

LEFEBVRE MEMORIAL HALL.

HONORING A GREAT NEW BRUNSWICK CATHOLIC—THE LEFEBVRE MEMORIAL HALL WILL PERPETUATE THE NAME OF THE FOUNDER OF ST. JOSEPH'S COLLEGE—FATHER CORMIER'S EULOGY OF ACADIA'S APOSTLE.

A recent meeting of the St. John Branch of the C. M. B. A. was attended by the following members of St. Joseph's College Alumni Association: Hon. Judge Landry, G. V. McInerney, M. P., Rev. A. B. O'Neill, C. S. C., Rev. A. D. Cormier, C. S. C., and A. D. Richard, M. P. At the close of the routine business, the doors were thrown open to visitors from other Catholic societies of the city, an informal meeting organized, and President P. Tole appointed to the chair. Judge Landry, being called upon to explain the purpose for which those present had been invited to assemble, delivered a forcible and eloquent speech in the course of which he gave the history of the Lefebvre Memorial Hall how being built at Memramcook, and dwelt on the desire of those who had undertaken its construction to receive the moral and material support of their fellow-Catholics throughout the province. Although only \$100 had been subscribed as yet, the executive committee of St. Joseph's Alumni Association had signed a contract for the completion of the work, which is to cost \$17,000. Judge Landry was followed by Father O'Neill, who said:

Mr. President and Gentlemen:—

Some little reflection during the past quarter of an hour has led me to the conviction that if ever the maxim, "Brevity is the soul of wit" finds its proper application, it must assuredly be on such an occasion as this, when a number of speakers are presumably committed to address on a subject whose phases in their entirety are neither very numerous nor very diverse, and whose discussion at length by individual orators would necessarily, therefore, entail more or less of repetition. Being so convinced, I shall repress my inclination to do what in other circumstances would afford me very genuine pleasure—pronounce before so distinguished an audience as the C. M. B. A. branch, or branches, of St. John, an extended paenegyric of Father Lefebvre; and shall confine myself to the suggestion, rather than the elaborate treatment, of a few among the reasons why the appeal made to you by your brethren of Westmoreland county should meet with a prompt, a hearty, and a generous response.

I use the term "appeal" as the readiest word that occurs to me to qualify the nature of our addresses this evening; but you will pardon me if, at the same time, I disclaim any intention whatever of employing that term in the sense of an entreaty for charity. If it has occurred to any of your number that this delegation of visitors from the Eastern portion of the province has come to you in the character of a begging committee, I would ask you, gentlemen, to banish that idea from your minds at once and for good. Speaking for my companions, I think—and for myself, certainly—I should wish it clearly understood at the outset that we are here to-night, not as importunate supplicants humbly craving the willing or reluctant tribute of your bounty, but rather as cordially frank and loyal brethren proffering to you, our fellow-Catholics, participation in a privilege and an honor.

For a distinct privilege and honor it undoubtedly is, gentlemen, to be afforded an opportunity of identifying oneself with the prosecution and successful achievement of an enterprise such as has been initiated by the Alumni Association of St. Joseph's College,—the erection of a fitting monument to that College's illustrious founder: to a New Brunswick priest of conspicuous and commanding merit; to a prominent champion of the twin causes that make for a country's permanent prosperity, religion and education: to one, in fine, who, judged by any possible standard of grandeur and nobility, cannot be considered as any other than a genuinely great and noble Catholic man.

I presume I may take for granted the existence among the St. John members of the C. M. B. A., as among Irish Catholics in the province at large, of a sentiment that has been characteristic of all civilized peoples in every era of the world's history,—the sentiment that dictates the perpetuation, by means of congruous and permanent symbols, of the names and memories of men who in their day stood pre-eminent among their fellows as public benefactors. The innate sense of gratitude to the great and good which ever animates the popular heart—a sense assuredly not least lively when the heart is Irish and Catholic—would seem to find its most natural and adequate outward expression in the erection of monuments, enduring memorials of the honor in which the illustrious dead were held by the generations that saw and properly estimated their worth. It is not at all surprising, therefore, that the

general regret experienced a little more than a year ago when the founder of St. Joseph's College passed away, should have been speedily followed by the thought, simultaneously arising in the minds of many, that a monument should be reared to his memory.

