

CHAPTER ~~VI~~ ~~XI~~THE DISASTROUS ~~EXPEDITION~~ EXPEDITION OF VILLASUR, ^{FROM SANTA FE} ^{VALLEY} TO THE MISSOURI, IN 1720.

In 1720 the Spaniards sent out from New Mexico, under Captain Pedro de Villasur, who was an officer of engineers and lieutenant-general of the province, a most unfortunate military and colonizing expedition, with the object of forming establishments in the Missouri country to check the westward advances of the French. The details of this expedition are but imperfectly known. From the brief and conflicting accounts of it given by French and Spanish writers, it would seem that it numbered several hundred persons and consisted of Spanish cavalry, besides civilians and women and a large number of New Mexican Indian allies; that it went well equipped for its undertakings, which, according to French authority,

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included prospecting for mines as well as the founding of a military post and settlement; that it was provided with horses and cattle for the settlers; that it conveyed the fixtures of a chapel and was accompanied by two priests or chaplains, one of whom was a Dominican, Padre Juan Mingués, and the other a Jacobin; that it arrived near the nations of the Missouri river and made known to one of them its plan of forming ~~an establishment~~ in their country (perhaps near the Otoes and Pawnees, ^{at} whose villages ^{it} ~~seems~~ first to have arrived), ^{an establishment in} ~~opposition~~ to the French, who were already pushing their ~~commerce~~ commerce up the Missouri river to and above the Platte, ^{one of the French} ~~and~~ ^{having known the Missouri} ~~residents in~~ the village of the Missouries since 1703; that the natives of the country pretended sympathy with the Spaniards and their designs and received them with outward cordiality, but at once set on foot a plan for their destruction, which was accomplished a few days later through a combined attack by Otoes, Pawnees and Missouries and perhaps some Kansas and Osages, in which, when the Spaniards were heavy with sleep (some say also with liquor) just before break of day, the savages surprised and massacred the colony. Villasur and most of the Spaniards were killed, as well as many of the New Mexican Indian allies.

According to Du Pratz, the Missouries afterward "dressed themselves with the ornaments of the chapel, and carried them in a kind of triumphant procession to the French commandant among the Illinois". Of the two chaplains, some accounts mention only the Dominican, others only the Jacobin. Charlevoix, writing in 1721, refers to them as "almoners", and says, "There were in the party two almoners; one of them was killed directly and the other got away to the Missouries, who took him prisoner, but he escaped them very dexterously. He had a very fine horse, and the Missouries took pleasure in seeing him ride it, which he did very skillfully. He took advantage of their curiosity to get out of their hands. One day, as he was prancing and exercising his horse before them, he got a little distance from them insensibly; then clapping spurs to his horse he was soon out of sight."

Dumont relates such escape by the Jacobin, and Escalante says that the Dominican, Padre Mingués, was killed.

France and Spain had been at war with each other since the preceding year; and it is clear enough that the general object of the Villasur expedition was to check the westward encroachments of the French; but there is ~~considerable~~ considerable variation in the several accounts as to the details of its plan and experience: and particularly as to which tribe the Spaniards were seeking, which one they actually first met, and which played the principal part in the massacre.

Escalante, a Spanish author, says that Villasur's company was sent out to find the "Pananas" (Pawnees), who, he thought, might be the

"Quiviras" of Coronado. Most French authorities seem to have been informed, or to have assumed, that it intended to destroy the village of the Missouri tribe, which had been most closely identified with the French. But this seems improbable, since an expedition with so aggressively war-like a mission, would not have been likely to encumber itself with women, cattle, etc.

There are several narratives which make the destruction of the Missouries a prime object of the expedition, and which romantically make these intended victims turn the table on the unfortunate Spaniards; those of Dumont⁽¹⁷⁵³⁾, Du Pratz⁽¹⁷⁵⁷⁾ and Stoddard⁽¹⁸¹²⁾ being of the number. As these are more circumstantial than any of the other accounts, we present here one of them — that of Dumont, which is perhaps the most interesting though its author exaggerates the size of the expedition, and otherwise seems to draw more or less on his imagination.

