

# Quebec's bishop as pawn: (Jean-Baptiste de) Saint-Vallier's imprisonment in England, 1704-1709.

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In August 1704 it was reported from Deal in Kent, that:

Her Majesty's Ships the Dreadnought, Oxford and Falkland, ... have brought in a considerable Prize, being a French Man of War from Rochfort, richly laden, of 36 Guns, but can carry 40, and 300 Men, 20 of them being Land Officers, who were going to Canada, whither she was bound; there were also on Board, a Bishop, and several Priests, which they took in their Voyage homewards to the Latitude of 46 Degrees. (1)

The report raises certain key questions. Who was he? What was he doing at sea? Why should a bishop, accompanied by sixteen fellow ecclesiastics when captured off the Azores, have become what was essentially a diplomatic pawn? Jean-Baptiste de la Croix de Chevaliers de Saint-Vallier, second Bishop of Quebec, had been en route for his vast diocese when naval craft had diverted him to England. Landing there, he was placed under open house arrest. The War of the Spanish Succession had been raging for two years, a Grand Alliance, led by England and the United Provinces, was pitted against the combined forces of France and Spain. During the eleven-year struggle there were four main theatres of operations - the Spanish Netherlands, the Iberian peninsula, the Italian peninsula, and the New World.

The significance of New World involvement was explained by the late J.S. Bromley in his usual masterful way:

The Succession War was won in Europe, but the succession itself included the greater part of the Americas in the world's principal source of silver and what were regarded as underdeveloped markets awaiting some livelier touch than the arrival of a fleet every two or three years from Cadiz. From their forward bases in Curacao and Jamaica, Dutch and English smugglers already traded slaves and manufactures to the coastal populations of what are now Venezuela and Colombia. (2)

For England the war was to be identified with victories at Blenheim, Ramillies, and Oudernarde, with the capture of Gibraltar in 1704 and of Minorca in 1708. Substantial numbers of prisoners were taken, some French and Spanish prisoners being held in Jamaica. (3) In England they were housed mainly in three communities - Coventry, Lichfield,

and Nottingham (4) with some high-ranking prisoners, such as Saint-Vallier, being held elsewhere. An examination of the man, his attributes and activities sheds light on why he was held as a pawn in a game of early eighteenth-century international power politics.

I

One of a family of ten children, Saint-Vallier was born on 14 November 1653 at Grenoble in S.E. France. In 1672 he gained a licentiate in theology and four years later became Almoner in Ordinary to Louis XIV. Ordained in 1681, he made such an impression upon his religious confreres that he was approached three years later with a view to translation to the see of Quebec, "the most wretched and difficult of the dioceses in mission hands." (5) But Quebec was a lot more than this, and so was its diocese.

The main gateway in the early eighteenth century to a relatively unoccupied North America was the mouth of the mighty St. Lawrence river, held in monopoly by the French. Its right "doorpost" was Newfoundland, its left was Acadia and its fortress key was Quebec. Thus it was in 1702, at the war's very outset, that an English expedition commanded by John Leake had successfully captured Newfoundland, over which he was appointed Governor and Commander-in-Chief. (6) From Boston Governor Dudley outlined to the Council of Trade and Plantations in London the benefits of taking Acadia:

I most humbly propose to your Lordships, that a Scotch Colony there of 5,000 men would find their own Scotch climate and health, and a country far surpassing all Scotland, for all sorts of provisions, flesh and fish, infinite timber and masts the first of the whole continent, and would with the assistance of these Provinces very easily remove the French and put an end to the troubles upon the whole shore of America, ... (7)

Three contemporary accounts are sufficient to make Quebec's significance crystal clear. Baron de Lahontan, there in the 1680s, was impressed by the quality of housing, the division of the community into upper and lower parts, and the fact that there was a cathedral and five churches. (8) In a 1708 report entitled "Canada Survey'd, or the French Dominions upon the Continent of America briefly considered" Captain Samuel Vetch commented of Quebec: "This town ... is the seat of the Governor General, Intendant and Bishop." (9) However, it was a Swedish visitor in the 1740s, Peter Kalm, who was to encapsulate Quebec's significance completely when he observed:

The bishop, whose see is in the city, is the only bishop in Canada. His diocese extends to Louisiana, on the Mexican gulf southward, and to the South Seas westward. No bishop, the Pope excepted, ever had a more extensive diocese. But his spiritual flock is very inconsiderable at some distance from Quebec, and his sheep are often many hundred miles distant from each other. Quebec is the only sea-port and trading town in all Canada, and from thence all the produce of the country is exported. (10)