It is doubtless true that he has built his own monument, both in the hearts of the people who were peculiarly his and in the material structures that overlook the Memramcook valley, but it was universally felt that something partaking more clearly of the nature of a public tribute to the man himself was needed to satisfy completely either popular sentiment or the "eternal fitness of things." Such a public tribute as handsome a monument, I am proud to say, as has ever been reared to one man's memory in this province—is now in process of construction; and we who have naturally been most active in its inception are here this evening to proffer you the opportunity of sharing the glory of its completion, to invite our co-religionists of the provincial metropolis to acquit themselves of the debt of gratitude which every New Brunswick Catholic owes to the memory of Father Camille Lefebvre.

I say advisedly, every New Brunswick Catholic, and not merely every French Acadian; for it is a statement—uncontestable of the fullest and most convincing proof that the founding and development of St. Joseph's College—the life-work of Father Lefebvre—has been an inestimable boon to the whole Church in this portion of Canada, a benefit for which we Irish Catholics should be scarcely less grateful than our French Acadian brethren. And as this, gentlemen, is a point not sufficiently appreciated, I think, by our people, either here in St. John, or in other parts of the province, I may, perhaps, be permitted to insist upon it some what, in the endeavor to give to it in your minds the prominence which it unquestionably merits.

That our college at Memramcook—or Father Lefebvre, if you will—has revolutionized the social standing, and, as a logical sequence, the economic and political importance of the Acadians, goes without saying. No man who contrasts the relative positions occupied by that people a quarter of a century ago and now, the virtual inferiority to other races with which they were stigmatized then and the fullest equality with those races which they admittedly enjoy to-day, needs any elaborate argument to convince him on a fact so patent. But what is too often lost sight of is this other fact that, in the regeneration, the elevation on the Acadians, our French co-religionists, all the members of our Church in New Brunswick have been advantageously affected, have gained very appreciably in prestige and weight, in public consequence and influence.

The solidarity of all Catholics in this province, or, for that matter, in this Dominion, is a condition which, be we willing or loath, we must vainly accept. There exists among us all, Irish, French, Scotch and English, not only unity of faith and worship, but fellowship in honor and dishonor, in gain and loss, in victory and defeat. The glory or the shame that comes to any who profess our faith affects us all in a very sensible degree. The progress made or the prosperity enjoyed by any considerable number of us materially influences both the estimation in which the whole body is held by our Protestant friends and neighbors, and the consideration that is shown to us by the majority, in the conduct of public affairs, whether municipal, provincial, or federal. If I may be allowed to point my argument with a personal allusion, the appointment of your C. M. B. A. brother, Judge Landry, to the Supreme Bench, was a recognition, not merely of Acadian, but of Catholic claims and merits; just as the distinguished ability with which he fills the exalted office reflects honor upon, and is a source of legitimate pride to, all his fellow-Catholics, whether Irish or French.

I maintain, then, that even if Father Lefebvre had never directly benefited any others than Acadians, even if his College had never opened her portals to a single English-speaking student, we Irish Catholics would still, as constituent members of the Church in New Brunswick, owe him a lasting debt of gratitude for having raised our general level by raising our French co-religionists to a higher plane of social, industrial and intellectual life. Some years ago, on the occasion of Parnell's visit to the United States, Wendell Phillips delivered in the Boston Music Hall an address on "The Cause of Ireland." Among other things, he said: "Just as my Lord Bacon, three hundred years in his grave, may lay one hand on the telegraph and the other on the steam engine, and say, 'these are mine, for I taught you to invent,' so O'Connell may say of the success already achieved by the Home Rule movement, 'This victory is mine, for I taught you the method and I gave you the tools.'" And so, in a sense quite as intelligible as that in which Phillips spoke of O'Connell, I say of Father Lefebvre that not only did he, not less certainly, if less directly, than other

agents, place Richard and his eight or nine French Catholic colleagues in the Provincial Parliament, Poirer in the Senate, and Landry on the Supreme Bench, but through the movable outcome of the Catholic educational movement which he inaugurated here in New Brunswick, he made possible Richard's accession to the police magistracy of St. John, and McInerney in the Commons, and Costigan in the Cabinet.

