

A LITERARY RETROSPECT.

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

(Concluded from last number.)

Whilst the Jesuits, the Quebec Seminary, the Sulpicians and the Ursulines were labouring at higher education, those pious mendicants, with the daughters of Sister Bourgeois and some lay teachers—the first de Vaudreuil had established a number of them—were imparting primary instruction.

If, as Charlevoix and Kalm have hinted, our young people were somewhat frivolous in their tastes and habits, as the manners of the time when those two writers visited the colony would lead us to expect, it is no less true that centres of light and science existed then as now, and those who represent the mass of people as plunged in darkness and ignorance, have no foundation for their assertion. After the Conquest, it must be confessed, there was a sad hiatus. I say so without bitterness, but not without emotion, for a long time we were the disinherited of two nations. Our old Mother Country had abandoned us; our new Mother had not yet adopted us. Almost all the educated class, except the clergy, a few seigneurs and lawyers, had returned to France; the two religious orders of which I have been speaking, had been suppressed; all the schools which they had conducted were closed. There were no more relations with France, no more books. Happily the printing press was soon set up. Our earliest Canadian publications were school books and religious works. Such books answered the most deep-seated wants. It was some time before newspapers were started, and even then, they had at first but small influence either on politics or literature. Two seats of enlightenment had, however, survived—the Seminaries at Quebec and Montreal. Thanks to those institutions, when constitutional government was established, there were among the French-Canadians as many and even more men adapted for political life than among their English contemporaries. Panet, the elder Papineau, Pierre Bédard, de Lotbinière, Taschereau, Blanchet, were among the glories of our early political life. Later the younger Papineau, Vallières, Viger, La Fontaine, Morin, and a crowd of others, walked in their steps. Politics also gave us our first writers—Bédard and Blanchet in the *Canadien* of 1810, and later on Morin and Parent. Poetry, timid at first, was limited to pastoral or didactic subjects, such as the works of Quesnel, of Mermet and of Bibaud. At a later period the patriotic muse arose full of distress and wrath. We had the dithyrambs of Angers, of Barthe, of Turcotte and Garneau. Then came Lenoir and Crémazie, precursors of the brilliant pleiad of to-day. Bibaud, Garneau, Ferland and Faillon soon made our history known. Garneau's work marked a new era, it was the starting-point of our historical studies.

Science was cultivated in our colleges. Messrs. Bédard, Demers and several others were its worthy adepts. I need only mention the High School of Mr. Wilkie, where such men as Andrew Stuart and Thomas Aylwin obtained their education. The Royal Institution and the project of a university had as yet no appreciable results. The legislature and the parishes had established parish schools, which, in 1836, were already numerous, when the necessary grant was rescinded by the Legislative Council. Several new colleges had also arisen to supplement those of Quebec and Montreal. In 1837, then, it appears, there was a temporary check to the progress of education, while the higher or classical education, as Lord Durham mentions in his Report, had given excellent results and continued to expand.

Coming to institutions of the nature of that which we inaugurate to-day, I find that the first attempt of the kind was made in 1809. The Literary Society, established in Quebec that year, took for its motto the words, *Floramus in nemoribus*, a motto which at that date, when the forest primeval extended from the walls of Quebec to Hudson's Bay, was quite appropriate. On the eve of the birthday of George III., whom I have already mentioned, the society offered prizes for a poetical competition, the earliest being the celebration of the monarch's virtues. An English poem, composed by Mr. Fleming, and a French piece by a writer who signed himself *Canadensis*, obtained the prizes. Addresses were delivered by M. Romain, President of the Society, and by Mr. Louis Plamondon, one of our earliest literary journals, the *Courier de Quebec*. The existence of this first society was not of long duration. First publications, first reviews, first organizations of this kind are like forlorn hopes. Those who follow them triumphantly must pass over their bodies.

