

VOLTAIRE



***THE SINCERE
HURON***

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Voltaire

The Sincere Huron

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Table of Contents

[THE HURON: Pupil of Nature](#)

[VOLTAIRE: HIS LIFE AND WORKS \(Biography\).](#)

THE HURON: Pupil of Nature¹

[Table of Contents](#)

Table of Contents

- [I. The Huron Arrives In France.](#)
- [II. The Huron, Called The Ingenu, Acknowledged By His Relations.](#)
- [III. The Huron Converted.](#)
- [IV. The Huron Baptized.](#)
- [V. The Huron In Love.](#)
- [VI. The Huron Flies To His Mistress, And Becomes Quite Furious.](#)
- [VII. The Huron Repulses The English.](#)
- [VIII. The Huron Goes To Court. Sups Upon The Road With Some Huguenots.](#)
- [IX. The Arrival Of The Huron At Versailles. His Reception At Court.](#)
- [X. The Huron Is Shut Up In The Bastile With A Jansenist.](#)
- [XI. How The Huron Discloses His Genius.](#)
- [XII. The Huron's Sentiments Upon Theatrical Pieces.](#)
- [XIII. The Beautiful Miss St. Yves Goes To Versailles.](#)
- [XIV. Rapid Progress Of The Huron's Intellect.](#)
- [XV. The Beautiful Miss St. Yves Visits M. De St. Pouange.](#)
- [XVI. Miss St. Yves Consults A Jesuit.](#)
- [XVII. The Jesuit Triumphs.](#)
- [XVIII. Miss St. Yves Delivers Her Lover And A Jansenist.](#)
- [XIX. The Huron, The Beautiful Miss St. Yves, And Their Relations, Are Convened.](#)
- [XX. The Death Of The Beautiful Miss St. Yves, And Its Consequences.](#)



The Priory entrance.

I.

The Huron Arrives In France.

[Table of Contents](#)

One day, Saint Dunstan, an Irishman by nation, and a saint by trade, left Ireland on a small mountain, which took its route toward the coast of France, and set his saintship down in the bay of St. Malo. When he had dismounted, he gave his blessing to the mountain, which, after some profound bows, took its leave, and returned to its former place.

Here St. Dunstan laid the foundation of a small priory, and gave it the name of the Priory Mountain, which it still keeps, as every body knows.

In the year 1689, the fifteenth day of July, in the evening, the abbot Kerkabon, prior of our Lady of the Mountain, happened to take the air along the shore with Miss Kerkabon, his sister. The prior, who was becoming aged, was a very good clergyman, beloved by his neighbors. What added most to the respect that was paid him, was, that among all his clerical neighbors, he was the only one that could walk to his bed after supper. He was tolerably read in theology; and when he was tired of reading St. Augustin, he refreshed himself with Rabelais. All the world spoke well of him.

Miss Kerkabon, who had never been married, notwithstanding her hearty wishes so to be, had preserved a freshness of complexion in her forty-fifth year. Her character was that of a good and sensible woman. She was fond of pleasure, and was a devotee.

As they were walking, the prior, looking on the sea, said to his sister:

"It was here, alas! that our poor brother embarked with our dear sister-in-law, Madam Kerkabon, his wife, on board

the frigate 'Swallow,' in 1669, to serve the king in Canada. Had he not been killed, probably he would have written to us."

"Do you believe," says Miss Kerkabon, "that our sister-in-law has been eaten by the Cherokees, as we have been told?"

"Certain it is, had she not been killed, she would have come back. I shall weep for her all my lifetime. She was a charming woman; and our brother, who had a great deal of wit, would no doubt have made a fortune."

Thus were they going on with mutual tenderness, when they beheld a small vessel enter the bay of Rence with the tide. It was from England, and came to sell provisions. The crew leaped on shore without looking at the prior or Miss, his sister, who were shocked at the little attention shown them.

