JESUIT MISSIONS
IN THE
ILLINOIS COUNTRY

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The order of Jesuits had as its founder a man whose history is peculiarly interesting and romantic. The early life of Ignatius Loyola was spent at the Spanish court where he received much praise and attention. As he grew to manhood he felt that such an existence was purposeless and determined to enter military service; and it was in carrying out this resolution that, in 1521, at the early age of thirty, he received a wound which lamed him for life and destroyed his dream of a brilliant career. During his convalescence he became interested in some religious works and decided to form a new order of monks. After much opposition from his friends he began his work and soon had a number of converts. These few men had to endure much persecution and for several years were not countenanced by the pope, but he was won over by their determination to obey him and to go where he would have them and in 1540 granted the order.

This new order was named, not for its founder, but for Jesus Christ whom its members were to serve. They were called the "Society of Jesus" and later "Jesuits". Their rules were very strict and covered a wide field; one of their most characteristic vows being that of poverty. The object of the society was to teach men of Christ and especially to educate the young. The
chief or general was given great power over the subordinates and each member of the order had to take an oath of unquestioning obedience to the pope or his successors.

The first chief of this new order was naturally Loyola. He lent to the order his stern inflexible purpose to attain the ideal at which he was aiming. From the first the society had a remarkable growth, and Loyola succeeded in obtaining from the pope many privileges which no other order possessed. This naturally aroused ill feeling on the part of the others, and the Jesuits have always been anxious to stimulate such antagonism. As the order increased in numbers there was better opportunity for those less sincere in their purpose to get in, until it became quite corrupted from its original state. The vows were broken with impunity, especially those of chastity and of poverty.

Soon after the foundation of their order the Jesuits began missionary work and rapidly gained a most powerful influence all through Europe, and then carried this influence into Asia and Africa. They attempted work in several sections of North America but it was among the French colonies that Jesuit missions prospered.

Early in the history of the French settlements Henry IV. asked that Jesuits be sent to Canada to labor with the Indians, but it was not until 1611 that a Jesuit mission was established on what is now the coast of Maine. Its existence was very short as the English under Argal attacked and destroyed the little settlement. The second Jesuit mission in Canada was begun in 1632 under the protection of the French government, because the
Recollects had refused to attempt alone the vast work in Canada. Here the Jesuits found before them a great field and a grand opportunity for extending their faith. They laid ambitious plans for reaching the Indian tribes around and even far to the West. Among the Iroquois they met with little success and great opposition, but did not give up readily; Among the Hurons they were more favorably received and established several missions from which they worked their way westward. In 1663, Father Allouez reached the western point of Lake Superior where he founded a vigorous mission and from it was started a number of expeditions to explore the then western country.

The Jesuit fathers were fond of exploration and were not only desirous of planting the Catholic faith among these wild people but also of winning to themselves renown for their discoveries and commendation from the government for the services they rendered. They were far from being on friendly terms with other Catholic orders, and were especially antagonistic to the Recollects. Because they were favored by the French government, and because their rules were more flexible than those of other orders they were able to extend themselves more rapidly and to win to their cause the Indians, as the other orders could not.

In 1669, Father Marquette came to the mission on Lake Superior where he learned of the Illinois country, through some of the Indians who came to the mission, and conceived a strong desire to work in that country.

The country claimed and occupied by these Indians extended

along the Illinois River from the Kankakee and Desplaines rivers to the Mississippi and even to some extent on the West side of it. From the Illinois River on the North it extended to the Ohio on the South, thus covering a large tract of land described by the early missionaries as rich and beautiful. The part of this country which the Illinois Indians favored was the northern and central, where hills, beautiful rivers and lakes were found. The marshes were said to abound in roots useful as food; the potatoes were considered good; and the trees were tall and fine. Apple, wild plum, mulberry and nut trees were found in abundance; peach trees had been imported from the South, and there were grapes of a moderately good quality. Few fruit trees were found about the villages because the Indians felt that it was less trouble to chop a tree down to get at the fruit than it was to obtain it in any other way. The game was also very plentiful in this region, buffaloes and roebucks being seen in great herds, bears were numerous, and swans, ducks, bustards and wild turkeys were found in abundance. It has been said that there were seventeen Indian villages in all this region, the largest being La Ventum, which in 1680 had a population of seven or eight thousand.

The Illinois were tall of stature, strong and robust, very active and have been called the swiftest runners in the world. Their name "Illinois" means "superior men". They were very proud.