The Literary and Historical Society of Quebec, founded by Lord Dalhousie in 1824, and which still exists, only succeeded the society just mentioned, by, as will be seen, a considerable interval. Since 1848 it has had a rival in the *Institut Canadien de Quebec*, to which the educated young men speaking the French language choose by preference to belong. The Natural History Society, the *Société Historique*, the Numismatic and Antiquarian Society of Montreal, the Canadian Institute of Toronto, the Geographical Society of Quebec, the *Institut Canadien-Français*, of Ottawa, and other societies of like aim in other cities of the Dominion, have laboured, and still labour, in the advancement of science and literature. The task which such societies have to perform in a country comparatively new is not an easy one. Their object is twofold—the progress of science and letters and the making of them popular.

For that purpose it is not so much an Academy that is needed as the lecture-room and the public library. But in proportion as learning advances, and the standard of literature is elevated, when high scientific careers become possible, the two functions just indicated may be separated and institutions of a higher and more exclusive character may be expected, with the aid of the government, to prosper. Have we yet reached that point? The time is passed for raising that question. It has been decided by a superior and impartial authority which has judged our intellectual and literary progress more favourably than we would have ventured to do ourselves. I have given a rapid sketch of the progress of this movement, as far as concerns the oldest province in the Dominion. In recent years how much it has accelerated! The great universities, Laval, McGill, Toronto, Lennoxville, Dalhousie, numerous colleges, normal schools, a complete system of public instruction have spread the taste for science and learning all over the land. Literary and scientific publications have become numerous; the works of some of our writers are known even beyond the confines of Canada.

For us, the descendants of the early colonists, the times have greatly changed since that evil day when we were, as I have said, the disinherited of two nations. To-day our new motherland accords us an enlightened protection and opens up to us a path of prosperity and importance to which no limits are assigned. On the other hand, our ancient Mother Country has remembered us, and now there exist between us and her relations both gracious and advantageous, such as there were in the days of Colbert and of Talon. Nor has literature been without its share in bringing about this reconciliation. If science and industry, by means of the three great Paris exhibitions, contributed to the desired end, it may be said that our historians and poets were the first to make us known to our old motherland, while they showed her the most glorious and touching pages of our history, pages which until then had been hidden in the shades of oblivion. One of our colleagues here present is a proof of what I affirm.

Again, for some years back, it seems to me, Canadian works in the French language are better known to the British population of Canada than used to be the case in former times, while the Anglo-Canadian poets, prose writers and men of science are better appreciated than formerly by their French compatriots.

The moment, therefore, was well chosen for the convocation within these Parliament Buildings of that other parliament of men of Letters and Science, less noisy than that which generally occupies this place, but whose debates, if they do not arouse men's passions, like those of politics, will be no less useful. Here are now met men of both nationalities, of all shades of opinion, of all parties in the country. The whole circle of the sciences can here fraternize, and literature and history can embrace each other.

Science has, in these days which test humanity, a mission more difficult than ever. Its responsibility was never greater than now. It has been reproached with having waged open war with revealed religion, with attempting to sap, by a destructive materialism, all the foundations of morality, of denying the existence both of Divine Providence and of human conscience. On the other hand, the powerful physical agents which it has discovered and placed within reach of the vulgar, have already given to those pernicious doctrines a terrible sanction. Unless care is taken, the moral ruin which those doctrines would bring to men's souls will be followed by material catastrophes equally terrible. From this point of view, it is a satisfactory assurance to have at the head of our new society a man who has struggled so long and so successfully for religious ideas in the domain of science, and who has won a reputation therefore both in the United States and Europe, which is well merited.

In the Old World there seems to be a reaction in favour of Christianity. The last reception at the French Academy is a proof of this fact. This great society crowns literary talent wherever it is found,—at the bar, in the Christian pulpit, at the orator's tribune, in the other sections of the Institut. It comprises in its vast jurisdiction all the branches of human knowledge, for in them all there is room for the application of the arts of speaking well and writing well. Biot and other *servants* have been admitted to the number of its members, and quite recently M. Pasteur, so celebrated for his discoveries in the matter of virus and microzoaires, delivered his reception discourse and delivered the *éloge* of his predecessor, Litré, who, though the disciple of the Positivist, Comte, died holding views quite different. The discourse of the new Academician is an able and eloquent vindication of the rights of religion to our respect and gratitude. He shows to revealed truth that they may be led who deny all that what frightful darkness they may be led who deny all that preceding ages have believed and revered. Everything in nature, said he, reveals to us the existence of God the Creator and of the human soul made in his image. He cites these words of Litré:—"Mankind must have a spiritual bond. Otherwise there would be in society only isolated families, hordes, in fact, instead of a true society." After showing that metaphysics, so disdained by the Positivist school, only translates within us the dominating idea of the infinite, he proclaims in these words of the highest philosophic elevation, the existence of that image of Divine power which is outside of man, but which in certain respects is man himself.

