

A LITERARY RETROSPECT.

BY THE LATE HON. P. J. O. CHAUVEAU, LL.D., ETC.

We have the pleasure of presenting our readers with a translation of the address, delivered by the late Hon. P. J. O. Chauveau, on the occasion of the inauguration at Ottawa of the Royal Society of Canada, of which he was then Vice-President, and of which he was subsequently elected President. Like all Mr. Chauveau's writings, it is marked by grace and vigour of style, and a scholarly choice of language. Apart from its interest as a review of the intellectual and literary movement in Canada, it has, from the circumstances of its delivery, a certain historical importance, which is enhanced now that Mr. Chauveau is no longer with us. It will, we trust, be appreciated by those who expressed their gratification at the publication of the "Souvenirs," of which Mrs. Curzon recently favoured us with a translation. Like those pleasant "Recollections," the following address has never before appeared in English:—

MY LORD, MEMBERS OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,—Half a century has not yet elapsed since, after a series of political events which were then considered disastrous, the two provinces created by the Constitution of 1791 were reunited into a single province; three lustres have scarcely passed since the federal union of the British colonies of North America, which succeeded to the legislative union of Upper and Lower Canada. Still, if I undertook to set forth in detail all the progress which has been accomplished in those two periods which I have just indicated, I should scarcely have any time to speak of our literary past and of the new institution which we inaugurate to-day, and which, there is every reason to hope, is itself a great progress and the complement of that which preceded it. In all directions our land is covered with canals and railways, vast and distant regions have been brought near to us and given up to colonization, our postal and telegraphic communications have multiplied, mines of every kind have been discovered and worked, our marine, our industries, our commerce, have assumed enormous proportions, new relations have been established with foreign countries, their capital has been attracted to us, new financial institutions have been created, finally our population, notwithstanding a constant exodus to the United States, has increased in a manner almost prodigious. So much for our material progress.

The true system of constitutional government, of which we had hitherto but a mere shadow, has been established, and is in operation both in the federal and in the provincial order; the municipal régime has been perfected, and, if it is the source of many abuses, it is also the cause of much progress; institutions destined for the relief of suffering humanity have multiplied, thanks to the initiative of the religious communities, of the charitable societies and of our governments; the eldest of the provinces has organized a code of civil laws which has been generally admired; questions which the religious and social interests of the different sections of the population, rendered very difficult, have been solved; in fine, our public men have had their sphere of action enlarged, and the two careers, federal and local, which are open to them, and whose relative importance, it is not easy to estimate so useful are they both, suffer from no lack of able and devoted men. So much for our political and social progress.

Popular education has made real and solid progress; the institutions of higher education have developed and augmented their utility; special and scientific institutions have been created; literary associations and journalism have greatly expanded; literary and scientific periodicals, notwithstanding the great obstacles that stand in the way of their success, have been started, new ones taking the place of those which have but just disappeared; libraries, museums, popular lectures have multiplied; historical investigation has had an important development; in fine, a national literature, in each of the languages of the country, languages which in modern times are what Greek and Latin were to the ancient world, has come to the birth, and has even begun to attract attention in Europe. So much for the intellectual movement in Canada.

I know that there are shadows on this picture; and if I present it to you under its fairest aspect, it is not because I would excuse those who gave a character of marked injustice to the great political development, which was the starting-point of all this progress, or still less would blame those of my own nationality who, in the beginning, offered so noble and energetic a resistance to the imperial legislation of 1840. Thanks to that resistance, gentlemen, we all now enjoy in common those liberties of which we are so proud. Without that struggle, the two great races which form the major part of our vast confederation would not have been placed on a footing of equality, would not fraternize as they do to-day. Besides, at the most critical moments of our history, there have always been English statesmen who understood the rôle which the two races had to play on this portion of the North American continent. Suffice for example those noble words of Lord Grenville in the discussion of the bill for the constitution of 1791. "Some have characterized as prejudice," said that eminent statesman, "the attachment of the Canadians to their customs, their laws, their usages, which they prefer to those of England. In my opinion, such attachment merits another name; I look upon it as founded on reason and on something better than reason—on the noblest sentiments of the human heart." Do you not find, gentlemen, a striking resemblance between that loyal declaration and the words

which, after many vicissitudes, many misunderstandings and struggles, have fallen at different times from the lips of several representatives of Her Majesty, and especially from those of Lord Elgin and Lord Dufferin, and on a still more recent occasion from those of the exalted personage who presides at this meeting (the Marquis of Lorne)?