Indirectly, then, in the resultant effects of his life and labors on our general position and economic standing he has a undeniable right to Irish Catholic gratitude. But he has, also, a far stronger and more appreciable claim. During the three decades or so, to be exact, the thirty-one years, of his career in this province, he acted directly on hundreds and hundreds of Irish Catholic students; and no one who is fortunate enough to have been subjected to his influence, no one indeed who properly appreciates the invaluable privilege of a thoroughly Christian education, needs to be told that his action was supremely beneficial. I do not intend to enter here upon a discussion of the inefficiency, from a Catholic standpoint, of our New Brunswick system of common schools; but it will perhaps be allowable to say that those schools, even with the extra-curricular privileges accorded to us in practice, while they are it may be the practicable best, are not the possible best. They do not, and they cannot, furnish the ideal Catholic education which the Church and her Sovereign Pontiff, Leo XIII., would desire to see available to all her children. At the risk, perhaps, of incurring the reproach of egotism or braggadocio, I venture the statement that the only institution in this province in which an education approximating that ideal can be obtained is Father Lefebvre's College at Memramcook.

As establishing still more clearly his claims on our gratitude, I need scarcely call your attention to the preponderating number of the priests of this diocese who owe their education, and in many cases their vocation as well, to St. Joseph's; nor need I dwell upon this signal advantage thus secured to our Catholic people, that of being served by a native clergy,—a blessing which, like good health, is never perhaps adequately prized until it is lost; but in view of the purpose of this meeting, it may be well to remind you that to Father Lefebvre, under God, is due the ordination of at least fifty of the seventy priests who have graduated from St. Joseph's halls; that, but for the extremely inexpensive, and in many a case, the entirely gratuitous, education received there, not a few of those ministers of the altar would now be wielding less notable influence in less noble fields, would possibly be acting as "hewers of wood and drawers of water" to more fortunate, or at least more wealthy, neighbors.

In fact, Mr. President and gentlemen, if you reflect upon the immense scope of the educational work carried on since 1861 by this devoted missionary and apostle whose memory we are seeking to honor; if you estimate at anything like its proper value the enormous influence he thus wielded over a not inconsiderable portion of the youth of this province; and consider how multiple and extended have been and are the ramifications of that influence as the years roll by,—you will agree with me that there is not a single member of a Catholic congregation in this city, or in all New Brunswick, who can truthfully say that Father Lefebvre has not been his benefactor—not a Catholic man or woman, whether of French or Scotch or Irish descent, who is not in one way or another, consciously or unconsciously, reaping the reward of his noble life and unselfish labors.

But I am forgetting the text I adopted when I began, and I have already overstepped the limits I had set for this address: so let me hasten to conclude. Yet I can scarcely terminate without saying something, if only a word or two, of the man himself, as distinct from his mission. I had the privilege of living in daily intercourse with him for eighteen years, and during the greater portion of that period, was closely associated with him, both as his English secretary and as director of English studies in the College. I knew him, therefore, intimately, and I have often thanked heaven that I did; for to see him habitually, to hold daily converse with him, to be admitted to his confidence, to listen to his aspirations, and to know his ideals, was in itself an education in all that is exalted in Christian piety and noble in human conduct. I speak with no imperfect knowledge when I say that his was a great hearted, broad-minded, magnanimous, sympathetic nature, absolutely incapable of the littlenesses that sometimes mar the symmetry of the finest characters, and luxuriant in all the grandest qualities that go to form the ideal man. A French Canadian by birth, the miserable, insensate spirit of national jealousy never found a moment's lodging in his bosom; and throughout his whole career he invariably received from his Irish students the well-merited

tribute of "Love as genuine and unstinted as if he had been a typical 'Soggarth Aroon' from Cork or Tipperary."

