

"Early Educators in Canada"

LECTURE

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Rev. President and Friends:—While politicians, statesmen and diplomats are puzzling their brains about the future possibilities of our respective countries, thank Providence, we have a field of common interest upon which we can meet and enjoy an "unrestricted reciprocity" of ideas and sentiments. In the vast arena of Catholic Education the giants of intellect wrestle for supremacy; the contest is one of emulation, not rivalry, and no matter to whom the honors may belong the spoils of victory must fall into the lap of a rising generation and the garland of triumph be twined around the brow of our Holy Religion. While the American eagle, symbolic of your glorious Republic, soars higher and higher in the atmosphere of national greatness, our Canadian beaver, with his characteristic industry and perseverance, is steadily cutting down the pillars of "the forest primeval" and laying the foundations of an edifice calculated to resist the strongest floods of adversity. Side by side America and Canada are moving along the highway of material progress; but in the midst of all the commercial and political improvements, it is necessary to pause and contemplate the rainbow of promise that unites our destinies—the great, all-embracing arch of Higher Education. To-day I come to speak to you of the early history of Canada, of the first missionaries, the martyrs, the men and women who sowed the seed from which have sprung the admirable institutions of education and religion that are at once the pride of that young country and the glory of our Church.

Canada is young in years, but old in the experience of the trials and obstacles with which the great nations of Europe have, during long centuries, contended. We have pages of history as glowing as any that tell of Greece or Rome; we have monuments as sacred to us as are the debris of ancient splendor to the inhabitants of the old world; all we would require are ruins that might eloquently speak of our heroic past.

One day, in the summer of 1878, I stood in front of the old Basilica of Quebec and I watched a score of men with axes, picks, powder and dynamite, working to demolish the walls of the first Jesuit College. Day after day, during that summer, and again the following year, I returned to note the progress made by the instruments of, what I considered, a modern vandalism.

It had been reported that these walls were dangerous, and might at any moment fall on the heads of the passers-by; on this pretext, permission was obtained to destroy the most precious landmark in Canadian history. Yet, the cement was as solid as the stones, and it required months, yes, three years—the most powerful explosives being used—to tear the edifice to pieces. It told a story of two centuries and a half of struggles in the cause of Catholic education; but that element of barbarism, that clings to purely material interests or commercial advancement, swayed the decisions of those in power and the result was the final destruction of the Jesuit College of Quebec—an institution founded in 1635, one year before Harvard, and consequently the oldest educational establishment on this continent. At last young Canada had ruins; and ruins of historical importance.

Standing upon the shattered walls, that were built to last for centuries, I recalled—not without a pang of sorrow and

a sense of humiliation—the words of the Poet Priest:—

"Yes, give me the land where the ruins are spread,
And the living tread light on the hearts of the dead;

Yes, give me the land of the wreck and the tomb,
There is grandeur in graves—there is glory in gloom;
For out of the gloom future brightness is born,
As after the night comes the sunrise of morn."

Yes, out of the night clouds of paganism and barbarism that hung round the cradle of our country, out of the misty shadows of persecution, misery and suffering that enshrouded the early labors of Catholic pioneers, educators and missionaries, have come forth the noble institutions that dot the land to-day, and from which, like stars on the sky of our history, flash the beams of promise that illumine the country's future.

Standing again, but this time in imagination, upon the broken pillars and battered remains of the Jesuit College of Quebec, and looking down into the grave of almost three centuries, I summon up the shadowy forms of scenes long vanished and actors long since disappeared. Lo! at my mandate the picture changes; the cities of to-day are lost in the wilderness of trees, and the events of our early history enroll themselves before my vision. I invite you for half an hour to that interesting theatre. You will perceive how like the old walls of the present ruin are the institutions, religious bodies and grand organizations of the Church; yes, how like their story except in the accomplishment of their destruction—is that Church herself. The thoughtless, the irreverent and the wicked have said that she is but a human institution, destined to one day crumble, and to crush in that fall the men who confided in her stability; but the axe of the infidel, the pick of the iconoclast, the powder of the innovator, and the dynamite of the secretly organized enemies of Truth, have failed to detach from each other stones that were laid by the Hand of Divinity and cemented by the blood of ten thousand martyrs.