That was not the behavior of a well-made youth, who, darting himself over the heads of his companions, stood on a sudden before Miss Kerkabon. Being unaccustomed to bowing, he made her a sign with his head. His figure and his dress attracted the notice of brother and sister. His head was uncovered, and his legs bare. Instead of shoes, he wore a kind of sandals. From his head his long hair flowed in tresses, A small close doublet displayed the beauty of his shape. He had a sweet and martial air.² In one hand he held a small bottle of Barbadoes water, and in the other a bag, in which he had a goblet, and some sea biscuit. He spoke French very intelligibly. He offered some of his Barbadoes to Miss Kerkabon and her brother. He drank with them, he made them drink a second time, and all this with an air of such native simplicity, that quite charmed brother and sister. They offered him their service, and asked him who he was, and whither going? The young man answered: That he knew not where he should go; that he had some curiosity;

that he had a desire to see the coast of France; that he had seen it, and should return.

The prior, judging by his accent that he was not an Englishman, took the liberty of asking of what country he was.

"I am a Huron," answered the youth.

Miss Kerkabon, amazed and enchanted to see a Huron who had behaved so politely to her, begged the young man's company to supper. He complied immediately, and all three went together to the priory of our Lady of the Mountain. This short and round Miss devoured him with her little eyes, and said from time to time to her brother:

"This tall lad has a complexion of lilies and roses. What a fine skin he has for a Huron!"

"Very true, sister," says the prior.

She put a hundred questions, one after another, and the traveler answered always pertinently.

The report was soon spread that there was a Huron at the priory. All the genteel company of the country came to supper. The abbot of St. Yves came with Miss, his sister, a fine, handsome, well-educated girl. The bailiff, the tax-gatherer, and their wives, came all together. The foreigner was seated between Miss Kerkabon and Miss St. Yves. The company eyed him with admiration. They all questioned him together. This did not confound the Huron. He seemed to have taken Lord Bolingbroke's motto, *Nil admirari*. But at last, tired out with so much noise, he told them in a sweet, but serious tone:

"Gentlemen, in my country one talks after another. How can I answer you, if you will not allow me to hear you?"

Reasoning always brings people to a momentary reflection. They were all silent.

Mr. Bailiff, who always made a property of a foreigner wherever he found him, and who was the first man for asking questions in the province, opening a mouth of large size, began:

"Sir, what is your name?"

"I have always been called the *Ingenu*," answered the Huron; "and the English have confirmed that name, because I always speak as I think, and act as I like."

"But, being born a Huron, how could you come to England?"

"I have been carried thither. I was made prisoner by the English after some resistance, and the English, who love brave people, because they are as brave and honest as we, proposed to me, either to return to my family, or go with them to England. I accepted the latter, having naturally a relish for traveling."

"But, sir," says the bailiff, with his usual gravity, "how could you think of abandoning father and mother?"

"Because I never knew either father or mother," says the foreigner.

This moved the company; they all repeated:

"Neither father nor mother!"

"We will be in their stead," says the mistress of the house, to her brother, the prior: "How interesting this Huron gentleman is!"

The *Ingenu* thanked her with a noble and proud cordiality, and gave her to understand, that he wanted the assistance of nobody.

"I perceive, Mr. Huron," said the huge bailiff, "that you talk better French than can be expected from an Indian."

"A Frenchman," answered he, "whom they had made prisoner when I was a boy, and with whom I contracted a great friendship, taught it me. I rapidly learn what I like to learn. When I came to Plymouth, I met with one of your French refugees, whom you, I know not why, call Huguenots. He improved my knowledge of your language; and as soon as I could express myself intelligibly, I came to see your country, because I like the French well enough, if they do not put too many questions."

Notwithstanding this candid remark, the abbé of St. Yves asked him, which of the three languages pleased him best, the Huron, English, or French?

"The Huron, to be sure," answered the *Ingenu*.

"Is it possible?" cried Miss Kerkabon. "I always thought the French was the first of all languages, after that of Low Britany."

Then all were eager to know how, in Huron, they asked for snuff? He replied:

"*Taya*."

"What signifies to eat?"

"*Essenten*."

Miss Kerkabon was impatient to know how they called, to make love?