Vast, but thinly populated, rich in timber, furs and fish, besieged by the Iroquois, the diocese of Quebec presented innumerable problems to its incumbent. In 1685, though not yet consecrated, but acting as Vicar General, Saint-Vallier left France for distant Canada. His first stay there, eighteen months long, was notable for the energy channelled into his work. By 1688 he was back in France where, on 25 January, he was formally consecrated Bishop, the King having also appointed him head of an abbey at Limoges. (11) Six months later he returned to his new diocese. The next few years were marked by internecine disputes, friction, and open hostility within the diocese of Quebec. Vigorous and enthusiastic, Saint-Vallier fell out with Governor Frontenac of New France, with Governor Calliere of Montreal, with colonial and religious officials alike, until by late summer 1694, at the age of 41, he had very few friends left in New France. With Governor Frontenac the differences arose, in part,

over cultural and moral issues. Intent on bringing drama to New France, via garrison theatricals, the Governor had ensured that plays by Corneille, Moliere, and Racine had all been performed in Quebec soon after their early "airings" in France. Initially seeing such performances as frivolous, Saint-Vallier subsequently condemned them outright. Immodest dress and dancing also earned episcopal disapproval and condemnation. To enforce his view, Saint-Vallier became overly free with excommunications, thereby, of course, reducing both their effectiveness and value.

That said, however, failure was not a hallmark of his episcopate. Almshouses were endowed in Quebec, Trois Rivieres, and Montreal; a General Hospital was established at Quebec to cope with the growing problem of mendicity. (12) Jesuits were allowed to operate in Montreal from 1692 onwards. At the end of 1694, however, Saint-Vallier was recalled to France to explain his conduct to his royal master. Refusing several requests to resign, he sailed back to Canada three years later. Yet more friction was to develop, chiefly over the Jesuits' role in missionary work to the Indians, though he did sanction such activity in Acadia in 1698. (13) Between 1700 and 1704 Saint-Vallier was once more in Europe. He journeyed to Rome where he was received by Clement XI, becoming the first North American bishop to visit a Pope. (14) Returning to France, Saint-Vallier began preparing for the long voyage back to Canada, a journey to which, by now, he was more than amply accustomed. It was on this return voyage that he was taken prisoner. Given his experience, power, and role in North America, he was clearly a glittering prize as far as the English authorities were concerned.

At first, Queen Anne would only agree to the Bishop's release if Louis XIV would set at liberty Baron de Mean, the Dean of Liege. The Sun King openly refused to entertain the idea, while some of Saint-Vallier's many opponents openly applauded the idea of his being kept out of harm's way in temporary English seclusion. (15) Another tack was tried, as the inveterate and resplendently named gossip Narcissus Luttrell (1657-1732) reported in November 1704:

And that an addresse be presented to her majestie, that in exchange for the bishop of Quebeck and others taken in a French ship last summer, she will have regard to the French refugees on board the gallies. (16)

For five years in all, between 1704 and 1709, the Bishop remained "a prisoner in little towns on the outskirts of London." (17) From Deal, the party of churchmen went to Rochester in the same county, and from there they were transferred to Farnham in Surrey. From that community, late in January 1706, Saint-Vallier wrote eloquently against being removed:

A report has been spread in Farnham that you intend to take away the prisoners here and transfer us to other towns in England. As I see no one here and enjoy perfect tranquillity in a solitude which I have often desired without daring to hope for, I cannot help calling your attention to the pain which it would cause me to be removed ... I beg that if you close the prisons of Farnham you will leave me here with my ecclesiastics. The Queen and Council have been willing up to now to allow us this little town as our prison on our word of honour not to leave it, I am persuaded that you will have no difficulty in obtaining permission for us to stay here on the same conditions. To allow us to remain in a spot which I believe to be one of the most lovely in England will do much to mitigate the hardness of a captivity which may yet last a long time. (18)

The letter reveals not only the Bishop's literary eloquence and charm but also this basic, almost philosophical, acceptance of his lot, as well as a certain calmness. Moreover, writing the letter cannot have been easy, for Saint-Vallier was probably already aware that he and his party were being used as scapegoats. A recent smallpox outbreak in Farnham, which "raged in this place with great fury for several months," according to a petition from townfolk to Queen Anne, was explained by the arrival of fresh troops to guard the party of French

clerics. What the petitioners overlooked, however, was that the prisoners were there on parole. Indeed, it was certified subsequently that smallpox had been brought to Farnham not by troops, but by a baker. (19)

