Samuel De Champlain’s Account of The New World

As told in Voyages of Samuel de Champlain
On the 9th of the month of October our savages going out to reconnoitre met eleven savages, whom they took prisoners. They consisted of four women, three boys, one girl, and three men, who were going fishing and were distant some four leagues from the fort of the enemy. Now it is to be noted that one of the chiefs, on seeing the prisoners, cut off the finger of one of these poor women as a beginning of their usual punishment; upon which I interposed and reprimanded the chief, Iroquet, representing to him that it was not the act of a warrior, as he declared himself to be, to conduct himself with cruelty towards women, who have no defence but their tears and that one should treat them with humanity on account of their helplessness and weakness; and I told him that on the contrary this act would be deemed to proceed from a base and brutal courage, and that if he committed any more of these cruelties he would not give me heart to assist them or favor them in the war. To which the only answer he gave me was that their enemies treated them in the same manner, but that, since this was displeasing to me, he would not do anything more to the women, although he would to the men.

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**Chapter 10**

*Return from the battle, and what took place on the way.*

After going some eight leagues, towards evening they took one of the prisoners, to whom they made a harangue, enumerating the cruelties which he and his men had already practiced towards them without any mercy, and that, in like manner, he ought to make up his mind to receive as much. They commanded him to sing, if he had courage, which he did; but it was a very sad song. Meanwhile, our men kindled a fire; and, when it was well burning, they each took a brand, and burned this poor creature gradually, so as to make him suffer greater torment. Sometimes they stopped, and threw water on his back. Then they tore out his nails, and applied fire to the
extremities of his fingers and private member. Afterwards, they flayed the top of his head, I and
had a kind of gum poured all hot upon it; then they pierced his arms near the wrists, and, drawing
up the sinews with sticks, they tore them out by force; but, seeing that they could not get them,
they cut them. This poor wretch uttered terrible cries, and it excited my pity to see him treated in
this manner, and yet showing such firmness that one would have said, at times, that he suffered
hardly any pain at all. I remonstrated with them, saying that we practised no such cruelties, but
killed them at once; and that, if they wished me to fire a musket-shot at him, I should be willing
to do so. They refused, saying that he would not in that case suffer any pain. I went away from
them, pained to see such cruelties as they practised upon his body. When they saw that I was
displeased, they called me, and told me to fire a musket-shot at him. This I did without his seeing
it, and thus put an end, by a single shot, to all the torments he would have suffered, rather than
see him tyrannized over. Page 2 of 2

After his death, they were not yet satisfied, but opened him, and threw his entrails into the lake.
Then they cut off his head, arms, and legs, which they scattered in different directions; keeping
the scalp, which they had flayed off, as they had done in the case of all the rest whom they had
killed in the contest. They were guilty also of another monstrosity in taking his heart, cutting it
into several pieces, and giving it to a brother of his to eat, as also to others of his companions,
who were prisoners: they took it into their mouths, but would not swallow it. Some Algonquin
savages, who were guarding them, made some of them spit it out, when they threw it into the
water. This is the manner in which these people behave towards those whom they capture in war,
for whom it would be better to die fighting, or to kill themselves on the spur of the moment, as
many do, rather than fall into the hands of their enemies. After this execution, we set out on our
return with the rest of the prisoners, who kept singing as they went along, with no better hopes for the future than he had had who was so wretchedly treated.

Footnote

1 The events described in chapter ten took place in what is now the state of Vermont.