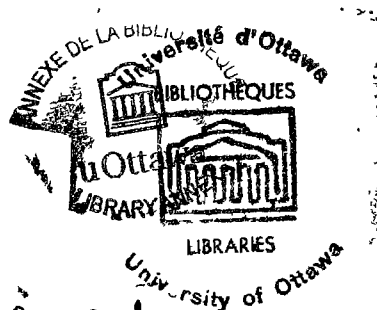


BREBEUF AND HIS BRETHREN: A GREAT CANADIAN POEM

by
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Thesis presented to the Faculty of Arts
of the University of Ottawa through the
Department of English in partial fulfil-
ment of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Arts.



Degree conferred May 22, 1958

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Secret. Graduate Division

Nanaimo, British Columbia, 1957

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This thesis was prepared under the guidance of the Director of the English Department, Doctor Emmett O'Grady.

The writer would like to express her gratitude to Doctor O'Grady for the interest he has shown in the thesis and for the helpful suggestions he has made for its improvement.

CURRICULUM STUDIORUM

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INTRODUCTION

Considerable attention has been given of late years to the poetry of Dr. E. J. Pratt. This is but just and necessary since Pratt is undoubtedly an original poet whose work is deserving of careful attention. It is the purpose of this thesis to study in particular one poem out of the whole body of Dr. Pratt's work, his epic of the Jesuit Martyrs, Brébeuf and His Brethren.

In their biographical and literary study¹, Henry W. Wells and Carl F. Klinck have treated this poem in both sections of the book, but they have not made a complete survey of its literary value. In Part Two, Chapter III, The Religious Epic, Mr. Wells makes a rather general study of the poem from the point of view given by the title of the chapter. He compares Brébeuf with a French lai, The Song of Roland, but makes no attempt to measure its value as a presentation of Canadian history, nor does he compare it with any Canadian poem of like subject-matter. In his book, On Canadian Poetry, Dr. E. K. Brown treats the poem briefly in the section E. J. Pratt. But, again, this is not a detailed study nor is it an essay at full literary criticism. In the series of biographies of

¹ Henry W. Wells and Carl F. Klinck, Edwin J. Pratt, Toronto, Ontario, The Ryerson Press, 1947.

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our writers, Leading Canadian Poets, edited by W. P. Percival, the section on Pratt is written by Dr. Pelham Edgar and in this criticism, necessarily brief, Brébeuf and His Brethren is dismissed in two paragraphs which make no attempt at analysis or evaluation. Reviews and articles written at the time of its publication and also those written on the appearance of Collected Poems praise the poem highly but do not study it fully. This thesis, then, will aim at a true and complete evaluation of the poem.

Brébeuf and His Brethren will be treated as a presentation of Canadian history and as a contribution to Canadian poetry. This will necessitate a study of its historical accuracy, its poetic form, its value in comparison with other Canadian poems of like or related subject-matter, its acceptance by Canadians and, finally, its place in the work of its author.

Dr. Pratt was born, February 4, 1883, at Western Bay, Newfoundland, the son of a Methodist minister. According to Methodist practice, the minister moved every third year from one village to another, so in this way the young Ned saw much of the Newfoundland coast and its people. His life in these fishing villages has furnished the background and also many of the details which make his sea poems so realistic. After completing his elementary school studies, Pratt gained some experience in salesman-

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ship as an apprentice in a draper's shop at St. John's. In 1903, after two years of High School work, he began to teach at Moreton's Harbour, and also to preach at the fishing villages of the Methodist circuit. Although he enjoyed meeting the people and used many of them later as characters in his poems of Newfoundland life, he found the work of a probationer to the ministry hard, especially when it was his duty to inform a family of their loss through a drowning, an all too frequent occurrence on that forbidding coast.

In 1907 Pratt began his studies at the University of Toronto. He graduated in Arts in 1911, obtained a Bachelor of Divinity degree in 1913 and a Doctorate in Philosophy in 1917. For six years, while following graduate studies and after, he lectured in the Department of Psychology at the university. At the suggestion of Dr. Pelham Edgar, he was, in 1919, appointed to the Department of English at Victoria College.

Before this appointment Pratt had written two books of poetry, Rachel, a narrative poem with a Newfoundland setting, and Clay, a long lyrical drama. The first of these was privately printed by a friend; the second, with the exception of one copy, was destroyed by the author. With the publication, in 1923, of A Book of

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Newfoundland Verse, Dr. Pratt took the first important step towards the position he now holds in Canadian letters.

In studying the work of Dr. Pratt we find that in many ways he is worthy of note. A fresh and original writer, he has been content to accept the somewhat limited honours that can be expected in this country, which has still to find its true literary level, instead of deserting us for more lucrative fields where recognition and returns are more generous and more complete. Again, as Professor of English Literature in one of our largest and most influential universities, Dr. Pratt could have gathered around him a school of disciples for achievements such as his could have won at least the tribute of imitation. But Dr. Pratt believes in integrity, not only for his own literary work, but also for that of his students. He would encourage them in their efforts, but their success must come of their own inspiration, not through imitation of others. He has written much and written well and has thereby set a standard which is encouraging and challenging to younger writers.

A major poet must necessarily produce original work of a high standard and in a considerable quantity. Dr. E. J. Pratt may claim this title for he fulfills all three requirements. Author of fourteen published volumes of verse including the privately printed Rachel, and having

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made one collection of his poems, Pratt can lay claim to recognition for the quantity of his work. But this work is also noteworthy for its quality, and for its outstanding characteristics of freshness, vigour and originality. Because of this high standard Pratt merits consideration as Canada's leading poet. The quality of his poetry in general will be dealt with in a later section when the place held by Brébeuf and His Brethren in Dr. Pratt's work will be estimated. The general biography of the author has been ably given by others², so this thesis, in its opening chapter, will confine itself to a brief glance at those incidents in Dr. Pratt's life which have had some bearing, either directly or indirectly, on the writing of Brébeuf and His Brethren.

² Wells and Klinck, op. cit., p. 3-38.

Edward K. Brown, On Canadian Poetry, Toronto, Ontario, The Ryerson Press, revised edition, 1944, p.143-164

CHAPTER I

BASIS OF EVALUATION

Brébeuf and His Brethren is a great Canadian poem and its position as such rests on a threefold excellence,-- it is a necessary expression of the thought of its author, it is a worthwhile representation of noble incidents in Canadian history, and it is an example of the best poetry that is being written in Canada to-day.

There are several circumstances in the author's life which have undoubtedly had some influence, direct or indirect, on the writing of this poem. Son of a Methodist clergyman, Edwin J. Pratt grew up in a home where the service of others was a dominant motive. In his formative years when he could have chosen a career in the business world of the capital city, he followed a higher inspiration and chose teaching and student preaching with the ministry in view. The parishes of the Newfoundland villages were poor and the people were simple, hard-working fisher folk. To them life was hard and death was not a poetic representation but a grim reality that must be met and measured in the daily struggle to bring in the harvest of the sea. Every now and then, through storm or fatal accident, some breadwinner was snatched from his family and then the minister had the difficult task of informing or consoling

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those he had left. No man, with any humanity in him, could live through such scenes in his formative years without developing a deep understanding of his fellowmen, a sympathy for them in their struggle to earn a living, a readiness to laugh with them when things went well and to sorrow with them in time of loss. All this makes for compassion, a bond with all humanity, and compassion is one of Dr. Pratt's noteworthy characteristics. It is this universal sympathy which gives his poetry its wide appeal.

Although differing in religious affiliation, he, as a minister, knew something of the attitude of the Jesuits to those among whom they laboured, their kindness to the Indians and their understanding of tribal traditions and training even when these found expression in revolting cruelty. Pratt, consoler of widows and orphans during his ministry, understood the unselfish service given by the missionaries to their charges when plague or famine brought suffering to the rude homes.

Dr. Pratt studied philosophy and psychology at the University of Toronto and taught psychology there for six years. To a man with this background the impact of the highly trained Jesuits on the ignorant and suspicious natives must have been an extremely interesting study. Interesting, too, would be the attitude of the gentle and compassionate priests to the savagely inflicted tortures

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which they were forced to witness and which they knew would be their own lot on the slightest and most unpredictable excuse. Pratt has understood all this and expressed it with notable clarity in his poem.

Endowed with a natural vigour, a convivial friendliness and a sense of humour, Pratt brings these qualities into play in his writing. His vigour shows itself in his poetry, not only in his choice of matter, but also in his manner of treating it. Action against odds on a grand and heroic scale is his favourite subject whether he is describing the struggles of men, animals or ships. It is but natural that the greatest epic incident in our history would appeal to such a poet. He likes his fellowmen and enjoys their company. He understands and appreciates the fraternal union of the missionaries as they work together:

Peace, union and tranquility are here
Between the members of our Order. . .¹

His appreciation of this brotherly love is shown also in the title he has chosen for his poem.

At first glance a sense of humour might seem to be out of place in writing about martyrdom. But in the daily lives of the missionaries amusing incidents provide the

¹ E. J. Pratt, Brébeuf and His Brethren, in Collected Poems, Toronto, Ontario, The Macmillan Company of Canada, second edition, 1946, p. 82.

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necessary relief from tension. Dr. Pratt enjoys the humour of these incidents and knows how to use them in his poem;-- the size of Brébeuf, "high as a totem-pole,"² the amazement of the Indians at the power of a magnifying glass,³ their admiration for the striking clock, "Le Capitaine du Jour,"⁴ their mystification at the white man's ability to understand a written message,⁵ even the contrast between the polysyllabic Indian name "Tsiouendaentaha" and the man's Christian name "Peter"⁶ brings a smile. Pratt's innate sense of humour which had expressed itself in the rollicking fun of The Witches' Brew now comes to his service here for these incidents, historically correct in detail, give the necessary comic relief and keep the poem from becoming too tense and overstrained.

Thus we see that Brébeuf and His Brethren is an expression of the things in life that have touched Pratt most closely and of those qualities which draw him nearer to his fellowmen. His energetic disposition, his natural sympathy, his interest in events which measure man's stature, his deep religious training, and his considerable missionary experience all form a natural background for a

² Pratt, op. cit., p. 41.

³ Ibid., p. 49.

⁴ Ibid., p. 50.

⁵ Ibid., p. 50.

⁶ Ibid., p. 51.

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thorough understanding and full appreciation of the most sublime chapter in our Canadian history,--the epic story of the Jesuit Martyrs. A man who is in love with life, as we see in The Titanic or The Cachalot; one who feels deeply for another's pain as shown in Erosion or To An Enemy; one who is impressed by the innate nobility in the common man, as exemplified in Dunkirk, could not fail to be inspired by greatness of soul in those who dare to work for God, not for a brief time only, but through years of stress and disappointment and heartbreak with hatred and suspicion as daily companions and the certainty of death in its most hideous form as their only earthly reward. A story such as this is a challenge to a great-hearted man and Dr. Pratt has met this challenge with a poem worthy of its inspiration.

This inspiration is found not in legend or in make-believe, but in the actual written history of the earliest missions in what is now Canada. Dr. Pratt has given us a well-authenticated study of the inspiring lives and noble deaths of a group of men who laboured among the aborigines of Canada and who died in that part of Ontario that has been called "Huronian," or in the former Mohawk territory that is now the central part of the eastern section of New York State. Huronia is our name for that area extending westward from Lake Simcoe to Lake Huron, northward to Georgian Bay and southward to Lake Erie, a region known to the

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priests of that time as the Mission to the Hurons. This included the lands of the Petuns and Neutrals as well as the relatively small area occupied by the Huron nation.

The Jesuit missionaries working in this territory and elsewhere sent each year to their Superior General an account of the work in progress and its success or failure. They described in great detail their methods of approaching the natives and the response given by the Indians. Maps and sketches accompanied the accounts which gave descriptions, not only of the people among whom they were working, but also of geographical details. They recorded as much Indian history as could be obtained. These reports, or Relations, are now a gold mine to the antiquarian or to the student of this period of our country's history. It was from this primary source that Pratt obtained the details as well as the over-all picture of the work of the missionaries. The value and veracity of these sources will be dealt with later.

These accounts are, indeed, Canadian history in the truest sense of the term, for the first two hundred years and more of our history is that of French Canada moulded and shaped by explorers, Governors, traders and soldiers, but also by missionaries, notably the Jesuits. Their knowledge of the country and its savage inhabitants was, on the whole, greater than that of the leaders at Quebec for

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it was the first-hand knowledge of direct contact. In their thirst for souls they ventured into regions where only the most reckless explorers dared penetrate and, in many cases, notably that of Father Marquette, they were the first white men to reach uncharted lakes and rivers. The story of their journeys, their work, their lives and deaths is an absorbing chapter in our history, a chapter which captures the imagination of even the most indifferent reader.

Having dealt with bravery on the sea in The Titanic and The Roosevelt and the Antinoe, Pratt found in these pages of our history an even greater bravery for the theme of his most inspiring work. It is a noteworthy fact that this poem was written during the war years when its appearance encouraged Canadians to emulate the bravery of these heroes and also served to unite French and English, Catholic and Protestant in common pride of this page from our past.

Although some incidents are localized in what is now the State of New York, these must also be classed as Canadian history, for their chief actors were Frenchmen who belonged to the colony of New France and who were subject to the authority of its Governor and to that of the Superior of the Jesuit missions. At that time this colony was often called Canada, and it was destined to be recog-

nized officially under that name a little more than a hundred years later. The martyrdom of Isaac Jogues and John de Lalande was actually the direct result of Montmagny's request that Jogues, knowing the territory and its people through his previous enslavement, would act as ambassador in what seemed to be a genuine offer of peace from the Mohawks at Ossernenon, prophetically named Mission of the Martyrs.

But Brébeuf and His Brethren is also poetry. Man's noblest achievements have always been matter for poetry from the days when Homer sang of Troy, and the story of these missionaries is one that uplifts the mind and arouses even the indifferent to sympathy. Pratt is noted for his dramatic narrative poetry, he knows how to tell a story and tell it well.

For over a hundred years descriptive nature poetry was predominant in Canadian writing. Some of it was good, even very good, for we can quote Archibald Lampman, Bliss Carman, Sir Charles G. D. Roberts, Duncan Campbell Scott and others in proof. But our literature needed something more. It needed the freshness and originality in subject-matter and treatment that has come to it in the longer poems of Duncan Campbell Scott, Earle Birney, and, notably, in those of E. J. Pratt. In Canada man is conscious of his physical environment, not only in its beauty but also in

its harshness which often necessitates a struggle with the elements, with forbidding regions, or with the savagery of native tribes.⁷ By one poet or another each of these factors has been presented. But Pratt deals with them all and, in Brébeuf and His Brethren, includes them all in one poem. In this poem beauty of description has been subordinated to the dramatic effect. There is beauty in the Indian place names and Pratt has used these words to their best advantage. Here and there we come upon a lyrical passage of great beauty. There are briefly expressed allusions to the loveliness of the natural setting. These are, for the most part, used for contrast with the harshness of the missionaries' life, or, when their work begins to meet with success, the beauty of nature seems to indicate that even the landscape is now smiling a welcome. These passages will be noted in detail at a later point. As an example of the lyric possibilities of this poem consider the opening lines, noting especially the musical quality of the last two lines:

The winds of God were blowing over France,
Kindling the hearths and altars, changing vows
Of rote into an alphabet of flame,
The air was charged with song beyond the range
Of larks, with wings beyond the stretch of eagles.⁸

⁷ Desmond Pacey, Creative Writing in Canada, Toronto, Ontario, The Ryerson Press, 1952, pp. 2 and 202.

⁸ Pratt, op. cit., p. 36.

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Although there are passages in which the historical details make heavier reading and the lines drag, this lyric note is caught again and again throughout the poem making the blank verse sing with a rare beauty until, in the sublime and moving epilogue, a unique perfection of mood and expression is reached. Dr. E. K. Brown thinks that Pratt "has never surpassed the tone and feeling that mark the conclusion of Brébeuf and His Brethren."⁹ Others, notably Desmond Pacey, prefer the lines just before this in which the climax is reached. Dr. Pacey gives this section high praise, indeed, for he says, "The poem moves quietly but firmly to a climax which forms the high-water mark of poetic achievement in Canada."¹⁰

But the poetic value must be dealt with in more detail than can be given in this introductory chapter which offers only a survey of the field to be studied. The poem has been found to be a necessary expression of the poet's personal experiences and temperament. As a contribution to Canadian literature, it has historic and literary value. Full attention will be given to each of these values in turn. Brébeuf and His Brethren will now be considered as a presentation of Canadian history.

⁹ Brown, op. cit., p. 156 ¹⁰ Pacey, op. cit., p. 122.

CHAPTER II

THE POEM AS CANADIAN HISTORY

All peoples have their heroes whose deeds furnish themes for poetry and song. Some heroes are almost purely mythical creations, some are historical characters whose exploits have grown with the centuries until they are of incredible magnitude, some are national leaders whose lives have been interpreted by others but who have left no personal record of their own thoughts and aspirations. Thus English literature has its Beowulf, its King Arthur and its Robert Bruce. But Canada has, in her Jesuit Martyrs, heroes whose bravery under the test of torture unto death is so great as to appear mythical but whose daily lives were sublimated by the white flame of sanctity and who wrote the story of their successes and failures, their hopes and fears, for all men to read. It is from this unique record that the poem Brébeuf and His Brethren has been developed. Here is poetry solidly based on history.

The Jesuit missionaries were intelligent men, trained in some of the best colleges of their time. They had held teaching or administrative posts in these colleges before going into the forests of New France to evangelize the savages. In order to help one another in the work

and to guide those who would come later to the mission field, they kept careful notes on everything that might lead to an understanding of the native peoples who had no written records of their own. These missionaries were the first white men to have prolonged contact with the Indians of Huronia and neighbouring districts before these natives, under the impact of another civilization, had lost their individuality. This first-hand knowledge was recorded in the remarkable series of letters known as the Jesuit Relations "which are, for historian, geographer, and ethnologist, among our first and best authorities."¹ These letters are simple friendly accounts of their work and its results sent by the missionaries to their superiors. The custom of writing reports had been started in the Society of Jesus by St. Francis Xavier who instructed his companions in the Far East to send to their higher superiors "such news as when known in Europe would make everyone that heard it give glory to God."² The letters sent from Canada were of interest not only to the members of the Society but also to the people of France so, from 1632 to

¹ Reuben Gold Thwaites, Introduction to Jesuit Relations by Edna Kenton, editor, New York, The Vanguard Press, 1954, p. xlix.

² James J. Walsh, American Jesuits, New York, New York, Macmillan, 1934, p. 75.

1673, they were published each year in Paris by Sébastien Cramoisy. It is from these Jesuit Relations, and other volumes based on them, that Dr. Pratt obtained the material for his poem.

The Jesuit Relations form a rich mine of information. Although written by missionaries about their work, they are not religious accounts only, but are

. . . valuable source books of materials for American ethnology and anthropology, for botany, folklore, geography, as well as for the history and especially the languages of the people with whom the Jesuits were brought in contact in the course of their missionary labors.³

Dr. E. B. Callaghan, Dr. John Gilmary Shea, Father Felix Martin, S. J., Francis Parkman and other noted historians of the period, recognizing their value, have considered them as source material of primary importance and of undoubted veracity.

That section of the Relations which deals with the Hurons is of exceptional value to archaeologists and historians because this nation was being systematically wiped out by their Iroquois enemies at the very moment when their lives and customs were being recorded by the missionaries. After the destruction of Huronia the land was uninhabited until Algonquins from neighbouring territory straggled in.

³ Walsh, op. cit., p. 73-74.

Forests grew up where Huron towns had been and when the first white settlers moved in and began to clear what seemed to be virgin forest they were amazed to turn up with the plough pits of skeletons and disjointed bones, kettles and weapons.⁴ The more conspicuous remains, such as those of Ste. Marie I near Midland and of Ste. Marie II on Christian Island, "would be to us a mystery as dark as Stonehenge"⁵ were it not for the Relations. The writings of the missionaries give light to our understanding of the historic relics which have been found and, conversely, the work of the archaeologists has furnished striking proof of the authenticity of the written records. Long before these proofs were dug from the earth, Parkman had written:

. . . the closest examination has left me no doubt that these missionaries wrote in perfect good faith, and that the Relations hold a high place as authentic and trustworthy historical documents.⁶

Dr. Pratt was aware of the importance of this correlation between the written history and that uncovered on the site. Speaking of the work in progress at Ste. Marie I, he said:

⁴ Francis Parkman, The Jesuits in North America, Boston, Massachusetts, Little, Brown and Company, 1925, p. 10.

⁵ William Sherwood Fox, St. Ignace, Toronto, Ontario, McClelland and Stewart, 1949, p. 15.

⁶ Parkman, op. cit., Introduction, p. vi.

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The archaeologists verified the accounts of the Jesuit Fathers given in the most accurate and illuminating history ever written about the beginnings of a country or⁷ a civilization -- the famous Jesuit Relations.

He knew the value of these sources and he used them well. From thousands of pages of the history of Huronia he has chosen the details which best suit his purpose and he has handled them so skilfully that the story suffers nothing in the telling.

The poem opens with a survey of the religious revival that swept Europe in the sixteenth century at the same time that newly discovered lands were being opened up by exploration. The hardships of these missions were a challenge to generous souls:

So, in the footsteps of their patrons came
A group of men asking the hardest tasks
At the new outposts of the Huron bounds
Held in the stern hand of the Jesuit Order.⁸

Fathers Jean de Brébeuf, Ennemond Massé and Charles Lalemant were the first Jesuits to journey to New France after their Society had accepted the Récollets' invitation to help them evangelize the Indians of Canada. The Huron

⁷ E. J. Pratt, The Huronian Martyrs and Their Work, lecture given at Convocation Hall, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, January 20, 1948. From the author's manuscript, p. 1. Used with permission.

⁸ E. J. Pratt, Brébeuf and His Brethren, in Collected Poems, Toronto, Ontario, The Macmillan Company of Canada, second edition, 1946, p. 38.

nation built large villages and lived on the produce of their cultivated fields. When, after a number of years, the fertility of the land was exhausted, the entire village was moved to a new location. This degree of permanency made the Hurons easier to teach than the other tribes who were nomadic. Hence the priests decided to make their most important mission station in Huronia, the area that is now Simcoe County in Ontario, and there they worked for twenty-five years.

From the very beginning, Brébeuf was the ideal missionary using every opportunity within reach to study the speech, habits and mentality of the Indians. He suffered greatly from the filth, vermin and smoke of the huts, from the nauseating food and the revolting manner in which it was served, from the complete lack of privacy, and from the suspicion and even open hostility of the savages. But he considered all this as so many steps to Calvary, the price he must pay for the salvation of their souls. Once, after baptizing a dying baby, he said, "For this one single occasion I would travel all the way from France, I would cross the great ocean to win one little soul for Our Lord."⁹

⁹ Francis Xavier Talbot, S. J., Saint Among the Hurons, New York, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1949, p. 98.

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Brébeuf spent twenty years in Canada, fifteen of them in Huronia. He was there from 1626 to 1629, and was beginning to understand the people and their mentality when he was recalled to Quebec by his superior because the English, under Kirke, threatened the safety of the colony. The Indians showed sorrow at his departure and were consoled only when he promised to return. But five years were to slip by before he could keep his promise. Four of these years were spent in France while he awaited the completion of negotiations between France and England for the return of the captured colony. One year went by in Quebec before he could get passage in the annual trading flotilla. When he finally reached Huronia, the Indians were pleased to see him and helped him build a mission house at Ihonatiria. This served as a center from which the three Fathers, Brébeuf, Davost, and Daniel, could visit the neighbouring towns.

The Indians, drawn by curiosity, swarmed into the mission house where they never tired of admiring the marvels brought from France: a magnet, a small handmill, a magnifying glass and, most wonderful of all, a striking clock. The priests worked hard to teach these savages the rudiments of Christian doctrine. The prayers and Commandments were taught to the children in simple Huron rhymes.

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But all their patient efforts seemed wasted. There were no converts.

Before long they saw how these Hurons dealt with captured enemies. An Iroquois prisoner was brought to the village and tortured with fiendish cruelty. The kind and gentle priests were appalled by the harrowing sight and pleaded for the captive's life. This request was refused, but the priests managed to give the man enough religious instruction that he could be baptized. The long hours of torture were filled with every cruelty that savage minds could invent. The priests saw all too clearly what their own fate would be if these people turned against them.

It was not long before the fickle Indians did turn against the priests to whom they had given, at best, an uneasy friendship. Epidemics of smallpox and influenza swept the country, dealing out death wholesale to the Hurons. The Blackrobes were blamed for this, especially Echon, as they called Brébeuf. Stirred by the calumnies of the medicine men, suspicion flared into open hatred. To their superstitious minds floods and drought, famine and pestilence, defeat and death were all caused by the priests, so these priests must die. Brébeuf's understanding of the Indian mentality saved their lives. He boldly summoned the savages to a feast of death at which he only, being about to die, had the right to speak.

While they ate he took them to task for their treatment of God's messengers. The Indians, admiring his bravery, left the missionaries alone and an uneasy peace replaced open hostility in that village.

The number of converts grew very slowly. After a decade a few outstanding men asked for instruction and baptism; there were not many ready to follow their example. In 1639 Fort Ste. Marie was built on the eastern bank of the small river that is now called the Wye. This mission was strongly built and was planned as a cultural and religious center for all Huronia, somewhat on the plan of the Reductions which were then meeting with such success in South America.¹⁰ Here the Christian Indians could gather and, remote from pagan tribesmen, practice their religion and, at the same time, learn all that the missionaries could teach them of agriculture, arts and crafts. It was an inspiring dream; one that seemed about to become a reality. But disaster struck the mission.

The Iroquois, sworn enemies of the Hurons although allied to them in race and language, became bolder. The Hurons found it more difficult each year to bring in supplies from Quebec. In 1642 Father Isaac Jogues, two lay

¹⁰ William Johnson, S. J., Utopia in South America, in Martyrs' Shrine Message, vol. 19, no. 3, p. 86, editor's note.

helpers, René Goupil and Guillaume Couture, and a group of Hurons were captured on the return trip and brought to the Mohawk country for torture. Couture was adopted by a family that had lost a member in battle. Goupil was killed for making the sign of the cross on the forehead of an Indian child. Eventually, with the help of the Dutch, Jogues escaped on a ship bound for Europe and made his way to France. But this torture-scarred missionary had but one thought -- to get back as quickly as possible to Canada and his work with the Indians. In the meantime the unpredictable Iroquois were engaged in negotiations for peace with the French. Governor Montmagny asked Father Jogues to go back to the Mohawks and, as his ambassador, to receive their pledge. When the terms had been accepted by both parties and ratified in Quebec, he was asked by his superior to return and open a mission, the Mission of the Martyrs, in that land. In the short interval between his visit as ambassador and his return as missionary, the temper of the savages had changed again. The crops had failed and the sorcerers blamed Jogues. As soon as they reached the Mohawk territory, he and his companion, the layman, Jean de Lalande, were seized, ill-treated, and killed.

On his first journey to Huronia, Father Bressani was captured under similar circumstances and tortured with unbelievable cruelty. He was so crippled from this treat-

ment as to be considered useless even for slavery and was sold to the Dutch who, in their pity, gave a generous ransom for him and sent him back to France. He was back in Canada within the year and this time reached Huronia safely. Some hint of his torture is given in this comment, written to his superior, "I could not have believed that a man was so hard to kill."¹¹

The work went on in Huronia. The converts were now numbered by the thousands and the missionaries felt that their dream of an entirely Christian nation would soon be realized. After a brief period of peace, the Iroquois struck again with greater daring and cunning. They took the village of St. Joseph in which Father Daniel was stationed, and shot the priest down as he fearlessly walked out to meet them, hoping to delay them long enough for his people to escape.

Brébeuf and Lalemant died the following spring. As they ministered to the dying defenders of St. Louis, they were taken by the Iroquois and driven over the trail to St. Ignace where the rest of their flock had already been captured or killed. The Iroquois tortured Brébeuf first, hoping that, in breaking him, they would break all the captives. The stake with its slow fire, boiling water in

¹¹ Parkman, op. cit., p. 351.

mockery of Baptism, the collar of red-hot axeheads, the belt of burning pitch, the cutting off of nose, lips and tongue to silence his preaching; the flesh of legs, thighs and arms stripped to the bone and eaten before his eyes, the wounds seared to prevent death from loss of blood,- all the diabolical tortures that savages could conceive in an orgy of cruelty were inflicted on the veteran missionary. He died with such exalted and indomitable courage as to leave his tormentors awe-stricken and defeated.