"The success of this expedition", says Dumont, "was very calamitous to the Spaniards. Their caravan was composed of fifteen hundred people, men, women and soldiers, having with them a Jacobin for a chaplain, and bringing also a great number of horses and cattle, according to the custom of that nation to forget nothing that might be necessary for a settlement. Their design was to destroy the Missouries, and to seize upon their country, and with this intention they had resolved to go first to the Osages, a neighboring nation, enemies of the Missouries, to form an alliance with them, and to engage them in their behalf for the execution of their plan. Perhaps the map which guided them was not correct, or they had not exactly followed it; for it chanced that instead of going to the Osages whom they sought, they fell, without knowing it, into a village of the Missouries, where the Spanish commander, presenting himself to the great chief and offering him the calumet, ^{made him understand through an interpreter,} believing himself to be speaking to the Osage chief, that they were enemies of the Missouries, and that they had come to destroy them, to make their women and children slaves, and to take possession of their country. He begged the chief to be willing to form an alliance with them, against a nation whom the Osages regarded as their enemies, and to second them in this enterprise, promising to recompense them liberally for the service rendered, and always to be their friend in the future. Upon this discourse the Missouri chief understood perfectly well the mistake. He dissimulated and thanked the Spaniard for the confidence he had in his nation; he consented to form an alliance with them against the Missouries, and to join them with all his forces to destroy them; but he represented that his people were not armed, and that they dared not expose themselves without arms in such an enterprise. Deceived by so favorable a re-

ception, the Spaniards fell into the trap laid for them. They received with due ceremony, in the little camp they had formed on their arrival, the calumet which the great chief of the Missouries presented to the Spanish commander. The alliance for war was sworn to by both parties; they agreed upon a day for the execution of the plan which they meditated, and the Spaniards furnished the savages with all the munitions which they thought they needed. After the ceremony both parties gave themselves up equally to joy and good cheer. At the end of three days two thousand savages were armed and in the midst of dances and amusements; each party thought of nothing but the execution of its design. It was the evening before their departure upon their concerted expedition, and the Spaniards had retired to their camps as usual, when the great chief of the Missouries, having assembled his warriors, declared to them his intentions, exhorted them to deal treacherously with these strangers who were come to their home only with the design of destroying them. At daybreak the savages divided into several bands, fell on the Spaniards, who expected nothing of the kind, and in less than a quarter of an hour all the caravan were murdered. No one escaped from the massacre except the chaplain, whom the barbarians saved because of his dress; at the same time they took possession of all the merchandise and other effects which they found in their camp. The Spaniards had brought with them, as I have said, a certain number of horses, and as the savages were ignorant of the use of these animals, they took pleasure in making the Jacobin whom they had saved, and who had become their slave, mount them. The priest gave them this amusement almost every day for the five or six months he remained with them in their village, without any of them daring to imitate him. Tired at last of his slavery, and regarding the lack of daring in these barbarians as a means of Providence to regain his liberty, he made secretly all the provisions possible for him to make, and what he believed necessary to his plan. At last, having chosen the best horse and having mounted him, after performing several of his exploits before the savages, and while they were all occupied with his maneuvers, he spurred up and disappeared from their sight, taking the road to Mexico, where doubtless he arrived".