Saint-Vallier's role as pawn continued. The release, in July 1707, of 203 prisoners from France without their officers was seen as a possible "French reprisal for the Bishop of Quebec and the ecclesiastics with him." A few months later the capture of an allied military chaplain in France was followed by orders being "sent to Farnham to doe the like to one of the priests taken some time since with the bishop of Quebeck." (20) In November 1707, Secretary of State Sunderland wrote to the Bishop, explaining that attempts were under way to exchange and repatriate him:

I have received yours of the 6th of this month, and on the assurances given me, that orders have been sent to Dunkirk, for the release of Mr Heskith, I have today sent similar orders to the Commissioners for the Exchange of Prisoners, in favour of the Abbe of Saujon, so that he'll enjoy the same liberty that he had before the accident. It is more than three months since I wrote to Monsieur Pontchartrain on certain matters regarding the exchange of prisoners, of which I have not yet received any reply. (21)

In August 1708 there were rumours that the Bishop would be exchanged for Colonel Robert Hunter. A soldier poet who had served at Blenheim, Hunter had been appointed Governor of Virginia. Setting out from England on 20 May 1707 to assume his duties, he had been taken by the French. While a replacement Governor, Colonel Edmund Jennings, was appointed, Hunter fretted in a French prison, demoralised not only by his incarceration but also by his consequent financial losses. (22)

While negotiations proceeded and rumours abounded, Saint-Vallier was himself causing trouble. On 28 December 1708 Jonathan Trelawney, the Cornish fox-hunting Bishop of Winchester, wrote from his seat at Farnham Castle a letter worth quoting at length:

My Lord

I had not so long deferr'd my most thankful acknowledgements for th[e] honour of y[ou]r Lor[dish.][ps] of the 21st, and the greate satisfaction it brought me by Her Majestys order by your Lordship for the close confinement of the Bishop of Quebeck, and his busy chaplains for the late impudent perverting of Martha Newland to the popish religion, had I not been tarry'd for the enclosed depositions from Mr Louth the Rector of Petersfield. I do not find by `em that any of the Queens subjects had a hand in it, but your Lordship will observe the danger others may be under of being perverted, for besides the personal application, they use that of books, leaving em in houses, where they hope they will make any impression and ever with strict injunction of saying nothing of em to the minister, so that he can never know of the person being giv'n til it works past cure.

He then went on to explain:

it is with greate greife of hearte that at Warnford, an other part of my Diocese, there is a popish seminary kept up for w[i]th drawing young persons from the Religion and Allegiance. I have already had the good fortune by the interest and assistance of the Bishop of Norwich and a decree from my Lord chancellor to rescue out of the hands two young gentlemen of Norfolk who had been stolen from protestant relations, and sent thither.

Trelawney concluded by asking for the appropriate measures to be taken for "dispensing and breaking this pernicious seminary." (23)

With his letter Bishop Trelawney enclosed sworn depositions from Petersfield inhabitants about what had been going on. From these it is quite clear that Saint-Vallier and his retinue had now moved from Farnham to this thriving Hampshire market town, located sixteen miles to the north-east of Portsmouth. Labourer Charles Long swore, on 14 December 1708, that about a month before Monsieur Fouquet, one of the priest prisoners lodging in his house, had returned for lunch, having spent part of that morning marrying Martha, daughter of Christopher Newland, to the Bishop of Quebec's servant. Reverend Paul Broadhurst of Petersfield swore, on the same day, that Fouquet and the servant had arrived at his house and offered him a 5s. piece "of silver as his dues for the said marriage mony, but he ... rejected it." Cordwainer Nicholas Page, the girl's godfather, observed her absence from church and tackled her as to

why She had Absented herself from the Publick Prayers of the National Church and went to the Bishop of Quebits Prayers, She Answered She had Married a Husband and he Persuad'd her So to doe. (24)

Quite clearly Saint-Vallier was beginning to demonstrate, very openly, his skill at proselytising. While it was natural that he should wish to see his servant married according to Catholic rites, such actions were viewed by the authorities as being quasi-illegal.

In 1709 came a distinct change of circumstance when Louis XIV at last agreed to release the Dean of Liege. (25) Early in June Saint-Vallier wrote from Petersfield to Lord Sunderland, asking to be sent home to France by the shortest way possible, and for a permit so that he could be accompanied by two servants. (26) It was now, however, that the final ironic twist in the story unfolded. The scene shifted to Portsmouth from where the Town Governor, John Gibson, wrote to Lord Sunderland on 25 June:

I presume to acquaint your Lordship that yesterday morning as I was Imbarking some Recruits here, I was told that the "Beshope of Quebeck" with his Retinue were come from Petersfield to this place. In order to Embarke for France. I was very much surprysed when I heard itt, having before given them precautions that they must not come here, but go to Southampton as a place more proper ...