Then the Iroquois turned on Lalemant. They tortured him with tempered fury and kept him alive and in agony for fourteen terrible hours. An evaluation of his sufferings in terms of their modern equivalent is thought-provoking:

Compared with what the Hurons [sic] did to Blessed Gabriel Lalemant of the Society of Jesus, the most interesting experiments carried out by Spanish Communists in the late Civil War seem amateurish. There is no reason to believe that ingenuity can improve on the Redskin technique.¹²

Warned by the smoke from the burning villages and, later, by refugees, those at Ste. Marie were preparing for the attack which they expected momentarily. They vowed Masses in honour of St. Joseph, begging the protection of

¹² D. B. Wyndham Lewis, St. Pius V, Pope, in Saints for Now, Luce, Clare Boothe, editor, New York, New York, Sheed and Ward, 1952, p. 225.

the patron saint of the whole Huron mission. On his feast day, March 19th, the Iroquois gave way to a sudden and unaccountable panic and withdrew to their own land in frenzied haste. The Hurons, discouraged by their losses, burned several of their outlying villages and then dispersed, some to Ste. Marie, others to the Petuns, Eries and Neutrals. With the Indians scattered and disbanded, Father Ragueneau was forced to make a momentous decision; the mission must be moved to the Island of St. Joseph, now Christian Island, where many of the Indians had gathered. The old mission buildings were destroyed by fire lest they serve as shelters for the Iroquois. The new Ste. Marie was very strongly built with walls of stone and cement, so strongly built that a handful of men could hold it against a horde of Iroquois. Several thousand Hurons took shelter on the island seeking the protection of the Blackrobes on whom they had once looked with suspicion or hatred.

The Iroquois raids continued and Huron hunting or foraging parties were cut off and killed whenever they ventured onto the mainland. Having been warned that the Iroquois were approaching St. Jean, Father Ragueneau sent runners to give the alarm and to tell Father Chabanel to return to Ste. Marie. Two days after his departure a band of Senecas and Mohawks seized and destroyed the town. Father Garnier stayed with his Christians until, badly

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wounded yet still ministering to the dying, he was felled with a tomahawk. Father Chabanel, the last of the martyrs of Huronia, was deserted by the guides who were conducting him to Ste. Marie. An apostate Huron overtook him, killed him and threw his body into the Nottawasaga River.

But Christian Island proved to be a poor refuge. The Hurons were unable to obtain enough food either from the lake or from the land. Roving bands of Iroquois were constantly on the watch for hunting parties. The deaths of Garnier and Chabanel increased the fear of the Indians. Finally, the chiefs begged Father Ragueneau to bring them all to Quebec where they might find shelter near the fort. In June, 1650, the party arrived safely at the citadel after fifty days of difficult travel.

The once smiling land of Huronia was deserted and desolate, and Ste. Marie I, the home of peace, lay in ruins. Almost two centuries were to roll by before this hallowed spot began the second phase of its life, this time as a place of pilgrimage, the Martyrs' Shrine.

This is the story that is told in Dr. Pratt's poem. It is also the story related in the Jesuit Relations, for the poem follows the history with remarkable fidelity. It is exact, not only in the historical details, but also in its portrayal of the attitude of these unselfish priests to the tasks assigned them. Pratt puts it briefly:

Here is the service
Of joy, that we will take whatever God
Ordains for us whether it be life or death.¹³

This is but another way of expressing the Jesuit motto,--
"ad maiorem Dei gloriam" -- "for the greater glory of God."

Dr. Pratt did much careful preparation before writing his poem. He read and studied more than a score of volumes. For his over-all survey of the story he used Parkman's Jesuits in North America, and for the details he studied the Jesuit Relations.¹⁴ He made many visits to the locale of the poem¹⁵ and, in order to get as close as possible to an understanding of the mentality and spirituality of the men he was portraying, he "lived for a year practically with the Jesuits, observed the Mass, spent hours and days in the Cathedrals before the altars."¹⁶ As a result of this careful study he was able to absorb the spirit of the story and to distill from it all that is significant. In doing this he has exhibited a finer historic sense than any of our poets hitherto has shown.

¹³ Pratt, op. cit., p. 86.

¹⁴ Pelham Edgar, Across My Path, Toronto, Ontario, The Ryerson Press, 1952, p. 110.

¹⁵ E. K. Brown, On Canadian Poetry, Toronto, Ontario, The Ryerson Press, 1944, revised edition, p. 158.

¹⁶ Henry W. Wells and Carl F. Klinck, Edwin J. Pratt, Toronto, Ontario, The Ryerson Press, 1947, p. 57.

Documents and letters were turned from prose into verse so skilfully that there are no parallels in our literature for the masterly results that he achieved.¹⁷

Pratt does not gloss over the hardships of the life he is describing; neither did the martyrs when they wrote their reports. Brébeuf's famous letter to those wishing to work on the Huron mission is a ringing challenge to their generosity in the service of God. An edited version is given in the poem with just the changes necessary to fit the rhythm. Here and there the order of the sentences has been changed; some sentences have been condensed or a phrase from another letter has been substituted when it fitted the *précis* more neatly than did Brébeuf's own words. But the meaning remains unchanged and Pratt's version also carries a challenge, although the impact is perhaps less than that of the original letter. Brébeuf says:

You will have to live in a hut so wretched that I doubt if I have seen any in France that can be compared to it.

You will be utterly worn-out, but we shall not be able to give you anything, but a poor mat, or at most a skin, to serve as a bed.¹⁸

Pratt's version is this:

¹⁷ Edgar, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

¹⁸ Lawrence Voisin, S. J., *The Heart of a Giant*, Midland, Ontario, The Martyrs' Shrine, 1945, p. 31.

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. . . we can offer you
 The shelter of a cabin lowlier
 Than any hovel you have seen in France.
 As tired as you may be, only a mat
 Laid on the ground will be your bed.¹⁹

Brébeuf goes on to describe the annoying insects:

Besides, you will arrive at a season when flies,
 mosquitoes, sandflies and other insects will keep you
 awake almost all night. And this petty martyrdom
 usually lasts three to four months of the summer.²⁰

Pratt puts this into two brief lines:

This country is the breeding place of vermin.²¹
 Sandflies, mosquitoes haunt the summer months.

When he expressed the moment of acceptance and the consolations to be found in suffering for God, Pratt caught the spirit, not only of Brébeuf's letter, but of his whole missionary life:

Wherein the gain, you ask, of this acceptance?
 There is no gain but this -- that what you suffer
 Shall be of God: your loneliness in travel
 Will be relieved by angels overhead;
 Your silence will be sweet for you will learn
 How to commune with God; rapids and rocks
 Are easier than the steepes of Calvary.
 There is a consolation in your hunger
 And in abandonment upon the road,
 For once there was a greater loneliness
 And deeper hunger. . .²²

¹⁹ Pratt, op. cit., p. 56-57.

²⁰ Voisin, op. cit., p. 31.

²¹ Pratt, op. cit., p. 57.

²² Ibid., p. 57-58.

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Many historians have written of the building of an Indian house. It would be difficult to give, in fewer words, a better description than this:

So with native help
The Fathers built their mission house -- the frame
Of young elm-poles set solidly in earth;
Their supple tops bent, lashed and braced to form
The arched roof overlaid with cedar-bark.
"No Louvre or palace is this cabin," wrote
Brébeuf, "no stories, cellar, garret, windows,
No chimney -- only at the top a hole
To let the smoke escape."²³

That is exactly what Brébeuf did write:

The cabins of this country are neither Louvres nor Palaces, nor anything like the buildings of our France, not even like the smallest cottages. . . I cannot better express the fashion of the Huron dwellings than to compare them to bowers or garden arbors,-- some of which, in place of branches and vegetation, are covered with cedar bark, some others with large pieces of ash, elm, fir, or spruce bark; . . . There are no different stories; there is no cellar, no chamber, no garret. It has neither window nor chimney, only a miserable hole in the top of the cabin, left to permit the smoke to escape.²⁴

There is the same fidelity to the sources throughout the entire length of the poem. Dr. Pratt worked with meticulous care to have his poem historically correct. When he described the eclipse of the moon which Brébeuf had foretold to the Indians, Pratt checked this statement in the Relations through Professor Chant of the David

²³ Pratt, op. cit., p. 49.

²⁴ Edna Kenton, editor, Jesuit Relations, New York, New York, The Vanguard Press, 1954, p. 108.

Dunlap Observatory, and found that the eclipse had occurred as recorded. He was happy to note that the priest's letter had not mentioned the weather but the event had made a profound impression on the savages, so the night was most likely clear.²⁵ Therefore, he wrote:

Brébeuf had known it --
Had told the Indians of the moment when
The shadow would be thrown across the face,
Nor was there wastage in the prayers as night,
Uncurtained by a single cloud, produced
An orb most perfect.²⁶

But Dr. Pratt was writing of missionaries whose religious beliefs must be carefully described. He did not want to make any errors in speaking of Catholic doctrine or practice, so he submitted his manuscript to the Jesuit Fathers at Guelph and accepted their criticism, amending the text when necessary.²⁷ A change was made even after publication. The word "merit" was changed to "win" in the line that now reads:

Grant that
I may so bear it as to win Thy grace.²⁸

Provost Cosgrave of Trinity College, Toronto, suggested this change to make the statement more acceptable as the

²⁵ Wells and Klinck, op. cit., p. 53.

²⁶ Pratt, op. cit., p. 50.

²⁷ Wells and Klinck, op. cit., p. 54.

²⁸ Pratt, op. cit., p. 85.

prayer of a Catholic. It was a happy change from a poetic point of view also as the altered line is more musical. This line and those immediately preceding it are direct translations of the prayers said by the priest when vesting for Mass. Here is another example of Pratt's accuracy. These prayers could have been obtained from one source only, the Missal. No Catholic could have described the vesting of the priest more accurately or more reverently than Pratt has done in these simple words:

There was prophetic meaning as he took
 The cord and tied the alb around his waist,
 Attached the maniple to his left arm
 And drew the seamless purple chasuble
 With the large cross over his head and shoulders,
 Draping his body: every vestment held
 An immediate holy symbol as he whispered --
 "Upon my head the helmet of Salvation.
 So purify my heart and make me white;
 With this cincture of purity gird me,
 O Lord.

May I deserve this maniple
 Of sorrow and of penance.

Unto me
 Restore the stole of immortality.
 My yoke is sweet, my burden light.

Grant that
 I may so bear it as to win Thy grace.²⁹

The prayer, as Pratt gives it here, is made up of a phrase taken from each of the prayers said as the priest puts on the vestments. In the original version the priest says, while donning the amice, "Impone, Domine, capite meo galeam

²⁹ Pratt, op. cit., p. 88-89.

salutis, . . ."; the alb, "munda cor meum; ut, in sanguine Agni dealbatus, . . ."; the cincture, "Praecinge me, Domine, cingulo puritatis, . . ."; the maniple, "Merear, Domine, portare manipulum fletus et doloris; . . ."; the stole, "Redde mihi, Domine, stolam immortalitatis, . . ."; and the chasuble, ". . . Jugum meum suave est et onus meum leve: fac, ut istud portare sic valeam, quod consequar tuam gratiam."³⁰

The same accuracy is to be noted in the description of the baptism of the first Huron chief, Tsiouendaentaha. Pratt touches the essential points only, but the result is an excellent summary of the ceremonies used in administering this sacrament:

"If therefore thou wilt enter into life,
Keep the commandments. Thou shalt love the Lord
Thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul,
With all thy might, and thy neighbour as thyself."
With salt and water and the holy chrism,
And through the signs made on his breast and forehead
The Huron was exorcised, sanctified,
And made the temple of the Living God.³¹

There are just two places in which amendments would make the history in the poem more exact. When Jogues made his journey in 1642, bringing the dying Father Raymbault to

³⁰ . . . Missale Romanum, editio juxta typicam Vaticanam, Neo-Eboraci, Neo-Eboraci, Benziger Brothers, Inc., 1942, p. lxiv.

³¹ Pratt, op. cit., p. 61-62.

Quebec, he met Brébeuf there. On May 20, 1641, Brébeuf had left Huronia for Quebec to receive treatment for his injured shoulder as it had not set properly after he broke it while returning from the terrible sojourn among the Neutrals. He stayed in Quebec until August, 1644. Isaac Jogues visited Sillery in 1642. Pratt makes this very clear:

A few days there,
With churches, hospitals, the Indian school
At Sillery, pageant and ritual,
Making their due impression on the minds
Of Huron guides, Jogues with his band of forty
Packed the canoes and started back.³²

Pratt does not mention the important fact that Jogues met Brébeuf there. In two long paragraphs, Francis X. Talbot describes the joyful meeting of Brébeuf with Jogues, Raymbault, and his French and Indian friends from Huronia whom he had not seen for a year. Then he says: "De Brébeuf accompanied Jogues, Raymbault and the Hurons down to Quebec."³³ In the Relation of 1642 and 1643, Father Barthélemy Vimont, the Superior, writes:

Father de Brébeuf and I went every Feast day and Sunday from Sillery to Quebec, to help them in hearing confessions, to speak a word of exhortation to the French, and minister to the consolation of all.

³² Pratt, op. cit., p. 69.

³³ Talbot, op. cit., p. 253-254.

Our Lord has called to himself, this year, Father Charles Raymbault, the first Religious of our Society to die in these quarters.³⁴

Brébeuf was still in the East when Jogues returned from France. Talbot says: "With de Brébeuf, Jogues went up to Three Rivers in July."³⁵ Jogues remained at Quebec when Brébeuf left for Huronia in August, 1644.

These meetings of the two veteran missionaries, so devoted to Huronia, were both very dramatic incidents, but they have been completely overlooked in the poem. In fact, Pratt's treatment of these events in point of time is very ambiguous. He says:

In those three years since Jogues' departure doubts
Though unexpressed had visited the mission
For death had come to several in the fold--
Raymbault, Goupil, Eustache, and worse than death
To Jogues, and winter nights were bleaker, darker
Without the company of Brébeuf.³⁶

Then he goes on to speak of Brébeuf's journey down to Quebec as if it had taken place after Jogues' capture:

But as his broken shoulder had not healed,
And ordered to Quebec by Lalemant,
He took the leave that seven years of work
Deserved. . . .
He went the rounds of the stations, saw the gains
The East had made in converts -- Sillery
For Indians and Notre Dame des Anges
For the French colonists.³⁷

Then, still in the same stanza, Pratt says:

³⁴Kenton, op. cit., p. 175. ³⁶Pratt, op. cit., p. 78.

³⁵Talbot, op. cit., p. 254. ³⁷Ibid.

Three bands of Hurons had been caught
 That summer. . . .
 So, when the reinforcements came from France,
 Brébeuf set out under a guard of soldiers
 Taking with him two young recruits -- Garreau
 And Chabanel -- arriving at the fort
 In the late fall.³⁸

This gives the impression that Brébeuf was away from spring until fall for a brief visit to the East. Actually he was away from May 20, 1641³⁹ until September 7, 1644.⁴⁰

The second historical point that is ambiguous and misleading is the account of Jogues' journey to the Mohawks at Ossernenon. Pratt says:

The trumpets blew once more, and Jogues returned
 With the spring expedition to Quebec.
 Honoured by Montmagny, he took the post
 Of peace ambassador to hostile tribes,
 And then the orders came from Lalemant
 That he should open up again the cause
 Among the Mohawks at Ossernenon.⁴¹

Since Pratt has Montmagny's request and that of Lalemant in the same sentence, it would appear that this was all just one expedition into Mohawk territory; that the task of ambassador for Montmagny was added to his normal work as a missionary. But this was not the case. The Relations say:

On the sixteenth of May, 1646, this good Father left three rivers in company with Sieur Bourdon, the engineer of Monsieur the Governor. They arrived (back) at three Rivers, -- having accomplished their embassy, -- the 29th of the month of June.

³⁸Pratt, op. cit., p. 78.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 267.

³⁹Talbot, op. cit., p. 243.

⁴¹Pratt, op. cit., p. 75.

Hardly had the poor Father been refreshed among us two or three months, when he recommenced his expeditions; on the twenty-fourth of September, in the same year, 1646, he embarks with a young Frenchman, in a canoe conducted by some Hurons, in order to return to the land of his crosses. He had strong premonitions of his death. We have learned that he was slain directly upon his entrance into that country full of murder and blood.⁴²

This shows clearly that there were two separate expeditions; that as ambassador and that as missionary, and that Jogues was killed as soon as he reached Ossernenon the second time.

The events in order of occurrence are:

1. Brébeuf leaves for treatment, May 20, 1641.
2. Jogues comes to Quebec with Raymbault, 1642.
3. Jogues is captured on the return journey.
4. Jogues returns from France to Quebec, 1644.
5. Brébeuf returns to Huronia, 1644.
6. Jogues makes his first journey back to the Mohawks as ambassador, May, 1646.
7. Jogues reports to Montmagny at Quebec, 1646.
8. Jogues returns to Ossernenon and is killed, 1646.

A greater attention given to these points would have made this ambiguous section perfectly clear.

In spite of these slight ambiguities one could go on indefinitely multiplying examples of the historical and doctrinal accuracy of the poem, but there is another factor

⁴² Kenton, op. cit., p. 201.

to be considered. The background is correct, but what of the characters? These are, in themselves, most interesting studies.

In the very title he has chosen Dr. Pratt gives a clue to his treatment of the personages in this epic poem. The title is a happy choice for it indicates that Brébeuf was the central figure in the work at Huronia. He was the first Jesuit in the field and was, for many years, the superior of the mission. One after another, in their letters and records, the other Fathers speak of him and of his ability as a missionary. They praise his facility in learning the language, his insight into the Indian character and mentality, his untiring energy in the work, his patience and kindness to all. Father Paul Le Jeune wrote:

Oh, what an excellent man for these countries is Father Brébeuf! His most fortunate memory, and his amiability and gentleness, will be productive of much good among the Hurons.⁴³

On his part Brébeuf was always ready to praise the efforts made by another, be he priest or savage, always willing to excuse, always eager to help, always happy to obey. The whole missionary effort was an example of teamwork under a trusted captain, or, better still, an example of fraternal co-operation under the guidance of a beloved

⁴³ Kenton, op. cit., p. 73.

elder brother. Brébeuf needed the others and they needed him as they worked together for the greater glory of God.

In spite of the fact that the poem deals with a group working as a unit, Pratt has individualized these members, at times with just a brief, but telling, phrase. He makes Brébeuf live and suffer. At the beginning of the poem Brébeuf is shown at Bayeux vowing his life to Christ and to the Indian missions. There was nothing romantic about his choice; he knew that he was choosing a life of incredible hardship. He had heard of Indian torture at fiery stakes, but he was eager to go and was impatient of delays. His facility in learning the language and his understanding of the Indians won admiration:

Three years of that apprenticeship had won
The praise of his Superior and no less
Evoked the admiration of Champlain.⁴⁴

When back in France he judged everything in terms of Huronia; the height of the Cathedral tower was measured by the "pines and oaks around the Indian lodges," the beauty of stained glass went unnoticed as he thought of cedar bark walls.⁴⁵ When he did return to New France he was delayed for a year in Quebec but he knew how to put this time to good use:

⁴⁴ Pratt, op. cit., p. 43.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 44.

In such delays which might have been construed
 By lesser wills as exits of escape,
 As providential doors on a light latch,⁴⁶
 The Fathers entered deeper preparation.

He spent this time teaching the other priests the Huron language and in visiting the tribes near Quebec.

Brébeuf's call for volunteers for the mission tells much about his character. Here was a man who faced difficulties and overcame them instead of trying to minimize or evade them. He told the volunteers just what to expect, but told it in such ringing terms that they were inspired to accept gladly all that might be their lot. His letter to those coming up to the mission shows his thoughtfulness and kindness to missionaries and to Indians alike. He wanted the newcomers to start out in the right way so as to make a favourable impression and win some measure of tolerance, if not friendliness, from the savages. He wanted the boatmen put to no inconvenience in their long and hazardous journey when tempers were strained and natural taciturnity could, at any moment, flare into open dislike.

The same disinterested love for the savages is shown in the care given them in sickness:

But never could the Indians infer
 Self-gain or anything but simple courage
 Inspired by a zeal beyond reproof,
 As when the smallpox spreading like a flame

⁴⁶ Pratt, op. cit., p. 47.

Destroying hundreds, scarifying thousands,
 The Fathers took their chances of contagion,
 Their broad hats warped by rain, their moccasins
 Worn to the kibes, that they might reach the huts,
 Share with the sick their dwindled stock of food --
 A sup of partridge broth or raisin juice,
 Inscribe the sacred sign of the cross, and place
 A touch of moisture from the Holy Water
 Upon the forehead of a dying child.⁴⁷

Brébeuf's understanding of the Indian character is shown again after he had witnessed the torture of the Iroquois captive. He was sickened by the cruelty, but he did not become enraged by it. He knew that much work must be done before these cruel practices could be stopped:

He went back to his cabin, heavy in heart.
 To stem that viscous melanotic current
 Demanded labour, time, and sacrifice.⁴⁸

Then he weighed the possibilities and planned his work:

He saw the way the women and their broods
 Danced round the scaffold in their exaltation.
 How much of this was habit and how much
 Example? . . .⁴⁹

But these people were brave, long-suffering, impassive, charitable, gentle and generous to one another and to strangers. They would respond to kindness.

Sometimes a man's character is indicated very clearly by the attitude of his enemies. What did the hostile Indians think of Brébeuf?

⁴⁷ Pratt, op. cit., p. 53.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 55. ⁴⁹ Ibid.

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Still, all attempts to kill him were forestalled,
 For awe and fear had mitigated fury:
 His massive stature, courage never questioned,
 His steady glance, the firmness of his voice,
 And that strange nimbus of authority,
 In some dim way related to their gods,
 Had kept the bowstrings of the Hurons taut
 At the arrow feathers, and the javelin poised
 And hesitant. . .⁵⁰

Were there moments when this brave man faltered,
 moments when he was tempted to leave it all and return to
 Quebec, or, perhaps, to France? Pratt suggests that there
 were:

How often did the hand go up to lower
 The flag?⁵¹

But if these men, Brébeuf and the others, had such thoughts,
 the significant thing is that they did not yield to them.
 They were all ready to accept martyrdom. Brébeuf vowed to
 take whatever God might send:

I vow never to fail thee in the grace
 Of martyrdom, if by thy mercy, Thou
 Dost offer it to me. . .⁵²

Noel Chabanel made the vow of stability in the mission that
 was to him a daily martyrdom:

"I, Noel Chabanel,
 Do vow, in the presence of the Sacrament
 Of Thy most precious blood and body, here
 To stay forever with the Huron Mission,
 According to the commands of my Superiors."⁵³

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 66.

⁵² Ibid., p. 59.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 53.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 46.

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Jogues and Bressani were returned to France after their captivity but they were both possessed by one desire, to get back as quickly as possible to their work in Huronia. Brébeuf suffered a broken collar-bone and was forced to spend some time in Quebec. His dominant thought while there was the Huron mission and what he could do, even at that distance, to help.⁵⁴

When the test came each of the martyrs met it with the supreme courage that had been built up by the lesser, but more sustained, bravery of their daily living. All the missionaries in Huronia were martyrs by desire; God chose those He wished, but the others were ready had the lot fallen on them. The strength of each martyr in turn is shown in a few brief lines that turn the spotlight of recognition on him and make him stand out momentarily from the group. Gabriel Lalemant is introduced to the reader:

The other, Gabriel, who would share the crown
With Jean Brébeuf, pitting the frailest body
Against the hungers of the wilderness,
The fevers of the lodges and the fires
That slowly wreathed themselves around a stake.⁵⁵

Charles Garnier had a brother a Carmelite and one a Capuchin; but,

The gentlest of his stock, he had resolved
To seek and to accept a post that would
Transmit his nurture through a discipline

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 78.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 45.

That multiplied the living martyrdoms,
Before the casual incident of death.⁵⁶

He was, moreover, the "closest student of the Huron mind"⁵⁷ and saw flaws even in Brébeuf's method of presenting the points for study. He realized that only a very vivid presentation would make any impression so he sent to France for pictures showing graphically the torments of hell.⁵⁸

Daniel's death is described quietly with something of the calm dignity that marked it as the willing choice of the shepherd that he might save his flock:

He faced the vanguard of the Iroquois,
And walked with firm selective dignity
As in the manner of a parley. Fear
And wonder checked the Indians at the sight
Of a single dark-robed, unarmed challenger
Against arrows, muskets, spears and tomahawks.
That momentary pause had saved the lives
Of hundreds as they fled into the forest,
But not the life of Daniel.⁵⁹

A long section is devoted to Isaac Jogues who is made to stand out almost as clearly as Brébeuf. With Garnier he made an unsuccessful trip to the Petuns which was a "triumph of the spirit over failure."⁶⁰ This was but a prelude to his greater acceptance of suffering during his captivity. Two of the most enlightening details of the

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 45.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 85.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 60.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 64.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 61.

whole character study are given in the story of Jogues, the captive. He had, by his diligence and courage, won a little leisure time. He spent some of it in prayer, as one would expect, but he also used it to study the language of his captors "to make concrete the articles of Faith,"⁶¹ hoping that an opportunity for missionary work among these Mohawks would present itself. The other detail which makes the picture vivid is that of Jogues finding and hiding The Following of Christ and St. Paul's Epistles.⁶² What a joy they must have been to him in the loneliness of his captivity! His unselfishness is also shown when, offered the opportunity of escape, he hesitated, wondering,

How close to suicide
Would be refusal?⁶³

In the end he was obedient unto death. He went back to the Iroquois knowing full well that he would never return. His character is fully portrayed in Pratt's version of his letter and of the account given to the Fathers by escaped prisoners. He is just a little less important than Brébeuf and he complements the older missionary's activities. The extended suffering of life in the Mohawk country as a captive is missing in Brébeuf; it is supplied in Jogues.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 72.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 74.

⁶² Ibid.

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Even the priests who did not face torture are shown as living human beings. Speaking of Ste. Marie and of its importance to the Fathers and to the Indians, Pratt says:

The plans were supervised by Lalemant,
Assigning zones of work to every priest.
He made a census of the Huron nation:
Some thirty villages -- twelve thousand persons.⁶⁴

Here is the busy administrator planning the work, dividing it so that no one would be unduly burdened, and making a careful survey of the mission field.

Father Ragueneau was superior during the fateful days of the destruction of the mission. After Daniel's death the Indians flocked to Ste. Marie for protection:

Ragueneau was distraught. He was shepherd-priest.
Daniel was first to die under his care,
And nigh a score of missionaries were lost
In unprotected towns. Besides, he knew
He could not, if he would, resist that mob
That clamoured at the stockades, day by day.
His moral supervision was bound up
With charity that fed and warmed and healed.⁶⁵

In his report to his higher superiors he could write:

"The obedience, patience of our missionaries
Excel reward -- all with one heart and soul
Infused with the high spirit of our Order;
The servants, boys, and soldiers day and night
Working beyond their strength! Here is the service
Of joy, that we will take whatever God
Ordains for us whether it be life or death."⁶⁶

A spirit such as that existing in a group of priests,

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 63

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 86.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 85-86.

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brothers and laymen tells all that is necessary about the superior. Before long he was forced to make the decision to withdraw first from Ste. Marie, then from Huronia:

No word from the east could arrive in time to shape
 The step he must take. To and fro--from altar to hill,
 From hill to altar, he walked and prayed and watched.
 As governing priest of the Mission he felt pride
 Of his Order whipping his pulse, for was not St. Ignace
 The highest test of the Faith? And all that torture
 And death could do to the body was done. The Will
 And the Cause in their triumph survived. Loyola's
 Sublime at their summits, were scaled to the ^{mountains,} uttermost
 peak.⁶⁷

The picture is clear; the superior feels the heavy weight of his responsibility, but he also finds pride in the bravery of his priests and inspiration in their triumph. The cost of his decision is better understood by looking back at the happier days of Ste. Marie and seeing the priests, back from their missions, gathered there where they can enjoy, however briefly, the books, the friendly exchanges of ideas, and the companionship of their beloved comrades. It is a perfect picture of a religious order:

What validity the dream
 Possessed was given by the seasonal
 Uninterrupted visits of the priests
 To their loved home, both fort and residence.
 Here they discussed their plans, and added up
 In smiling rivalry their tolls of converts:
 They loitered at the shelves, fondled the books,
 Running their fingers down the mellowed pages
 As if they were the faces of their friends.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 93.