"The Greeks," he says, "have bequeathed us one of the most beautiful words in our language, the word *enthousiasm—en theos*—a god within us. The grandeur of human

actions is measured by the inspiration which originates them. Happy he who carries within him a god, an ideal of beauty which obeys him; an ideal of art, ideal of science, ideal of gospel virtues. These are the living sources of great actions. Everything is made light by the reflection of the infinite."

Perhaps I have too long abused the kindness of this distinguished audience. At any rate I will leave my hearers under the charm of the words which I have just cited. But, before I close my address, I would, in the name of the whole society, thank His Excellency for the interest which he takes in Science and Letters. And more particularly, on behalf of the first section to which I belong, I thank him for the place of honour which he has so graciously given to French literature and the history of Canada in the organization of the society.

In a Scrap Album.

TO D. W.

One heroine there is in Scottish song,
To whom in thought I often liken thee;
As gleams the daisy thro' the grasses long
Thy sweet face shines—my "Bonnie Bessie Lee,"

Montreal.

JOHN ARBORY.

Asleep in the Old Arm Chair.

"Oh, like a dove so sweet
And fair and pure thou art,
I gaze at thee and tears
Steal into my full heart.

I cannot choose but lay
My head on thy soft hair,
And pray that God may keep thee
As sweet and pure and fair.

And, oh! when thou art gathered
To thy home beyond the skies
Oft will I think I see thee
Through the bright blue heavens, thy eyes

And thy lips, so warm and ruby,
Oft will appear to call
For the lover thou'lt leave behind thee
In this dark, forsaken hall.

Thy face now radiant with beauty
To me always seems to shine
With a bloom that surpasses the earthly,
And can be naught else than divine."

Hush! she awakes with a shudder
And starts when she sees who it is,
Then throws her fair arms o'er my shoulders
And smothers me with a kiss.

"Oh, Nellie, my love and my darling,
I caught you fast asleep
In that dear old-fashioned arm chair,
And I couldn't help but peep

And the thoughts that came to my mind then
Were the thoughts of the bitter pain
I would feel were you taken from me
That I ne'er should see you again."

"Oh, banish such thoughts," says Nellie,
"And don't worry now, my dear,
For you may wish all this had happened
Before we've been married a year."

Ottawa.

ALEXANDER S. POTTS.

Liszt in England.

Liszt's former triumphs in England were destined to be eclipsed by the enthusiasm of the reception which awaited him when he was prevailed upon to return in 1866. In 1824 George IV. had given the sign to the aristocracy of homage to the child-prodigy; and his visits in the following year and in 1827 were successful enough. In 1840-41 the Queen's favour was accorded to him, and he shared with Thalberg a reputation as a skillful pianist in fashionable circles. But it was not until 1886 that the vast popularity which had hitherto been withheld from him, owing to the conditions of musical life in our country, was meted out to him in full measure. "There is no doubt," says a musical critic, "that much of this enthusiasm proceeded from genuine admiration of his music, mixed with a feeling that that music, for a number of years, had been shamefully neglected in this country, and that now, at last, the time had come to make amends to a great and famous man, fortunately still living. It is equally certain that a great many people who were carried away by the current of enthusiasm—including the very cabmen in the streets, who gave three cheers for the 'Habby Liszt'—had never heard a note of his music, or would have appreciated it much if they had. The spell to which they submitted was a purely personal one; it was the same fascination which Liszt exercised over almost every man and woman who came into contact with him."