There are two questions of vital importance connected with the origin of our early educational establishments and the labors of the first missionaries, that I will ask you to consider. The first regards the intentions and aims of the French Kings, who sent out explorers, traders and colonists to Canada; the second refers to the grand and all-important obstacle that stood in the way of the Early Educators and teachers of Christian Truth amongst the Indians. On the first point there are many false impressions which historians have taken very little pains to dispel, on the second, by means of suppressing evidence, writers, like Parkman, Bancroft, Lescarbot and others, have succeeded in keeping in the foreground facts of minor importance and covering up—for one reason or another—events and circumstances that are calculated to cast an entirely different light upon the labors and sacrifices of the heroic missionaries of that first century.

We are too often led to suppose that the grand object of the French monarchs was to secure more territory and consequently greater revenues, as well as increased power; but history proves, beyond a doubt, that from Francis I. to Louis XIV., every one of the French Kings entertained a desire of advancing the cause of religion, and that any con-

siderations of conquest or material gain were merely secondary and in the majority of cases absolutely nil. By the letters-patent conferred, the edicts promulgated, the conditions set down in the grants of lands, the communications with ecclesiastical and civil authorities concerning the missionaries, and, in a word, every document that connects French royalty with Canadian history, all prove most conclusively that the thought of Christianizing a new world was uppermost in the minds of the monarchs and that the idea of great material gains never swayed their councils. (A.) As we proceed with the history of that epoch you will observe how strongly the documents, and other evidence adduced, refute the oft-repeated assertion that Canada was first colonized through mercenary motives.

On the subject of the obstacles with which the missionaries had to contend there is ample opportunity afforded by the principal historians for misconceptions of the actual state of affairs. Parkman, that accurate historian, when it suits his own purposes, goes out of his way to praise the Jesuits for deeds that could not be ignored without risking entirely his own reputation; but he is very careful to counteract whatever effect his truthful statements might produce, by holding them up to ridicule, as men of little minds and victims of an overwrought enthusiasm. So is it in the case that I wish to analyze. We are told that these pioneer educators had to contend against the severity of the climate, the disadvantages arising from imperfect means of navigation, the long winters and months of separation from Europe, the famines that consequently menaced their little bands, and finally against the ferocity of the Iroquois, the treachery of the Huron and ignorance of all the savage tribes. It did not require Mr. Parkman nor Mr. Lescarbot to tell us these things. They are obstacles so natural to the situation that to ignore them would be entirely impossible. But these writers, who claim the high post of accurate historians, neglect to mention the real and all-important obstruction that blocked the way of civilization and Christianity—particularly Catholicity—in the first years of our history. Intentionally, or through lack of knowledge, they suppress what seems to me the most important evidence of the difficulties to be overcome by the founders of our educational institutions.

Yes; the grand obstacles in the path of the missionaries was the opposition created by the members and employees of the different commercial and trading companies. These organizations, from time to time, received certain privileges, and were granted the monopoly of the fur-trade in the colony. The special agents of DeMont, of de Caen, and those of the company of "One Hundred Associates," the company of "New France" and the company of "Montreal" made it their business to create distrust in the breast of the Huron, enmity in that of the Iroquois, and to retard, by every imaginable means, the cause of religion and instruction. Through these monopolies they were building up colossal fortunes in Europe at the expense of the Indian's enlightenment and Christianity. They knew that the more domesticated, or civilized, the tribes became the more were they liable to neglect the hunting fields, and a consequent loss to the dealer and adventurer would follow; they knew, also, that the more enlightened the Indians became the more likely were they to know the value of the furs that they had been so long selling at a sacrifice. The result was that the agents, factors, interpreters and other employees of those companies cast every conceivable impediment in the way of education and civilization. They went so far as even to refuse to teach the missionaries the Indian languages; and, as a rule, when called upon to translate their sermons, these unscrupulous mercenaries interpreted the words of the priests in the very opposite sense to that in which they were used. The result was untold miseries and sufferings on the part of the missionaries, unnecessary wars between the Indians, unprovoked massacres of colonists, and (as the Venerable Marie de l'Incarnation wrote), "had it not been for the villainess of the company's agents and the treachery of the paid servants of the traders, perhaps Fathers Lallement and de Bebeuf would never have been

martyred by the irritated Iroquois." (B.)

These are two points that I wish particularly to emphasize in the course of the few remarks that the limited time at my disposal will allow me to make.