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They stood for hours before the saints or knelt
 Before the Virgin and the crucifix
 In mute transfiguration. These were hours
 That put the bandages upon their hurts,
 Making their spirits proof against all ills
 That had assailed or could assail the flesh,
 Turned winter into spring and made return
 To their far mission posts an exaltation.⁶⁸

It is true that these characters are not shown in all their complexity as they would be in a drama. There is no development, towards good or evil, even in the central figure. From the very beginning they are all formed or set in their sanctity, in their purpose, in their attitude towards life, in their acceptance of its ultimate meaning. But this is quite in keeping with Pratt's purpose. The poem is an epic and, as such, it shows the struggle of an already developed hero against forces beyond his control.

Pratt has given the Indians the subordination that their role requires. He has, however, furnished an excellent study of them. It is true that, except for a few noteworthy converts; Eustache, Onnonhoaraton, Totiri and Tsiouendaentaha, he does not treat them as individuals at all. Of these four Eustache is the only one who really stands out as a person. His constancy under torture and the impression made on the other Hurons by his bravery are definite indications of his character. The other Indians

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 79.

are treated as a group. It is their typical mentality, habits, actions and reactions that Pratt wishes to convey. Collectively they are the force against which the Jesuits are struggling. There are so many of them that they blur into a background against which the priests, so few in comparison, stand out clearly. But there is nothing vague about these savages as a dramatic force. Pratt has given an excellent picture of the Indian character, its weakness and its strength. Brébeuf's first winter with the savages is here in vivid detail:

Wintering with the Algonquins, he soon knew
 The life that was before him in the cabins--
 The troubled night, branches of fir covering
 The floor of snow; the martyrdom of smoke
 That hourly drove his nostrils to the ground
 To breathe, or offered him the choice of death
 Outside by frost, inside by suffocation;
 The forced companionship of dogs that ate
 From the same platters, slept upon his legs
 Or neck; the nausea from sagamite,
 Unsalted, gritty, and that bloated feeling,
 The February stomach touch when acorns,
 Turk's cap, bog-onion bulbs dug from the snow
 And bulrush roots flavoured with eel skin made
 The menu for his breakfast-dinner-supper.
 Added to this, the instigated taunts
 Common as daily salutations; threats
 Of murderous intent that just escaped
 The deed-- the prologue to Huronia!⁶⁹

On the journey west the Hurons admired Brébeuf but were suspicious of him. When he returned from France, they could not understand why he came to live among them:

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 40.

Three years he had been there, a friend
 Whose visit to the tribes could not have sprung
 From inspiration rooted in private gain.
 He had not come to stack the arquebuses
 Against the mountains of beaver pelts.
 He had not come to kill. Between the two--
 Barter and battle-- what was left to explain
 A stranger in their midst?⁷⁰

They were fascinated by the things in the mission house; they were amazed by the mystery of writing, baffled by the prediction of the eclipse, confounded when the white man's prayers brought rain. Their visits east for trade had shown them the way the Frenchmen built their forts and the savage minds were quick to see the advantages of imitating them. They were slow, however, in grasping religious doctrine. The prayers and Commandments were best taught to them in rhymes. Their hearts were most easily reached by kindness and gentleness:

The Fathers found the softer crevices
 Through deeds which readily the Indian mind
 Could grasp-- where hands were never put to blows
 Nor the swift tongues used for recrimination.⁷¹

Kind to their own, over-indulgent to their children, these savage people were the embodiment of cruelty to their enemies. They vied with one another in administering torture and a cry of pain from the captive was an honour to the one who had evoked it, much as a scalp was considered a trophy of victory. This lust for cruelty was deep in the

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 48-49.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 51.

Indian character and would not be easily removed. Men, women, and even little children delighted in it, as each torture suggested another more painful. But hidden under this were qualities worth cultivating:

A fighting courage equal to the French--
It could be lifted to crusading heights
By a battle speech. Endurance was a code
Among the braves and impassivity.

.
But then their charity and gentleness
To one another and to strangers gave
A balance to the picture. Fugitives
From villages destroyed found instant welcome
To the last communal share of food and land.
Brébeuf's stay at Toanche gave him proof
Of how the Huron nature could respond
To kindness.⁷²

The movement and colour of the liturgy appealed to them but the doctrines required mental effort that was not readily made:

But of all work
The hardest was instruction. It was easy
To strike the Huron sense with sound and colour--
The ringing of a bell; the surplices worn on the
cassocks;
The burnished ornaments around the altar;
The pageant of the ceremonial.
But to drive home the ethics taxed the brain
To the limit of its ingenuity.⁷³

Half the village assembled for the baptism of the first adult convert and Pratt gives a picture of this congregation. There were priests, mechanics, labourers and soldiers present; and there were Indians, too:

⁷² Ibid., p. 55-56.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 60.

The warriors lean, lithe, and elemental,
 "As naked as your hand" but for a skin
 Thrown loosely on their shoulders, with their hair
 Erect, boar-brushed, matted, glued with the oil
 Of sunflower larded thickly with bear's grease;
 Papooses yowling on their mothers' backs,
 The squatting hags, suspicion in their eyes,
 Their nebulous minds relating in some way
 The smoke and aromatics of the censer,
 The candles, crucifix and Latin murmurs
 With vapours, sounds and colours of the Judgment.⁷⁴

What many of these impassive witnesses were really thinking was evident to the Fathers when they began their mission to the Petuns and Neutrals. Enemies from the Huron towns visited these tribes to stir up hatred and the priests found themselves engulfed by a wave of diabolical fury so great that even hospitality was denied the travellers and they were driven from town to town, stoned and cursed and starved. This was an unheard of treatment for strangers. It shows very clearly how the natives could be carried away in unreasoning fury by the sorcerers and by others who knew how to rouse them. It was also an example of Huron treachery, for these people, not willing to take the blame themselves for killing the priests, tried to get their neighbours to do it for them. The drought and the failure in hunting, the sickness and the Indians' inability to cure it, all evils, real or imaginary, were blamed on the priests and any one who dared would soon be free to kill

⁷⁴ Pratt, op. cit., p. 62.

them. But no one dared:

The council ended,
The feeling strong for death, but ruled by fears,
For if those foreign spirits had the power
To spread the blight upon the land, what could
Their further vengeance not exact?⁷⁵

When the Hurons were converted they proved that
their Indian character was strong enough to face death for
their faith. A young captive died instead of Jogues:

Onnonhoaraton, a youthful captive,
They killed--the one who seeing me prepared
For torture interposed, offering himself
A sacrifice for me who had in bonds
Begotten him for Christ.⁷⁶

Bressani had his wounds to speak for him when he reached
Huronian. This, and the story of Jogues and Eustache,
impressed the natives more than any words could have done:

Bressani's presence stimulated faith
Within the souls of priests and neophytes.
The stories burned like fuel of the faggots--
Jogues' capture and his rock stability,
And the no less triumphant stand Eustache
Had made showing the world that native metal
Could take the test as nobly as the French.⁷⁷

Garnier told another tale of Indian bravery:

. . . that Totiri,
A native of high rank, while visiting
St. Ignace when a torture was in progress,
Had emulated Jogues by plunging through
The flaming torches that he might apply
The Holy Water to an Iroquois.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 66.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 77.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 72.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 80.

They had, indeed, come a long way from the days when they refused the hope of going to heaven if the Iroquois were to be there.⁷⁹ Indian character had shown to what heights it could be raised when motivated by the love of God.

Brébeuf and His Brethren is Canadian history. It is more than just a listing of events; it is a profound study of the reaction of a pagan people to the teachings of Christianity and an interesting presentation of the play of character on character,--the trained mind against superstition, the saint against the savage. "C'est une oeuvre authentiquement canadienne, non seulement par le sujet, mais encore par l'âme."⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Pratt, op. cit., p. 80.

⁸⁰ Guy Sylvestre, Aspects de la poésie canadienne de langue anglaise, article in L'Action Universitaire of Montreal, vol. 17, no. 2, January 1951, p. 31.

CHAPTER III

A GREAT CANADIAN POEM

Brébeuf and His Brethren is, indeed, Canadian history, but it is much more. It is an outstanding contribution to Canadian literature and is worthy of attention as such. Any discussion of the historical, geographical or dogmatic accuracy of a poem is only marginal criticism, a preparation for the real evaluation based on literary merit. The work done so far in this thesis has been preparatory. It is the purpose of this chapter to make a critical study of Brébeuf and His Brethren and to find out if this poem has the intensity, the inspiration, and the perfection of form and expression that belong to poetry. This study will be further developed by considering the sense, feeling, tone and intention of the poem and by judging the versification, texture and inspiration in so far as they contribute to the total effect.

Is Brébeuf and His Brethren poetry? Undoubtedly it is. Its author has taken a tale of heroism and, with a balanced and controlled power, has written a poem that is unquestionably a worthwhile contribution to Canadian literature.

Brébeuf and His Brethren is an epic poem and belongs to that group which has made Pratt's work so

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distinctive and original. Since it is a modern epic it is shorter and more compact than the great epics of Homer or Virgil, but in its theme it is of sufficient grandeur to have appealed even to those masters. It fulfills all the heroic requirements of subject, personages, action and treatment. The subject is the effort, completely unified and yet sufficiently diverse, of a band of heroes who struggled to death against a much stronger group that in the end prevailed and won what seemed to be a victory. But the epilogue of the poem shows that the cause for which these heroes died has really been triumphant and that their seeming defeat was, in reality, a victory.

In keeping with the epic idea the personages are great and noble, not only in their ideals, aspirations and priestly dignity, but also in character and birth.

Brébeuf's ancestry is given:

The oath Brébeuf was taking had its root
 Firm in his generations of descent.
 The family name was known to chivalry--
 In the Crusades; at Hastings; through the blood
 Of the English Howards; called out on the rungs
 Of the siege ladders; at the castle breaches;
 Proclaimed by heralds at the lists, and heard
 In Council Halls:-- the coat-of-arms a bull
 In black with horns of gold on a silver shield.¹

¹ E. J. Pratt, Brébeuf and His Brethren, in Collected Poems, Toronto, Ontario, The Macmillan Company of Canada, second edition, 1946, p. 39.

The action is also heroic. The martyrs are shown as they cope with the long-sustained details of daily living which test their moral fibre. There is a mental struggle when the fight is against discouragement and the temptation to seek other fields of labour in which their efforts would meet with more immediate success. And there is the final physical torture in which both moral fibre and mental strength, previously tested, combine to sustain the martyrs through sufferings which are greater than those described hitherto in any epic poem. This action is developed in the traditional manner through dialogue, soliloquy and narrative to form a unified whole. It is evident throughout that the sense of the poem is the plain sense of the words. The poet is telling a story and he asks us to give a sympathetic hearing to the tale.

From the simple honesty of the telling one can readily deduce Pratt's feeling. He admires these priests and their heroic lives and he wants his readers to share that admiration. This attitude lends conviction to the story and this conviction is further strengthened by the sound historical basis on which the poem is developed. Dr. Pratt wrote Brébeuf and His Brethren when Canada was gathering her strength for unified effort in the earlier months of World War II. His poem was an inspiration to those of all faiths and to the members of Canada's two

great racial groups. All felt a just pride in their common heritage and an inspiration to emulate the heroes of old.

Mr. A. J. M. Smith says:

That Brébeuf is at once a Christian poem and a heroic narrative that does honor to our French compatriots is of great significance.²

Thus the feeling, tone and inspiration of the poem combine to blend the author's pride in the past with the reader's motivation of the present. The epic strives to praise what is best in brave men and to stir others to imitation. The inspiring quality of Brébeuf and His Brethren is one of the strongest evidences of the epic nature of the poem.

The poet has chosen also the accepted epic form, blank verse. The unrhymed iambic pentameter is simple and dignified. It lends force to the recounting of a story which, of itself, is already possessed of noble qualities. There is a vigour to the lines that gives life and movement. This vitality pervades the whole poem with the exception of a few slow-moving passages, notably the fifth section. But these plateaus in which the movement slows down are necessary lulls in the action before it sweeps on to the next level. They form the ebb of the wave before it rises to the next crest.

² A. J. M. Smith, The Book of Canadian Poetry, Toronto, Ontario, W. J. Gage and Company, 1943, p. 278.

The style of the poem is simple, direct and masculine. The lines are stripped of all ornament which could exist for the sake of mere decoration. Wherever Pratt uses poetic devices he does so to make the meaning clearer or to give force to the point he is presenting. A notable example of this can be found in the almost complete avoidance of nature descriptions. Some critics, notably Guy Sylvestre, have felt this to be a loss:

Il faut peut-être déplorer que le poète n'ait pas cherché à ressusciter en de hauts tableaux la nature vierge, mais il s'est intéressé surtout à l'âme de ses géants spirituels.³

This critic is correct in saying that the poet is interested above all in the martyrs and their spirit, but a study of the poem will reveal that the short, but startlingly beautiful, passages in which nature is described are used as foils for the action. Detailed nature descriptions would have weakened the effect. In the true epic spirit the priests must fight against every difficulty, even against the harshness of their environment. When the struggle is difficult the setting is shown in all its harshness, but when the mission work meets with some measure of success the scene is painted with softer details.

³ Guy Sylvestre, Aspects de la poésie canadienne de langue anglaise, article in L'Action Universitaire of Montreal, vol. 17, no. 2, January 1951, p. 31.

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The unknown lands of the New World are:

. . . chartless seas and coasts
And the vast blunders of the forest glooms.⁴

Even before Brébeuf had been granted permission to go to
Canada he knew that the mission of his choice was difficult,
but he also knew something of its beauty. He had heard:

The stories of those northern boundaries
Where in the winter the white pines could brush
The Pleiades, and at the equinoxes
Under the gold and green of the auroras
Wild geese drove wedges through the zodiac.⁵

Later, in his letter to the future missionaries, there is a
hint of the cathedral-like beauty of the Canadian forests:

. . . for if we go outside
Our cabin, is not heaven over us?
No buildings block the clouds. We say our prayers
Freely before a noble oratory.⁶

When the first Huron chief had been converted nature smiled
in harmony with the beauties of the ceremony:

He was baptized
With all the pomp transferable from France
Across four thousand miles combined with what
A sky and lake could offer, and a forest
Strung to the aubade of the orioles.⁷

The harshness comes in again to echo the mood when
Jogues and Garnier set out on their mission to the Petuns:

All day confronting swamps with fallen logs,
Tangles of tamarack and juniper,

⁴ Pratt, op. cit., p. 38.

⁶ Ibid., p. 58.

⁵ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., p. 61.

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They made detours to avoid the deep ravines
And swollen creeks.⁸

This, together with a line farther on:

. . . the stumble over mouldering trunks
Of pine and oak,⁹

makes a perfect picture of travel through the rough places
in our Canadian woods. So vivid is the description that
the word "mouldering" evokes the odour of decay that
pervades a spot such as the one described.

After Brébeuf and Chaumonot had made their disastrous
visit to the Neutrals nature again worked against
them. Pratt gives a terse description of the snowstorm:

And on their journey home the Fathers took
A final blow when March leagued with the natives
Unleashed a northern storm, piled up the snow-drifts,
Broke on the ice the shoulder of Brébeuf,
And stumbled them for weeks before she sent
Them limping through the postern of the fort.¹⁰

But, later, there was a period of peace and the priests
gathered at Ste. Marie. Nature smiled again:

And often in the summer hours of twilight
When Norman chimes were ringing, would the priests
Forsake the fort and wander to the shore
To sing the Gloria while hermit thrushes
Rivalled the rapture of the nightingales.¹¹

The peaceful plenty of Ste. Marie is expressed in a beautiful
description of the frontier farm:

⁸ Ibid., p. 64.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 68-69.

⁹ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 79.

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Acres rich

In soil extended to the forest fringe.
 Each year they felled the trees and burned the stumps,
 Pushing the frontier back, clearing the land,
 Spading, hoeing. The stomach's noisy protest
 At sagamite and wild rice found a rest
 With bread from wheat, fresh cabbages and pease,
 And squashes which when roasted had the taste
 Of Norman apples. Strawberries in July,
 October beechnuts, pepper roots for spice,
 And at the bottom of a spring that flowed
 Into a pond shaded by silver birches
 And ringed by marigolds was water-cress
 In chilled abundance. So, was this the West?
 The Wilderness? That flight of tanagers;
 Those linguists from the bobolinks; those beeches,
 Roses and water-lilies; at the pools
 Those bottle-gentians!¹²

And, finally, pictures of autumn and spring are used to point the contrast between the lonely work in the lodges in winter and the happy return to Ste. Marie in the spring:

And so the seasons passed. When the wild ducks
 Forsook the Huron marshes for the south,
 It was the signal for the priests to pack
 Their blankets. Not until the juncos came,
 And flickers tapped the crevices of bark,
 And the bloodroot was pushing through the leaf-mould,
 Would they reset their faces towards their home.¹³

Pratt has given, in these short but exact vignettes, an excellent picture of Huronia. It is true that he has not described fully any of the natural beauties of that region, but it was not his purpose to write a descriptive poem. He was writing an epic, recounting deeds of bravery, so he wisely kept nature descriptions in the background. Nature is the setting for the action and that is all.

¹² Ibid., p. 80-81.

¹³ Ibid., p. 82.

There is even a hypermetric line of sixteen syllables:

But Pratt is too good a craftsman to change completely and suddenly the meter which he had used so successfully for some two thousand lines. In the twelfth section, after thirty-three of the longer lines which give Brébeuf's thoughts of his coming martyrdom in terms of what his brethren have already experienced, there is a return to the customary iambic pentameters of blank verse. In a beautiful passage of twenty-five lines the thoughts of each

16 Ibid.

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scene than could be conveyed by simple description:

Where was the source
Of his strength, the home of his courage that topped
the best
Of their braves and even out-fabled the lore of their
legends?
In the bunch of his shoulders which often had carried
a load
Extorting the envy of guides at an Ottawa portage?
The heat of the hatchets was finding a path to that
source.
In the thews of his thighs which had mastered the
trails of the Neutrals?
They would gash and beribbon those muscles. Was it
the blood?
They would draw it fresh from its fountain. Was it
the heart?
They dug for it, fought for the scraps in the way of
the wolves.¹⁹

And yet, the same blending of iambs and anapests is used
in the peaceful and sublime epilogue:

Three hundred years have passed, and the winds of God
Which blew over France are blowing once more through
the pines
That bulwark the shores of the great Fresh Water Sea.²⁰

From all these examples it is apparent that this skill in
the adaptation of meter to feeling is remarkable. Dr. E.
J. Pratt has surely shown his mastery of rhythm in this
outstanding poem.

A few further comments must be made on the versi-
fication. Dr. Pratt has used the traditional epic method
of dividing the poem into twelve sections of varying
length, corresponding to the twelve books of Virgil's

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 92.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 94.

Aeneid. Each section deals with a phase of the story in the same way that the chapter divisions are used in prose. These sections are in turn subdivided into stanzas which are really verse-paragraphs since each contains the material that would form a paragraph in prose. This is the conventional method of division for long narrative poems, especially those written in blank verse. In a few places Pratt has used chapter headings such as, The Founding of Fort Sainte Marie²¹ and The mission to the Petuns and Neutrals.²² These titles are always enclosed in parentheses to show that they are used as guides to the subject-matter of the poem. A notable exception is the epilogue which is entitled THE MARTYRS' SHRINE,²³ printed in capitals. This gives an air of finality to the epilogue and serves as a strong reminder of the lapse of years between the abandonment of the mission and the return of the mission sites to the Jesuits. Dr. Pratt has also used a marginal gloss of dates, a very useful device for pointing out the historical continuity of the events described. This scholarly and accurate poem has a format in keeping with its dignity.

²¹ Ibid., p. 62.

²³ Ibid., p. 94.

²² Ibid., p. 64.

Except for four brief passages there is no humour. One smiles at the comment on Brébeuf's size, the Indians' amazement at the things in the mission house, their stupefaction at the priests' ability to convey messages by writing, and at the contrast between the old and new names of the Indian convert. The rollicking fun, so characteristic of Pratt's narrative poetry is absent here. The poet felt, and rightly, that, in this poem, it would have been out of place.

The texture of the poem is also deserving of study. Dr. Pratt is noteworthy for his use of words. In other poems, for example, The Witches' Brew and The Cachalot, the wide range of his vocabulary is amazing. His thoughts pour out in resounding polysyllabic words that reverberate like thunderclaps and give a bounding zest to his work. But in Brébeuf and His Brethren the diction is quieter. The tone is subdued and reverent, quite in keeping with the dignity of the subject. However, Dr. Pratt does not avoid polysyllables. He uses them naturally and unobtrusively whenever they fit the thought, and one accepts them without being conscious of them. The words are tools used to express the ideas and not ornaments displayed for vain show.

Here and there he uses an Indian name of great length but, in each case, it is one that resounds with a music of its own, such as Tsiouendaentaha, and the ringing

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Onnonhoaraton. There is music also in the shorter names like Mattawa and Nipissing. Dr. Pratt was fully aware of the beauty of sound in such words for he has said:

. . . in writing this story I had the good luck to find sonorous proper names, personal and geographical, to work into the verse measures. I found musical names running about through the Jesuit Relations. The name Brébeuf itself was magnificent for a pivotal character. The priest referred to his name as suggesting the patience and endurance and strength of the ox. But look at some of the Indian names. The place where Brébeuf laboured was Ihonatiria near the Bay of Penetanguishene, and when the place was abandoned he served at Teanostaye and then at Ossanonane on the shore of the Nottawasaga.²⁴

In the actual telling of the story there are fine examples of Dr. Pratt's unusual and highly-developed sense of word and phrase. Time and time again he has the inevitable expression, the one which is exactly right and which could not be changed without losing something of the idea that he wishes to convey. What a picture of the seventeenth-century zest for exploration is given in two lines:

Skylines unknown to maps broke from the mists
And there was laughter on the seas.²⁵

The boundless fervour of St. Francis Xavier to spread the kingdom of God to the furthestmost parts of the world is here:

²⁴ E. J. Pratt, The Huronian Martyrs and Their Work, unpublished manuscript. Used with permission.

²⁵ Pratt, Brébeuf and His Brethren, p. 36.

Xavier had risen from his knees to drive
His dreams full-sail under an ocean compass.²⁶

When Pratt describes the Indians' blood-lust and cruelty as a "viscous melanotic current"²⁷ one gets some idea of the difficulties that permeated the whole missionary effort. Again, through the happy choice of words, a whole chapter of Canadian history stands out behind this brief passage:

. . . a war
Freshly renewed--the Iroquois (Dutch-armed
And seething with the memories of Champlain)
Arrayed against the French and Huron allies.²⁸

It would be difficult to find an expression that would show more clearly the length of the journey from Huronia to Quebec and its dangers than does this statement:

He reached
Quebec with every day of the five weeks
A miracle of escape.²⁹

At times Pratt uses words in their less common forms and so gives them a telling impact. For example, he says that March

Broke on the ice the shoulder of Brébeuf,
And stumbled them for weeks before she sent
Them limping through the postern of the fort.³⁰

The verb "stumbled" is here used transitively. This is a much less common usage than the intransitive form ordina-

²⁶ Ibid., p. 37.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 55.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 68.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 69.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 68.

rily employed so it gives the sentence freshness and unusual force.

Technical terms, such as the word "postern" in the quotation above, are used exactly. This precision is especially noteworthy in regard to religious terms. Pratt chooses the words that a Catholic would use to describe the services, the liturgy and all the religious concepts of the poem, and he employs them so adroitly that there is no hesitation or lameness in the utterance.

Much of the strength of Pratt's poem comes from the absence of adjectives. There is conviction in a plain statement of facts. The dearth of descriptive words comes as a refreshing relief in this day when advertising has taken the force even from superlatives. Most of the descriptive words used are verb-forms, past participles used as adjectives. This gives added power to the narrative passages and a movement to the nouns that is quite unusual. Pratt speaks of "the troubled night . . . the forced companionship,"³¹ "the invaded tribes,"³² "unexpected raids,"³³ "scattered hours of leisure,"³⁴ and "their dragged bodies flung into the Mohawk."³⁵ A participial

³¹ Ibid., p. 40.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 72.

³² Ibid., p. 87.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 76.

³³ Ibid., p. 86.

phrase is used to give a perfect picture of a clear moonlit night:

Nor was there wastage in the prayers as night,
Uncurtained by a single cloud, produced
An orb most perfect.³⁶

Perhaps the most striking example of the forcefulness of Pratt's diction is to be found in the epilogue, The Martyrs' Shrine.³⁷ In this passage of twenty-three lines the movement is quieter and more subdued, and yet in the entire section there are only eight adjectives used directly and thirteen adjectival phrases. But, of the one hundred thirty-two words there are thirty-eight verbs, used either directly or in verb phrases, and of the nouns four; "tread," "feet," "trails" and "highways," have movement or activity associated with them. A lesser poet would have written "the shining skies" or "the shining stars," but Pratt uses "shining" as a verb and gains immeasurably in the freshness of the thought:

The skies that had banked their fires are shining again
With the stars that guided the feet of Jogues and
Brébeuf.³⁸

However, Pratt does not completely eschew the use of adjectives. He uses them sparingly but all the more effectively. When he does use an adjective it is a master

³⁶ Ibid., p. 50.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 94.

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stroke in a word picture, arresting and vital to the sense, and giving the line a startling beauty; for example:

Made silver flutes out of the parish spires.³⁹

The word "silver" carries a double sense; one hears the ringing note of the musical instrument and sees the church spire gleaming with a clear light as the sun's rays catch it and turn it into a pointing finger. There is also the connotation of church bells with the idea of the spire which brings the thoughts again to the music of the silver flutes. Note the use of adjectives in this passage:

It brought to earth the prophets and apostles
Out of their static shrines in the stained glass.
It caught the ear of Christ, reveined his hands
And feet, bidding his marble saints to leave
Their pedestals for chartless seas and coasts
And the vast blunders of the forest glooms.⁴⁰

The words "static" and "marble" give the safety and security of the civilized world and contrast sharply with the "chartless" waters and shores and the "vast" and gloomy forests. Again the thoughts evoked by the two expressions "vast blunders" and "forest glooms" are closely intertwined; the "blunders" probably exist because the forests are dark, gloomy and "vast," and the vastness of the unexplored forests adds to their gloominess.

Another example of the exact and perfectly fitting use of adjectives is found in this passage:

³⁹ Ibid., p. 37.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 37-38.

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Under the stars,
 Along an incandescent avenue
 The visions trembled, tender, placid, pure,
 More beautiful than the doorway of Rheims
 And sweeter than the Galilean fields.
 For what was hunger and the burn of wounds
 In those assuaging, healing moments when
 The clearing mists revealed the face of Mary
 And the lips of Jesus breathing benedictions?⁴¹

It would be impossible to give just this effect if the adjectives "incandescent," "tender," "placid," "pure," "assuaging," "healing" and "clearing" were replaced by synonyms. There is something about each word, in rhythm, sound, sense and connotation, which makes it the only choice for the thought that is being expressed.

But the verbal magic of this poem does not lie entirely in the metrical pattern and in the meaning of the words. Since the poem is written in blank verse there is no rhyme, but alliteration and assonance are made to serve as acceptable substitutes. Alliteration is used skilfully throughout the poem. It ensures a lingering of sounds and a linking together of phrases and lines. But its use is not overdone and it never calls attention to itself. Examples are numerous, as in the lines:

. . . driving to their last,
 Refuge the ragged remnants.⁴²

The "r's" in the first line pass unnoticed, but they

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 67.

⁴² Ibid., p. 83.

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prepare the ear for the stronger alliteration of the second line. It appears in shorter word-groups: "lean, lithe, and elemental,"⁴³ "crushed corn,"⁴⁴ and "no power predicted."⁴⁵ There are also clever uses of sibilants, such as:

Loyola's mountains,
Sublime at their summits, were scaled to the uttermost
peak.⁴⁶

The vowels in these two lines show assonance that is almost rhyme:

To and fro--from altar to hill,
From hill to altar, he walked and prayed and watched.⁴⁷

Wherever harshness of nature or of man is portrayed the passages have harsh vowels and consonants. The whole account of the torturing of Brébeuf is full of dissonances. This sentence will serve as an example:

They dug for it, fought for the scraps in the way of
the wolves.⁴⁸

The lines just before this have a unique value since they describe the different kinds of pain endured:

The heat of the hatchets was finding a path to that
source.
In the thews of his thighs which had mastered the
trails of the Neutrals?
They would gash and beribbon those muscles.⁴⁹

⁴³ Ibid., p. 62.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 84.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 93.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 92.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

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The combination of assonance and alliteration in this passage gives the intense pain being suffered as well as the cruelty of the deeds being done. "Heat of the hatchets" presents searing, sharp pain ruthlessly administered; "thews of his thighs" emphasizes the dull, intense ache of the pain-weary body; "gash and beribbon those muscles" has all types of pain mingled in full intensity and endured with a calm heroism that surpasses the cruelty of the inflictors.