He informed her, *Trovander*, and insisted on it, not without reason, that these words were well worth their synonyms in French and English. *Trovander*, especially, seemed very pretty to all the company. The prior, who had in his library a Huron grammar, which had been given him by the Rev. Father Sagar Theodat, a Recollet and famous missionary, rose from the table to consult it. He returned quite panting with tenderness and joy. He acknowledged the foreigner for a true Huron. The company speculated a little on the multiplicity of languages; and all agreed, that had it not been for the unfortunate affair of the Tower of Babel, all the world would have spoken French.

The inquisitive bailiff, who till then had some suspicions of the foreigner, conceived the deepest respect for him. He spoke to him with more civility than before, and the Huron took no notice of it.

Miss St. Yves was very curious to know how people made love among the Hurons.

"In performing great actions to please such as resemble you." All the company admired and applauded. Miss St. Yves blushed, and was extremely well pleased. Miss Kerkabon blushed likewise, but was not so well pleased. She was a

little piqued that this gallantry was not addressed to her; but she was so good-natured, that her affection for the Huron was not diminished at all. She asked him, with great complacency, how many mistresses he had at home.

"Only one," answered the foreigner; "Miss Abacaba, the good friend of my dear nurse. The reed is not straighter, nor is ermine whiter,—no lamb meeker, no eagle fiercer, nor a stag swifter, than was my Abacaba. One day she pursued a hare not above fifty leagues from my habitation: a base Algonquin, who dwells an hundred leagues further, took her hare from her. I was told of it; I ran thither, and with one stroke of my club leveled him with the ground. I brought him to the feet of my mistress, bound hand and foot. Abacaba's parents were for burning him, but I always had a disrelish for such scenes. I set him at liberty. I made him my friend. Abacaba was so pleased with my conduct, that she preferred me to all her lovers. And she would have continued to love me, had she not been devoured by a bear! I slew the bear, and wore his skin a long while; but that has not comforted me."

Miss St. Yves felt a secret pleasure at hearing that Abacaba had been his only mistress, and that she was no more; yet she understood not the cause of her own pleasure. All eyes were riveted on the Huron, and he was much applauded for delivering an Algonquin from the cruelty of his countrymen.

The merciless bailiff had now grown so furious, that he even asked the Huron what religion he was of; whether he had chosen the English, the French, or that of the Huguenots?

"I am of my own religion," said he, "just as you are of yours."

"Lord!" cried Miss Kerkabon, "I see already that those wretched English have not once thought of baptizing him!"

"Good heavens," said Miss St. Yves, "how is it possible? How is it possible the Hurons should not be Roman

Catholics? Have not those reverend fathers, the Jesuits, converted all the world?"

The Huron assured her, that no true American had ever changed his opinion, and that there was not in their language a word to express inconstancy.

These last words extremely pleased Miss St. Yves.

"Oh! we'll baptize him, we'll baptize him," said Miss Kerkabon to the prior. "You shall have that honor, my dear brother, and I will be his god-mother. The Abbot St. Yves shall present him to the font. It will make a fine appearance: it will be talked of all over Britany, and do us the greatest honor."

The company were all of the same mind with the mistress of the house; they all cried:

"We'll baptize him."

The Huron interrupted them by saying, that in England every one was allowed to live as he pleased. He rather showed some aversion to the proposal which was made, and could not help telling them, that the laws of the Hurons were to the full as good as those of Low Britany. He finished with saying, that he should return the next day. The bottles grew empty, and the company went to bed.

After the Huron had been conducted to his room, they saw that he spread the blankets on the floor, and laid himself down upon them in the finest attitude in the world.

[1.](#) *Le Huron* was dramatized, under the name of *Civilization*, by Mr. John H. Wilkins, and successfully produced at the City of London Theatre, on Wednesday, November 10, 1852. Mr. James Anderson enacted the part of *Hercule, the Huron*, and added to his well-earned reputation by his correct conception and representation of the Indian character.

