic about their chances of civilizing and converting Montagnais adults, had been seeking boys who they could keep and educate as Christians, in the hope that later they would form a nucleus of the faith amongst their own people. Some of these boys had been sent to France for further training, sometimes with very sad results.[90] Up to this time, however, the Montagnais had refused to turn over any girls to the French, even though a French surgeon had asked for one to educate and marry.

The band was clearly in a desperate state to be willing to make an offer of this sort, but as relations with the French were not good they probably knew that the latter would agree to feed them only if they were willing to leave some children as hostages to guarantee their good behaviour. It is possible that they offered girls because their relative, Chomina, knew that this would please Champlain.[91] The French themselves were short of provisions

and the traders were reluctant to give food away under any circumstances. Champlain feared, however, that the Indians would grow resentful if they were not fed and was anxious to secure the girls so that he might send them to France. It is uncertain whether the girls' parents were fully aware of Champlain's intentions. Because the priests could not have the girls living with them, Champlain personally undertook to look after them. He gave them the charming names of Faith, Hope and Charity.[92]

We do not know what sort of life these girls had with Champlain. In view of his wife's youth at the time he married her and the subsequent history of their marriage, it has been suggested that his interest in them was far from healthy, but there is no evidence to confirm or deny such charges. In any case, his lack of knowledge of the Montagnais language must have limited his ability to communicate with them. Moreover, the Indians in this region abhorred physical punishment as a means of controlling children, to the horror of the French, who believed that it was essential to raise them properly. Champlain informs us that he personally instructed the girls in needlework.[93] Faith quickly ran away, but the other two remained with Champlain until the capture of Quebec in 1629.

After the capture of Quebec, Champlain was determined to take the two remaining girls back to France with him, even though, under the circumstances, neither might ever see Canada again.[94] Permission was refused when Nicolas Marsolet,[95] a French Indian agent who, like so many others, preferred to stay in Canada and even to work for the British rather than to return to France, informed his new employers that a council of all the headmen and leading Indians had met at Three Rivers and demanded that the girls be returned to their parents. Marsolet also reported that the Indians were likely to harm the British if the girls were not released.

Champlain claimed that the entire story was invented by Marsolet, who was hoping to get hold of the girls for carnal reasons. Champlain states that Hope reported that Marsolet had made improper advances to her and that she had denounced him publicly in a fiery and impassioned speech.[96] It must be noted, however, that the speech has an artificial and highly theatrical

ring to it and that all or part of it may be Champlain's invention. It is more significant that Champlain wanted to offer the Indians 1000 *livres* worth of trade goods to be able to keep the girls, an offer which the British prevented him from making.

The two girls were returned to their own people and we hear no more about them. While their failure to greet Champlain on his return to Quebec in 1633 might be because both had died in the interval, Champlain's failure to mention them suggests that no fond memories of their devotion to him remained to be recorded. Champlain's adoptive parental relationship with these girls appears to be yet another, and possibly the most pathetic, of his illusions.

Conclusions

Important as Champlain's contributions to the early development of Canada have been, his dealings with the Indians were far from heroic. At all times, Champlain appears to have viewed the native peoples of the New World as a means to an end and in later years his treatment of them became increasingly callous. Champlain had no doubts about the superiority of all aspects of European civilization and was fully convinced that he had the right, and ultimately the obligation, to render the Indians subject to French control and to impose European ways upon them. In this policy, he was ably seconded by the Recollets, who believed it necessary to make "men" (that is, Frenchmen) out of "savages" before they could make them Christians. Champlain was frustrated in his dealings with the Indians by his chronic financial and military weakness, which made it impossible for him to impose his policies on the Montagnais by force.

Champlain was unwilling to make an effort to understand Indian ways except at a very superficial level. Because of this, he frequently erred in his interpretations of Indian behaviour and formulated policies that were thoroughly unrealistic and self-defeating. He failed to grasp the basic concept which was to provide the key to much of the Jesuits' success in later years — that if a small number of Europeans wish to alter the behaviour of a much larger number of people whom they are unable to control, they must seek to understand their culture and work to

change it from within. From an anthropological point of view it is a great pity that the early *coureurs de bois* or trading agents who lived with Indians, learned their languages and often intermarried with them according to local custom did not leave behind a written record of their experiences. The maintainance of good relations between the Indians and the French in these early years must have been largely their doing, and in the case of the Montagnais, they must have succeeded in spite of the ill-will that Champlain's blustering and erratic behaviour produced.

A final question that we must ask but cannot answer, in this paper: Was Champlain's treatment of the Indians the product of a not unusual ethnocentrism and an isolated facet of his personality or was it typical of his attitude towards other people in general? If it was the latter, this study may serve as the starting point for general re-evaluation of Champlain's life and works.

Notes

The research on which this paper is based was carried out while the author was the recipient of a Canada Council Leave Fellowship. Variant versions of most of the incidents discussed in this paper may be found in the early sources. Because of lack of space, it has not been possible to analyze these variants in detail; nevertheless, in each instance the conclusions are the result of a careful comparison of all the available material. Even if alternative versions were to be preferred, the major thesis of the paper would not be affected. Although this paper deals with events that took place long ago, it was my hope that Dr. Jenness would have seen in these events a portent of some of his most vital contemporary concerns.

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