The sound of the words also plays its part in building up the total effect. Much of the contrast between the metrically-similar passages of the twelfth section lies in the vowel sounds of the words used. This is clearly shown in the following selections. Study first:

Why did not the flesh of Brébeuf cringe to the scourge,
Respond to the heat, for rarely the Iroquois found
A victim that would not cry out in such pain--yet here
The fire was on the wrong fuel.⁵⁰

The harsh consonant sounds in "cringe" are echoed in "scourge." In these four lines there are twelve "r's." The vowels are short and sharp as in "did," "cringe," "victim," "cry" and "fire." Compare these words with the open vowels in these lines:

The undulating miles of wheat and barley,
Gardens and pastures rolling like a sea
From Lisieux to Le Havre.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 92.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 91.

Occasionally there are minor faults of diction in the poem. There are too many inversions in sentence structure and, although these are usually effective, in some cases they fail and so weaken the emphasis. One of the first examples of this awkward sentence structure is this:

Out of the Netherlands was heard the call
Of Kempis through the Imitatio
To leave the dusty marts and city streets
And stray along the shores of Galilee.⁵⁴

The meaning is clear enough, but the word groups are not in their happiest arrangement. Again, the expression, "Rude it was" is not more effective than "It was rude" would have been in:

Rude it was
But clean, capacious, full of twilight calm.⁵⁵

In describing the congregation assembled for the first adult baptism and the Mass that followed, Pratt uses two passages that are not sentences, although they do paint an excellent picture of the people in the group. The first, and shorter, passage will serve as an example. It has the flavour of modern journalism:

Oblates from Quebec,
Blackrobes, mechanics, soldiers, labourers,
With almost half the village packed inside,
Or jammed with craning necks outside the door.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 37.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 62.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 63.

One more example of poor sentence construction will suffice:

The Eucharist requiring bread and wine,
Quebec eight hundred miles away, a war
Freshly renewed--the Iroquois (Dutch-armed
And seething with the memories of Champlain)
Arrayed against the French and Huron allies.⁵⁷

The description of the Iroquois, in its full historical importance, is perfect; but the whole expression is not a sentence and it certainly includes too much poorly related material, even though each idea adds to the total effect of urgency and danger.

These are examples of flaws in sentence structure. On the other hand there are many parallel examples in which the inversions or incompletions are very effective. Speaking of the plan to build a central mission Pratt says:

And so to house
Them all the Residence--Fort Sainte Marie!⁵⁸

The expression is not a sentence but an exclamation. It is very effective because it is colloquial and natural, just the sort of thing anyone would say when a good idea comes to him suddenly.

The hostility shown to the priests when they made the journey to the Petuns and Neutrals is made very clear in a few words:

⁵⁷ Pratt, op. cit., p. 68.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 63.

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When the priests arrived,
They found that their black cassocks had become
The symbols of the scourge.⁵⁹

An effective inversion comes at the beginning of the same stanza:

And now began a labour which for faith
And triumph of the spirit over failure
Was unsurpassed in records of the mission.⁶⁰

There are also some short sentences that are particularly forceful because they suggest so much with so few words:

They carried on their backs
A blanket with the burden of the altar.⁶¹

This gives a very clear picture and also a kinaesthetic image because one almost hunches his shoulders in sympathy under the weight of the load carried along difficult and almost impassable trails. Another kinaesthetic image, a form of onomatopoeia, is found in the same stanza where again one feels the weight of the packs and the weariness of the travellers:

Morning--the packs reshouldered and the tramp
Resumed, the stumble over mouldering trunks
Of pine and oak, the hopeless search for trails,
Till after dusk with cassocks torn and "nothing
To eat all day save each a morsel of bread",
They saw the smoke of the first Indian village.⁶²

It would be difficult to find a better expression of

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 64-65.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 64.

⁶² Ibid.

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hesitancy brought on by fear and resolved into hope that treachery might succeed than is here given:

But now cunning might do
What fear forbade.⁶³

The justifiable pride of priests and people in the bravery of a missionary forms the background for a clear statement in:

Bressani's presence stimulated faith
Within the souls of priests and neophytes.⁶⁴

Two good examples of Pratt's ability to pack the sentence with meaning are found in these short statements:

The Mohawks and the Senecas uniting,
A thousand strong, the town bereft of fighters,
Four hundred old and young inside the stakes,
The assault was made two hours before the dawn,⁶⁵

and this equally striking expression:

The alarm
Sounded, five hundred of the natives fled
To the mother fort only to be pursued
And massacred in the snow.⁶⁶

Pratt also uses structural variations. Here is a sentence in which two similar phrases balance each other and so give emphasis:

The fury of taunt was followed by fury of blow.⁶⁷

There is a similar balance in the parallel structure of the

⁶³ Ibid., p. 66.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 77.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 87.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 88.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 92.

two "over" phrases in this longer passage:

Over the wastes abandoned by human tread,
Where only the bittern's cry was heard at dusk;
Over the lakes where the wild ducks built their nests,
The skies that had banked their fires are shining again
With the stars that guided the feet of Jogue's and
Brébeuf.⁶⁸

As a final example of sentence structure there is this sentence in which the idea points very cleverly in two directions. After speaking of the possible peace with the Iroquois, Pratt says:

This was the pipe-dream--was it credible?⁶⁹
He has used a cliché, "the pipe-dream," in its accepted sense of something impossible which one imagines as happening. But it is given a new value by the historical connotation of the Indian pipe as a symbol of peace, so the sentence seems to speak only of a dream and the mind finishes the thought into a "dream of peace." Then memory reminds us that, historically, this dream of peace was, indeed, a pipe-dream. It is a very clever use of words, refreshing and provocative.

But the texture of a poem does not exist entirely in the diction and sentence structure. It is also in the imagery. Dr. Pratt has shown skill in building his sentences and mastery in his use of words. Wherever

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 94.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 79.

possible he has avoided adjectives in order to gain simplicity and strength. But the poem is not stripped austere of all ornament. There are figures of speech, alliteration, symbols and other devices which are used in such a way as to enhance the whole, although they are, in themselves, entirely subordinate to the narrative. These ornaments are used skilfully and forcefully. One never has the impression that a line was written solely to give the poet an opportunity for using poetic decorations, but one does feel, whenever they are used, that they flow naturally from the intensity of the thought. So naturally do they occur that the reader is not conscious of them or of what means the poet has used to make the line so effective. One finds them by searching for them. This is the strongest and most efficient use that any poet can make of such devices. Here again, Pratt shows his mastery of the art of poetic expression.

It is not possible to study each example of poetic ornament, nor is it necessary to search through the poem for an example of each kind of figure or image. A selection will be made and enough examples studied to show how cleverly and effectively Dr. Pratt has used them.

In the opening lines, which are particularly rich in figures of speech, one finds synecdoche. This figure recurs constantly throughout the poem. The species is

used for the genus, that is, all singing birds are represented by the "lark" and all birds of strong flight by the "eagle" in these lines:

The air was charged with song beyond the range
Of larks, with wings beyond the stretch of eagles.⁷⁰

In another example the market-places and streets show the crowded life of the cities and are contrasted with the shores as a symbol of the peace of the countryside of Galilee:

To leave the dusty marts and city streets
And stray along the shores of Galilee.⁷¹

Again synecdoche, this time in the use of a part for the whole, appears in this line:

Held in the stern hand of the Jesuit Order.⁷²

There are many examples of metonymy, but two will suffice to show how this device has been used. The container, the "hearth," is used to express the idea of the fire which warms the home. It also connotes the fire of faith which at this period of history blazed in the homes and found its outlet in religious vocations which resulted in a spreading of the fire of faith, symbolized by candle flames illuminating altars. All this lies behind the brief expression; "Kindling the hearths and altars."⁷³

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 36.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 37.

⁷² Ibid., p. 38.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 36.

In the next example the word "sod" is not used just as a part of a whole, but it stands for all that is implied in the idea of preparing for and building the mission and, because of this connotation, the figure is metonymy:

And turn the first sod of the Jesuit mission.⁷⁴

Three examples will show Dr. Pratt's use of transferred epithets. Canadians, familiar with the prairies' golden miles, can appreciate this picture of the grain lands of France and the emphasis given by the position of the adjective:

The undulating miles of wheat and barley.⁷⁵

The cold, starving, unsheltered missionaries, repulsed by the Petuns, are brought clearly to mind by the unusual use of the adjectives in:

Fresh visits to the Petun tribes
Had little yield but cold and starving days,
Unsheltered nights.⁷⁶

The transferred adjective "fruitless" and the omission of the word "toil" which it should modify make this short sentence intense and vivid:

There he spent
The winter, fruitless.⁷⁷

There are many examples of effective use of repetition. This one, with "four months" made stronger by the

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 42.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 85.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 91.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 42.

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use of one more adjective, is noteworthy:

Defying threats, the Fathers spent four months,
Four winter months, besieging half the towns
In their pursuit of souls.⁷⁸

Balanced phrases give this sentence emphasis:

. . . the treasury
Was dry of presents and of promises.⁷⁹

The use of parallel structure occurs again in the passage which describes Brébeuf's sufferings and is employed there with great success, especially in the lines:

They would gash and beribbon those muscles. Was it
the blood?
They would draw it fresh from its fountain. Was it
the heart?⁸⁰

There are many examples of litotes, meiosis and hyperbole. Deliberate understatement to soften the effect is found in this example of litotes:

Met at the doors
By screams and blows, they would betake themselves
To the evergreens for shelter over-night.⁸¹

This sentence also leaves much to be supplied by the imagination before the thought in the phrase "rebuff of speech and club" is complete:

At dawn they came back to the huts to get
The same rebuff of speech and club.⁸²

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 67.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 67.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 48.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 92.

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The meiosis in this passage is an outstanding example of understatement:

He reached
Quebec with every day of the five weeks
A miracle of escape.⁸³

Hyperbole appears strikingly in the description of Brébeuf, "high as a totem-pole,"⁸⁴ and also in Jogues' statement:

I will return
Cost it a thousand lives,⁸⁵

where the exaggeration gives great strength to the voicing of his decision. This same force, gained through hyperbole, is found also in the brief statement of Brébeuf's importance to the mission:

Lion
Of limb and heart, he had entrenched the faith,
Was like a triple palisade himself.⁸⁶

The "lion" metaphor in the first line and the simile in the last line of the quotation above exemplify Pratt's use of comparisons. There are many similes and metaphors, both direct and implied, in the poem. They are fresh and original and often of striking beauty. There is a very well-defined simile in these lines:

So the natives
Beheld a mass of iron chips like bees
Swarm to a lodestone.⁸⁷

83 Ibid., p. 69.

84 Ibid., p. 41.

85 Ibid., p. 76.

86 Ibid., p. 78.

87 Ibid., p. 49.

There is a simple and natural simile in this:

. . . a phial where a captive flea
Looked like a beetle,⁸⁸

and a very sharp one in the expression, "the Iroquois, alert as eagles."⁸⁹ The march of the captives is given in these lines which, besides containing an excellent simile, form also an example of onomatopoeia. The slow, heavy fall of the syllables is a perfect expression of the discouragement and exhaustion of the prisoners:

Naked, laden with pillage from the lodges,
The captives filed like wounded beasts of burden.⁹⁰

Dr. Pratt has used metaphors with equal skill. Speaking of the preparations for their apostolic work he says that the priests:

. . . took hold
Of Huron words and beat them into order.⁹¹

Brébeuf, having witnessed the tortures inflicted on the Iroquois captive by the Hurons, is inspired to write a letter to possible volunteers. Pratt puts it in this clear metaphor:

Only a bell with a bronze throat
Must summon missionaries to these fields.⁹²

This metaphor is a fresh use of Christ's description of

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 49.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 47.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 86.

⁹² Ibid., p. 56.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 88.

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the harvest:

'Twas ploughing only--for eight years would pass
Before even the blades appeared.⁹³

At first sight this figure seems to be a substitution but, on examination, it is clearly seen to be a clever metaphor since the word "blades," although representing the harvest which would come later, is really used to carry through the idea that the gaining of converts is a spiritual harvest. The periods of peace and rest at Ste. Marie between missionary journeys are compared to a nurse or a doctor binding up a wound:

These were the hours
That put the bandages upon their hurts.⁹⁴

Huronian, as a mission, is compared to a huge bowl which is being broken under repeated blows as the outlying missions are captured and destroyed:

Piece by piece the rim
Was being cracked and fissures driven down
The bowl.⁹⁵

A very clear picture is given in this sentence:

The villages fell before a blizzard of axes
And arrows and spears, and then were put to the
torch.⁹⁶

Perhaps the most striking example of implied metaphor is given in these two passages which, although several

⁹³ Ibid., p. 42.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 86.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 79.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 93.

pages apart, carry on the same idea, that of the deepening intensity of the struggle. Huronia is a piece of metal which is being shaped by a blacksmith. There is no direct statement of what the smith is making but, through the implied metaphor, one is led to think of a sword being shaped for the impending battle, a comparison quite in keeping with the epic nature of the poem:

Between the hammer and the anvil now
 Huronia was laid and the first priest
 To take the blow was Daniel.⁹⁷

The same idea is repeated in the later passage:

. . . for the spring
 Opened upon the hardest tragic blows
 The iron in the human soul could stand.⁹⁸

A hint of what lies ahead appears in the passage just quoted. In the handling of dramatic irony Dr. Pratt again shows consummate skill. The missionaries were all prepared and eager to give their lives for Christ if He wanted that sacrifice of them. They thought often about torture by fire or death from a sudden blow and considered these as means of sharing in Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Page after page of the Relations has a reference to the cross and to suffering and these statements are in such simple, direct language that one is convinced that this daily acceptance was part of the missionary's life. For

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 84.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 86.

example, in one of Brébeuf's early letters, incorporated with the Relation of 1635, this passage occurs:

But, in this journey, we all had to begin by these experiences to bear the Cross that our Lord presents to us for his honor, and for the salvation of these poor Barbarians. In truth, I was sometimes so weary that the body could do no more, but at the same time my soul experienced very deep peace, considering that I was suffering for God; no one knows it if he has not experienced it.⁹⁹

This thought comes in regularly throughout the poem. Here it is in Brébeuf's words:

There is no gain but this--that what you suffer
Shall be of God,¹⁰⁰

and, a little farther on:

. . . for you will find
A consolation in the cross that far outweighs
Its burdens.¹⁰¹

Dr. Pratt has used this acceptance as a symbol in his poem and a means of gaining greater unity. He uses physical suffering as a thread to bind the poem together and as a device to employ dramatic irony. He also uses fire and the cross as symbols of the motivating force in the lives of the missionaries.

The many references to fire fall into three main groups; those that use fire as a symbol of religious

⁹⁹ Edna Kenton, editor, Jesuit Relations, New York, New York, The Vanguard Press, 1954, p. 103.

¹⁰⁰ Pratt, op. cit., p. 58.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

observances, those that use it as a comparison such as would be made by anyone under natural circumstances, and those that point to fire as a phase of torture or as a hint of such torture yet to be borne by the missionaries. To the Indians the first and last of these groups would represent two distinct ideas; but to the missionaries, in their own lives, they are but two phases of the same thing. To them the physical reality of death by fire was a completion of the holocaust, the whole burnt offering, that they had made of themselves to God when taking their vows as religious. The candle flames on the altar were a symbol of Christ; the victim in the flames, offered to God in love for Him and for the salvation of their fellowmen, was likewise a symbol of Christ. By his use of the fire symbol in his religious and historical references Dr. Pratt shows that he has understood this connection between the two and so, by their use, he gains unity in the poem. Some of the fire images are very beautiful, for example:

The flame had spread across the Pyrenees--
 The visions of Theresa burning through
 The adorations of the Carmelites,¹⁰²

and this from Brébeuf's dream of home as he faces death:

Had dawn
 This very day not flung her surplices
 Around the headlands and with golden fire

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 37.

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Consumed the silken argosies that made
For Rouen from the estuary of the Seine.¹⁰³

But, in other passages, fire is not an image; it is the
stark statement of a horrible reality, such as:

. . . the fires
That slowly wreathed themselves around a stake.¹⁰⁴

There is brutal horror in this:

. . . had reserved
The one survivor for a fiery pageant.¹⁰⁵

Fire is also the fate of the beloved Sainte Marie:

It fell
To Ragueneau's lot to perform a final rite--
To offer the fort in sacrificial fire!
He applied the torch himself.¹⁰⁶

Dr. Pratt uses the idea of fire very cleverly
throughout the whole poem, not only as a means of obtaining
unity, but also for contrast, as a study of the examples
above will show. Choosing only the mention of flames,
fire, candles, and coals, and leaving out less direct
allusions such as heat and smoke, one finds that there are
fifty fire references in the poem. Of these, ten are
religious symbols, beginning with:

Kindling the hearths and altars, changing vows
Of rote into an alphabet of flame,¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 91.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 94.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 53.

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continuing with, "To flame on an eternal Calendar,"¹⁰⁸ and closing with the picture of religious ceremonies in the restored Martyrs' Shrine:

. . . the candles
Are burning today in the chancel of Ste. Marie.¹⁰⁹

There are sixteen references which might be called "natural comparisons," such as:

Between the two nostalgic fires Brébeuf
Was swung--between two homes;¹¹⁰

or these shorter expressions, "the fire of the Relations,"¹¹¹ and "to burn the torpors of his heart."¹¹² At times these comparisons give a fresh and vivid picture:

The stories burned like fuel of the faggots.¹¹³

The remaining twenty-four references are to fire used as an instrument of torture. Some tell in a few moving words a tale of horror, such as:

. . . dimming the red glow
Of the hatchet collar,¹¹⁴

or Bressani's terse remark:

Only ~~one~~ finger of the hand
Is left unburned.¹¹⁵

108 Ibid., p. 58.

109 Ibid., p. 94.

110 Ibid., p. 44.

111 Ibid., p. 45.

112 Ibid., p. 46.

113 Ibid., p. 77.

114 Ibid., p. 55.

115 Ibid., p. 77.

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Pratt has also used references to death, especially death by martyrdom, as a means of foreshadowing, for contrast with the peaceful scenes, and to build up the climax. When Brébeuf first hopes to be sent to Canada as a missionary he is ready to travel "Per ignem et per aquam"¹¹⁶ and to face life in Indian camps "with forts and palisades and fiery stakes."¹¹⁷ He took his vows with the determination:

I shall be broken first before
I break them.¹¹⁸

His first Mass at Rouen is mentioned¹¹⁹ as a foreshadowing of his last one at St. Louis.¹²⁰ His first journey to Huronia was delayed because Viel had been drowned by the natives.¹²¹ His first missionary work, that of spending a winter with the Algonquins, was darkened with:

. . . threats
Of murderous intent that just escaped
The deed--the prologue to Huronia!¹²²

When the Iroquois captive was tortured the priests knew what lay in store for them as they saw:

. . . the crude unconscious variants
Of reed and sceptre, robe and cross, brier

116 Ibid., p. 38.

117 Ibid.

118 Ibid.

119 Ibid., p. 39.

120 Ibid., p. 88.

121 Ibid., p. 40.

122 Ibid.

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And crown! Might not one day baptismal drops
Be turned against him in a rain of death?¹²³

Again, during the period of waiting in France, Brébeuf
thought of the two fields of labour that he might choose;
in his homeland, undisturbed prayer;

But in the other would be broken altars
And broken bodies of both Host and priest.¹²⁴

Later Pratt uses the same phrase in describing the altar
stone used at Brébeuf's last Mass. His altar is as holy as
that in St. Peter's:

For, covered in the centre of the table,
Recessed and sealed, a hollowed stone contained
A relic of a charred or broken body
Which perhaps a thousand years ago or more
Was offered as a sacrifice to Him
Whose crucifix stood there between the candles.¹²⁵

Besides the reference to the broken body in this
quotation another significant phrase occurs, "whose
crucifix stood there." The symbol of the cross, or in its
more specific form, the crucifix, is the leitmotiv of the
whole poem. Dr. Pratt made a deliberate choice of the
cross as a symbol. In this connection Dr. E. K. Brown says:

What is fundamental to Pratt's interest in the story is
suggested by his remark that he began the composition
of the piece with a quest for "a simile for the Cross
which would express alike shame and glory, something
strongly vernacular set over against cultivated imagery

¹²³ Ibid., p. 54.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 89.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 44.

and language. Two slabs of board--nails--Jewish hill,
and so forth, contrasted with lilies, robes and so
forth."¹²⁶

There are twenty-eight direct references to the cross, the crucifix and the sign of the cross used in Baptism, and two to Our Lady of Sorrows, a title which, to every Catholic mind, conjures up a picture of Calvary. Like the fire symbol, the cross symbol is found early in the poem:

The very clouds at night to John of the Cross
Being cruciform.¹²⁷

Christ with His cross, the altar of His sacrifice, is one of Brébeuf's earliest visions:

And in Bayeux a neophyte while rapt
In contemplation saw a bleeding form
Falling beneath the instrument of death,
Rising under the quickening of the thongs,
Stumbling along the Via Dolorosa.¹²⁸

Here is the Indians' wondering impression of the crucifix:

. . . with that new sign
Of wood or iron held up before the eyes
Of the stricken.¹²⁹

A later vision of Brébeuf, after he had suffered so terribly among the unfriendly Neutrals, shows the cross, not only as a religious symbol, but also as a foreshadowing of martyrdom:

¹²⁶ E. K. Brown, On Canadian Poetry, Toronto, Ontario, The Ryerson Press, 1944, revised edition, p. 156.

¹²⁷ Pratt, op. cit., p. 37.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 38.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 66.

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Upon his bed that night Brébeuf related
 A vision he had seen--a moving cross,
 Its upright beam uprising from the south--
 The country of the Iroquois: the shape
 Advanced along the sky until its arms
 Cast shadows on the Huron territory,
 "And huge enough to crucify us all."¹³⁰

In the account of Father Jogues' tortures one reads that he
 suffered a form of crucifixion:

Weak through hanging by my wrists
 Between two poles, my feet not touching ground.¹³¹

A little farther on Pratt tells of the death of René Goupil,
 the martyr of the sign of the cross:

René Goupil,
 While placing on a child's forehead the sign
 Of the Cross was murdered by a sorcerer.¹³²

The same sign is also a source of strength to the priests.

During their brief visits to Ste. Marie:

They stood for hours before the saints or knelt
 Before the Virgin and the crucifix
 In mute transfiguration.¹³³

As Brébeuf said his last Mass he linked the sacrifice of
 Christ on the Cross and the actual offering of his own life
 for Christ into a beautiful prayer of acceptance:

And now I offer Thee the sacrifice
 Which Thy Beloved Son made of Himself
 Upon the Cross and now renews on this,
 His holy altar . . .
 Graciously receive

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 68.

¹³² Ibid., p. 72.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 71.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 79.

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My life for His life as he gave His life
For mine.¹³⁴

The climax of this symbolism is reached as the source of Brébeuf's strength is finally disclosed. It lies

. . . in the sound of invisible trumpets blowing
Around two slabs of board, right-angled, hammered
By Roman nails and hung on a Jewish hill.¹³⁵

The final reference is to the return of the triumphant cross to the mission site, now the restored shrine:

Near to the ground where the cross broke under the
hatchet,
And went with it into the soil to come back at the turn
Of the spade with the carbon and calcium char of the
bodies,
The shrines and altars are built anew; the Aves
And prayers ascend, and the Holy Bread is broken.¹³⁶

The symbol of our salvation was, indeed, a motivating sign in the lives of Brébeuf and his brethren, and Dr. Pratt has shown this with reverence, understanding and skill.

All this facility in developing feeling, tone and texture has been used to build up the inspiration of the poem. There can be no doubt that this poem is stirring and uplifting. These qualities do not result only from the story that is told; they spring equally from the manner of telling. Dr. Pratt's poem is successful as history and also as poetry. Dr. Pelham Edgar says, "Brébeuf and His

¹³⁴ Pratt, op. cit., p. 89.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 93.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 94.

Brethren is generally regarded as Pratt's most solid achievement."¹³⁷

This poem is inspiring because it has intellectual and emotional appeal. It reaches the intellect through its presentation of events. This is done in such a way that the mind must act on them if the poem is to be fully understood. It recognizes the dichotomy that must exist between the static and the dynamic elements. A too rapid movement, or a rapid movement too long sustained, detracts from the sincerity of a poem and gives it a certain superficiality that lacks conviction. On the other hand over-emphasis of the static elements destroys its life. Dr. Pratt has avoided these extremes by skilfully blending the two elements and by continually balancing them against one another. For example, he quotes letters and conversations to break the long narrative sections and to add variety of texture. He also changes the number of characters in the different scenes; sometimes Brébeuf is alone, sometimes he is with all his brethren. Pratt has kept the poem moving by his treatment of events. Although he keeps the idea of martyrdom continually in the foreground, he describes several ways in which it is attained. The plot is devel-

¹³⁷ Pelham Edgar, Across My Path, Toronto, Ontario, The Ryerson Press, 1952, p. 113.

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oped as described. Enough foreshadowing is given to stimulate interest, and the reader's attention, once caught, is easily held.

By a discriminating choice of incidents he shows, rather than tells of, the nobility of the characters. One is led to admire the missionaries in action and to love them for what they are, noble, unselfish, God-fearing heroes. There is no attempt to substitute certificates of veracity for art. Pratt tells the true story, but he tells it so beautifully and so sympathetically that it is fresh and intensely appealing. He employs all the devices commonly used by poets, but he does not allow them to eclipse the story. He knows that all technique should come organically and should represent a solid structure, not a hollow shell. He uses the outward mechanisms permitted to poets to seize, to hold, and to satisfy the attention.

In addition to its demands on the intellect this poem also makes an appeal to the emotions. There is an epic note in the life of every man, for, some time or other, he is forced to meet with and overcome difficulties that challenge all that is best and noblest in him. It is natural to admire brave deeds, and for this reason epic poetry will always have its readers. This ability to admire the greatness in others is self-revealing, it shows the innate characteristics of the man himself. Through

this poem one learns a great deal about Pratt:

Most important, the story of Brébeuf, Lalemant, and the other pioneer priests tortured to death by the Iroquois, gives full scope for the human qualities of "Ned Pratt," his unabashed warmth of heart, and his enthusiasm for mankind in its moments of courage, endurance, comradeship and self-sacrifice.¹³⁸

Dr. Pratt has chosen for his poem one of the most inspiring chapters of our history. The dramatic conflict of civilization against savagery, of faith against paganism, has stirred the imagination from the day that the first white-sailed ship broke the horizon of the New World. Many phases of the conflict have been dealt with as our literary heritage developed, but Dr. Pratt is the first to write the whole story in a poem of universal appeal. In his review of Brébeuf and His Brethren, Nathaniel A. Benson says:

These divine stories of the love of men for God and for their fellow-men have never been told as movingly and powerfully as this great Canadian poet tells them. It is not likely that they will ever be told as majestically again, for Pratt approaches his theme with a reverential attitude for its enormous spiritual significance. He lets his scholarship, his detailed study of the period, his all-embracing poetic power, and his sense of narrative construction fashion again these compelling, almost incredible sagas of immortality, the stories of these deathless god-like lives of long ago.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Earle Birney, Canadian Poem of the Year article in Canadian Forum of Toronto, vol. 20, no. 236, September, 1940, p. 180.

¹³⁹ Nathaniel A. Benson, Brébeuf and His Brethren review in Canadian Poetry Magazine of Toronto, vol. 5, no. 1, September, 1940. p. 42.

The sentiment in the poem is strong, but there is no sentimentality, no grovelling in emotion for its own sake. The control and restraint give a sense of fulfilment and completion. Treated by a less skilful poet, the visions could have become emotional orgies, but Pratt knows just how to use them. To the missionaries they were inspiration and a sign of God's approval, an encouragement to continue their work for Him. Pratt uses them in this way, reverently, understandingly, powerfully.