Despite being shown a pass from the Commissioners of Sick and Wounded, Gibson had grave reservations, as he explained:

I do think it not for Her Majesties service that they should stay here, my Lord Considering that our Fleet is making up here some Regiments already on board; others as I am told Expected, I doe humbly conceave itt not proper to suffer the Bishope nor any of his Retinue to goe over to France before this Fleet is sailed I have my Lord both on this score and the former stopt both sweedish and dutch ships that have been In this Harbour when Fleets have been ready to saile from Spithead, till these Fleets had been gone some four dayes. (27)

Four days later Gibson again wrote to the Secretary of State. He appreciated Sunderland's approval of his actions and explained that he had forwarded a letter to Saint-Vallier who, with his retinue, was now in Southampton:

I sent for Mr. Levermore who as Agent here for the Commissioners for Exchange off Prisoners off War, and told him that the Bishope nor any off his retenue must not be permitted to goe to France till the Fleet near heer be sailed, I sent allso for the master off the vessel that is to carry them and give him the same orders. (28)

Sunderland thoroughly approved of Gibson's actions and explained on 1 July that the Commissioners of Sick and Wounded's agent at Southampton should not suffer him to

depart till he hears from you." On 9 July 1709 the Bishop sailed from Southampton aboard the 35-ton *MariAnn*, skippered by Cyprian Hughs who, with his three-man crew and pilot Joseph Bromett, (29) deposited the Bishop in France as a free man.

## II

After four years in his native country, and now aged 60, Saint-Vallier was permitted to return to his Canadian see. By now, however, he was a changed man. Prematurely aged, disillusioned by fractious quarrels, and burdened with feelings of strong moral guilt, he had lost much of his earlier fire. To add to his worries, his relations with the Governor of New France, the experienced Marquis de Vaudreuil, were strained. The Bishop's enforced stay of five years in England and four in France, plus Vaudreuil's absence from the colony between 1714 and 1716, made prolonged contact between two of Quebec's three natural leaders almost impossible. Moreover, neither was adept at compromise. The Marquis complained that the Bishop married off soldiers without permission; in return, Saint-Vallier claimed that the Marquis and his wife entered convents and monasteries without permission. The final fourteen years of Saint-Vallier's life were marked by profound austerity and a last-ditch effort to ensure the success of orthodoxy and morality in his huge, sprawling, diocese. (30)

Bishop of Quebec for forty-two years, Saint-Vallier died on 26 December 1727 (31) and was buried in the crypt of Notre Dame Cathedral in his diocese, while, on the banks of the mighty St. Lawrence stands a small community named after him. Leading a full and tragically stormy life, with copious colour, suffering, and courage, Saint-Vallier made an immense contribution to consolidating Catholicism in North America, giving the colony a catechism and its clergy a *Rituel*. For a short while his equanimity, nerve, and overwhelming desire to spread the Catholic word had been seen in Kent, Surrey, and Hampshire. A rigorous and resolute churchman, he strove, even in honourable captivity, to fulfil his life's work. That Louis XIV was willing to leave this zealous churchman languishing in England for five years was revealing. Did it perhaps reflect the royal attitude to Quebec and his feeling that the Catholic church might be better off for Saint-Vallier's prolonged absence? Did the French authorities really want him liberated? Were his opponents, of whom there were more than a few, experience relief precisely because he was in England? Further research, beyond the remit of this present paper, would be needed to answer such questions. Some indication of attitude was revealed, however, when, in a moment of unguarded royal clarity, Louis XIV, master of so many men's minds, described the stalwart churchman as a "scourge sent by God to punish everyone for their sins." (32)

(1) London Gazette, 7-10 August 1704.

(2) J.S. Bromley, *Corsairs and Navies 1660-1760* (London: Hambledon Press 1987), 21.

(3) Their upkeep cost for 25 March 1703 - 29 September 1704 inclusive was [pounds sterling]626 12s. 11/2d.: *Calendar of Treasury Books 1705-1706*, 709.

(4) *Ibid.*, 602.

(5) *Dictionary of Canadian Biography (DCB)*, 2:238.

(6) G. Callender, ed., *The Life of Sir John Leake* (2 vols.) (London: Navy Records Society 1920), 1: cxli-cxlii.

(7) Governor Dudley to Council of Trade and Plantations, 2 October 1706: *Cal(endar of) S(tate) P(apers) Am(eric) and W(est) I(ndies) 1706-1708*, 234.