Long before the days of Cartier the shores of Canada were known to the Basques; those Norman and Breton fishermen, who chased the whale into the straits of Labrador and supplied the markets of Europe with cod from the banks of Newfoundland. (C)

When the Florentine adventurer, Jean Verazzani, wrote from Dieppe, in 1524, to Francis I. that he had discovered Indians who had neither temples nor altars, and seemed to possess no religion, but who were of a nature calculated to accept the mysteries of our Faith, he fanned into an all-consuming flame the smouldering embers of royal fervor, and the King determined on sending out explorers and envoys to rescue the savage tribes from the night of ignorance and infidelity. "What," cried out Francis, "the Kings of Spain and Portugal calmly divide the New World between them; I would like to see that portion of Adam's will in which he creates them heirs to America." Again he said: "Am I a 'most Christian King,' and yet careless of the Catholic cause; if old France be the 'eldest daughter of the Church,' then New France must become the youngest one." (D.)

In 1540 Jacques Cartier received letters-patent whereby he was instructed to "execute the King's will in New France, and establish the Catholic religion in the colony." Lescarbot suppresses many of Cartier's beautiful letters that illustrate his great faith and the object of his mission. But happily these documents are conserved in manuscript at Paris. (E)

The Recollet Fathers were the first missionaries in what was long known as Canada proper; but if we refer to the country, according to the geographical limits of the present Dominion, the palm goes to the Jesuits—for as early as 1611, Fathers Beard and Masse planted the cross on the shores of Acadia. (F.) In fact, in 1604, Rev. Nicholas Aubry and a companion priest came to the place called Port Royal. (A)

The wildest flights of fancy and the most extravagant pencillings of romance are tame compared with the true history of those early days. The *Compagnies Marchandes* had obtained the monopoly of trade in New France on the condition of establishing, at their own expense, colonies, and securing the establishment of the Catholic faith amongst the tribes. But to the members of the companies fur was more precious than souls; sailors became merchant traders; and a regular post was established at Tadoussac. Jacques Noel, a nephew of Cartier, was the first to receive a royal commission to execute, at his own expense, the plans conceived by Francis I., and was therefore the one to open that commercial avenue along which hundreds found fortunes and thousands met with ruin. (G.)

To conciliate contending parties in France, after the edict of Nantes, and the expedition of the Norman Calvinist, Saint Chauvin, Henri IV. granted a com-

B—Fallant, "Hist. de la Col. Franc. au Can.," vols. 1, 2 and 3.

"Premier établis. de la Fol," by Father Sagard, p. 10.

Champlain's voyage of 1615, Paris, 1627; 2d ed., 1615.

Relations des Jesuites, 1620.

Ven. Marie de l'Incarnation, Lettre du 15 Juin, 1630.

Father Leclercq, vol I, pp. 300-313.

Champlain, 1632, 2d part, pp. 78 and 84, also pp. 218-220.

La Pêre Sagard, pp. 837, &c.

Archives de la Prefecture de Rouen; Registre de N. D. de Rouen, la 7 & 8 Dec., 1617.

Prem. établis. de la Fol, vol. I, pp. 172, &c., 308, &c.

C—Davit's "Description du monde," 1660, vol V, part 3, p. 27.

Lescarbot. Edit. of 1618, p. 228.

D—L'Art de verifier les dates. Edit. 1733; Vol. I, p. 635.

Lescarbot. Book I, ch. I, page 3.

E—Els. de la Colonte Franc. Introduction, p. 8.

Complement des Ordonnances, &c. Quebec, 1856, p. 5.

"Relations de la Nouvelle France," by Pere Biard, 1616, p. 23.

F—Lescarbot, p. 632.

P. Biard, p. 127, &c.

Antiquites et Chroniques de Dieppe, par Asseline, l'An. 1611.

G—Archbishop O'Brien's life of Blahop Burke.

H—Lescarbot, vol. III, ch. XXXI, p. 403.

"Hist. de la N. France," by P. Charlevoix; vol. I, p. 107.

Relations des Jesuites pour 1626, p. 5.

Voyage of Champlain in 1613.

Second voyage of Cartier, ch. I, p. 23.

Voyages en Canada, Quebec, 1843, pp. 99, 100, 101.

A—Abbe Fallant, Introduction to "Histoire de la Colonie Francaise au Canada."