Dr. Pratt has used his material well. In a long poem of this nature it was necessary to build up a contrast in each phase of the work. He has done this. But unity is equally important, and it has never been sacrificed. As a result the poem holds together as a well-integrated whole. This is not accidental. It is the reward of skilful planning and thoughtful co-ordination. Because of this the poem has an individuality that is unique. Speaking of all Pratt's long narrative poems L. A. Mackay says:

. . . the inherent unity that underlies the seeming artlessness of construction is demonstrated by the fact that the poetical effect is the effect of the poem as a whole. There are indeed few poets in whom the whole is so much greater than the parts.¹⁴⁰

In Brébeuf and His Brethren the effect is indeed the effect

¹⁴⁰ L. A. Mackay, The Poetry of E. J. Pratt article in Canadian Forum of Toronto, vol. 24, no. 287, December, 1944, p. 209.

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of the whole. This poem induces an experience that could not be produced by any other. It is, then, an entity. It has its own individuality that makes it distinct from all others. It is, in truth, a great Canadian poem.

CHAPTER IV

COMPARISON AND CONTRAST

But it is surely time that we should recognize only two criteria of literary judgment. The first is primitive, and merely clears the ground of rubbish; it is: Does the work before us, or the author, perform what he sets out to perform with a distinguished skill in the direction in which his powers are exercised? If not, he interests the higher criticism not at all; but if yes, then follows the second test: Where, in the vast and ever-shifting scheme of literary evolution, does he take his place, and in what relation does he stand, not to those who are least like him, but to those who are of his own kith and kin?¹

Through an historical and literary evaluation of Brébeuf and His Brethren, Dr. Pratt's achievement has been measured according to the first test proposed by Edmund Gosse. This chapter will study the poem under the second of his literary criteria and will compare it with poems of similar subject-matter by other Canadian writers.

It is impossible in a work of this length to study every Canadian poem dealing with Indians or with the struggle between the white men and the natives in Canada. Nor is it possible to find a poem equal in length to Brébeuf and His Brethren and dealing with the same matter. Hence a selection has been made of four poems that are of

¹ Edmund Gosse, A Short History of Modern English Literature, New York and London, D. Appleton and Company, 1924, p. 390-391.

special interest. Pauline Johnson's As Red Men Die has been chosen for two reasons: first, it was written by a poet who, because she was an Indian, could be expected to present a unique point of view, and, secondly, it deals with torture by fire unto death of a Mohawk captured by Hurons. Since Dr. Pratt's poem has a similar incident there is here an interesting parallel. Archibald Lampman's At the Long Sault: May 1660 deals with the defence of a flimsy fortification against Iroquois attack. In Pratt's poem there are several scenes dealing with the defence of a fort against the Iroquois. It will be possible to find parallel passages for comparison. Lampman's poem is of great interest because its author is generally recognized as a leading member of the small group of Canada's best poets; Dr. E. K. Brown places him first of three: Archibald Lampman, Duncan Campbell Scott, and E. J. Pratt,² and Desmond Pacey lists him first of the four that he thinks best: Lampman, Carman, Pratt, and Klein.³ Since both critics include Lampman and Pratt, a study of the two poems should prove interesting. Marjorie Pickthall, who is generally acknowledged to be a poet of unusual ability, has

² E. K. Brown, On Canadian Poetry, Toronto, Ontario, The Ryerson Press, 1944, pp. 88-164.

³ Desmond Pacey, Creative Writing in Canada, Toronto, Ontario, The Ryerson Press, 1952, p. 191.

written the soliloquy of a Jesuit missionary from Huronia in her Père Lalement. Dr. Pratt deals with similar subject-matter in several places in his poem. Finally, Alan Sullivan's Brébeuf and Lalemant has been chosen for comparison since it deals with the two companion martyrs during their hours of torture. This scene has also been chosen by Pratt. It is true that Alan Sullivan is not considered a major Canadian poet, but the very title of his poem gives him a valid claim to consideration here.

Pauline Johnson's poem is well known to Canadian readers. It treats of torture inflicted on a Mohawk prisoner by his Huron captors. By the whole tone of the poem one is left in no doubt as to where its author's sympathies lie. There is a blazing defiance or an expression of hereditary hatred burning in every line, and its very fury helps one to understand why the wars between these two nations were so fierce and so relentless.

Pauline Johnson's poem is strongly personal for it relates an event in her family history. Mr. W. McRaye says:

As Red Men Die is an incident in the life of one of her ancestors, an Iroquois prisoner of the Hurons, hereditary enemies, with whom the Iroquois warred incessantly, finally exterminating them at Penetanguishene.⁴

⁴ Walter McRaye, Pauline Johnson and Her Friends, Toronto, Ontario, The Ryerson Press, 1947, p. 90.

This poem of fifty-seven lines is a dramatic narrative in heroic couplets. The story is told partly through the captive's defiant thoughts, partly through the Hurons' question and its scornful answer, and finally through a description of the torture and the Mohawk's manner of meeting it.

Pratt tells us:

Endurance was a code,
Among the braves, and impassivity,⁵

and his treatment of the dialogue passage emphasizes this:

The prisoner
Was made to sing his death-song, was embraced,
Hailed with ironic greetings, forced to state
His willingness to die.

"See how your hands
Are crushed. You cannot thus desire to live.

No.

Then be of good courage--you shall die.

True!--What shall be the manner of my death?

By fire.

When shall it be?

Tonight.

What hour?

At sunset.

All is well."⁶

But Pauline Johnson's dialogue shows none of this refined cruelty. It is not impassively impersonal and, lacking

⁵ E. J. Pratt, Brébeuf and His Brethren, in Collected Poems, Toronto, Ontario, The Macmillan Company of Canada, second edition, 1946, p. 55-56.

⁶ Ibid., p. 54.

this restraint, it is not nearly so horrible:

"Wilt thou
Walk o'er the bed of fire that waits thee now--
Walk with uncovered feet upon the coals,
Until thou reach the ghostly Land of Souls,
And, with thy Mohawk death-song please our ear?
Or wilt thou with the women rest thee here?"
His eyes flash like an eagle's, and his hands
Clench at the insult. Like a god he stands.
"Prepare the fire!" he scornfully demands.⁷

His answer, "Prepare the fire!" is sufficiently laconic, but the spirit of it is anything but "impassive." Note also the description of his attitude towards his captivity and his captors as shown in his manner:

With scowling brow he stands and courage high,
Watching with haughty and defiant eye
His captors, as they council o'er his fate,
Or strive his boldness to intimidate
His eyes flash like an eagle's, and his hands
Clench at the insult. Like a god he stands.
"Prepare the fire!" he scornfully demands.⁸

This is very different from the code which permitted no sign of emotion whatever to be shown.

There is a difference also in the length of time required to accomplish the prisoner's death. In the Johnson poem there is no hint that the prisoner has been weakened by previous torture, unless it lies in the line:

He--who despises pain and sneers at grief.⁹

⁷ E. Pauline Johnson, Flint and Feather, Toronto, Ontario, The Musson Book Company, 1931, p. 6-7.

⁸ Ibid., p. 6.

⁹ Ibid.

But his death occurs with amazing rapidity for one whose body has undergone rigorous training for the war-path:

The path of coals outstretches white with heat,
A forest fir's length--ready for his feet.
Unflinching as a rock he steps along
The burning mass, and sings his wild war song;

Up the long trail of fire he boasting goes,
Dancing a war dance to defy his foes.
His flesh is scorched, his muscles burn and shrink,
But still he dances to death's awful brink.

Slower and slower yet his footstep swings,
Wilder and wilder still his death-song rings,
Fiercer and fiercer thro' the forest bounds
His voice that leaps to Happier Hunting Grounds.
One savage yell--

Then loyal to his race,
He bends to death--but never to disgrace.¹⁰

This torture seems to be quickly over. The long, slow agony of Pratt's Iroquois is much more terrible in itself and in the hideous compassion of the captors:

Eleven fires
Were lit along the whole length of the cabin.
His body smeared with pitch and bound with belts
Of bark, the Iroquois was forced to run
The fires, stopped at each end by the young braves,
And swiftly driven back, and when he swooned,
They carried him outside to the night air,
Laid him on fresh damp moss, poured cooling water
Into his mouth, and to his burns applied
The soothing balsams. With resuscitation
They lavished on him all the courtesies
Of speech and gesture, gave him food and drink,
Compassionately spoke of his wounds and pain.
The ordeal every hour was resumed
And halted, but, with each recurrence, blows
Were added to the burns and gibes gave place

¹⁰ Johnson, op. cit., p. 7-8.

To yells until the sacrificial dawn,
 Lighting the scaffold, dimming the red glow
 Of the hatchet collar, closed the festival.¹¹

This man's torture lasted from sunset until dawn. Pratt's description is much less spectacular, but it is infinitely more convincing and in its restraint there is a greater artistry.

The diction of Pratt's poem is also more restrained and much more powerful. Note the impact of the last line of this sentence:

The warriors had surprised
 A band of Iroquois and had reserved
 The one survivor for a fiery pageant.¹²

One wonders what had been done to the other prisoners; had they died fighting? or had this one alone survived the preliminary tortures? What was there about this one that had made the captors single him out for the fire torture? Again, notice the built-up horror which is added to the whole idea of torture by the two historical references in this passage:

No cunning of an ancient Roman triumph,
 Nor torment of a Medici confession
 Surpassed the subtle savagery of art
 Which made the dressing for the sacrifice
 A ritual of mockery for the victim.¹³

¹¹ Pratt, op. cit., p. 54-55.

¹² Ibid., p. 53.

¹³ Ibid.

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The sibilant alliteration of "surpassed the subtle savagery" lets us hear the Hurons' hiss without calling attention to it as Miss Johnson does. She has some effective alliteration in "hideous hate" and "forest fir's length--ready for his feet." But nowhere in the whole Pratt poem is there an expression as blatant or as harsh as Miss Johnson's "reeking, red, and raw"¹⁴ as a description of the scalps. It is true that she is describing something very ugly in fact and in implication and there is even an echo of the war-cry in the "ee-eh-aw" vowel sounds of the words. But there is a lack of finesse in the expression which makes it startling and which gives the impression that the whole purpose behind the wording is to add to its stage effect. The position of "soon" does not add anything, either in emphasis or in clarity, to this expression:

Not thinking, soon that reeking, red, and raw,
Their scalps will deck the belts of Iroquois.¹⁵

Her use of "knoweth," in the stanza before this one, as an isolated example among verbs which are used in their normal forms is unfortunate and strikes a false note:

He knoweth not that this same jeering band
Will bite the dust--will lick the Mohawk's hand.¹⁶

The contracted form "thro'" is unnecessary, for the word is

¹⁴ Johnson, op. cit., p. 7.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

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still just one syllable whether spelled out in full or not and the contraction looks careless, especially when it comes at the very climax of the poem. In two places Miss Johnson uses "o'er," contracted to fit the rhythm. This, again, is unfortunate and, with a happier arrangement of the words, or by substitution, it could have been avoided.

Mr. Hector Charlesworth has made an interesting statement about the genesis of this poem. He says that it

. . . was written in less than forty minutes; a fact which to the reader, who has never written verses, may seem incredible, but it is true nevertheless. And it might be added that but one word in the whole poem was afterwards altered; that the verses do not contain a single clumsy or crude expression is known to most Canadian readers.¹⁷

The fierce savagery of expression does suggest that this selection was written in forty minutes and at a white heat of inspiration. But it would have been a more perfect poem had it been revised carefully and critically after the first intensity had died down. Just how little modern critics agree with Mr. Charlesworth's last statement is evident from Mr. A. J. M. Smith's comment:

When Miss Johnson tried to portray more directly and more dramatically the feelings of the aborigines, she became, in such poems as "A Cry from an Indian Wife," "As Red Men Die," and "The Pilot of the Plains," theatrical and crude. The rhythm is heavy, the imagery

¹⁷ Mrs. W. Garland Foster, The Mohawk Princess, Vancouver, B. C., Lions' Gate Publishing Company, 1931, p. 172-173.

conventional, and the language melodramatic and forced. Her best work is to be found not in her Indian poetry at all but in one or two pretty and very artificial little lyrics.¹⁸

These divergent opinions can be reconciled if a clue given by Dr. O. J. Stevenson is noted. Describing his first meeting with Pauline Johnson in 1893, he says:

. . . I recall the fascination with which I listened to her recital of "As Red Men Die" and "The Song My Paddle Sings" . . . It was a new kind of poetry, which jarred and jangled strangely with "The Eve of St. Agnes," and "Fra Lippo Lippi," and "The Idylls of the King"; and to this day as I recall her recital I cannot think of the march of the Iroquois Chieftain over the bed of burning coals without an indescribable thrill.¹⁹

The operative words are "as I recall her recital." This poem was written to be recited. It has become a point of literary tradition in Canada that Pauline Johnson made an irresistible appeal when, dressed in Mohawk costume complete with bear claw necklace and, later, a scalp dangling from her belt, she recited her Indian poetry. If As Red Men Die now seems melodramatic one must remember that it was written to be given as a vivid reading. As such it must have been a stirring presentation. Both selections under comparison exhibit dramatic qualities for it is interesting to note here that Pratt's poem was

¹⁸ A. J. M. Smith, The Book of Canadian Poetry, Toronto, Ontario, W. J. Gage and Company, 1943, p. 21.

¹⁹ McRae, op. cit., p. 36-37.

presented over CBC stations, the modern equivalent of Miss Johnson's popular readings. But Pauline Johnson is no longer with us to give to her work the added impact of her personality. Unfortunately, her poem loses in a quiet reading just as much as Dr. Pratt's poem gains. Although each poem helps towards an understanding of the other, the surer and more finished interpretation is that given in Brébeuf and His Brethren.

Archibald Lampman's At the Long Sault: May 1660 is a masterly presentation of an historic incident which is proudly revered by all Canadians, the saving of Montreal from Iroquois attack through the self-sacrificing bravery of Daulac and his companions. This event took place just eleven years after the death of Brébeuf and Lalemant and ten years after the withdrawal of the Jesuits and their Christian Huron charges to the relative safety of the country near Quebec. In the intervening period of time, the Iroquois became ever more daring and attacked the white settlers, even those living near the fortified areas. But the resistance offered by Daulac and his fellow patriots gave pause to the Iroquois incursions and brought safety to Montreal. It is interesting to note that this poem deals with the action of a band of heroes under one strong leader, this time laymen fighting for the safety of their homes. In this it resembles Brébeuf and His Brethren which

Lampman's poem of ninety-six lines is written in irregular rhymed stanzas. These vary in length except the last four which are quatrains with the second and fourth lines rhyming. The lines of this section are predominantly of iambic trimeters, but there is great variety in the meter; some feet are anapests and some lines are hyper-metric.

The poem opens with a description of the setting, a calm night in May, the woods flooded with moonlight. Except for the foreshadowing given by mention of the grey hawk, there is no hint of the impending battle:

Under the day-long sun there is life and mirth
In the working earth,
And the wonderful moon shines bright
Through the soft spring night,
The innocent flowers in the limitless woods are
springing
Far and away
With the sound and the perfume of May,
And ever up from the south the happy birds are winging,
The waters glitter and leap and play
While the grey hawk soars.²⁰

Lampman is generally considered to be primarily a nature

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poet and this picture is surely painted by one who has a love for all things in nature and also the keen observing eye of an artist. But there is a subdued, sympathetic tone to these introductory lines that sets the mood for what is to come. Nature here is the background for the action just as it is with Pratt when he says:

The stories of those northern boundaries
Where in the winter the white pines could brush
The Pleiades, and at the equinoxes
Under the gold and green of the auroras
Wild geese drove wedges through the zodiac.²¹

Again, like Lampman, Pratt describes springtime in terms of birds and wild flowers:

Not until the juncos came,
And flickers tapped the crevices of bark,
And the bloodroot was pushing through the leaf-mould,
Would they reset their faces towards their home.²²

In these extracts there is an amazing similarity of idea and at the same time a great diversity of expression. Each poet has succeeded admirably in what he has set out to do in these descriptive lines. So far, the honours are equally divided.

After painting in the background, Lampman sets the stage for the action:

But far in an open glade of the forest set
Where the rapid plunges and roars,
Is a ruined fort with a name that men forget,-
A shelterless pen

²¹ Pratt, op. cit., p. 38.

²² Ibid. p. 82.

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With its broken palisade,
 Behind it, musket in hand,
 Beyond message or aid
 In this savage heart of the wild,
 Mere youngsters, grown in a moment to men,
 Grim and alert and arrayed,
 The comrades of Daulac stand.²³

In this passage there is an indescribable note of loneliness and futility which begins with the word "far," continues with "a ruined fort with a name that men forget," "a shelterless pen," "broken palisade," "beyond message or aid" and "this savage heart of the wild." The urgency of the defence is suggested by the fact that it is undertaken by "mere youngsters, grown in a moment to men" and that "grim and alert" they stand waiting. And then we meet the enemy:

Ever before them, night and day,
 The rush and skulk and cry
 Of foes, not men but devils, panting for prey.²⁴

These are the same Iroquois that Pratt describes:

Treacherous and stealthy in their ambuscades,
 They terrorize the country.²⁵

They are the same men who captured Jogues:

Enraged that on the east-bound trip the party
 Had slipped their hands, awaited them, ambushed
 Within the grass and reeds along the shore.²⁶

²³ Lampman, op. cit., p. 13.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Pratt, op. cit., p. 57. ²⁶ Ibid., p. 69.

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And they are in the same country that Brébeuf knew:

. . . along the Ottawa
Through the steep gorges where the river narrowed,
Through calmer waters where the river widened.²⁷

Pratt also gives a picture of the whole district when the Iroquois were on the war-path. It is against a background like this that one must place Daulac's defence:

The thunder clouds were massing in the east
Under the pounding drums.

.
The Iroquois
Infesting lake and stream, forest and shore,
Were trapping soldiers, traders, Huron guides:
The whole confederacy was on the march.
Both waterways were blocked, the quicker route--
St. Lawrence, and the arduous Ottawa.
They caught the Hurons at their camps, surprised
Canoe-fleets from the reeds and river bends
And robbed them, killed them in the portages.
So widespread were their forays, they encountered
Bands of Algonquins on the hunt, slew them,
Dispersed them from their villages and sent
Survivors to the northern wilderness.
So keen their lust for slaughter, they enticed
The Huron chieftains under pledge of truce
And closed negotiations with their scalps.²⁸

Pratt has certainly succeeded better in furnishing the historical background, but, in writing a very much longer poem, he had the advantage of being able to give more space to description. In regard to the tone and all that it implies Lampman has achieved greater intensity. In his poem the air of sadness and desperate fidelity when faced with defeat and death could not be surpassed. This is

²⁷ Ibid., p. 41.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 82-83.

particularly noticeable in the next stanza, especially in its closing line:

Day and night they have watched while the little plain
 Grew dark with the rush of the foe, but their host
 Broke ever and melted away, with no boast
 But to number their slain;
 And now as the days renew
 Hunger and thirst and care
 Were they never so stout, so true,
 Press at their hearts; but none
 Falters or shrinks or utters a coward word,
 Though each setting sun
 Brings from the pitiless wild new hands to the
 Iroquois horde,
 And only to them despair.²⁹

In the next stanza Lampman speaks of the white-faced, silent band which fights on doggedly. And then, in his noteworthy simile, he compares this last stand to that of a bull-moose cornered by wolves. This passage is of great interest because "here for the first time he deals with one of the great creatures of the wilds."³⁰

. . . like a tired bull moose
 Whom scores of sleepless wolves, a ravening pack,
 Have chased all night, all day
 Through the snow-laden woods, like famine let loose;
 And he turns at last in his track
 Against a wall of rock and stands at bay;
 Round him with terrible sinews and teeth of steel
 They charge and recharge; but with many a furious
 plunge and wheel,
 Hither and thither over the trampled snow,
 He tosses them bleeding and torn;
 Till, driven, and ever to and fro
 Harried, wounded and weary grown,

²⁹ Lampman, op. cit., p. 14.

³⁰ Brown, op. cit., p. 109.

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Lampman has also chosen well the words he uses to build up his picture, especially in phrases like "teeth of steel," "a ravening pack" and "like famine let loose." His total effect is more poignant than that obtained by Pratt. Here Lampman is the finer and more sensitive poet.

At the Long Sault gives a measure of the power Lampman had at the end of his career in dealing with human themes. It is not notable in narrative; but the great virtues of moral poetry are here--the wisdom, the intensity, the beauty, which all depend in part upon the awareness that the particular situation, the selected personalities, are parts of a great whole.³³

An interesting contrast between the two poets is made apparent by Dr. Brown's statement. At the end of his career Lampman had grown into the ability to deal with human themes, but is not notable in narrative. But, from the beginning of his career Pratt has been remarkable for his facility in narrative poetry and for his ability to show man's innate nobility in time of trial.

Lampman's poem has reached a very high level of poetic expression. It is true that it is a much shorter and more condensed treatment than that which Pratt gives to the poems in which he deals with man's struggle against insuperable difficulties. Whether the earlier poet could have kept this level of sublimity throughout a longer treatment of the subject is doubtful. He would probably have

³³ Brown, op. cit., p. 110.

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defeated his own purpose had he tried to do so. By knowing just how far to carry this expression of intense emotion, Lampman shows the sensitivity that has made his work outstanding.

But, one by one, the brave men in the pitiful fort fell:

And then the great night came
With the triumph-songs of the foe and the flame
Of the camp-fires.
Out of the dark the soft wind woke,
The song of the rapid rose alway
And came to the spot where the comrades lay,
Beyond help or care,
With none but the red men round them
To gnash their teeth and stare.³⁴

Although their own losses had been heavy beyond all proportion to the numbers of the little band of white men, the Iroquois were impressed by the bravery of their foes. Pratt also gives a picture of bravery that brought the Iroquois to a halt. The enemy had attacked the town of St. Joseph and Daniel came out of his chapel:

Seeing the panic, fully knowing
Extinction faced the town with this invasion,
And that ten precious minutes of delay
Might give his flock the refuge of the woods,
He faced the vanguard of the Iroquois,
And walked with firm selective dignity
As in the manner of a parley. Fear
And wonder checked the Indians at the sight
Of a single dark-robed, unarmed challenger
Against arrows, muskets, spears and tomahawks.
That momentary pause had saved the lives

³⁴ Lampman, op. cit., p. 15.

Of hundreds as they fled into the forest,
 But not the life of Daniel. Though afraid
 At first to cross a charmed circumference
 To take a struggle hand-to-hand, they drove
 Their arrows through him, then in frenzied rush
 Mastering their awe, they hurled themselves upon
 The body, stripped it of its clothes and flung it
 Into the burning church. By noon nothing
 Remained but ashes of the town, the fort,
 The cabins and their seven hundred dead.³⁵

This passage from Pratt complements that from Lampman since it shows the normal outcome of an Iroquois attack and it helps us to understand their baffled fury when Daulac's little band held out so valiantly and so long. Pratt's descriptions of the capture of St. Ignace and of St. Louis give the same picture of a sudden strong assault and victory after a few hours of fighting.

The last sixteen lines of At the Long Sault form an epilogue and correspond to the closing twenty-three lines of Brébeuf and His Brethren. Lampman continues his note of sadness but adds one of peace. The townsmen are not aware of the fate of the heroes nor are they aware of the danger that had come so near. The opening picture is again brought to mind; moonlight is flooding down on the rushing river, the surrounding forest, and the sleeping flowers. Pratt's poem also closes with an idea which returns to the opening lines. The winds of God which had

³⁵ Pratt, op. cit., p. 85.

blown over France at the beginning of the story are blowing over Huronia at the close. Pratt, too, speaks of stars shining down on the land which had seen the deaths of the martyrs. In each case the epilogue is a beautiful and moving section of the poem; in each case it has a definite lyrical quality and a quiet peace. The sad note lingers in the shorter poem, the sense of inspiration remains in the longer one, and both keep their note of sublimity. These two poets, in their literary efforts, have attained something of the comradeship which they laud in others. Each poem helps towards a fuller and more complete understanding of the other. Each in its own way is a noteworthy Canadian poem enriching the growing treasury of our literature.

In Père Lalement, Marjorie Pickthall presents another facet in the life of a missionary. Father Lalement [Miss Pickthall uses one of the alternative spellings of the name] takes an hour's rest on a missionary journey and, in his prayer which is really a soliloquy, he reviews the difficulties of his work among the savages. Speaking of the position which this poem holds in its author's work, Desmond Pacey says that it

. . . is the only narrative with a Canadian setting. As we might expect, the characteristic ruggedness of the wilderness has been reduced to a gentle softness.³⁶

³⁶ Pacey, op. cit., p. 93.

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The poem opens with the suggestion that Father Lalement is saying Mass in a shady park-like space in the woods:

I lift the Lord on high,
Under the murmuring hemlock boughs, and see
The small birds of the forest lingering by
And making melody.³⁷

Apparently there are no worshippers, so he claims the birds and the animals who are watching in round-eyed wonder:

These are my acolytes and these my choir,
And this my altar in the cool green shade,
Where the wild soft-eyed does draw nigh
Wondering, as in the byre
Of Bethlehem, the oxen heard Thy cry
And saw Thee, unafraid.³⁸

His boatmen, apparently still pagans, sit at a little distance and watch impassively:

My boatmen sit apart,
Wolf-eyed, wolf-sinewed, stiller than the trees.
Help me, O Lord, for very slow of heart
And hard of faith are these.³⁹

Then his mind wanders from his savage companions to the little towns of eastern Canada, Montreal and Quebec, then back to Huronia and to himself as a wandering missionary. Finally, the time is up and, with a prayer for God's guidance and comfort, he continues his journey:

³⁷ Marjorie Pickthall, Père Lalement in The Voice of Canada, A. M. Stephen and J. F. Swayze, editors, Toronto and Vancouver, J. M. Dent and Sons, 1946, p. 12.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

Whither I go I know not, nor the way,
 Dark with strange passions, vexed with heathen charms,
 Holding I know not what of life or death;
 Only be Thou beside me day by day,
 Thy rod my guide and comfort, underneath
 Thy everlasting arms.⁴⁰

If Marjorie Pickthall really meant that this was to be a picture of a priest's Mass from the elevation, "I lift the Lord on high,"⁴¹ until the close of the Mass, she has surely missed the integrated unity of Catholic liturgy. It is true that a priest might have some distractions, but the observance of the rubrics would bring him back to attentive prayer and his thoughts would not wander on in this way. Compare this with Pratt's description of Brébeuf's last Mass. He vested carefully and prayerfully and then

Entering, he knelt before as rude an altar
 As ever was reared within a sanctuary,
 But hallowed as that chancel where the notes
 Of Palestrina's score had often pealed
 The Assumpta est Maria through Saint Peter's.
 For, covered in the centre of the table,
 Recessed and sealed, a hollowed stone contained
 A relic of a charred or broken body
 Which perhaps a thousand years ago or more
 Was offered as a sacrifice to Him
 Whose crucifix stood there between the candles.
 And on the morrow would this prayer be answered:-
 "Eternal Father, I unite myself
 With the affections and the purposes
 Of Our Lady of Sorrows on Calvary.
 And now I offer Thee the sacrifice
 Which Thy Beloved Son made of Himself
 Upon the Cross and now renews on this,

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 13.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 12.

Graciously receive
My life for His life as he gave His life
For mine . . .

This is my body.

Take ye and drink--the chalice of my blood."⁴² In like manner . . .

In the Pickthall poem the words, "My hour of rest is done,"⁴³ make one wonder if the first part of the poem is really meant to suggest that a Mass is actually being celebrated, or if Lalement is sitting at rest under the trees, thinking about the Mass and the possibility of celebrating it under such circumstances. In the Catholic liturgy the statement, "I lift the Lord on high,"⁴⁴ could refer only to the Elevation in the Mass or to Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. The latter possibility is imme-

⁴² Pratt, op. cit., p. 89.

⁴³ Pickthall, op. cit., p. 13. ⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 12.

diately ruled out by the rubrics which would not permit this ceremony under the conditions described in the poem. But, if these words refer to the Elevation in the Mass, there is no definite and exact reference to any other point of the liturgy. Pratt refers to the vestments worn by the priest, the prayers he says in donning each, the altar with its candles, crucifix, and altar stone, and his prayer is made up of parts of prayers said in the Mass; even the words of the Consecration are used reverently and convincingly. Except for the brief sentence that suggests the Elevation, Miss Pickthall omits everything that would point definitely to a religious ceremony in progress. There are vague references to birds as a choir and acolytes, and to does drawing near as did the oxen at Bethlehem. Then, after many wandering thoughts, there is another reference to the birds as members of the congregation, a thought which is immediately linked with the incident in St. Francis' life when, unable to gain the attention of the bystanders, he preached to the birds that gathered around listening attentively. But this was not a Mass. Had Lalement really been celebrating Mass he would not have shrugged off the incident with the words, "My hour of rest is done."⁴⁵ To a priest, and especially to a missionary

⁴⁵ Pickthall, op. cit., p. 13.

working under such difficulties, the Mass would have been the supreme motivating action of the day, not a mere rest period. But this passage could mean that the Mass is the only spiritual relief that his soul finds in the work among the pagans who, through ignorance and lack of interest, are completely impervious to his teachings. The poem is indefinite. It is easy to suggest all the possible meanings; to select the exact meaning is another matter. From this it is clear that Miss Pickthall is much less precise than E. J. Pratt in the description--or is it suggestion?--of the Holy Sacrifice.