George III. was reigning when our first two constitutions—1774 and 1791—were given to us, and our historian, M. Garneau, whose testimony is above suspicion, does honour to the efforts of that monarch to overcome the prejudices, the resentments and the fears which opposed every measure of liberality or even of justice towards his new subjects, as Canadians of French origin were then called. He ascribes to the gratitude of our fathers the enthusiastic welcome given to Prince William Henry, who visited this country in 1787, and to Prince Edward, father of our gracious Sovereign, who was present at the inauguration of the constitution of 1791. The period included under our two other constitutions (1840-1867) has seen in this country no fewer than five of the descendants of George III., and among them the heir presumptive to the Crown, who inaugurated the giant Victoria Bridge, one of the marvels of America and of the entire world, and who laid the foundation of the building in which we now hold our sessions. May we not believe that the good will, of which this great colony has been the object, is a family tradition, a tradition not quite unconnected with the solicitude which our Governor General is at present showing for all that relates to our intellectual progress?

Already on behalf of the Fine Arts, there has been established, under the patronage of H.R.H. the Princess Louise and His Excellency the Governor-General, an Academy of which the first exhibitions have given birth to the fairest hopes. To-day it is the turn of Science and Letters.

Science and Letters! That is soon said—and how much there is in those two words! Still, what they represent is neither so new nor so incomplete in this country as is generally thought. For a long, very long time, noble efforts for the culture of the human mind have been made on the banks of the St. Lawrence. It is with that part of our early history—due proportion being, of course, observed—as it is with that of the Middle Ages, so long ignored or travestied. Whoever has read the charming pages of Ozanam and of Montalembert cannot but feel indignant when he hears those ages called dark and ignorant, in which flourished doctors who have not since been surpassed or even equalled, and when the cloisters were academies, museums and libraries, and thousands of pupils crowded the benches of the universities, when students as well as professors made the greatest sacrifices for knowledge, when the same self-denial, the same courage, the same perseverance which had been shown by entire generations of artists and artisans in building those mighty cathedrals which raise their spires like giants above the structures of modern Europe caused legions of masters and disciples to work without ceasing in preserving and extending the domain of intelligence. Well, since the first settlements were made in Canada, not only have men been engaged in spreading the light of religious truth, and in practising the loveliest of the virtues which it teaches, that charity, to which so many monuments, of which some still exist, were raised, but they have also been employed zealously and actively in transplanting and causing to flourish on this soil those sciences and arts which at that period cast so bright a lustre over the continent of Europe. It is well known that the majority of the early colonists could read and write—several of them were men of classical or professional attainments,—that schools were opened in several places, in addition to and independently of the institutions of the Jesuits, the Seminary, founded by Mgr. Laval, and that of the Sulpicians. A literary and domestic education of the healthiest kind and of a higher class than many might be inclined to believe, was given to young ladies by Ursulines at Quebec and Three Rivers and by the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame at Montreal. The lovers of the beautiful, of the æsthetic, as they say now-a-days, might still find much to admire in the rich works preserved in some of our convents. The College of the Jesuits at Quebec, the School of Arts founded by Mgr. Laval at St. Joachim, helped to cultivate minds, some of which rendered important services to the colony. Public theses were delivered on the model of those of the old world—the governor and intendants taking part in the debates. Those officials and the bishop were almost always men of letters. Frontenac was a fund of literature; his wife belonged to the inner circle of Madame de Sevigné. M. de Galissonnière was a *savant*. Talon was a man of the finest education; M. Dupuy, one of his successors, brought to Canada a large library. M. Boucher, Governor of Three Rivers, wrote a natural history of the country. The missionaries were most often not only apostles and diplomatists, but also explorers in the field of science. Père Charlevoix and Père Laflatau published ethnologic studies and made valuable discoveries in botany. The great *voyageurs* did not venture into the vast regions of the west without having the knowledge of astronomy and engineering necessary for such explorations. Lately an instrument for taking observations was found which Champlain is supposed to have lost on his journey from Ottawa to Nipissing. That great man, whom we may well call the father of the country, was both a man of science, a vigorous thinker, and an able writer. Besides the history of his travels in Canada, he has left a treatise on the art of navigation and a splendid description of the region around the Gulf of Mexico, in which he has displayed his knowledge of the art of drawing and of all the branches of natural history. Moreover,

it was he who first conceived the project of uniting the two oceans by a canal across the Isthmus of Panama—a project which, after two centuries and a half, it has fallen to one of his compatriots to initiate. The Nicolets, the Marquettes, the Gauthiers de la Veyrendie based their discoveries on the data of science. Joliet was a pupil of the Jesuits' College, and conducted a public debate which drew much attention to him. More than one botanist traversed our forests in those days, and before Kalm, the countryman and pupil of Linnæus, came to the castle of St. Louis to enjoy the hospitality of M. de la Galissonnière, a friend of science, as is to-day the occupant of Rideau Hall, Gauthier and Sarrasin had already given their names to useful plants. M. Talon caused researches to be made into the mineral resources and geography of the country over a vast extent of territory, and to do so he must have employed men of science.