## Reynolds, Pioneer History of Illinois, p.5.
and haughty, and absolute masters of themselves so that they were not subject to law. They had chiefs but these men had no real authority and commanded no respect, except when they had something with which to make a feast. The men were lazy; treacherous, fickle, deceitful and thievish; without honor or truth, ready to promise anything to any one who would be liberal with them; but at the same time thankless for favors and only made more arrogant by them. They felt that to acquire the good opinion of the public one must gain a reputation as a good hunter, or more especially as a brave warrior. They hesitated to undergo no hardship or danger if there was any hope of obtaining glory thereby. When a warrior returned to his country with many scalps he received great honor, but he covered himself with glory if he brought home a prisoner; who was used most brutally until such a time as the old men had assembled and decided whether or not he might live. In case he was so fortunate as that, he was adopted into some wigwam from which a warrior had been killed. This was called reviving the dead. In case he was doomed to die, his torture was most brutal and agonizing. The more pain he could be made to manifest the more the savages delighted in his suffering.

The chase and war were almost the sole occupations of the men; their chief arms were arrows which they used with great skill. The rest of the work fell on the women. They built the wigwams, prepared the ground for sowing grain, pounded the corn for food, did the cooking, and on the journeys bore the burdens. When the women were not busy with such work they occupied their time in

# Charlevoix, History of New France, Vol. 5. p. 130.
making ornaments of buffalo hair, beads, stones, etc., toiling all the time like slaves.

When the men were not engaged in war or the chase their time was largely passed in games, feasting or dancing. They had two kinds of dances; one of joy in which the most distinguished women were allowed to take part; and one of grief at the death of some person of the nation. This last was kept up a greater or less time according to the value of the presents offered by the friends of the dead to the dancers. The most magnificent festival they knew was a feast of the dogs, called the feast of the chiefs. It was in a feast of this kind that they deliberated on their most important affairs. After the chief had delivered what might be considered an address, plates were passed, one plate to two guests, they then ate while they discussed the matter and when through carried what still remained on the plates with them.

The Iroquois were the only ones of their neighbors whom they feared and they were feared by all the tribes around. They had defeated the Illinois several times before the French came to their country and the Illinois were only too glad of the new alliance for protection.

The French had had almost no relations with the Illinois Indians before the missions were started among them. A few traders had visited them, and some of the Indians had been at the missions at Green Bay and La Pointe; so that the nation had learned of the French and were prepared to receive the mission-
aries in a friendly manner. It was thought by some of the fathers a good thing for the Illinois that they were situated so far from Quebec that it was difficult to get them the fire water which would make them so brutal and unmanageable; so that it would seem the missionaries, when they first came among this people did not have to strive against the evil influences of the French as they did in so many places.

The first missionary to this people was Father Jacques Marquette, who was born in France 1637. His mother was a woman of marked piety and from her he imbibed a warm affection for the Virgin Mary which characterized him all through his life. At the early age of seventeen he joined the order of Jesuits and as soon as he attained to the priesthood became desirous of doing a noble service for his God in some mission. So in 1666 he was sent to Canada.

At the time of his arrival the interest in western missions was growing and Marquette was sent to Lake Superior where in 1668 he founded the mission of Sault St. Marie. Here he was joined by D'Ablon and labored successfully for about a year when he was sent onward to La Pointe; while here he heard of the Illinois country and people and met some of the Indians. He became interested in them and their account of their country and was filled with a strong desire to go to work among them. At this time the

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## Shea, Discovery and Explorations of the Mississippi, p. 42.
reports of a great river in the West were becoming more numerous and definite, and when in 1673 Marquette had an opportunity to go with Joliet in search of this great river he gladly accepted, in hopes of meeting with the Illinois on his journey. And he was not disappointed for on their way down the Mississippi they came near an Illinois village, and again on their way back stopped on the Illinois River. Marquette told the people of his great desire to come to teach them and was eagerly urged by them to remain; but he felt he must go on then and return to these people later.

In the Fall of 1674 he set out to go to the village of Kaskaskia then situated on the upper Illinois River. He became ill on the way and had to remain near the present site of Chicago during the Winter. In the Spring he was able to continue his journey and in April reached the Indians who were so eagerly watching for his coming. His constitution had been completely undermined by his travel and exposures and he was hardly able to undertake the duties of his office. For a few days he remained with this people preaching and teaching as he was able, but his disease became so troublesome that he was forced to give up his labors before he had done much to found the mission he had so longed to form, and to which he gave the name of the Mission of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin. He started to return to an older mission at what is now Mackinaw, where he

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hoped to receive help, but died on the way. His piety and zeal caused him to be regarded as a saint by both Indians and whites and his repute increased after his death. His distinguishing characteristics seem to have been a sweet, gentle, courageous disposition stimulated to noble action by his wonderful devotion to the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin.