The year of this massacre has also been variously given. It has been placed as early as 1719 and as late as 1722. That it was not 1722, however, is certain, since we have official notice of it in the spring of 1721; and that the year 1719, though the event is referred there by both Escalante and Charlevoix, is ~~undoubtedly~~ erroneous, seems almost equally certain. The date given by most of the older writers, is 1720. ~~By the Indian nations of the Missouri country, the event~~

~~seems to have been considered as belonging to the winter of 1720-21.~~

The Memoire ~~by~~ by Sieur Philippe de la Renaudiere, Mining Engineer and Director of Mines for the Company of the West, ^{at New Orleans,} dated August 23, 1723, ascribes the event to 1720, in words of which the following is a translation:

"In all these places* the Spaniards prospected for mines, with the

Footnote

*Regions south and west of the lower part of the Missouri river.

object of establishing posts. The Indians would not in any wise suffer them in 1720". ~~This Memoire of 1723~~ ^{This Memoire of 1723} is merely a memorandum about the streams, Indian towns, and supposed mines of the Missouri valley, and is based on the statements of voyageurs and Indians of the Missouri, a region about which Renaudiere seems to have known nothing by personal observation until the year following, when he ^{was at} ~~went from~~ Fort Orleans of the Missouri ^{and thence west} far out into present Kansas with De Bourmont. Renaudiere seems to have been a man of sufficient education and family ~~and~~ ~~influence~~ to have procured a good position with the company of the West, but to have lacked the practical training and ability to discover and develop mines; and actual mining and metallurgical operations in what is now the state of Missouri, were left to a private company, one of whose directors, Sieur Philippe Francis Renault, founded in 1720 the little village of St. Philippe, near Fort Chartres, and with 200 mechanics, miners and laborers brought from France, and 500 slaves brought from St. Domingo, introduced for the first time both the science of mining and the institution of slavery into upper Louisiana.

By the Indians of the Missouri country, the massacre of the Villasur company seems to have been considered as belonging to the winter of 1720-'21.

In Indian chronology, prominent events cited a few or many years after their occurrence, are usually connected with the winter or summer to which they stand nearest. If Indians had committed a massacre of Spaniards at any time in the cooler six-month, from October to March inclusive, they would later allude to the time of it as "the snow when we wiped out the Spaniards", or "the winter when the Spaniards were killed". And in reckoning the number of winters that had elapsed since the event, the winter in or near which it occurred, would not be counted, even though the event stood at the beginning of that winter, or, as we would say, just before the winter. Thus, alluding in the summer of 1863, to an event of October or November of 1861, we would say that two winters had ^{passed} ~~elapsed~~ since the event, as we would consider that it had occurred before the winter of '61-'62, and that the winters of '61-'62 and '62-'63 had both

passed since it took place; but an Indian would say, there is now one winter since the event, as he would identify the event with the winter of '61-'62, since which winter only the one winter of '62-'63 had passed.

In the general council held by Commandant De Bourgmont with the Indians, at Fort Orleans, November 19, 1724, speaking for the Missouries and in the presence also of the Otoes and Osages, who were parties to the council, the chief of the Missouries said, "We love the French nation and naturally hate the Spaniard and the Englishman. We —the Otoes, Panimahas* and ourselves— proved it, there are three winters

Footnote

*Pawnees of the Platte and Loup Fork.

since, having completely made away with a large party of Spaniards who came to establish themselves among us". As the three preceding

Footnote

*Margry, Origines Francaises, VI, 450.

winters are those of 1721-'22, '22-'23 and '23-'24, it is obvious that this Missouri chief's testimony —unimpeachable because given by one who knew, and before so many red as well as white witnesses who also knew— indicates the Indian "winter" of 1720-'21, and would not be consistent with a date earlier than the fall of 1720, nor later than the spring of 1721. Taken in connection with the prevailing statement of authors, that 1720 was the year, ~~1720~~ this chief's testimony indicates one of the later months of 1720, as the time of the massacre. ^{It also indicates} ~~that~~ the object of the Spaniards' expedition was to found a post and colony "among" the tribes of the Missouri river region, rather than to destroy any one of them; and that several of these tribes joined together to slay the new comers, — *either because of an attack which Charlevoix says, the Spaniards had made on some of the Otoes, or merely* not to revenge threatened destruction of the Missouries, but because they liked the French and "hated the Spanish."

either because of an attack which Charlevoix says, the Spaniards had made on some of the Otoes, or merely

half or wholly apocryphal.