Mr. James Wallack, Jr., afterward introduced the play to a New York audience at Burton's old Chambers Street Theatre, where it was also received with great favor. Unfortunately for dramatic literature, the promising young author of *Civilisation* did not long survive his success, but soon filled an early grave.—E.

[2.](#) In Mr. Wilkins's dramatic version of this romance, the Huron is described as

"A modell'd Hercules! Mien, stature, glance,
That are the blazons of the inner man,
And voice it to the stars! A hero born,
Whose air commands respect above a king's;
Bearing the stamp from the great mint of
heaven,
And current to the world!"—E.

II. The Huron, Called The Ingenu, Acknowledged By His Relations.

[Table of Contents](#)

The *Ingenu*, according to custom, awoke with the sun, at the crowing of the cock, which is called in England and Huronia, "the trumpet of the day." He did not imitate what is styled good company, who languish in the bed of indolence till the sun has performed half its daily journey, unable to sleep, but not disposed to rise, and lose so many precious hours in that doubtful state between life and death, and who nevertheless complain that life is too short.

He had already traversed two or three leagues, and killed fifteen brace of game with his rifle, when, upon his return, he found the prior of the Lady of the Mountain, with his discreet sister, walking in their nightcaps in their little garden. He presented them with the spoils of his morning labor, and taking from his bosom a kind of little talisman, which he constantly wore about his neck, he entreated them to accept of it as an acknowledgment for the kind reception they had given him.

"It is," said he, "the most valuable thing I am possessed of. I have been assured that I shall always be happy whilst I carry this little toy about me; and I give it you that you may be always happy."

The prior and Miss smiled with pity at the frankness of the *Ingenu*. This present consisted of two little portraits, poorly executed, and tied together with a greasy string.

Miss Kerkabon asked him, if there were any painters in Huronia?

"No," replied the *Ingenu*, "I had this curiosity from my nurse. Her husband had obtained it by conquest, in stripping some of the French of Canada, who had made war upon us. This is all I know of the matter."

The prior looked attentively upon these pictures, whilst he changed color; his hands trembled, and he seemed much affected.

"By our Lady of the Mountain," he cried out, "I believe these to be the faces of my brother, the captain, and his lady."

Miss, after having consulted them with the like emotion, thought the same. They were both struck with astonishment and joy blended with grief. They both melted, they both wept, their hearts throbbed, and during their disorder, the pictures were interchanged between them at least twenty times in a second. They seemed to devour the Huron's pictures with their eyes. They asked one after another, and even both at once, at what time, in what place, and how these miniatures fell into the hands of the nurse? They reckoned and computed the time from the captain's departure; they recollected having received notice that he had penetrated as far as the country of the Hurons; and from that time they had never heard anything more of him.

The Huron had told them, that he had never known either father or mother. The prior, who was a man of sense, observed that he had a little beard, and he knew very well that the Hurons never had any. His chin was somewhat hairy; he was therefore the son of an European. My brother and sister-in-law were never seen after the expedition against the Hurons, in 1669. My nephew must then have been nursing at the breast. The Huron nurse has preserved his life, and been a mother to him. At length, after an hundred questions and answers, the prior and his sister concluded that the Huron was their own nephew. They embraced him, whilst tears streamed from their eyes: and

the Huron laughed to think that an Indian should be nephew to a prior of Lower Britany.



The Huron identified.—"*By our Lady of the Mountain,*" he cried out, "*I believe these to be the faces of my brother, the captain, and his lady.*"

All the company went down stairs. Mr. de St. Yves, who was a great physiognomist, compared the two pictures with the Huron's countenance. They observed, very skillfully, that

he had the mother's eyes, the forehead and nose of the late Captain Kerkabon, and the cheeks common to both.

Miss St. Yves, who had never seen either father or mother, was strenuously of opinion, that the young man had a perfect resemblance of them. They all admired Providence, and wondered at the strange events of this world. In a word, they were so persuaded, so convinced of the birth of the Huron, that he himself consented to be the prior's nephew, saying, that he would as soon have him for his uncle as another.