Only those of us who have spent our youth and early manhood within the immediate circle of his activity, can gauge with even approximate identity the never-failing courage and fortitude with which he encountered giant obstacles, trials, troubles, prejudices, and discouragements innumerable, discouragements coming not seldom from those on whom as cordial cooperation he had a right to count, but who all too frequently looked upon his generous projects with a distrustful eye, cracked out dismal and pessimistic prophecies of his eventual collapse, and would have greeted such collapse, had it come, with that contemptible criticism of vain glories and omens which I told you of.

That his projects did not fail, that they were carried even to their own consummation, is due, among other causes, to the true greatness of soul with which he regarded him, the world, and his mission therein. Thank God, he understood that, in the conduct and management of Heaven's appointed work, while human prudence undoubtedly finds its place, there is, after all, a higher law than the cut and dried maxims of commercial astuteness. Thank God he had as full confidence in the blessings of Divine Providence as in the solvency of the Bank of New Brunswick, and that his charities and benefactions were never retarded or hampered by considerations as to whether they would or would not prove successful financial speculations, certain to yield him a perennial six per cent.

Yes: his work succeeded. But even in the opposite event even had that work been overtaken by disaster and ruin, I would honor and admire him none the less. With Archbishop Ireland I say: "The safe conservatism that never moves fast is fail, I abhor it: it is the dry rot in the Church, and my heart goes out to the man who never tolerated it in his calculations." "Safe conservatism," continues the St. Paul prelate, "would have left the Apostles in Palestine. Let me add that it would have left us at Memramcook in a two-story wooden building, with a more handful of students, and the probable reputation of a third-rate boarding-school; just as it has left some eighty thousand English-speaking Catholics in this province without a single Catholic paper to advocate their interests, and scarcely a Catholic Truth Society to help dispel the ignorance that still enshrouds so many of our fellow citizens as to the doctrines and the aims of our Church in Canada."

But enough. I have said sufficient to convince you all that, to my mind at least, the founder of St. Joseph's College deserves well, eminently well, of New Brunswick Catholics, irrespective of nationality. Let me add in conclusion that I am quite willing to admit that "Brave men were living before Agamemnon, and that I have no desire whatever to exalt my hero at the cost of depreciating the worth or work of other notable Catholics, either in Church or State. But, proffering my opinion for what it is worth—and your valuation thereof will doubtless be a truer one than my own—I have no hesitation in stating in this presence that, looking through the Catholic history of New Brunswick, past or present, I can find, among laymen or ecclesiastics, no figure that towers so grandly pre-eminent, no name that so truly represents elevation of character or great and noble thoughts that have flowered into perfect deeds, as the figure whose semblance will crown the structure now building at Memramcook, and the name that will stand out in bold relief above that structure's portal, Lefebvre.

Other addresses were delivered by Mr. McInerney, Father Cormier, and Messrs. Richard, Cook, Carleton, and Ferguson, all of whom spoke warmly of the project under consideration. Mr. McInerney in particular favoring his auditors with a veritable oratorical treat. The meeting was highly successful, and will without doubt be followed by organized action on the part of St. John members to ensure the completion at an early date of what will be so far as the writer knows the only Memorial building thus far reared in honor of a Canadian Catholic.

Honor Roll:

Branch No. 115 Chepstow, Ont., heads the honor roll for the greatest number of initiations in the month of April, 1896, having initiated ten members.

Branch No. 89, Perth, Ont., comes next in order, having initiated eight members.

Branch 26, Montreal, Que., and No. 180, Yarmouth, N. S., initiated seven and six members respectively.