- (8) "Lahontan's Travels in Canada" in J. Pinkerton, ed., *A General Collection of the Best and Most Interesting Voyages and Travels in all parts of the World* (London: Longman et al, 17 vols. 1808-14), 13:263. While the first part of Lahontan's work was dedicated to the King of Denmark, the second was dedicated to the Duke of Devonshire.
- (9) *Cal.S.P.Am. And W.I.* 1708-1709, 43. Vetch (1668-1732), who had served in Darien, settled in Albany, New York in 1699, and was employed to negotiate with the Indians in 1700 and 1702 and with the Canadian French in 1705. Subsequently governor of Nova Scotia, he died in a debtors' prison.
- (10) "Peter Kalm's Travels in North America" in Pinkerton, *A General Collection*, 13:637. Kalm was Professor of Economy at the University of Abo in Swedish Finland.
- (11) Louis XIV to Marquis de Louardin, Ambassador at Rome, 24 December 1687: Archives Nationales du Quebec (ANQ). For Quebec's archives, see B. Weibrenner, "Les Archives du Quebec," *Revue d'Histoire de l'Amerique Francaise*, 18 (1964), 3-13.
- (12) M. Wade, *The French Canadians 1760-1967* (2 vols. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada 1968), 1:25. F. Parkman, *The Old Regime in Canada* (Toronto: Morang 1909), 446.
- (13) ANQ, Grants by Saint-Vallier, 22 August 1692, 4 May 1698
- (14) DCB, 2:332.
- (15) Ibid.
- (16) N. Luttrell, *A Brief Relation of State Affairs from September 1678 to April 1714* (6 vols. Oxford: 1857), 5:485.
- (17) DCB, 2:332.
- (18) Jean, Bishop of Quebec, to Commissioners for Sick and Wounded, 23 January 1706: H(istorical) M(anuscripts) C(ommission) MSS. of Earl of Portland, 4:281.
- (19) Peter, Bishop of Winchester to Dr. Adams, 23 January 1706; Commissioners for Sick and Wounded to Robert Harley, 25 January 1706: Ibid, 282. Farnham's inhabitants also had to cope with prisoners who did try and escape. John Tilly and John de Gart broke out in June and October 1705 respectively: *London Gazette*, 2-5 May 1705; 18-22 October 1705. Peter Mews was Bishop of Winchester between November 1684 and his death in November 1706.
- (20) Commissioners for Sick and Wounded to Earl of Sunderland, 12 July 1707; Sunderland to Monsieur Pontchartrain, 1 August 1707: HMC House of Lords MSS. 1706-8, 157, 164; Luttrell; 6:217.
- (21) Earl of Sunderland to Bishop of Quebec, 11 November 1707: B(ritish) L(ibrary) Add. MS. 61652. f.36.
- (22) *Cal.S.P.Am. and W.I.*, 1706-1708, 417, 503, 504, 763; *Cal.S.P.Am. and W.I.*, 1708-1709, 199, 97.
- (23) Jonathan, Bishop of Winchester to Earl of Sunderland, 28 December 1708: B L Add. MS. 61594, ff.70-71v. Jonathan Trelawney was Bishop of Winchester between June 1707 and his death in July 1721. The Bishop of Norwich to whom Trelawney made reference was Charles Trimnell, his successor at Winchester.

- (24) The depositions are contained in B L Add. MS. 61594, ff.72-4. The servant was Rene Dueuon and the marriage was performed on 10 November 1708. The Latin certification, endorsed by Saint-Vallier and dated 25 June 1709, is contained in B L Add. MS. 61593, f.85.
- (25) DCB, 2:232.
- (26) Jean, Bishop of Quebec to Earl of Sunderland, 6 June 1709: HMC VIIIth Report, 47; DCB, 2:332-3.
- (27) Sir John Gibson to Earl of Sunderland, 25 June 1709: B L Add. MS. 61594, ff.89-89v.
- (28) Same to same, 29 June 1709: Ibid, f.91.
- (29) Earl of Sunderland to Sir John Gibson, 1 July 1709: B L Add. MS. 61652, Lord Sunderland's Letter Book 1706-1715, f.160b. Saint-Vallier to R. Pringle, 9 July 1709: B L Add. MS. 61594, f.100.
- (30) DCB, 2:332-4.
- (31) Ibid., 328.
- (32) W.J. Eccles, *Canada under Louis XIV, 1663-1701* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, The Canadian Centenary Series, Vol 3, 1964), 138-9.

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