The prior went to return thanks in the church of our Lady of the Mountain; whilst the Huron, with an air of indifference, amused himself with drinking in the house.

The English who had brought him over, and who were ready to set sail, came to tell him that it was time to depart.

"Probably," said he to them, "you have not met with any of your uncles and aunts. I shall stay here. Go you back to Plymouth. I give you all my clothes, as I have no longer occasion for anything in this world, since I am the nephew of a prior."

The English set sail, without being at all concerned whether the Huron had any relations or not in Lower Britany.

After the uncle, the aunt, and the company had sung *Te Deum*; after the bailiff had once more overwhelmed the Huron with questions, after they had exhausted all their astonishment, joy, and tenderness, the prior of the Mountain and the Abbé of St. Yves concluded that the Huron should be baptized with all possible expedition. But the case was very different with a tall robust Indian of twenty-two, and an infant who is regenerated without his knowing anything of the matter. It was necessary to instruct him, and this appeared difficult; for the Abbé of St. Yves supposed that a man who was not born in France, could not be endowed with common sense.

The prior, indeed, observed to the company, that though, in fact, the ingenious gentleman, his nephew, was not so

fortunate as to be born in Lower Britany, he was not, upon that account, any way deficient in sense; which might be concluded from all his answers; and that, doubtless, nature had greatly favored him, as well on his father's as on his mother's side?

He then was asked if he had ever read any books? He said, he had read Rabelais translated into English, and some passages in Shakespeare, which he knew by heart; that these books belonged to the captain, on board of whose ship he came from America to Plymouth; and that he was very well pleased with them. The bailiff failed not to put many questions to him concerning these books.

"I acknowledge," said the Huron, "I thought, in reading them, I understood some things, but not the whole."

The Abbé of St. Yves reflected upon this discourse, that it was in this manner he had always read, and that most men read no other way.

"You have," said he, to the Huron, "doubtless read the bible?"

"Never, Mr. Abbé: it was not among the captain's books. I never heard it mentioned."

"This is the way with those cursed English," said Miss Kerkabon; "they think more of a play of Shakespeare's, a plum pudding, or a bottle of rum, than they do of the Pentateuch. For this reason they have never converted any Indians in America. They are certainly cursed by God; and we shall conquer Jamaica and Virginia from them in a very short time."

Be this as it may, the most skillful tailor in all St. Malo was sent for to dress the Huron from head to foot. The company separated, and the bailiff went elsewhere to display his inquisitiveness. Miss St. Yves, in parting, returned several times to observe the young stranger, and made him lower courtesies than ever she did any one in her life.

The bailiff, before he took his leave, presented to Miss St. Yves a stupid dolt of a son, just come from college; but she scarce looked at him, so much was she taken up with the politeness of the Huron.

III. The Huron Converted.

[Table of Contents](#)

The prior finding that he was somewhat advanced in years, and that God had sent him a nephew for his consolation, took it into his head that he would resign his benefice in his favor, if he succeeded in baptizing him and of making him enter into orders.

The Huron had an excellent memory. A good constitution, inherited from his ancestors of Lower Britany, strengthened by the climate of Canada, had made his head so vigorous that when he was struck upon it he scarce felt it; and when any thing was graven in it, nothing could efface it. Nothing had ever escaped his memory. His conception was the more sure and lively, because his infancy had not been loaded with useless fooleries, which overwhelm ours. Things entered into his head without being clouded. The prior at length resolved to make him read the New Testament. The Huron devoured it with great pleasure; but not knowing at what time, or in what country all the adventures related in this book had happened, he did not in the least doubt that the scene of action had been in Lower Britany; and he swore, that he would cut off Caiphaz and Pontius Pilate's ears, if ever he met those scoundrels.

His uncle, charmed with this good disposition, soon brought him to the point. He applauded his zeal, but at the same time acquainted him that it was needless, as these people had been dead upwards of 1690 years. The Huron soon got the whole book by heart. He sometimes proposed difficulties that greatly embarrassed the prior. He was often obliged to consult the Abbé St. Yves, who, not knowing what