In this little world, so isolated during the long winters, ever subject to the excitement of a fresh war, a fresh invasion, the wonder is that there was any thought of science or literature. And yet what a charm there is in the *Relations* of the time, what a pleasing and elegant style; and, above all, what ardour, what elevation, what profound philosophy in the letters of that celebrated mystic who predicted the greatness of our country, and whom Bossuet has called the Ste. Thérèse of Canada! The taste for the beautiful, for the ideal, for the appreciation of what is sublime in nature, that is, poetry; the investigation of truth, that is, philosophy; the study of the world and its laws, that is, science, are not found in books alone. Books are only the archives of human thought, archives incomplete and laden, in some cases, with what is useless, to say no more. The finest things which are found in them were often not intended for them. The Letters of Madame de Sevigné, those of Lord Chesterfield, the *Pensées* of Pascal, were not written for publication. Racine timidly composed for a few friends two tragedies, of which one has become one of the greatest masterpieces of the French drama. I may be told that nothing which took place in our country in those early days justifies such a comparison. All that can be shown—and I think I have proved it—is that there existed in Canada an intellectual activity, which was indicated in a thousand ways, and if its only traces now are a small number of written works, printed in France and sold to-day at their weight in gold, it did not the less contribute to the triumph of civilization over barbarism. Was it not an admirable spectacle, that little community, centred in a few towns, in part extending over vast distances, bringing to the world the account, true but scarcely credible, of all that it had suffered,—alas! in many cases the explorers did not return at all—was it not, I say, an admirable spectacle which was given to mankind by that valiant vanguard of civilization, whose rôle was, in some respects, exactly modelled on that of the Christian society of the Middle Ages? The latter, suppressed by transforming the barbarism which had invaded the Old World; the former came to conquer in this New World another barbarism still more terrible, to struggle against it at thousands of leagues' distance from Europe, beyond an unknown ocean, in the boundless forests, where for half the year thick snow covered the ground. It was by contact with such learned men, men sometimes of superior genius, with those ladies of distinction, that the Canadian *habitant*, himself often the representative of a good family, a former interpreter, an ex-officer or soldier of some of the crack regiments, was enabled to preserve that enlightened intelligence, that robust faith, that invincible patience, those principles of honour, that politeness, that happy gaiety, in a word, those higher human qualities which furnished to the ancients a name for literature itself—*litera humaniores*. The population of the colony was long limited; the educated class comprised a considerable portion of it; it, therefore, mingled, on terms of more or less intimacy, with the class less favoured as to education; there was of necessity a radiation from the one to the other. The missionaries—and at that time all the *curés* were missionaries—did not devote their attention to the savages alone. They fostered everywhere the light of civilization, and could not but impart a certain degree of instruction in their constant intercourse with the rural population, even when most isolated. Of the religious orders, two of the most illustrious gave Canada the benefit of their devotion. One of those orders is famous the world over, and it is Canada which has supplied some of the most glorious pages in its annals. Though less known than the Jesuits, the Franciscans have not less contributed by their labours to the work of civilization. They bore the brunt of danger and suffering, but they have by no means had proportionate honour. The mild and humble solitary of Assisi, was just the man to be the model of such apostles—men who were to pass their lives in the midst of primitive nature or bear the first rudiments of human learning from habitation to habitation along the banks of our great river. He was—with the permission of the *savants*—the most skilful of naturalists, that good St. Francis, for, according to the legend, he loved not only all animated creation, but he also made himself loved in return. He charmed the fishes, the birds, even the wild beasts. "My brother, the dog," "my brother, the wolf," he was wont to say. In his *Genie du Christianisme*, Chateaubriand gives a charming picture of the wanderings of the Franciscans from hamlet to hamlet and from castle to castle in France; M. de Gaspé has also given us some illustration of what they were in our own country in his time. But how much more interesting would it be to have an account of their early missions!

(To be continued.)