The "Decouverte et Avenures de Mathieu Sagean" relates that about 1685 or '6, the party of La Salle, of which Sagean tells us he was a member, was attacked by the Missouries, having eight men killed and four or five wounded, Sagean among the latter. The Missouries themselves, having forty-five killed, and on the next day finding La Salle's party (including Frenchmen and Mohegan and Miami Indians) 120 men strong and able to repel them with fire-arms, asked for a parley, which resulted in peace. They afterwards became the best of friends with La Salle's party, and told them that they had at first taken them for Spaniards, who were their irreconcilable enemies. The Missouries at this time ~~seem to have been~~ ^{were} resident, or ranging, not far west of the Mississippi river, and the enmity between their nation and the Spaniards, may have descended from the time of De Soto, whose ruthless and bloody course, west as well as east of that river, seems to have

engendered the bitter hatred of every Indian nation that met him or heard of him.

Knowledge of the massacre of Villasur's party in the latter part of 1720, does not seem to have reached the French village of Kaskaskias till the spring of 1721, when the voyageurs ~~had returned~~ had returned thither after the close of their winter trading season on the Missouri, as it is not until May 24th of that year, that De Boisbriant, Governor of the Illinois, communicates knowledge of it to his superior officer, Bienville, Governor of Louisiana. In his letter of that date, he states that he had heard that 300 Spaniards had left Santa Fe for the purpose of driving the French out of Louisiana, but were attacked by the Osages and Pawnees and driven back to Santa Fe: information which is so different from the ^{ingenuous and weighty} ~~testimony~~ testimony of the Missouri chief, above cited, as to indicate as its source, Frenchmen who were greatly excited over the bold invasion of their territory by the Spaniards, and who, being interested in showing a better ^{reason} ~~reason~~ for the massacre than that ~~offered~~ offered by the Indians, guessed or invented that the Spanish intended to destroy the village of the Missouries, which was ^{then} the principal French trading-point in the Missouri river valley. Better informed, apparently, save as to the immediate purpose of the Spaniards, is ~~the~~ Governor Bienville's letter to the Conseil de Regence, dated July 20, 1721, which said that 200 Spanish cavaliers and a great number of Padouca Indians of New Mexico had come to the Missouri with the design of taking the French who were at the Illinois; but that they had been discovered by the Otoes and Panimahas, who attacked them and wiped out the Spaniards (save one, whose life they spared) and part of the Padoucas.

The locality of this massacre is generally said to be in Saline county, Missouri. There was the Missouri Indian village, as may be seen by comparing D'Anville's excellent Map of Louisiana —drawn in 1732— with any good modern map of the state of Missouri. From Margry's Origines Francaises, further, we learn, ~~that~~ on the authority of La Renaudiere, that this village was south of the Missouri river, and that it was six French leagues' travel thither from the mouth of Grand river. But Charlevoix tells us that the Spanish priest who survived the massacre, "got away" from the battle-ground "to the Missouries", and gives us to understand that the fighting was near the ^{one of which, atleast, was then on the south side of Platte} ~~villages of the Otoes,~~ river, not far below the mouth of Saline creek; and it is a fair question, therefore, whether the massacre did not take place in southeastern Nebraska.

~~It was Captain Villasur's expedition; the fear of Spanish~~

There is a legend which indicates that the Spaniards of this ill-fated expedition, in leaving New Mexico, passed down the canon of the Purgatory river, in ^{present} south-eastern Colorado; and that their friends having last seen them going down its valley to an unforeseen destruction, is the circumstance which gave to that river its name of "Rio de las Animas Perdidas de Purgatorio," a name by which, abbreviated to "Las Animas", the river is yet often called, and which is also perpetuated by the Colorado county of Las Animas and by the town of that name at the junction of that river and the Arkansas.

(End of Chapter III)