By checking the historical records, one finds evidence to indicate that the missionaries did not say Mass at all under such circumstances. A priest alone, as he seems to be, except for pagan boatmen, would hesitate to say Mass, especially out in the woods in that way. With Christian boatmen, or even neophytes, the possibility of an outdoor Mass becomes greater. But Talbot recounts two incidents in the life of Brébeuf which suggest the usual procedure under such circumstances. Brébeuf spent his first winter in Canada, 1625 to 1626, with the Montagnais so that he might study their language, customs, and habits. Talbot lists the reasons why this was a difficult and a dangerous thing to do and he finishes with this revealing statement:

He would be deprived of the consolation of confession for months to come. He could neither celebrate Mass nor receive Communion. He would be alone, with himself and God.⁴⁶

Then, in the closing paragraph of the same chapter, he describes Brébeuf's return to his brethren at Quebec:

On Friday, March 27, 1626, two days after his thirty-third birthday, Père Jean swung open the gate of the Recollet garden and was welcomed by his brethren. They appraised him, they embraced him, and they joined him in the chapel where he and they offered their prayer of thanksgiving for his safe home-coming. More than five months had passed since his last visit to the Blessed Sacrament, since his last Confession, since his last celebration of Holy Mass. Now, in the strangeness of the chapel, he felt within himself the peace and sweetness of God's love, and the stronger determination to do all for God, to give all to God.⁴⁷

This shows clearly that Brébeuf did not say Mass when alone among the pagans. From the very manner in which the events are related this seems to have been the accepted practice among the missionaries. Even when the Fathers were traveling in pairs in Indian territory they did not say Mass when they were among hostile pagans. When Fathers Brébeuf and Chaumonot made their visit to the Neutrals from November, 1640, to March, 1641, they refrained from saying Mass although each Father could have assisted the other. Talbot writes of their return to Ste. Marie:

⁴⁶ Francis Xavier Talbot, S. J., Saint Among the Hurons, New York, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1949, p. 37.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 44.

It was nearing twelve when they hurried into the gate. They delayed greetings and waved off welcomings. They confessed themselves and washed while the other priests prepared the chapel. About noonday Père de Brébeuf and Père Chaumonot stood at the altars with the missals opened at the Mass of Saint Joseph. Not since November 2, four and one-half months ago, had they experienced the supreme and ecstatic joy of receiving the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.⁴⁸

From this it would appear that Lorne Pierce's comment on Miss Pickthall's use of liturgical references is justified:

She borrowed her symbolism from the Mass, just as she did from folk-lore, mythology, or anywhere else, and for the simple reason that she found something beautiful about them, and because she intended to use them in her own way.

.
Her use of certain sacramental ideas was of the widest and freest nature. No Catholic will claim "Pieter Marinus" as the true idea of the doctrine of purgatory, or "The Lamp of Poor Souls" and "Père Lalement" as reflecting the orthodox idea of the Mass and prayers for the dead.⁴⁹

She has certainly not studied religious observance or background, nor has she sifted the sources with the meticulous care that Pratt gave to them when he was writing his poem. In the second chapter, which deals with the historical accuracy of Brébeuf and His Brethren, this thesis has shown that Pratt made a special study of Catholic doctrine and practice for the sole purpose of avoiding any such errors.

⁴⁸ Talbot, op. cit., p. 236.

⁴⁹ Lorne Pierce, Marjorie Pickthall: A Book of Remembrance, Toronto, Ontario, The Ryerson Press, 1925, p. 168-169.

The results of this preparation are shown in the noteworthy accuracy of his poem. The lack of such study shows in the vagueness of Marjorie Pickthall's poem.

There is another historical point which is quite generally misunderstood or misinterpreted, that is, the identity of Père Lalemant. The name Lalemant is quite naturally linked with that of Brébeuf, hence the subject of Miss Pickthall's poem is commonly thought to be Saint Gabriel Lalemant. But there were two other Jesuits bearing this name, the brothers Charles and Jerome Lalemant. They were uncles of Saint Gabriel Lalemant. Father Charles Lalemant was in Canada, as superior in Quebec, from 1625 to 1627, and was again in Quebec from 1634 to 1639. He died in France in 1674.⁵⁰ He did not work on the Huron missions so he could not have been the subject of the poem.

Father Jerome Lalemant did work in Huronia and was appointed to replace Brébeuf as Superior of the Huron Mission in 1638.⁵¹ He remained there until 1645⁵² when he was replaced in Huronia by Father Paul Ragueneau⁵³ who was in charge until the closing of the Mission. Father Jerome Lalemant laid the general outline for the building of Ste.

⁵⁰ Edna Kenton, editor, Jesuit Relations, New York, New York, The Vanguard Press, 1954, footnote, p. 11.

⁵¹ Talbot, op. cit., p. 191.

⁵² Ibid., p. 264-269.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 266.

Marie and did much for the better organization of the missions in the whole Huron country. Pratt describes it thus:

The plans were supervised by Lalemant,
Assigning zones of work to every priest.
He made a census of the Huron nation;
Some thirty villages--twelve thousand persons.⁵⁴

He travelled extensively among the Indians at Quebec and in the Huron country and, if the missionaries ever did say Mass in the open, he was probably one who did so. This priest, Father Jerome Lalemant, is the Père Lalement of Marjorie Pickthall's poem. Miss Pickthall must not be criticized for the mistake that others have made in assuming that she meant Father Gabriel Lalemant as the subject of her poem. But this error has received such general acceptance that it appears quite casually in school text-books. For example, in the notes given on this poem in the Teacher's Guidebook of a current Junior High School reader this statement is made:

Gabriel Lalement came to Canada from France in June, 1646. He worked with Brebeuf, another missionary, around the little Huron settlements of St. Ignace and St. Louis near the present town of Midland.⁵⁵

The author then goes on to speak of the martyrdom of

⁵⁴ Pratt, op. cit., p. 63.

⁵⁵ Beulah Swayze and J. Fred Swayze, Teacher's Guidebook for Our Heritage, Toronto, Ontario, The Ryerson Press, 1953, p. 7.

Brébeuf and Lalemant. Even E. K. Brown, a very well-informed critic, shares this error. When writing of the development of poetry in Canada, he took Père Lalement as an example of certain characteristics of Miss Pickthall's work:

Or there is the dramatic monologue in which she presents one of the Jesuit martyrs, Gabriel Lalement. She has caught the priest stepping aside from his Indian band during a portage near one of the upper lakes and dreaming nostalgically of the centres of Canadian civilization during the seventeenth century.⁵⁶

From the clues which Miss Pickthall has given in the poem it is evident that the priest in question could not be Gabriel Lalement. It is true that he came to Canada in 1646, but

. . . he spent two years in ministrations at the French settlements on the St. Lawrence. He arrived in the Huron country in August, 1648, and his martyrdom took place on March 17 following.⁵⁷

The season in Marjorie Pickthall's poem is spring:

Up the St. Lawrence comes the Spring again,
Crowning each southward hill
And blossoming pool with beauty.⁵⁸

But Gabriel Lalement arrived in August, 1648, and was martyred March 17, 1649. On their last missionary trip:

⁵⁶ E. K. Brown, op. cit., p. 65-66.

⁵⁷ Kenton, op. cit., p. 219.

⁵⁸ Pickthall, op. cit., p. 12.

De Brébeuf and Lalemant trudged back along the snow-covered ridges the three miles to St. Louis.⁵⁹

So Gabriel Lalemant did not live to see his first spring in Huronia.

In this poem the missions of St. Ignace and St. Louis are mentioned and the very linking of these names brings to mind the martyrdom of Brébeuf and Lalemant. But, here again, the better-known historical fact tends to overshadow a less well-known one. The St. Ignace where Brébeuf and Lalemant were martyred is St. Ignace II. St. Ignace I had existed for some time before this:

Now this St. Ignace was the first station of that name in Huronia and is the one that is marked on DuCreux's inset map of 1660. Its appearance there, like all the other details of that map, is based upon data compiled in 1640.⁶⁰

St. Louis was also in existence then. In Talbot's account of the return of Brébeuf and Chaumonot after their sojourn among the Neutrals in 1641 this village is mentioned:

Breathlessly, they pushed on as fast as they could, passed hurriedly by the villages of St. Louis and Ste. Anne, and came to the last hills, down which they dropped into the level fields before Sainte Marie.⁶¹

Since Jerome Lalemant worked in Huronia from 1638 to 1645, he must have known both St. Ignace I and St. Louis well

⁵⁹ Talbot, op. cit., p. 291.

⁶⁰ William Sherwood Fox, St. Ignace, Toronto, Ontario, McClelland and Stewart, 1949, p. 37.

⁶¹ Talbot, op. cit., p. 236.

enough to link them in his mind with the loving reverence that Miss Pickthall attributes to him in her poem.

In spite of the vague religious setting, Marjorie Pickthall has written a beautiful and moving poem. The priest's attitude towards the Indians among whom he is working is shown clearly in the third stanza:

My boatmen sit apart,
Wolf-eyed, wolf-sinewed, stiller than the trees.
Help me, O Lord, for very slow of heart
And hard of faith are these.
Cruel are they, yet Thy children. Foul are they,
Yet wert Thou born to save them utterly.
Then make me, as I pray,
Just to their hates, kind to their sorrows, wise
After their speech, and strong before their free
Indomitable eyes.⁶²

This stanza shows a good understanding of the everyday difficulties of the missionary's life among the savages. It also shows the priest's recognition of the fact that in his work among these people he must put his trust in God and seek help from Him. Pratt suggests the same idea of the difficulties of missionary work and their acceptance by the priests. This is Brébeuf's first winter in Canada:

A year's delay of which Brébeuf made use
By hardening his body and his will,
Learning the rudiments of the Huron tongue,
Mastering the wood-lore, joining in the hunt
For food, observing habits of speech, the ways
Of thought, the moods and the long silences.
Wintering with the Algonquins, he soon knew
The life that was before him in the cabins--

⁶² Pickthall, op. cit., p. 12.

The troubled night, branches of fir covering
 The floor of snow; the martyrdom of smoke
 That hourly drove his nostrils to the ground
 To breathe, or offered him the choice of death
 Outside by frost, inside by suffocation;

Added to this, the instigated taunts
 Common as daily salutations; threats
 Of murderous intent that just escaped
 The deed--the prologue to Huronia!⁶³

Pratt's description is detailed and factual, unemotional and convincing.

In the closing stanza of Miss Pickthall's poem there is a further recognition of the difficulties that lie ahead of Père Lalement and a calm acceptance of whatever God might send his way:

Whither I go I know not, nor the way,
 Dark with strange passions, vexed with heathen charms,
 Holding I know not what of life or death;
 Only be Thou beside me day by day,
 Thy rod my guide and comfort, underneath
 Thy everlasting arms.⁶⁴

In his inspiring version of Brébeuf's letter to the novices and future missionaries in Huronia, Pratt has put into moving phrases this same recognition of hardships and this same resignation to God's will:

Wherein the gain, you ask, of this acceptance?
 There is no gain but this--that what you suffer
 Shall be of God; your loneliness in travel
 Will be relieved by angels overhead;
 Your silence will be sweet for you will learn

⁶³ Pratt, op. cit., p. 40.

⁶⁴ Pickthall, op. cit., p. 13.

How to commune with God; rapids and rocks
 Are easier than the steeps of Calvary.
 There is a consolation in your hunger
 And in abandonment upon the road,
 For once there was a greater loneliness
 And deeper hunger.

.
 Here is the place to practise faith and hope
 And charity where human art has brought
 No comforts, where we strive to bring to God
 A race so unlike men that we must live
 Daily expecting murder at their hands,
 Did we not open up the skies or close
 Them at command, giving them sun or rain.
 So if despite these trials you are ready
 To share our labours, come; for you will find
 A consolation in the cross that far outweighs
 Its burdens. Though in many an hour your soul
 Will echo--'Why hast Thou forsaken me,'
 Yet evening will descend upon you when,
 Your heart too full of holy exultation,
 You call like Xavier--'Enough, O Lord!'⁶⁵

When these two passages are compared the truth of Desmond Pacey's criticism of Père Lalement becomes apparent:

The poem, stressing the priest's loneliness, attains a mild pathos but not tragedy. It is all too soft and muted and unreal--very unlike the great treatment of a similar theme in Pratt's Brébeuf and His Brethren.⁶⁶

On the other hand the sublimity of Pratt's treatment cannot be denied. It was of this passage that Benson wrote; "'Miltonic' is not too high an adjective to describe lines of such inspired poetry."⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Pratt, op. cit., p. 57-58.

⁶⁶ Pacey, op. cit., p. 94.

⁶⁷ Nathaniel A. Benson, Brébeuf and His Brethren, review in Canadian Poetry Magazine of Toronto, Ontario, vol. 5, no. 1, September, 1940, p. 42.

Although Miss Pickthall's poem does not reach as high a level as that of Brébeuf and His Brethren, it has its own beauty and value. There are several noteworthy lines, among them her description of spring. There is the delicacy and freshness of a watercolour in her picture:

Up the St. Lawrence comes the Spring again,
Crowning each southward hill
And blossoming pool with beauty.⁶⁸

That word-picture has its place with Lampman's introduction to At the Long Sault:

The innocent flowers in the limitless woods are
springing
Far and away
With the sound and the perfume of May,
And ever up from the south the happy birds are
winging.⁶⁹

Pratt's picture of spring is more specific in its details but, again, wildflowers are a symbol:

Not until the juncos came,
And flickers tapped the crevices of bark,
And the bloodroot was pushing through the leaf-mould,
Would they reset their faces towards their home.⁷⁰

In Père Lalement there are two outstanding comparisons. Speaking of the two mission posts, the poet says:

St. Ignace and St. Louis, little beads
On the rosary of God.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Pickthall, op. cit., p. 12.

⁶⁹ Lampman, op. cit., p. 13.

⁷⁰ Pratt, op. cit., p. 82.

⁷¹ Pickthall, loc. cit.

This shows, indeed, a sympathetic understanding of all that those two cherished spots where the faith has been received would mean to an ardent missionary.

In order to grasp the full beauty of the other comparison one must picture the dark forests of evergreens dotted at intervals with white birch trees, as they so often are in the Ontario woods. Miss Pickthall speaks of the pines which are to be the pillars, then she adds:

. . . and each birch tree
Shines like a holy thought.⁷²

This is the sort of comparison that leads the thoughts on beyond what the poet has actually said. Pratt does the same thing when he says, "Wild geese drove wedges through the zodiac."⁷³ This quality of being able to capture the attention and then release the mind to travel beyond the thought suggested is one of the characteristics of good poetry. Both poets have used it admirably in the selections which have been studied. But in religious interpretation and in sublimity of expression Brébeuf and His Brethren is far above the level reached by Père Lalement.

In Brébeuf and Lalemant, Alan Sullivan has limited himself to a brief description of the work of Brébeuf and

⁷² Pickthall, op. cit., p. 12.

⁷³ Pratt, op. cit., p. 38.

Lalemant among the Hurons, an account of the capture of St. Louis, a suggestion, through apostrophe, of the tortures endured, and a quiet closing commentary. This poem of eighty-six lines is divided into seven stanzas of irregular length and most of its lines are heroic couplets, although there are two triplets and many lines which rhyme alternately. The rhymes are not always unobtrusive. At times they are definitely contrived with an off-beat accent that is disturbing, for example, when "sacred Tree" is rhymed with "embassy," and "earthly price" with "Paradise." In the third stanza there is a very unfortunate grouping. The rhyming words of the first eight lines are: "day," "pray," "wood," "cried," "blood," "wide," "flood," "stood," in that order. No doubt, "blood" and "flood" are meant to be rhymed and also "wood" and "stood," but the four words, coming in the order in which they appear in the poem, strike a harsh note. In sound each is close enough to the other rhyming group to suggest assonance, but this idea is destroyed as the stanza develops and the two pairs of rhymes are furnished. These rhyming difficulties weaken the impact of the poem and show how wise Pratt was in using blank verse for a work of this type in which irregularities can be so disturbing.

In the Sullivan poem there are also examples of poor diction. In the opening lines he says:

Came Jean Brébeuf from Rennes, in Normandy,
To preach the written word in Sainte Marie.⁷⁴

"Written word" is an unfortunate synonym for the Gospel which could be more aptly called the "living word." The expression "written word" is trite because it is used so often in contrast with "spoken word" and when used with "preach" it gives the impression that the poet has not been exact in his choice of words. The second stanza begins with:

'Twas in St. Louis, where the Hurons lay,
Screened from the blue sweep of the Georgian Bay.⁷⁵

This sounds as if the poet had strained the words to fit them into the pattern. The use of "the" to stretch out the number of syllables is unfortunate since the term "Georgian Bay," being a proper noun, does not require an article. The word "'twas" is weak and rather flippant in connotation because of its common use in light verse. The fourth stanza furnishes this example:

Torn from the breast, the child was cleft in twain,
The mother shrieked, then fell among the slain.⁷⁶

"Cleft in twain" is archaic. It has been used too often in descriptions of the battles of heavily armed knights to strike quite the right note when used of a little child,

⁷⁴ Alan Sullivan, Brébeuf and Lalemant, in John W. Garvin, Canadian Poets, Toronto, Ontario, McClelland and Stewart, 1930, 2nd printing, p. 388.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 389.

although it does tell exactly how the child died. There is another example of poor diction in the line, "Brébeuf and Lalemant in chains were led."⁷⁷ The expression "in chains" to denote captivity is a cliché. If it is meant to be exactly descriptive there is abundant evidence to show that the Iroquois tied their prisoners with thongs or ropes.⁷⁸ Had they owned chains they would have used them, for example, to make the hatchet-collar a more lasting ordeal instead of one that was terminated as soon as the green withes were burned through by the hatchets.⁷⁹

This anachronism in the use of the word "chains" is matched with another historical error in the second line:

Came Jean Brébeuf from Rennes, in Normandy,
To preach the written word in Sainte Marie.⁸⁰

Sainte Marie was built in 1639, and the Jesuits took up residence there that summer and fall.⁸¹ But Brébeuf had first gone to Huronia in 1626, thirteen years before there was any Ste. Marie.⁸²

⁷⁷ Sullivan, op. cit., p. 389.

⁷⁸ Kenton, op. cit., pp. 206 and 220.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 221.

⁸⁰ Sullivan, op. cit., p. 388.

⁸¹ Wilfrid Jury and Elsie McLeod Jury, Sainte-Marie Among the Hurons, Toronto, Ontario, Oxford University Press, 1954, p. 16.

⁸² Kenton, op. cit., p. xxxvii.

But Alan Sullivan's poem is not to be completely discounted for its faults. There are several passages that are noteworthy and well worth comparing with Pratt's treatment of the same idea. Speaking of Brébeuf's fearlessness, Sullivan says:

But, onward through the forest, to his fate
 Marched the great priest, unawed by Huron hate:
 In every scourge he glimpsed the sacred Tree
 And the dear Master of his embassy.⁸³

Despite the poor rhyme the last two lines give a true picture of Brébeuf's acceptance of difficulties as his share in Christ's cross. Pratt puts it in these words:

. . . for you will find
 A consolation in the cross that far outweighs
 Its burdens,⁸⁴

and, later, he gives a glimpse of the inspiration that came to Brébeuf through the cross and also through the visions he had:

Forms that illumined darkness, stabbed despair,
 Turned dungeons into temples and a brand
 Of shame into the ultimate boast of time--
 So to Brébeuf had Christ appeared and Mary.⁸⁵

Pratt's use of the word "forms" is a much happier choice than that made by Sullivan when, to describe a vision, he uses the word "spectres":

⁸³ Sullivan, op. cit., p. 388.

⁸⁴ Pratt, op. cit., p. 58.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 59.

And spectres, armed with javelin and sword,
Foreshadowed the dread army of the Lord.⁸⁶

Had they foreshadowed an army of demons the word would have been correct.

Alan Sullivan describes the building of the mission house at St. Louis:

'Twas in St. Louis, where the Hurons lay,
Screened from the blue sweep of the Georgian Bay,
That the frail brother Lalemant, and Brébeuf,
Built a strange sanctuary, whose trembling wall
Was birchen bark, on whose long, curving roof
Lay tawny skins.⁸⁷

Pratt has a similar scene:

So with native help

The Fathers built their mission house--the frame
Of young elm-poles set solidly in earth;
Their supple tops bent, lashed and braced to form
The arched roof overlaid with cedar-bark.⁸⁸

Pratt's description is much more definite and accurate and gives a more exact picture. Here again, in the Sullivan quotation, there is an historical error. He has the "frail brother Lalemant" helping Brébeuf to build a mission at St. Louis. As shown in an earlier section of this chapter, St. Louis was built prior to 1640 and Gabriel Lalemant did not reach Huronia until the fall of 1648. If by the term "brother" he means that Lalemant, being a Jesuit, was

⁸⁶ Sullivan, op. cit., p. 388.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Pratt, op. cit., p. 49.

Brébeuf's spiritual brother, one of the brethren, he is correct. But the phrase could indicate a lay brother helping a priest with the construction of a mission, and in this sense it would not be correct. Lalemant was ordained to the priesthood in 1638.⁸⁹ In the whole of Pratt's long poem there is not one example of a definite historical error. At most he can be accused of only two slight ambiguities.⁹⁰ When this is balanced with the record of the other poets whose work has been studied in comparison with his, it is readily seen that Pratt's achievement is, indeed, remarkable.

In his description of the Indians' attitude towards Christian religious services, Sullivan gives a very clear picture.

A spirit seemed to call
In supplication through the holy place
For some strong mercy on the untamed race
That, naked, sat in this thrice wondrous room;
And, peering through the incense-burdened gloom,
Stared at the altar, where the black-robés bent
O'er the bright vessels of their sacrament.⁹¹

That is very well expressed, especially the "incense-burdened gloom" which suggests how hazy the whole concept is to the onlookers. Pratt has also shown the Indians'

⁸⁹ Lawrence Voisin, S.J., The Strength of God, Midland, Ontario, The Martyrs' Shrine, 1949, p. 6.

⁹⁰ Supra, p. 31-35.

⁹¹ Sullivan, op. cit., p. 389.

mystification at what they saw and could not understand. He describes "half the village" crowding into the little church or craning their necks to get a glimpse of what is going on:

The warriors lean, lithe, and elemental,
 "As naked as your hand" but for a skin
 Thrown loosely on their shoulders, with their hair
 Erect, boar-brushed, matted, glued with the oil
 Of sunflower larded thickly with bear's grease;
 Papooses yowling on their mothers' backs,
 The squatting hags, suspicion in their eyes,
 Their nebulous minds relating in some way
 The smoke and aromatics of the censer,
 The candles, crucifix and Latin murmurs
 With vapours, sounds and colours of the Judgment.⁹²

The people in Pratt's picture are real and the altar furnishings more exact, but in each case there is the same suggestion that the Indians are watching intently something that they do not understand.

Alan Sullivan uses a forest fire as an excellent simile to describe the terrible fear that seized the Hurons when the attack was made on St. Louis, but his unfortunate choice of rhymes weakens the effect:

Till, on the grim and memorable day,
 When, to the Host, they bade their converts pray,
 There flashed a gasping runner through the wood:
 'The Iroquois! The Iroquois!' he cried.
 As fire that stings the forest into blood
 And drives red gales of ruin far and wide,
 So frenzied fear ran riot, in a flood
 That surged convulsive. But the great priest stood
 Like a strong tower, when the fretted billows race

⁹² Pratt, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

Tumultuously about its massy base:
 'Courage, my children, through the flame I see
 The dear white Christ, whose long sought sons are ye.'⁹³

The last line loses somewhat in conviction because the rhyme sounds too contrived. Pratt gives the same incident, briefly and directly:

Less than two hours it took the Iroquois
 To capture, sack and garrison St. Ignace,
 And start then for St. Louis. The alarm
 Sounded, five hundred of the natives fled
 To the mother fort only to be pursued
 And massacred in the snow. The eighty braves
 That manned the stockades perished at the breaches;
 And what was seen by Ragueneau and the guard
 Was smoke from the massed fire of cabin bark.⁹⁴

There is no weakening of the description by poorly contrived rhyme. No doubt Pratt has the advantage in having written a longer poem. He has been able to build up the effect over several hundred lines. He does not need to quote Brébeuf at this point because his Brébeuf is sufficiently well known for the reader to imagine what he would have said under these circumstances.

In his next stanza, Sullivan continues his description of the Indian attack:

Then suddenly from out the wood there rose
 The shouting of innumerable foes,
 And waves of painted warriors from the glade
 Swept yelping, through the tottering palisade.⁹⁵

⁹³ Sullivan, op. cit., p. 389.

⁹⁴ Pratt, op. cit., p. 88.

⁹⁵ Sullivan, loc. cit.

That is excellent. Movement and sound combine to make a picture that is vivid and convincing. They are the same Indians that engulf St. Ignace in Pratt's poem:

The Mohawks and the Senecas uniting,
A thousand strong, the town bereft of fighters,
Four hundred old and young inside the stakes,
The assault was made two hours before the dawn.
But half-aroused from sleep, many were killed
Within their cabins. Of the four hundred three
Alone managed to reach the woods to scream
The alarm to the drowsed village of St. Louis.⁹⁶

After the excellent opening lines of the fourth stanza, Sullivan's poem loses by becoming too melodramatic:

Were devils ere so murderous as men
In whose brown breasts those devils breathed again,
When agony the shuddering sky assailed,
When age and youth in choking anguish wailed?
Torn from the breast, the child was cleft in twain,
The mother shrieked, then fell among the slain;
Age had no power to swerve the dripping knife,
Youth gained but torture as the end of life,
The wounded perished in the bursting flame
That left St. Louis but a woeful name.⁹⁷

Sullivan then goes on to speak of the priests working among the dying until they are led away as captives and bound to stakes for torture. He does not describe their torture directly, but hints at it very cleverly through the use of apostrophe:

O heart of iron, O strange supernal zeal,
That braves the fire, the torture and the steel!

⁹⁶ Pratt, op. cit., p. 87.

⁹⁷ Sullivan, op. cit., p. 389.

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lent for a short account, but it does not lift the poem to the sublimity that Pratt has reached. Pratt has played the antagonists against the protagonist in such a way as to sound to the depths the character of each. There are very few poets who have a sufficiently deep knowledge of the human soul, especially the soul of a savage, to lay it bare as he does.

The first three lines of the next stanza of the Sullivan poem are not particularly notable, but the last three lines are very good, not only in the clarity of the picture given through the simile, but also in the note of sadness and futility:

And all the Huron missions, one by one,
Were driven by the Iroquois like spray
That strong winds snatch and swiftly whirl away.¹⁰⁰

There is something of the same note of finality that Lampman has put into the closing lines of At the Long Sault:

The numberless stars out of heaven
Look down with a pitiful glance;
And the lilies asleep in the forest
Are closed like the lilies of France.¹⁰¹

As the closing stanza of his poem Sullivan gives a peaceful forest scene with the somewhat vague idea of a benediction lingering over the place because of the men who had died there:

¹⁰⁰ Sullivan, op. cit., p. 390.

¹⁰¹ Lampman, op. cit., p. 15.

Sleep, Lalemant! Brébeuf, a long surcease!
 Still moves your martyr's spirit through the glade;
 Still mourns the northern forest, when the peace
 And benediction of the twilight shade
 Awakens in the dark memorial pines
 A velvet-footed, cedar-scented breeze,
 That whispers where the green and knotted vines
 Enmesh the cloistered colonnade of trees.¹⁰²

The forest picture is well given but there is an air of futility about the statement which makes it inadequate as a closing for the poem. If the hallowing of this part of our Canadian forest through the terrible conflict of martyrdom awakens only a "cedar-scented breeze" does the reward justify the ordeal? This closing is quite different from that which Lampman used when he showed that, although those saved were unconscious of their danger, much good had been accomplished by the men who had sacrificed their lives to save them. It is different also from the quiet exaltation of the closing section of Pratt's poem in which there is conviction that through the saintly lives and exalted deaths of the martyrs this spot where they lived has become a holy shrine where

And prayers ascend, and the Holy Bread ^{the Aves} is broken.¹⁰³

Brébeuf and His Brethren is vastly superior to the poems with which it has been compared and contrasted. Dr.

