

French Evangelization.

Address delivered in Leaside church, Toronto, by Rev. Calvin E. Amaron, of Montreal.

We all believe in the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we believe in it because we have experienced its blessed results in our own lives and have made ourselves acquainted with its triumphs in the dark places of the earth.

We believe that what the teachings of Jesus Christ have done in days past in other lands, they have the same power of doing to-day in our own country. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day and for ever. The slowness of His work is too often due to our lack of faith.

For over fifty years a work of evangelization has been carried on among the French speaking portion of our mixed population. The difficulties connected with such a missionary effort are very well known to you all. There would be no object in alluding to these.

A more important and hopeful question is that of the results obtained after these years of hard struggle. Do the results justify the outlay of money, the expenditure of time and labour?

We do not hesitate to say they do.

When my father came from Switzerland in 1840 as one of the first missionaries of the old F. C. M. Society, the superstition and ignorance which prevailed in Lower Canada were simply appalling. About ninety per cent. of the French-Canadian population could not as much as read and write. Not a copy of the Word of God could be found throughout the length and breadth of a parish or county.

When I think of the hardships of those pioneer missionaries, obliged to live and bring up a family on a salary of from \$180 to \$240 a year, without a friendly neighbour; when I think of the young mother left alone for a whole week at a time during our Canadian winters, while the missionary husband was wading through the snow from house to house offering the Gospel, sleeping often in barns when turned out by order of the priests, I cannot but exclaim, "Oh! men of devotedness and faith. Oh! women of consecration and love, let your mantles fall on us so that when we, to day, become discouraged and would be tempted to seek a work more easy and more remunerative, may be kept in the path of duty and inspired by your faith and zeal."

The results achieved are known to God alone. It were impossible for us to measure them. Suffice it to say this much, fifty-five years ago there was not a French Protestant to be found. It is estimated that there are 12,000 Canadians of French origin who attend evangelical places of worship in Canada, and that there are about 25,000 French Protestants who have gone to the United States.

There are, at the present time, 1,500 pupils attending Protestant mission schools.

But however much there may be in these figures, there are facts which any careful observer can make himself acquainted with, which are much more significant.

The work of education through our schools, the distribution of the Gospel and other wholesome literature, the preaching of the word through the pulpit and press, all these efforts supplemented by other enlightening influences, have had the effect of changing public opinion among the French, especially the educated class, in a marked degree.

It cannot be gainsaid that a spirit of independence, hitherto unknown, save in a few rare cases, has arisen, and is making itself felt and heard in every corner where a few intelligent and educated French-Canadians are to be found. Montreal, St. Hyacinthe, Ste. Scholastique, Quebec, of course, furnish the greater number of independent minds, but they are found all over the country. The spirit of which we speak has manifested itself in more ways than one. The Canada Boy has been the most outspoken exponent of the views of the disaffected faction in the ranks of our French-Canadian population. This faction embraces lawyers, physicians, notaries, journalists and educated business men.

For a long time they have recognized and felt that the French-Canadian people, as a whole, occupy in this country a position of inferiority. They have felt that it was next

to impossible for French-Canadian young men to cope with English-speaking Protestant young men around them and have been led to seriously inquire into the cause. Unwilling, and right they were and are in that, to attribute this recognized inferiority to a want of intellect, and of natural ability in their nationality, they have concluded that the power that has so generations ruled with almost uncontested sway New France, must be held responsible for the state of things which they deplore. The clergy, they say, and rightly, has been, and is the enemy of liberty, of true education and emancipation, of political independence, of true growth and progress. They repeat the statement of the great French statesmen. — "Le clericalisme, viola l'ennemi."

The following reforms, among others, they ask —

1. They ask that the priests be amenable to civil, not only to canonical law, as the Church teaches. When such scandalous conduct as that of Abbe Cuyhot is known, it should be severely dealt with. The guilty priest should not be sent to another parish, but removed from the priesthood as unworthy of confidence.

2. In the second place they ask that in financial affairs connected with the Church, the rights of the people be recognized. Now the function of the people is to close their mouths tightly, but open their ears and purses widely. The reforms they ask in this direction are:—

(a). That the priest be paid a respectable salary, and that there be a limit to his power to extort money from the people.

(b). That ecclesiastical property acquired with the money of the poor be no longer exempt from taxes. I give my hand and heart to such a measure. What a boon for our city if it could pass.

(c). They ask, of course, for the abolition of tithes, that remnant of mediævalism.

(d). They ask that St. Sulpice Seminary be made to reveal the extent of its wealth, and report on the use it makes of the funds left to it in trust.

3. A third class of reform they ask for is in the direction of education. They wish education to be taken out of the hands of the clergy. If we had their full thought, in all likelihood it would be almost that of Paul Bert in France, the secularization of education.

