

THE FRENCH CANADIAN HABITANT.

BY HARRIET J. JEPHSON.

THERE is no peasant so much attached to tradition as the French Canadian. He finds himself on a continent whose moving spirit is that of progression. The rest of the American world is more or less given up to electric-tramcars and railways. Factory chimneys belch forth their smoke, and sawmills rend the air with hideous noises, within touch, almost, of the quaint, picturesque French villages which lie nestling to the south of the St. Lawrence. The contiguity of progress and push, of manufacture and wealth, in no wise affects the unambitious *habitant*. He teems with contentment and philosophy. Jacques Bon-Homme has a supreme belief in himself and his belongings, in his country and its constitution. A poor *habitant* (the story goes) went to Quebec, and was taken by a friendly priest to see the sights of the city. In a convent church he saw a large painting of David and Goliath. Jacques fixed his gaze admiringly on Goliath. "Ah!" said he, "what a fine man!" "Yes," said the *curé*, "it is a fine man." "Magnificent!" said Jacques; then paused. "I suppose he was a French Canadian?" "Bien, oui!" retorted the priest, not liking to disappoint the patriot. "O yes! Goliath was a French Canadian."

That strikes the key-note of the French Canadian character. Where people are self-complacent enough to believe themselves perfect, they do not need to seek improvement, nor do they strain after higher ideals. The *habitant* believes implicitly in the wisdom of his forefathers, and remains the most picturesque and only historical figure on the continent of North America. He farms his own acres, owes allegiance to no man besides his priest, builds his cottage on the ancient Norman model, and looks upon all new-fangled inventions

(such as steam-ploughs and threshing-machines) as creations of the evil one. Although more than a century has elapsed since the British standard was unfurled in the Citadel of Quebec, the *habitant* remains as French as his ancestors were the day they left their country. This, too, on a continent where the English, the Irish and the Scotch merge their national characteristics in the course of thirty years into their environment. Jacques, happy in coming under the rule of a generous conqueror, has preserved his language, his laws and his religion intact; and he has gratitude enough to value the liberty given him by his English rulers and to make him the strongest opponent of annexation in Canada.

The French Canadian peasantry are descendants of the hardy men brought to American shores by Champlain over two hundred years ago. The *patois* of the French Canadian peasant has long been the subject of discussion and research; but there seems little reason to doubt that it is the dialect spoken by his Norman ancestors two hundred years ago. Conservative in this, as in all else, the French Canadian has preserved the dialect of his forefathers; whilst his French cousin of to-day has kept pace with the times and drifted into more modern forms of speech.

The *habitants* of Canada are chiefly confined to the province of Quebec. From the Gulf, all the way up the wonderful St. Lawrence, the river's banks are dotted with innumerable white houses and villages. Enter any of these, and you find yourself transported to old-world and time-honoured institutions. Here are veritable Norman cottages, steep-roofed, with dormer windows, wide and deep chimneys, picturesque rafters. Cross the road and you see an oven of ancient construction;