¹⁰² Sullivan, op. cit., p. 390.

¹⁰³ Pratt, op. cit., p. 94.

Pratt's long and detailed study of the historical, geographical, and religious background of the events he records has enriched his poem by making it accurate where others are careless, and precise where others are vague. He shows a better understanding of the minds of savages and of their code than Pauline Johnson has reached although she is of their own race. He has a more vivid grasp of the meaning of religious rites and ceremonies than has Marjorie Pickthall, and a more discriminating alertness to historical events and periods, and their significance, than that shown by either Miss Pickthall or Alan Sullivan. He has an insight into the value of men's actions that is equal to that attained by Archibald Lampman. In describing the lives of the Jesuit Martyrs he has gone right to the core of their spirituality. The Cross is, indeed, the symbol of the idea underlying the poem. It is what T. S. Eliot would call the "objective correlative" through which the whole expression of the emotion becomes possible.¹⁰⁴ But it is more than this. To the Jesuit missionaries, whether they suffered martyrdom or not, it was not merely a symbol. It was a way of life, the chosen expression of their love for God and their willing acceptance of all that He might ask

¹⁰⁴ T. S. Eliot, The Sacred Wood, New York, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1921, p. 92.

of them. In recognizing this fact, Pratt has not only touched on the center of their lives, but he has also measured the whole compass of their influence. In comparison with this the other poems are merely peripheral. Although each poem studied is good within its own limits, each serves to point out the superiority of Brébeuf and His Brethren in much the same way that the depth and the sharpness of a shadow make us conscious of the intensity of the light.

CHAPTER V

A FINAL EVALUATION

The history of Canada abounds in great subjects for fiction, drama, and poetry; and it has been a standing complaint that writers have either declined to present them at all, or have presented them in a manner so painfully inadequate, that silence seemed better. The choice of one such subject by our noblest living poet, is a white milestone in the development of Canadian literature.¹

Before concluding this thesis it is necessary to make a final evaluation of the poem. This will be done by giving further consideration to the last two points proposed in the introduction: first, To what extent has this poem been accepted by Canadians? and, second, What place does this poem hold in Dr. Pratt's work?

There are several means of judging the impact made by any poem on the literary consciousness of a nation. Perhaps the most satisfactory of these are a study of the number of printings it has had, an evaluation of the criticism it has evoked, and an enumeration of the honours or awards it has received.

Brébeuf and His Brethren has had three printings; the first in 1940, the second in 1941, and the third in

¹ E. K. Brown, Poetry review in University of Toronto Quarterly of Toronto, vol. 10, no. 3, April, 1941, p. 283.

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1942 for the Basilian Press in Detroit. This third printing was split for marketing and a quantity of it remained with Macmillan while the rest was distributed in the United States by the Basilian Press. The poem is included in full in Pratt's Collected Poems published by Macmillan in 1944. This collection was reprinted in 1946. An edition of the first printing of the collection was published by Alfred Knopf in the United States. Moreover, a shortened form, about two-thirds of the original length of Brébeuf and His Brethren, appears in Ten Selected Poems, a book prepared especially for classroom use.²

These figures are informative. The fact that the demand necessitated three printings in two years--and these were war years-- shows that the poem has met with a considerable measure of popularity from the first moment of its appearance. The release of the poem in the United States indicates that some interest has been shown in it in that country, and the fact that this printing was handled by the Basilian Press suggests that the poem has received recognition in Catholic literary circles.

Before studying Canadian criticism it will be of interest to give some attention to comments that have

² Personal correspondence of the author, letter from Wanda Phillips, Publicity Department, Macmillan Company of Canada, Toronto, Ontario, dated Dec. 30, 1955.

appeared in American publications. In each review of Pratt's collected work this poem is one of those selected for special mention. Robert Hillyer calls it a "noble tale of the martyrdom of the early French priests in the river wilderness of Canada" and he praises its versification, "Brébeuf and His Brethren is in blank verse, sometimes opening into three-part rhythms with an effect almost classical."³ The reviews in Catholic periodicals show a like enthusiasm. Father Boniface Buckley, C. P., says that the book is "rich in spiritual and intellectual dividends," and that the poem, "a little masterpiece," is

distinctive in that it is written in blank verse in a highly dramatic style.

The author, E. J. Pratt, is an accomplished Canadian poet and he has lent to this effort the fine qualities which distinguish his other poetry. The thing is like a melodious fugue which emphasizes the heroism and sanctity of Brébeuf and his companions, whose high-mettled courage is finally receiving due acknowledgment from the world after a lapse of three hundred years.⁴

Mary Frances Ward says that this poem "has been acclaimed in Catholic circles as a well-nigh flawless presentation of the heroic story of the early French Jesuits, martyred in

³ Robert Hillyer, Poetic Sensitivity to Time, review in The Saturday Review of Literature of New York, vol. 28, no. 17, April 28, 1945, p. 11.

⁴ Boniface Buckley, C. P., Brébeuf and His Brethren, review in The Sign of Union City, vol. 22, no. 12, July, 1943, p. 765.

their determination to bring Christianity to the Indians."⁵
 The Jesuit periodical America gives Pratt a warm, and very informal, reception:

Mr. Pratt is a find which any literary explorer might feature in his trophy room. He is a superb raconteur, creator of lissom rhythms and explosive rhymes, a master of organic blank verse. Brebeuf and His Brethren is a notable addition to our religious and narrative poetry. The portrayal of the gigantic Brebeuf, making himself a slave to the savages to win their souls and putting down the rebellious crusading ancestors who awoke in his blood with brandished weapons, is a strong man's tribute to a strong saint.⁶

To Will Lissner the poem seems "to dramatize the struggles of Christian culture with paganism as few poems ever have," and he claims that Pratt "has shown that great poetry can be written in our day upon themes that will live."⁷

The greater number by far of Canadian critics have shown a like enthusiasm. Their critiques indicate the wide range of interest that has been centered in the poem. For some it is of value for its religious significance, others weigh its historical worth, to many the literary evaluation is paramount, and there are some who praise most highly the

⁵ Mary Frances Ward, review of Collected Poems in The Catholic World of New York, vol. 162, no. 969, December, 1945, p. 282.

⁶ William A. Donaghy, review of Collected Poems in America of New York, vol. 73, no. 10, June 9, 1945, p. 202.

⁷ Will Lissner, A Great Modern Poet, article in The Catholic Digest of St. Paul, vol. 10, no. 1, November, 1945, p. 29.

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effect it has had on Canadian national unity during the war years. In Chapters Two and Three this thesis has given considerable attention to the religious, historical, and literary values of the poem and in Chapter One its national importance was noted. Hence a brief study of each group of criticism in turn will give a fairly complete summary of critical opinion in Canada. Whenever an adverse critique is available this will be presented first, then other opinions or quotations from the poem will be used to support or to refute it.

In regard to its religious significance Mr. Wells makes a strange statement:

Although Brébeuf and His Brethren successfully tells the story of the Canadian Jesuit martyrs, it takes only a limited view of their characteristic religious life. The poem proves strangely denuded of theological allusion. The strong emphasis upon the ascetic ideal as symbolized by the cross by no means characterizes the Jesuits as Christians and might readily be taken as pertaining to some relatively primitive and elemental religious attitude. Basically Pratt's emphasis falls not upon religion but upon heroism; Brébeuf himself, as we have seen, is presented as an epic rather than a pious character.⁸

On reading this statement one wonders how carefully its author has studied the poem. It is true that Wells, at this point in his book, is trying to prove that "Pratt as a poet remains singularly unaffected by religious and meta-

⁸ Henry W. Wells and Carl F. Klinck, Edwin J. Pratt, Toronto, Ontario, The Ryerson Press, 1947, p. 157.

physical thinking."⁹ No doubt Pratt's own thinking is expressed in his other poems, especially those, like The Iron Door, which spring entirely from his own thought. But in Brébeuf and His Brethren the story does not originate with Pratt. He is re-telling incidents which are so well authenticated in historical records that any misrepresentation or distortion would have brought upon him a storm of protest. To prove a point, then, concerning Pratt's personal attitude towards religion, Mr. Wells has used the very poem in which any personal expression of Pratt's own beliefs would not have been tolerated.

Each of the four sentences in the Wells quotation deals with a separate phase of the whole criticism. It will be profitable to treat each in turn.

"Although Brébeuf and His Brethren successfully tells the story of the Canadian Jesuit martyrs, it takes only a limited view of their characteristic religious life." What, exactly, is their characteristic religious life? The life of any member of a religious order should be a life dedicated to the service of God under obedience to the rule of the order and under the guidance and direction of his superiors. This requires a two-fold effort, first, towards personal sanctification through the rules of

⁹ Wells and Klinck, op. cit., p. 157.

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the order and, second, a sharing in the salvation of souls through the work assigned to the order, whether it be contemplative prayer or the active ministry. The poem, then, should indicate that Brébeuf is dedicated to the service of God, that he works at his personal sanctification, and that he does the work for souls that is assigned to him by his superiors. Pratt has certainly made it clear that Brébeuf was dedicated to the service of God and that he sought perfection through God's service:

This is the end of man--Deum laudet,
To seek and find the will of God, to act
Upon it for the ordering of life,
And for the soul's beatitude.¹⁰

His obedience to his superior is well expressed in this one line, "Back to Quebec by Lalemant's command."¹¹ His complete surrender to God and his identification with the Society of Jesus could not be expressed more clearly than this:

With his own blood Brébeuf wrote his last vow--
"Lord Jesus! Thou didst save me with thy blood;
By thy most precious death; and this is why
I make this pledge to serve thee all my life
In the Society of Jesus--never
To serve another than thyself. Hereby
I sign this promise in my blood, ready
To sacrifice it all as willingly
As now I give this drop."--Jean de Brébeuf.¹²

¹⁰ E. J. Pratt, Brébeuf and His Brethren, in Collected Poems, Toronto, Ontario, The Macmillan Company of Canada, Second edition, 1946, p. 38.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 40.

¹² Ibid., p. 44.

The same dedication, through a life vowed to God and to personal sanctification under the guidance of superiors, is found in the accounts of the other priests, notably in Noel Chabanel's vow. Pratt puts it in these words:

"I, Noel Chabanel,
Do vow, in presence of the Sacrament
Of Thy most precious blood and body, here
To stay forever with the Huron Mission,
According to the commands of my Superiors.
Therefore I do beseech Thee to receive me
As Thy perpetual servant and to make
Me worthy of so sublime a ministry."¹³

Anyone who says that the poem "takes a limited view of their characteristic religious life" has certainly missed the plain sense of the words.

In the first section of the book which he co-authored with Mr. Wells, Mr. Klinck, speaking of Pratt's characteristic theme, "the struggle of man against himself," claims that "Brébeuf developed the same theme with richer insight." Then he makes this telling comment:

It is difficult to see why reviewers of the latter have lost the spiritual significance of the action, for every incident is clearly progressive, one scene in a series bringing out the struggle of the Jesuit against his lower self, against the temptation to quit--the basic struggle in all human enterprise and development.¹⁴

And, strange to say, in an earlier chapter in his section

¹³ Pratt, op. cit., p. 46.

¹⁴ Wells and Klinck, op. cit., p. 38.

of the book, Mr. Wells expresses an opinion contrary to that of his own later statement:

In Brébeuf and His Brethren Pratt deals with a national mythology which, like many other myths, one suspects, enjoys the advantage of being literally true. His heroes are saints, their deeds all but unbelievable. For them their daily bread is bread of the spirit.¹⁵

The next sentence in the Wells critique is this; "The poem proves strangely denuded of theological allusion." Just what does Mr. Wells mean by the expression "theological allusion?" If he means controversial arguments his statement is correct, and must be so from the very nature of the poem. Since Brébeuf and His Brethren is not didactic it does not require theological discussion. Anyone interested in the theology of the Jesuits can easily find it elsewhere. Pratt was writing a narrative poem, a "religious epic," to use Mr. Wells' own expression,¹⁶ and his performance must be judged by what he, himself, set out to do, not by what others think he should have done. In making this accusation Mr. Wells is imposing his own limitations on Pratt, and his remarks lose that objectivity which forms the basis of all just criticism.

But there is another possible meaning to the phrase "theological allusion." It could denote an allusion or

¹⁵ Wells and Klinck, op. cit., p. 91.

¹⁶ Ibid.

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reference to God and to religious belief in general. In that case the poem is again the best rebuttal of that argument. The passages quoted above show very definitely that there are "theological allusions" in Brébeuf and His Brethren and it is an easy matter to match these quotations with others that are equally clear. In the letter to the future missionaries in Huronia, Brébeuf lists all the difficulties, physical and mental, that lie before them and then he sweeps them aside with these words:

"Wherein the gain, you ask, of this acceptance?
There is no gain but this--that what you suffer
Shall be of God: your loneliness in travel
Will be relieved by angels overhead;
Your silence will be sweet for you will learn
How to commune with God; rapids and rocks
Are easier than the steeps of Calvary.

.
. . . Though in many an hour your soul
Will echo--'Why hast Thou forsaken me,'
Yet evening will descend upon you when,
Your heart too full of holy exultation,
You call like Xavier--'Enough, O Lord!'"¹⁷

And what profound theology lies behind the brief statement in Jogues' last letter to his Superior:

"I will return
Cost it a thousand lives. I know full well
That I shall not survive, but He who helped
Me by His grace before will never fail me
Now when I go to do His holy will."¹⁸

Mr. Wells' own words from the earlier section of the book

¹⁷ Pratt, op. cit., p. 57-58.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 76.

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can be used as the final answer to this charge. He describes the conflict and the deaths of the martyrs, then he says:

Thus the climax is reached in supreme moments of spiritual rather than physical distress. This makes possible a most delicate handling of the theme of death and resurrection.¹⁹

To what does the eschatological theme of "death and resurrection" eventually lead if it does not lead to God?

Mr. Wells' next statement is, perhaps, the most amazing of all: "The strong emphasis upon the ascetic ideal as symbolized by the cross by no means characterizes the Jesuits as Christians and might readily be taken as pertaining to some relatively primitive and elemental religious attitude." It would be interesting to have Mr. Wells' definition of a Christian. In common acceptance the term means: One who believes in or professes the religion of Christ. The cross has its value as a religious symbol only because of its association with Christ who died on it to save mankind. Historically, there is no religion, before or after Christianity, that uses the cross as a symbol of union with a saviour. Speaking of the visions granted to Brébeuf, Pratt says:

The signs were given--voices from the clouds,
Forms that illumined darkness, stabbed despair,

¹⁹ Wells and Klinck, op. cit., p. 94.

Turned dungeons into temples and a brand
Of shame into the ultimate boast of time.²⁰

The "brand of shame," the cross, is turned "into the ultimate boast of time" only through its association with Jesus Christ as the instrument by which He redeemed the world. Mr. Wells has surely missed the whole point of Christian asceticism if he thinks that the cross as a symbol of suffering in union with Christ can be expressive of "some relatively primitive and elemental religious attitude." Surely Pratt has located the climax of his poem with sufficient religious and geographical exactitude:

. . . not in these the source--
But in the sound of invisible trumpets blowing
Around two slabs of board, right-angled, hammered
By Roman nails and hung on a Jewish hill.²¹

Mr. Klinck sees the inspirational value of this symbol:

But it is in his longer poems that he rises to express that superb love of men who died to serve strangers on the Antinoe or the Titanic or of martyrs who died for savages under the inspiration of the Cross.²²

And Mr. Wells, himself, makes this statement:

Thoroughly aware of the ascetic core in Jesuit thought, Pratt has declared that the germ of his poem lies in the Cross, and that in all its parts his chief aim has been to give fullness and body to his basic conception.²³

²⁰ Pratt, op. cit., p. 59.

²¹ Ibid., p. 93.

²² Wells and Klinck, op. cit., p. 40.

²³ Ibid., p. 94.

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Does Mr. Wells always argue both sides of a question in as confusing a manner as this? In each case one of the best rebuttals of his argument lies in a statement that he, himself, has made earlier. It looks as if Mr. Wells distorts statements to make them mean whatever he wishes them to mean at the moment.

The fourth sentence of the criticism under study is best divided into its two parts. "Basically Pratt's emphasis falls not upon religion but upon heroism." Exactly. But, here again, Mr. Wells confuses the issue. The martyrs are men dedicated to religion and the fulness of the religious life is heroism. We have this from the Founder of Christianity: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."²⁴

With this statement Mr. Wells has returned to the core of the argument. Pratt was not writing a treatise on religion, but an epic in which he depicted heroism, but heroism motivated by religion, the cross accepted through the torture of daily living right through to the ultimate triumph of holy dying. He was showing heroism in practice. Heroism and religion are inseparably linked. The daily

²⁴ The Holy Bible, Douay-Rheims, London, England, Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1914 edition, St. Luke 9:23.

imitation of Christ brings ultimate union with Him even though the portal to that union be a fiery stake. Personal sanctification is the key to effective work with other souls but, conversely, whole-hearted and unselfish service of others for the love of God is the best means of developing personal holiness. Brébeuf's heroism grows from his religious dedication; his religion is the motivation behind the whole drama of his life in Huronia:

". . . Here is the service
Of joy, that we will take whatever God
Ordains for us whether it be life or death."²⁵

The remainder of this final sentence from Mr. Wells' comment is this: "Brébeuf himself, as we have seen, is presented as an epic rather than a pious character." In the last paragraph it has been shown that true sanctity is heroism. It is, therefore, epic in its very nature. But Mr. Wells seems to be confusing piety--reverence towards God--with pietism--a mere display of religious feeling. Anyone who has studied Pratt's Brébeuf knows that there is no empty show of religion paraded there. Brébeuf lived whole-heartedly, in every phase of his life, the sincere reverence that he showed to God. He was strong, an epic character, indeed, but he was so because his love for God and his fellowmen was the driving force in his life.

²⁵ Pratt, op. cit., p. 86.

In commenting on the religious content of the poem Mr. Wells says:

Religion in Pratt's longest poem has much more of strength and endurance than of charity, love or gentleness.²⁶

Three selections from the poem will serve to show the quality of religion it portrays. In his instructions to those travelling to Huronia, Brébeuf says:

You must sincerely love the savages
As brothers ransomed by the blood of Christ.
All things must be endured. To win their hearts
You must perform the smallest services.²⁷

He goes on to list the services: helping to light the fire, carrying wood and water; punctuality, cleanliness, cheerfulness; and the sharing of the burdens at portages. There is surely charity, love, and gentleness here, and these virtues are evident in the little everyday points of daily living, just where they count the most.

How do the Fathers act when unusual circumstances test their charity?

But never could the Indians infer
Self-gain or anything but simple courage
Inspired by a zeal beyond reproof,
As when the smallpox spreading like a flame
Destroying hundreds, scarifying thousands,
The Fathers took their chances of contagion,
Their broad hats warped by rain, their moccasins
Worn to the kibes, that they might reach the huts,

²⁶ Wells and Klinck, op. cit., p. 96.

²⁷ Pratt, op. cit., p. 52.

Share with the sick their dwindled stock of food--
 A sup of partridge broth or raisin juice,
 Inscribe the sacred sign of the cross, and place
 A touch of moisture from the Holy Water
 Upon the forehead of a dying child.²⁸

That is heroic charity, the kind of love and service in which self is completely submerged and forgotten.

And, finally, when the Iroquois raids had made life in Huronia almost impossible and thousands of homeless, hungry refugees crowded into Ste. Marie, Ragueneau could write to his superiors:

"We are here as yet intact,
 But all determined to shed blood and life
 If need be. In this Residence still reigns
 The peace and love of Heaven. Here the sick
 Will find a hospital, the travellers
 A place of rest, the fugitives, asylum.
 During the year more than three thousand persons
 Have sought and found shelter under our roof.
 We have dispensed the Bread of Life to all
 And we have fed their bodies, though our fare
 Is down to one food only, crushed corn boiled
 And seasoned with the powder of smoked fish."²⁹

That also is charity and love of neighbour carried out on a colossal scale in the wilderness of Huronia where there were no spectators to measure it or comment on it. These deeds were done through Christian charity motivated by the love of God. Dr. Edgar's comment will serve as a conclusion to this study of criticism on the religious value of the poem:

²⁸ Pratt, op. cit., p. 53.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 83-84.

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The poem is not only an example of poetic condensation. It exemplifies also a range of imaginative sympathy which alone made it possible for a Protestant by instinct, tradition and conviction to write the greatest Catholic poem of our day. The heroism of this martyr band emerged from fiery belief, and thus sufficed to make the poet generous to a faith that was naturally alien to his own.³⁰

The next group of criticism to be measured is that dealing with the historical and national importance of Brébeuf and His Brethren. In an evaluation of Canadian literature Mr. Harold Horwood says:

No one was ever more out of his depth than E. J. Pratt when he tackled the Brébeuf theme. . . . Poetry of this pseudo-Canadian sort often impressed one as having been prefabricated in America or England, and assembled by an amateur with "made in Canada" stamped all over it. Pratt's Brébeuf is an example of almost everything that is bad in Canadian poetry--it is pretentious, it is as pseudo-Canadian as Grey Wolf and Jack Miner's geese, it lacks spontaneity, and it achieved, on a lesser scale, the same sort of vulgar popularity that greeted John Brown's Body in the U. S. A.³¹

This sort of criticism impresses one as being petty and somewhat ill-natured. It is rather interesting to note that Mr. W. W. E. Ross holds just the opposite view to that expressed in Mr. Horwood's first sentence for he says:
"E. J. Pratt was on the right track when he came up out of the north Atlantic, shook off the salty drops and located

³⁰ Pelham Edgar, A Great Canadian Poem, review in Saturday Night of Toronto, vol. 55, no. 42, August 17, 1940, p. 15.

³¹ Harold Horwood, Number Ten Reports, article in Northern Review of Montreal, vol. 4, no. 2, Dec.-Jan., 1950-51, pp. 19-20.

himself in Huronia."³² Many other critics will be found to agree with this.

The whole critique presents five points for consideration: the poet was out of his depth in writing this poem, it is pretentious, it is pseudo-Canadian, it lacks spontaneity, and it has achieved vulgar popularity. The critic deals in generalities and makes no attempt to say exactly where or how the poem fails to meet his standards on any of these points, nor does he state just what his standards are. Since he makes no definite and specific accusations against the poem itself or any part of it, his charges can be met by citing critics who are much better known in the literary field than Mr. Horwood is and whose opinions differ from his. The four points dealing with literary evaluation will be treated in the next section. Let us consider first the charge that Brébeuf and His Brethren is pseudo-Canadian.

What is the test for the nationality of any literary effort? Mr. William Arthur Deacon gives a very simple one:

The true test of the nationality of a literature is whether it could have originated elsewhere; and, with few exceptions, we find that never in substance, and

³² W. W. E. Ross, On National Poetry, article in Canadian Forum of Toronto, vol. 24, no. 282, July, 1944, p. 88.

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sometimes not even in form, could the books designated as Canadian literature have emanated from any other country.³³

Mr. Deacon then says that in regard to Champlain's chronicles, the Jesuit Relations, Hearne's and Mackenzie's accounts of their voyages

. . . the country had only determined the subject-matter: it had not formed the authors. Valuable historically in their several degrees as all such records are, none of them can be classed as Canadian Literature.³⁴

This is a clear and direct statement of opinion. Since the Jesuit Relations were written by men who had been formed in France they cannot be classed as Canadian literature even though Canada had determined the subject-matter. As soon as a poet, formed in Canada, deals with this matter it should become, by definition, Canadian literature.

Although Newfoundland is now our tenth province, it was not at the time of Pratt's birth a part of Canada. But Pratt obtained his college education in Canada and from 1907, when he went to Victoria College, until 1940, when he wrote Brébeuf and His Brethren, he had made his home in Canada. Surely thirty-three years spent at one of the cultural centres of our country as a student and as a teacher should

³³ William Arthur Deacon, Poteen, Ottawa, Ontario, The Graphic Publications Limited, 1926, p. 146.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 147.

give this poet a claim to Canadian literary citizenship. Since 1949 this claim cannot be denied.

In this poem, then, there is genuine Canadian history re-told by a Canadian poet. Where then does the objection lie? The Jesuit martyrs, by their apostolate among the aborigines of Canada, have as valid a claim to the title "Canadian martyrs" or "Canadian missionaries" as St. Boniface has to "Apostle of Germany," or St. Patrick to "Apostle of Ireland," or even St. Augustine of Canterbury to "Apostle of England." Would Mr. T. S. Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral be discounted as English literature because the protagonist, Thomas à Beckett, was of Norman descent, or because he was murdered by men of doubtful allegiance to the English king? The Jesuit Relations give a better picture of life in early Canada than the Bayeux Tapestry gives of the Norman Conquest, yet who would dismiss the claim that this tapestry is both French and English history?

Or, perhaps, the criticism means that this poem is not Canadian because it does not describe Canada as it is to-day. Would a faithful and exact description of life in Elizabethan England be called pseudo-English simply because it does not portray the life that is lived in England to-day? Would descriptions of the lives of immigrants in Canada be considered as non-Canadian because these people

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are making an adjustment to our way of life? If so, then a considerable body of Canadian literature should be discarded and our national culture will be that much poorer.

Mr. Horwood claims that the poem is as pseudo-Canadian as Jack Miner's geese. Perhaps he does not realize that by his comparison he is really emphasizing the nationality of the poem. The Canadian Postal Department has considered the Canada goose so truly representative of the wild-life of our country that it has used this bird on a recent issue of the seven-cent stamp. This is a very interesting stamp in subject and in design, and one that is distinctively Canadian.

But other critics have expressed their opinions on the national validity of Brébeuf and His Brethren. Mr. A. J. M. Smith comments on Pratt's development towards moral seriousness and then continues:

This development has brought him in his most ambitious poem, Brébeuf and His Brethren (1940), not only closer to a significant moral theme but closer to a truly national one.³⁵

With considerable warmth Arthur L. Phelps expresses somewhat the same idea:

Pratt has also handled Canadian material with unabashed vigour and enthusiasm, not because it is

³⁵ A. J. M. Smith, The Book of Canadian Poetry, Chicago, Illinois, The University of Chicago Press, 1943, Introduction, p. 27.

Canadian, but because it comes as appropriately as anything else within a poet's compass. In a long narrative poem Brébeuf and His Brethren celebrating, (and I think celebrating is the word), the heroisms of the French Jesuits among the Indians, the essential right elements of the Canadian scene are gathered, shaped, and built together until they carry the accent and authority of art's universality.³⁶

This comment is particularly interesting in the last sentence which suggests that this Canadian material is so well integrated by the poet that the poem becomes, not de-nationalized or pseudo-Canadian, but so typical of what it sets out to describe that it takes on the universal appeal that belongs to all great art because it belongs to all mankind.

Dr. Pelham Edgar looks at it from somewhat the same point of view:

For the first time in his career he has bitten deep into the rind of history and human endeavor. His work is the result of a profound study of a unique period in Canadian annals, and reveals to us the concentrative power that poetry at its best possesses.³⁷

These opinions certainly show unanimity. Dr. Earle Birney and Dorothy Livesay both carry the thought a step farther. If it were of doubtful historical or national value one might hesitate to recommend the poem for use in schools. But Dr. Birney says, "No finer introduction both

³⁶ Arthur L. Phelps, Canadian Writers, Toronto, Ontario, McClelland and Stewart, 1951, p. 7-8.

³⁷ Pelham Edgar, loc. cit., p. 15.

to early Canadian history and to contemporary poetry could be given school children of this country than Mr. Pratt's Brébeuf."³⁸ Dorothy Livesay expresses the same idea in her brief remark, "Poets, too, are proving better historians than those who gave us our school text-books. Pratt's Bréboeuf [sic] is an example which may well be followed."³⁹

There is another phase of this question which is of considerable importance. This poem appeared in 1940 when the direction and extent of Canada's war effort was still a matter that required delicate handling in order to attain national unity and maximum efficiency. In Brébeuf and His Brethren, Pratt presented a page from Canada's history that was inspiring, a page in which all Canadians had a justifiable pride. Dr. E. K. Brown says that in choosing this subject Pratt sought to "be reassured as to the qualities of Canadian life. He wished to be sure that we could bear the strains of war."⁴⁰ Mr. Klinck claims that in writing this poem Pratt was making his contribution to the nation's war effort by helping to promote national unity:

³⁸ Earle Birney, Canadian Poem of the Year, article in Canadian Forum of Toronto, vol. 20, no. 236, September, 1940, p. 18.