Notwithstanding the vigorous opposition of the clergy, and of the ultramontane press, these ideas have made headway in the province. The proofs of it we have.

In the first place, several priests have been sued, not in cities only, but in country parishes, and in more than one instance, judgment has been rendered against them. There have been many rebellions against clerical claims. The case of Maskinongy is well known, and its results. Kamouraska County was the scene of a similar rebellion, and the Church yielded. Not far from Nicolet a church was closed three Sabbaths, I understand, and the priest yielded. The Pike River case is still in the Courts, I believe the people object the division of the parish. At Beaumont, Que., the people refuse to build a church. But the best and surest indication of the growth of this spirit of independence, is found in the complaints of the clergy through their ultramontane organs, that the priests are no longer respected as they were, their word does not command the authority it did, and piety is on the wane.

The important and most serious question which presses itself upon our attention is: What is to come out of all this? I am not one of those who think that the destruction of Romanism is in itself and of itself a desirable work. However mischievous the system may be in many directions, however inadequate to satisfy the wants of the soul and to lead to spirituality, it is better than no religion or infidelity.

But we are face to face with a problem foisted upon us by this very system. Among thousands upon thousands of French Canadians in Quebec, it is not so much Romanism as religious indifference, and among the better educated classes infidelity, that we are called upon to meet. The main doctrines are cast aside, papal infallibility, trans-substantiation, confessions, etc., revealed religion is called in question.

We are going to have, I fear, something of a repetition of the history of France. Unyielding dogmatism, arrogant absolutism has always been followed by a revolt of the intelligence and conscience. The people say: "If this be religion, if this be God's teachings, away with religion, away with God. In the United States the hierarchy complain that they have lost 20,000,000 of their people. You look for them in the Protestant churches and find but comparatively few. If you further ask where these millions are whom Rome once held under its power, in Ireland, Poland, Italy, Bohemia and Canada, the answer comes: In the lapsid masses, among the lawless strikers, among the anarchists. I repeat that I fear we are coming to something of the kind in Canada. A law-abiding, long-suffering, religiously inclined people, after a night of more than two and a half centuries, is beginning to open its eyes. They see they have suffered as a nation, they have been kept ignorant, they have been bled by an enormously wealthy clergy. For thousands religion has been but a mere form, void of power and life, whilst the educated class have become out-and-out skeptics. The day of reckoning is coming. History is repeating itself, the outraged conscience and intellect revolt and infidelity and its attendant evils are sure to follow.

In view of the situation, the duty of Christ's church is clear. We are called upon to redouble our efforts, so as to bring the Gospel home to those hearts and intelligences that are going away from all religion. There is no need for controversy, no need to tear down. It is a work of reconstruction, of building up, that is called for. It is preaching directed to the conscience, aiming at spiritual results. I should like to see more missionary work, somewhat on the plan of the McAll mission, tried in our country. It seems to me that where so many are in this state of transition, before they have settled down into infidelity, if the Gospel could be presented in an intelligent rational way, with earnestness and fervor, that it would be gladly received and many would be saved.

In view of this state of unrest, of this rebellion against ecclesiasticism, we feel in Montreal the need of taking steps to guide this movement aright and prevent it from culminating into a godless result. What can we do to guide those who are throwing aside the yoke of mediævalism, and persuade them that the yoke of irreligion and of Satan will not rest more lightly on their shoulders? What method shall we adopt to set before them the liberty of the Gospel, of that Gospel which proclaims the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, of that Gospel which respects man's dignity and offers pardon and reconciliation, happiness and peace.

We have concluded that to the other agencies now employed, the preaching of the Word, the Christian Missionary schools, we should add the Christian paper. We have done something through the press but we have never had a paper such as the nature of the field demands. What is now needed is a good, strong, pure, vigorously and well edited paper. So strongly has this need been felt that an invitation was sent to a number of business men in Montreal, to attend a meeting at which the matter was fully discussed. It was agreed that the moment was opportune for such an undertaking. In order to make the enterprise successful it was resolved to form a joint stock company with a capital, for the present, of \$10,000. One half of the amount has been raised in shares of \$10. The paper is to be undenominational, truly Catholic and Evangelical in spirit and contents.

The Board of Directors will be selected from the various denominations. All objectional controversy will be excluded, and harmful discussions and attacks ruled out of order. The paper shall be courteous, charitable and Christian in tone.

The power of the press is so fully understood to-day that I need say nothing further to demonstrate the value of such an agency.

A good weekly, family messenger, giving wholesome information to our French Protestant converts, on a multitude of questions of vital importance, church work, Sabbath school work, temperance reform, Sabbath observance, education, would be a mighty