This little mission which hardly deserved the name of mission was next taken up by Father Allouez who had come from France in 1658. He was not a man of great learning or refinement, but his zeal and courage were great and his devotion to the cause of Christ was no less real and intense than that of others whose names are remembered with more reverence. When he came to Quebec it was his great desire to go to the Indians in the West and so for several years he spent his time organizing missions along the Lakes.

He reached Kaskaskia shortly after Marquette left and at once erected a cross twenty-five feet high about which he gathered the Indians to preach to them. At the approach of La Salle to this neighborhood he retired leaving the mission without a priest until 1684 when he returned and remained at the village for three years. He was the ablest of all the missionaries sent to the West and he has been called the apostle of the West. He was a man of admirable character; no charge of unfairness, jealousy.

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or mistrust was ever brought against him. It is thought his last
visit to Illinois was made in 1689 and in August of this same
year he died in about his seventy-fifth year.

Again this mission was to be left for a time without a head,
but the next year, 1690 Gravier was sent out. He remained until
1692 when he was succeeded by Rasle, a learned and most devoted
missionary, who had been laboring in Maine, and after two years
work in Illinois went to the East again - then Gravier returned
for a year's work. He has been called the founder of Illinois mis-
sions because he was the first one to reduce the Illinois lan-
guage to grammatical rules and to make preaching to them avail.
It was his labor that assured the continuance of the mission. He
did some work among the Peorias as well and was anxious to reach
the Cahokias and Tamaroras, but was unable to make them more than
a single brief visit. In 1699 he was recalled and went to Quebec
leaving fathers Binneteau and Pinet in charge of the work.

About this time the Iroquois began to crowd upon the Illinois
and the whole tribe started to go to the mouth of the Mississippi
taking their missionaries with them. In the years 1700 and 1701,
Gravier made a trip through the country and met these Indians as
they were starting to move. He was opposed to the movement, but was
unable to prevent it entirely, although the tribe did stop at the
present site of Kaskaskia where they settled under the charge

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# Shea, Discovery and Exploration of the Mississippi, p.69.
#I Moses, Illinois, Historical and Statistical, Vol.I.p.84.
#2 Perkins, Annals of the West, p.55.
#3 Moses, Illinois, Historical and Statistical, Vol.I.p.84.
of Mermet who had meanwhile joined them. The mission was now firmly established and the tribe finally settled at Kaskaskia where they were joined by a large number of French who intermarried with the Indians, forming a mixed population which within twenty years had become so large that a parish was formed.

During the last few years before the founding of the parish Marest and Mermet, who was called the soul of the nation, labored here diligently. The records of this parish have been pretty well preserved and from them we learn that a large number of priests labored here during the years that followed and that Kaskaskia became quite a little town.

After Gravier had seen Kaskaskia moved he went to Peoria where he was ill-treated by the medicine men and received a wound which resulted in his death a few years later. For this crime Peoria was left without a missionary. Because by this they were practically cut off from French trade, the Peorias asked for another missionary, promising to behave better, Father Deville was sent to them, but it is not known how long he or his successors remained.

At Cahokia the first mission was founded by Rev. James Pinet, up to 1699 no black gown, except Gravier, had ever visited them, but the next year they had three missionaries, Rev. Bergier, who had charge of the French, and fathers Pinet and

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Lamoges who discharged the functions of missionaries to the Indians. At this time the Tamaroras had taken up their residence two leagues below the village and the Cahokias were four above. The village was called Ste. Famille de Caoquias, and the mission, the mission of St. Sulpice. From this time on through the French possession this mission was continuously occupied by the Jesuits.

These Jesuits were usually men of strong character kindled with a great enthusiasm to spread the gospel of Jesus over the world, and stimulated by a strong love of adventure and a desire to win for France this rich western land. They went out to this wild people with the spirit of martyrs and looked forward complacently to a death of violence. They had much to suffer from the hands of these people whom they longed to serve and their wandering mode of life was often painful and even dangerous to health; but they bore all without complaint, working with zeal and giving all the glory to God. By their friendly and humane attitude toward the Indians they won their hearts and influenced their lives as much as such a thing was possible. The time when the missionaries were especially needed was when the tribe broke up for its season of hunting; and this was also the time when the work was most difficult, but unless their teachers remained constantly with them these poor savages soon forgot their good lessons, and readily took on their old habits.

When the tribe was in the village there was usually a settled rule for the religious services which was adhered to by all.