³⁹ Dorothy Livesay, This Canadian Poetry, article in Canadian Forum of Toronto, vol. 24, no. 279, April, 1944, p. 21.

⁴⁰ E. K. Brown, On Canadian Poetry, Toronto, Ontario, The Ryerson Press, 1943, p. 158.

Brébeuf is the story of Roman Catholics told by a Protestant, the story of Frenchmen told by an English-Canadian. It succeeds partly because it reminds English and French of their common history and of heroism which belongs to all races and religions. English and French research had gone into an elucidation of The Jesuit Relations, and the martyrs, if not as saints, are recognized as giving all Canadians a richness of background and nobility of stature sought after among peoples of the New World. Pratt's own research was painstaking and tireless: no controversial allusions will mar his record. A literary monument of tolerance and united Canadian purposes--produced against a background of racial hatreds in Europe--Brebeuf was a practical demonstration of true democracy, a contribution to war and to peace. Its reception by the Canadian public has encouraged the belief that Pratt's countrymen of all races recognize what he has done for their national life.⁴¹

On this point there is unanimity between Mr. Klinck and his co-author, Mr. Wells. The latter says:

When in a new hour of epic trial Canadians sought unity and inspiration, it was inevitable that eyes should revert to the theme. On this occasion a poet worthy of the materials appeared, not among the French Canadians themselves, but among those of British origin who could bring to the subject the heroic strength of the English tongue.⁴²

E. K. Brown brings out one more point that is worthy of notice when he says that "Brébeuf and his fellow-martyrs are the Canadian types of sanctity--they are the only Canadians canonized at Rome."⁴³ From this it is evident that they are epic figures that lead us on to brave deeds

⁴¹ Wells and Klinck, op. cit., p. 36.

⁴² Ibid., p. 90.

⁴³ Brown, op. cit., p. 158.

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and to national unity and they also inspire us to imitate their sanctity. That is the noblest citizenship; beyond that there is nothing more.

The remaining points of Mr. Horwood's criticism pertain to the literary evaluation of the poem. He claims that Pratt was out of his depth in writing it, that it is pretentious, that it lacks spontaneity, and that it has achieved vulgar popularity. A brief study of the opinions of other critics will show that they do not agree with Mr. Horwood on the first three points. The type of popularity that it has achieved will be noted separately.

Dr. E. K. Brown, comparing the poem with Pratt's earlier work, finds that qualities such as humour and exuberance have been sparingly introduced and that the vigour is chastened and quiet. "In place of such qualities we are given, along with craftsmanship of the most considered fineness, loftiness and calm."⁴⁴ Mr. George Herbert Clarke says that

Dr. Pratt is to be heartily congratulated on this new achievement, for the poem is even subtler in its feeling and richer in its humanity than his widely popular sagas of the sea, difficult as any critical comparison must prove.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Brown, review in Poetry, p. 286.

⁴⁵ George Herbert Clarke, Brébeuf and His Brethren, review in Queen's Quarterly of Kingston, vol. 47, Winter 1940, p. 483.

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The charge that Brébeuf and His Brethren lacks spontaneity can be met with this comment from Dr. Pelham Edgar:

The salient facts are marshalled in briefest compass and made to pulsate with life, and our admiration cannot be withheld for the skill of divination which enabled a Protestant mind to penetrate so sympathetically into an alien faith, and discover there the energetic springs of heroic action.⁴⁶

Referring to Pratt's handling of the poem, Wells says that "the climax is contrived with calm mastery worthy of a symphony of Brahms."⁴⁷ This critic certainly does not agree with the charge that Pratt is "out of his depth" in handling this theme.

Even Pratt's skill in the difficult task of character portrayal comes in for its meed of praise. Dr. Edgar uses Pratt's version of Brébeuf's letter to the novices as an example of the poet's skill in handling the documents from which he drew the material for his story. Then he passes his judgment on Pratt's success:

The character of Brébeuf is stamped on every line of this historic letter. There is no psychological complexity in the presentation, only, as befits the epic tone of the narrative, characterization in its broader aspects, the undaunted courage of the man, his abounding faith, his Christian mysticism. He is cast in the heroic, and is of the stuff of which martyrs are made. His individualism needs no further manipulation. Pratt's poem is thoroughly humanized, and the reproach

⁴⁶ Pelham Edgar, Across My Path, Toronto, Ontario, The Ryerson Press, 1952, p. 110.

⁴⁷ Wells and Klinck, op. cit., p. 94.

that is sometimes levelled at our Canadian poetry that character is so generally scantied is singularly wide of the mark. When we have a Canadian poetic drama it will be time to seek for greater circumspection.⁴⁸

That the major Canadian critics do not agree with Mr. Horwood's charges is now evident. Dr. Birney, who is himself a noted poet, will be permitted to make the final comment:

On the other hand, there is a restraint and simplicity, which are comparatively new, though exhibited in many of Mr. Pratt's shorter poems since the first days of Newfoundland Verse. And there is, by the same token, an absence of those weaknesses which have flowed from the excess of strength in his previous narrative work. In Brébeuf, the tempo never gets out of hand, the voice does not hoarsen from a too prolonged fortissimo (as at times in The Titanic) and there is none of the rhetorical fireworks which occasionally bedim even the best of his poems. Above all, in Brébeuf, bigness of deed and character is not made merely spectacular or grotesque, but is heightened into the grand.⁴⁹

The last point must now be considered. The popularity of Brébeuf and His Brethren can be gauged to some extent through a consideration of the awards and distinctions it has received. Mr. John Masefield has advanced the opinion that the radio will eventually play its part in shaping poetic requirements. He envisioned the poets of the future reciting their poems over the networks to vast audiences in much the same way that bards of the past

⁴⁸ Edgar, op. cit., p. 115.

⁴⁹ Birney, loc. cit., p. 181.

entertained the crowds in the market-places.⁵⁰ E. J. Pratt might be considered as one of the forerunners of this movement because several of his poems, notably The Cachalot and Brébeuf and His Brethren, have been presented to radio audiences. On September 26, 1943, a dramatized version of Brébeuf with incidental music by Healey Willan was broadcast for the first time over CBC under the direction of James Finlay. Ettore Mazzoleni conducted the orchestra and Albert Whitehead directed the choir of twenty voices. The narrator was W. Lyndon Smith, and Ernest A. Dale read the words of Brébeuf.⁵¹ This programme met with a most enthusiastic response. A few months later, on January 18, 1944, the same arrangement was presented at Massey Hall by the Toronto Symphony Orchestra of seventy pieces and the Toronto Mendelssohn Choir of one hundred-fifty voices conducted by Sir Ernest MacMillan. For this presentation Ernest A. Dale was the narrator, and Ivor Lewis read the lines of Brébeuf.⁵² The work again stirred favourable comment and plans were made to have the pageant presented at the Martyrs' Shrine at Midland. But these were war

⁵⁰ Wells and Klinck, op. cit., p. 40.

⁵¹ CBC Program Schedule for the week of September 26, 1943.

⁵² Concert Programme of Tuesday, January 18, 1944.

years and the certain financial loss that would be incurred in presenting such a programme was so great that the plan was abandoned. This pageant has never been presented at the Martyrs' Shrine.⁵³ On March 17, 1948, a performance of the complete work was given over the Trans-Canada network of CBC, and a short excerpt from the poem was used in the CBC International Service programme Anthology on January 10, 1949.⁵⁴ The very names of those connected with the musical and dramatic arrangements of these performances indicate the quality of the reception given to the poem.

If by the phrase, "vulgar popularity," Mr. Horwood means that the poem is accepted by the common people, his sneer becomes a compliment; it argues a wider appeal than most poets dare to dream of for their work. In any case, to have achieved vulgar popularity is not exactly a fault, and if it is, then it is one not often committed by our Canadian writers. The typical complaint is, rather, of the indifference shown by the public.⁵⁵ If Pratt has succeeded

⁵³ Personal correspondence of the author, letter from Reverend Joseph Fallon, S.J., Martyrs' Shrine, Midland, Ontario, dated June 20, 1956.

⁵⁴ Personal correspondence of the author, letter from Agnes Tassie, Permissions, The Macmillan Company of Canada, Toronto, Ontario, dated May 8, 1957.

⁵⁵ E. K. Brown, Our Neglect of Our Literature, article in Civil Service Review of Ottawa, vol. 17, no. 3, Autumn, 1944, p. 339.

in arousing some enthusiasm in this plethora of apathy he should be congratulated, not censured.

In addition to the favourable reception it has been given by English and French, and by Protestant and Catholic critics, Brébeuf and His Brethren has also received Canada's highest literary recognition, the Governor-General's Award, for 1940. Hence it is evident that this poem has, indeed, gained recognition at all levels.

This evaluation of criticism will not be complete without some mention of the place that Brébeuf and His Brethren holds in Dr. Pratt's poetry. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to go into a detailed study of the relative merits of each of Pratt's longer narrative poems. It is also impossible, since Dr. Pratt is still writing, to give Brébeuf and His Brethren its ultimate position in the body of the poet's work. Attention will be given to the statements of Canada's leading critics and, in this way, some idea will be gained of the general consensus of opinion regarding the position this poem holds in Pratt's writing. Many critics unhesitatingly place it first; others do not admit it to such high rank, but feel that it certainly must be included with Pratt's best work.

Mr. Burns Martin expresses his opinion with direct simplicity:

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There will always be difference of opinion concerning which is the best of the long narrative poems. At present Brébeuf and His Brethren seems to be the favourite, but for this present writer this poem has two defects: the poet has had to work with recalcitrant matter and has not been able, because of the very abundance of martyrs and material, to mould it into a perfect form; and secondly, the very loose blank verse tends at times to break down, as late Jacobean and Caroline blank verse did, into rhythmical prose. For the present writer The Roosevelt and the Antinoe and The Titanic contend for first place, the former because of its simple, majestic mass, and the second because of the poet's almost successful attempt to impose a Greek conception on the story, and both because they show the nobility of the common man when a great crisis faces him. In an age when so many poets have whined at the fate of man, it is refreshing to find such simple faith, such rugged grandeur as Pratt sees in man.⁵⁶

By this comment Burns Martin shows that he is no criticaster. He expresses his opinion simply, and gives the reasons which lead him to make his decision. This makes his statement worthy of study, so each point that he has brought up will be considered in turn.

Mr. Martin finds that Pratt was dealing with recalcitrant matter, that there were too many martyrs and too much material, and that this has led to a lack of perfection in form. Dr. Edgar does not agree with this opinion. He thinks that Brébeuf is more revelatory of Pratt's quality than the sea narratives, although his name is usually associated with them. He accepts the argument that

⁵⁶ Burns Martin, Collected Poems, review in Dalhousie Review of Halifax, vol. 24, January, 1945, p. 485.

the material in them is indigenous and that Pratt is more at home when describing the sea than he is in the woods:

Viewed in that light the sea-pieces are more naturally spontaneous, children of the experienced fact, and Brébeuf a more sophisticated offspring engendered by much pondering upon books. Yet, with all these things conceded, Brébeuf is a highly revealing poem. Consider alone this matter of its bookish background. With such an origin behind it, that Pratt should succeed in keeping his narrative free from pedantry and present to us the ordered record of thirty years three hundred years ago, is evidence of a finer historic sense than any of our poets hitherto have shown. Our inference from a success so compelling is that the theme initially possessed his imagination so completely that prosaic detail was submitted to a species of transfiguration, or burned in the glowing mass. Prosaic detail fortunately did not abound in his bulky dossier of material, but there were documents and letters to be rendered into verse, and we have no parallels in our literature for the masterly translation he achieved.⁵⁷

Burns Martin's second objection is that "the very loose blank verse tends at times to break down into rhythmical prose." In the section on versification this thesis dealt with several passages that approach prose.⁵⁸ But, in comparison with the numerous and very impressive sections in which the poet has really succeeded, these failures are few, and none occurs in any point where such a failure would mar the impact of the whole. Most critics are ready to admit that there are some imperfect sections, but as soon as they turn their attention to the effect of the

⁵⁷ Pelham Edgar, op. cit., p. 115.

⁵⁸ Supra, pp. 76-77.

whole poem they are forced to forget these minor imperfections. Desmond Pacey's comment is typical:

But in one of his poems of the war period--Brébeuf and His Brethren (1940)--Pratt found the perfect subject for his talents and created a masterpiece. Since the heroes of the poem are the Jesuit Martyrs, it might seem that this poem is an exception to our general rule that Pratt's best poems make the non-human heroic. The exception is more apparent than real. Brébeuf and his brethren are not the protagonists of humanity--they are the protagonists of the Divine. Man--silly, ignorant, proud and cruel man--is represented by the Indians who martyr these emissaries of God. But the poem is an exception in the sense that here Pratt's grave note has an impressiveness that needs no incidental humour to enliven it. Dull stretches there are, but on the whole the tone is magnificently sustained, and the poem moves quietly but firmly to a climax which forms the high-water mark of poetic achievement in Canada.⁵⁹

After stating the two points which are, in his opinion, the poem's defects, Burns Martin offers The Roosevelt and the Antinoe and The Titanic as his choices for first place in Pratt's work. He chooses both poems "because they show the nobility of the common man when a great crisis faces him." This is an interesting comment, but it loses something of its force when we recall that, although these poems do show nobility under a great crisis, Brébeuf shows a whole lifetime of crises, each faced and overcome under the constant threat of a horrible death, and that, when this threat becomes a reality, the superhuman

⁵⁹ Desmond Pacey, Creative Writing in Canada, Toronto, Ontario, The Ryerson Press, 1952, p. 122.

nobility shown by the martyrs has grown out of their daily lives into a habitual state of mind. This is, beyond question, the higher nobility.

Other critics have compared Brébeuf and His Brethren with both poems selected by Mr. Martin. Earle Birney prefers Brébeuf because in it "the tempo never gets out of hand" and the voice, unlike that in The Titanic does not "hoarsen from a too prolonged fortissimo." He says also that "bigness of deed and character is not made merely spectacular or grotesque, but is heightened into the grand." Then he gives a very sound evaluation of the poem:

Brébeuf is then, in some respects, Mr. Pratt's best work, though by no means illustrative of his manifold talents. It is not so well integrated as the Roosevelt, nor as individualized, nor as emotionally full. Its climax is more satisfactory, but still, as in his other narratives, it falls somewhat short by being too intensely anticipated. But Brébeuf is eminently faithful to its heroic aim, which is to exalt a group of suffering and undaunted human beings against their background of medieval France and barbarian Huronia.⁶⁰

Five years after the appearance of Brébeuf and His Brethren, George Herbert Clarke singled it out for a similar comparison when he was reviewing Collected Poems:

Despite the power of this sea saga [The Roosevelt and the Antinoe] and of the stirring tale of the Titanic, they cannot compete with the subtle overtones of Brébeuf and His Brethren, which remains Pratt's

⁶⁰ Earle Birney, Canadian Poem of the Year, article in Canadian Forum of Toronto, vol. 20, no. 236, September 1940, p. 181.

highest achievement. When he made that poem he had rich sources at his disposal and knew how to use them, his sense of style and his structural designing had been firmer, and the wells of his humanity were full. The man who wrote Brébeuf is a poet of "unusual strings." He has charm and he has power. These are the right terms for his contemporaries to employ. Time, the ultimate critic, will supply the others: and Time is less concerned with mere eulogy than with what Saintsbury calls "corrected impressions"--corrected through the progressively sensitive focussing of the educated imagination.⁶¹

From this array of critical opinion it becomes evident that Canadian critics have placed Brébeuf and His Brethren in the very highest rank in the body of Pratt's work⁶² and that most of them agree with Dr. Edgar in considering this poem "an unquestioned masterpiece."⁶³ Some critics go even beyond this. Mr. Northrop Frye claims that it is the greatest single Canadian poem.⁶⁴ Nathaniel A. Benson is of the opinion that it is this poem that gives Pratt his high place in Canadian literature:

With Brébeuf and His Brethren Pratt has certainly established himself as the finest poet of his own generation. He has placed himself far beyond the other

⁶¹ George Herbert Clarke, Recent Canadian Poetry, review in Queen's Quarterly of Kingston, vol. 52, no. 1, Spring, 1945, p. 123.

⁶² L. A. Mackay, The Poetry of E. J. Pratt, article in Canadian Forum of Toronto, vol. 24, no. 287, December, 1944, p. 208.

⁶³ Edgar, A Great Canadian Poem, p. 15.

⁶⁴ Northrop Frye, Canada and Its Poetry, article in Canadian Forum of Toronto, vol. 23, no. 275, December 1943, p. 210.

Canadians, men and women of his own age, so far beyond them all that there is little or no contemporary work to compare with his own.⁶⁵

This is, indeed, high praise and, although other critics do not go quite so far in their evaluation of the poem, the very fact that one is prepared to make and to defend this statement shows that Pratt's rank in the galaxy of Canadian poets is indeed high, and that Brébeuf and His Brethren is a worthwhile contribution to our literature.

In conclusion, let us review the purpose of this thesis. It has tried to show that Brébeuf and His Brethren expresses Pratt's compassion and sympathy towards his fellowmen, that this poem is a sound portrayal of Canadian history, true in feeling and in expression to the source from which it was drawn, the Jesuit Relations. This thesis studied the literary value of the poem and found that, in this field also, Pratt's Brébeuf is noteworthy not only for its versification, diction, and imagery, but particularly for its tone, the intensity of its feeling, and its understanding of the great nobility to which a human being can rise. In this alone Pratt has come very close to this ideal:

⁶⁵ Nathaniel A. Benson, Brébeuf and His Brethren, review in Canadian Poetry of Toronto, vol. 5, no. 1, September, 1940, p. 40.

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We assert that the need in the whole field of poetry is primarily a recognition of the true nature of man. Poetry is a fine art and is inevitably predicated on a being who has a place of dignity in his world.⁶⁶

This evaluation was carried further by a comparison with four poems of related subject matter by recognized Canadian writers. This comparison established the fact that Pratt has nowhere fallen below the level of their achievement, that in all cases he has done as well as they, and in most of the sections studied his work has been incomparably better. The thesis then turned to a study of the position that Brébeuf and His Brethren holds in the contemporary literary field as shown by the number of printings, the criticism that has been offered, and the rewards it has received. And, finally, the body of criticism available has been sifted to gain some idea of the position held by the poem in the work produced by Dr. Pratt.

The poem is, without doubt, a great Canadian poem, and it has its own high place in Dr. Pratt's poetry. So distinctive is it that no one could possibly attempt a study of Pratt without giving considerable attention to Brébeuf and His Brethren. Whether one places it in first, second, or third place, it must be given recognition

⁶⁶ John Gilland Brunini, Francis X. Connolly, and Joseph G. E. Hopkins, editors, Return to Poetry, New York, New York, The Declan X. McMullen Company, 1947, p. 6.

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whenever Canadian poetry is studied, just as Pratt must be included in any mention of Canadian poets. The comment of our French compatriot, Guy Sylvestre, is an excellent summary of critical opinion, and it will form a fitting conclusion to this study of the poem:

Au Canada anglais, le plus authentiquement canadien des poètes est sans doute Edwin John Pratt, dont le Brébeuf and His Brethren est le poème le plus considérable encore chanté à la gloire de notre histoire (la Légende d'un peuple de Frechette est en effet moins un poème qu'un recueil de poèmes divers). S'il est vrai que ce poème épique de plus de deux mille vers est inférieur aux brèves épopées marines du même poète, il n'en est pas moins une oeuvre importante, d'une haute inspiration, d'une sincérité toujours évidente, et abondante en beautés.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Guy Sylvestre, Brébeuf and His Brethren, review in Le Devoir of Montreal, vol. 35, no. 161, samedi 15 juillet, 1944, p. 8.

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A reprint, in book form, of two series of articles which appeared in Patrie of Montreal, this is an interesting, popular account of Huronia, past and present.

Brown, E. K., On Canadian Poetry, revised edition. Toronto, The Ryerson Press, 1944, xi-172 pages.

Dr. Brown has made a sound evaluation of Canadian poetry in general. Under the heading, III. The Masters, he has devoted special sections to Archibald Lampman, Duncan Campbell Scott, and E. J. Pratt. There is an excellent study of Pratt's work on pages 143-164.

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MacMechan, Archibald, Headwaters of Canadian Literature. Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1924, 247 pages.

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McRaye, Walter, Pauline Johnson and Her Friends. Toronto, The Ryerson Press, 1947, xvi-182 pages.

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Percival, W. P., Leading Canadian Poets. Toronto, The Ryerson Press, 1948, x-271 pages.

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Phelps, Arthur L., Canadian Writers. Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1951, 119 pages.

A study of the better-known Canadian writers. Pages 1-9 give a concise, but good, critique of E. J. Pratt.

Pierce, Lorne, Marjorie Pickthall: A Book of Remembrance. Toronto, The Ryerson Press, 1925, xiv-217 pages.

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Walsh, James J., American Jesuits, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1934, ix-336 pages.

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An excellent study of E. J. Pratt's work as a whole and of its place in Canadian letters.

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This author seems to be an individualist who likes to express opinions contrary to those held by other critics for the sole purpose of being different, and he does not offer well-balanced arguments soundly supported with proof. He shows no understanding of Brébeuf and His Brethren and all that it implies, but dismisses it with a sneer. The article is of interest, however, to this thesis because it is the only one, of all those read and studied, that condemns the poem as worthless. For this reason, Mr. H. Horwood's criticism has been used as the core of the study which this thesis makes of the reception given to the poem.

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Middleton, J. E., An Appreciation--Collected Poems, in Saturday Night, vol. 60, no. 9, November 4, 1944, p. 32.

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Sutherland, John, The Past Decade in Canadian Poetry, in Northern Review (First Statement), vol. 4, no. 2, December-January, 1950-51, p. 42-45.

A good survey of the ten years of Canadian poetry from 1940 to 1950.

-----, E. J. Pratt: A Major Contemporary Poet, in Northern Review (First Statement), vol. 5, nos. 3 and 4, February-March, and April-May, 1952, p. 36-64.

This article analyzes E. J. Pratt's psychological background in the development of his poetic themes. It over-proves its point to some extent and gives the impression that Mr. Sutherland is forcing his own personal opinion on the reader instead of convincing him with well-balanced arguments soundly backed with proof. It makes Dr. Pratt's whole attitude to his work seem much more complicated than the writer of this thesis thinks justifiable. It forms, however, an interesting and challenging point of view.

Sylvestre, Guy, Brébeuf and His Brethren, in Le Devoir, vol. 35, no. 161, samedi, 15 juillet, 1944, p. 8.

This is sound criticism. The religious and the historical backgrounds of the poem are well understood, fully appreciated, and correctly evaluated by this reviewer.

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-----, Aspects de la poésie canadienne de langue anglaise (suite et fin), in L'Action Universitaire, vol. 17, no. 2, Janvier 1951, p. 31-45.

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A collection of lectures which were given over CBC. The broadcast, Poetry, treats of Canadian poetry in general but almost one-half is devoted to the work of E. J. Pratt. This antedates Brébeuf and His Brethren, but it gives very useful material for a study of Pratt's earlier work.

CBC Program Schedule, September 26, 1943.

This schedule gives the details concerning the broadcast of Brébeuf and His Brethren.

Concert Programme, Massey Hall, Golden Anniversary Season, Tuesday, January 18, 1944.

This is the programme prepared for the dramatic presentation of Brébeuf and His Brethren by the Toronto Symphony Orchestra and the Toronto Mendelssohn Choir, arranged by Healey Willan and given under the direction of Sir Ernest MacMillan. This programme is of interest to this thesis because it gives details regarding the performance.

Voisin, Lawrence, S.J., The Heart of a Giant: John de Brébeuf, S.J. Midland, The Martyrs' Shrine, 1945, 61 pages.

A short account of the life of Saint John de Brébeuf. There are many direct quotations from the writings of Brébeuf. These have been used for ready reference in the work of this thesis.

-----, The Strength of God: Saint Gabriel Lalemant. Midland, The Martyrs' Shrine, 1948, 62 pages.

A short account of the life of Saint Gabriel Lalemant. This booklet has been used for ready reference in preparing this thesis.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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MANUSCRIPT

Pratt, E. J., The Huronian Martyrs and Their Work. Unpublished manuscript, 3 pages, typewritten, single-space.

In reply to an inquiry regarding the possibility of obtaining a copy of the newspaper report on this address, Dr. Pratt, with very great courtesy, sent his own typewritten copy with permission to quote from it at will.

This address was given at Convocation Hall, Queen's University, January 20, 1948. A partial text of the address appeared in The Canadian Register, Toronto Edition, vol. 6, January 31, 1948, page 7, under the title, Saga of Canadian Martyrs Story of Heroism for Christ and Men's Souls. This manuscript was of very great interest to this thesis since it gives Dr. Pratt's own appreciation of the Martyrs who form the subject of his great poem.

PERSONAL CORRESPONDENCE

Phillips, Wanda, Publicity, The Macmillan Company of Canada, Toronto, Ontario, dated December 30, 1955.

This letter furnished details regarding the number of printings of Brébeuf and His Brethren and their dates.

Fallon, Joseph, S.J., Martyrs' Shrine, Midland, Ontario, dated June 20, 1956.

This letter answered an inquiry regarding the proposed plan for performing the Healey Willan arrangement of Brébeuf and His Brethren, at the Martyrs' Shrine.

Tassie, Agnes, Permissions, The Macmillan Company of Canada, Toronto, Ontario, dated May 8, 1957.

This letter gave details of the radio performances of Brébeuf and His Brethren, either in the dramatic-musical arrangement or as a reading, over the Trans-Canada network of CBC.

AN ABSTRACT OF
Brébeuf and His Brethren: A Great Canadian Poem
by Sister Mary Rosalinda

This thesis purports to make a detailed study of Edwin John Pratt's Brébeuf and His Brethren. It is the first lengthy analysis of this poem. Most Canadian critics have accepted this narrative as one of the most important of Edwin John Pratt's works, but no critic has yet offered a complete evaluation of it. Henry W. Wells and Carl F. Klinck, in their book Edwin John Pratt: The Man and His Poetry, have presented a study of the poem in the chapter entitled "The Religious Epic," but this study is very general in character and it does not present any textual analysis.

Chapter I contains a survey of the field to be treated. It notes the circumstances in the poet's life and training which could have had some influence on the writing of the poem. It suggests the method of treating the historical background of the poem and it indicates that the literary evaluation will be made through textual analysis, comparison, and a study of criticism.

Chapter II presents the poem as Canadian History. It weighs the validity of the sources from which Edwin John Pratt obtained his material and then studies his

accuracy in using this matter. This study is an original contribution.

These first two chapters form the preliminary survey which is necessary for a complete understanding of the poem. The main contribution made by this thesis lies in the following chapters.

In Chapter III, under the title "A Great Canadian Poem," a detailed textual analysis is made. The theme, with its sense, feeling, tone and intention; the versification, in rhythm and in form; the texture, with its diction and imagery; and the inspiration, both intellectual and emotional, are all studied carefully. This chapter is completely original, and critics have been quoted only in proof of the writer's own findings.

Chapter IV studies the poem from a fresh viewpoint by comparing it with the work which other Canadian writers have done on a like or related subject. The poems chosen for comparison are Pauline Johnson: As Red Men Die, Archibald Lampman: At the Long Sault: May 1660, Marjorie Pickthall: Père Lalement, and Alan Sullivan: Brébeuf and Lalemant. In the book mentioned above, Henry W. Wells compares Brébeuf and His Brethren with The Song of Roland. In Leading Canadian Poets, W. P. Percival groups some historical poems with this poem, thus indicating that there

is a basis of comparison. Except for these suggestions this section of the thesis is also original.

Chapter V presents a study of the success this poem has obtained and a summary of critical opinion. This matter is touched on lightly by E. K. Brown in On Canadian Poetry and by Henry W. Wells and Carl F. Klinck in their study of the poet. No one has attempted to weigh the body of critical opinion in order to arrive at a just evaluation of the poem.

E. J. Pratt's Collected Poems, published in 1944, has been used throughout for the text of the poem.

An annotated bibliography furnishes brief comments on the content and value of the reference books, periodicals and reviews that have been used in preparing this thesis.

Presented in 1957 to the Department of English in the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Canada, in view of obtaining a degree of Master of Arts, this thesis contains 205 pages.