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# Walker, The Mississippi Valley, p. 177.
We are told that at Kaskaskia the pupils attended church at early dawn neatly and modestly dressed in a large deer skin. After their lessons they chanted the canticles; then mass was said in the presence of the French and the converts. From this prayer and instruction the missionaries proceeded to visit the sick, and it was often through the medical help they could give and the suffering they were able to relieve that they won the confidence of those Indians whom they could reach in no other way. In the afternoon the catechism was taught to both young and old; the most noticeable fact about this being that there was none,—not even the great medicine men who were the most opposed to the missionaries—who did not send their children to this service. In the evening all again assembled at the chapel for instruction, prayer and hymns, completing a day full of effort and exertion for the missionaries. Saturday and Sunday were the days for confession and communion. Every convert confessed once in two weeks. The name the Indians gave to Christianity was prayer, showing the narrowness of the conception their minds were able to form of the great truths they were taught. They seemed always to listen gladly to what the missionaries had to say taking the same pleasure in it the French would have taken in a romance.

# Brown, History of Illinois, p. 145.
A warm friendship sprung up between the French and Illinois, which lasted throughout their relations and was strengthened by the work of the Jesuits but the religions they taught could not have a marked influence on the lives of the Indians. The women, depressed by their daily toil were more docile to the truths of the gospel than were the men whose lives varied by hunting, war, or idleness rendered them unfit to submit to the gospel. They would have been more ready to embrace it if it had permitted polygamy, but they found they had to turn from their evil ways, for they had first to be made men, and then Christians.

The later missionaries reported that the people had been somewhat civilized by the teachings of Christianity, and that they had become gentle and docile. Often they were possessed with an ardor for the practice of the Christian virtues, and sometimes the missionaries were rewarded with some of as striking examples of Christian virtue as was to be met with in any of the missions of Canada. This was especially true in Kaskaskia where in 1715 nearly all the inhabitants were called Christians and where also there was a large settlement of French traders who had inter-married with the Indians. The influence of the medicine men everywhere worked strongly against Christianity, as they often refused to treat one who had accepted it, and even insulted them and the missionaries.

If the French who settled among these Indians were docile and religious they helped the Indians, but if they were irreligious they weakened very materially the influence of the missionaries. One of the things which seems to show the success of the missionaries was the friendly way in which the French and Indians lived together and the number of inter-marriages that were performed according to the rites of the Catholic church.

French settlement in the West grew more rapidly than in Canada. In 1721 Kaskaskia was the capital of the country. Fort Chartres later became the capital and was one of the most formidable posts on the continent. These missions and French posts in the Illinois country were a part of the system of posts from Canada to Louisiana; and were of great importance to French trade with the Indians. In 1730 the settlements on the Illinois embraced one hundred and forty families of which six hundred members were converted Indians. There were among this number of families many traders. This seems a poor showing for such a length of time since settlement began, but the trader was opposed to settlement because it meant the destruction of his trade, and the Jesuit was opposed to it because it meant the destruction of his mission field. Later the Jesuits became ambitious of wealth and power

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# Hinsdale, Old North West p. 47.
#1 Hinsdale, Old North West p. 45.
#2 Hinsdale, Old North West p. 46.
#3 Walker, The Mississippi Valley p. 182.
and lost their great religious zeal for the conversion of the inhabitants of the Mississippi valley whom for the most part they found rather unpromising material for organizing strong communities. This worked with other causes to prevent the French possession of the Mississippi valley from being much more than nominal.

It depends on the aim we consider as to how far these missions were successful. There were few adults who tried to lead Christian lives. The comfort of most of the missionaries was to baptize a baby and thus save an innocent soul. They for the most part did not succeed in teaching the precepts which made the tribe less war like. In 1750 it was said that in Kaskaskia all the Indian families had been baptized except five or six, but that fire water had caused a great number to abandon their religion. Father Louis Verier felt that the greatest good a missionary could do was to administer baptism to children at the point of death. By 1765 the Cahokias had abandoned their religion and the Kaskaskias were the only ones who had preserved it at all well.

The failure seems to have been due to two causes, the methods of the missionaries, and the Indians themselves. The missionaries tried to keep the Indians in their old life and make them Christians, and failed to comprehend the fact that they could not become Christians and recognize law and authority unless they first recognized civil law, and this was what the missionaries tried to keep from them. The Indians themselves were not capable

of understanding and comprehending Christianity. They would be baptized ten times a day for a pint of brandy. They were easily influenced by the traders and this influence was for the most part degrading; so that the missionaries had much to contend against and their success must be generously measured.

When this country came into the possession of the English the new protestant English missionaries had no better success with the Illinois, and as civilization moved westward they were crowded on. In 1803 they had become deteriorated mentally and morally from drunkenness. They were dispossessed of their property in Illinois and went to the reservation in Indian Territory where in 1885 there were one hundred and forty-nine living under the name of Peorias. They were reported to be for the most part an active, well to do race of farmers, living in frame houses, and had evidently lost all race lines.

#2 " " " " " " Vol. I. p. 44.
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