

CANADIAN FRENCH.

A PURE LANGUAGE AND NO PATOIS.

AN EXTRACT FROM A LECTURE BY REV. FATHER GRENIER, S. J., DELIVERED BEFORE THE CATHOLIC TRUTH SOCIETY OF WINNIPEG.

The Northwest Review reports a most instructive lecture, by Rev. Father Grenier, S. J., from which we take the following:

There is a point, he said, on which the French Canadians have been and are yet every day calumniated, and to which I would call your attention in a special manner. It has been said, and is still believed by not a few, that the language they speak is at best a sort of slang, a more patois, and nothing like the language spoken by the people of France.

Here something better can be had than the testimony of English-speaking writers. Listen, if you please, to the following witnesses, about whose competency surely nobody could reasonably entertain the least doubt.

1. Father de Charlevoix, S. J., is, as every Canadian ought to know, the celebrated historian of La Nouvelle-France, the author of the first great historical work ever written on Canada. Now, Fr. de Charlevoix belonged to a family standing high in Parisian society. Born and brought up in Paris, he twice visited Canada (in 1705 and 1720), spending considerable time in the country, travelling over the length and breadth of it in order to collect materials for his intended history. Surely, if a man was ever qualified to pass a correct judgment on the French Canadians, particularly on their language and manners, de Charlevoix was that man.

Well, listen to his words about Canada, French Canada, the only one then in existence: "Nowhere else is our tongue spoken with greater purity. Not even anything like a peculiar accent is to be noticed here... Gentleness and polite manners are common to all; and, besides, it is in language or demeanor, it is unknown even in the remotest part of the country." (10).

2. At the very beginning of the French colony, a quite similar testimony was rendered to my ears by the "venerable" Mother Marie de l'Incarnation, a lady of superior parts, who came over to Canada and founded, in 1639, the renowned Ursuline Convent of Quebec, where she died in the odor of sanctity in 1672.

3. A member of the French Academy, the noble Poullet, a distinguished author in French literature, who died in 1768, thus writes: "An opera may be sent to Canada, and it will be sung at Quebec note for note and with the same accent as in Paris; but one could not send a letter of conversation to Bordeaux and to Montpellier, and have every syllable of it pronounced as in Paris." (11).

4. Thus, so far have we learned, on the best authorities, what kind of French the Canadians spoke up to the present century. But what kind of language have French Canadians spoken since? What sort of French are they using now?

It is Father Grenier's answer. Being a French Canadian sixty years old, he says and having had, since my beginning in 1838, the advantage of an almost daily intercourse with several distinguished fellow-religious who were educated in Paris, I might perhaps, without laying myself open to a suspicion of partiality, venture to express my personal opinion in regard to the present kind of French spoken in Canada. I prefer, however, to recall a fact which will be known to many others, as well as to myself, the fact, namely, that of all the very many religious, Jesuit and Oblate Fathers especially, that have come to Canada from old France and preached missions for the last fifty years all over the country, constantly going from parish to parish, not one that I know of could be found that did not express his wonder at the uniformity and purity of the French they have heard everywhere.

5. Paul Feval, one of the brightest and most popular novelists of France, who died a fervent and devoted child of the Church in 1887, observes as follows in one of his novels (Force et Faiblesse): "I have been told that French is pretty well spoken in Moscow and Saint Petersburg. But if you wish to hear the true accent of Bossuet and Corneille's tongue, the general opinion is that you must go to Canada, where thrives an offshoot of the old French tree." (12).

6. Xavier Marmier, an illustrious member and perpetual secretary of the Academie Française, whom he had the pleasure of seeing in Montreal, could write in his last work, a few years before his death (1832): "Here (in Canada) is preserved, in the use of our tongue, that elegance, that sort of atticism which distinguished the golden age of our French literature. Even the common people speak it pretty correctly; and there is no patois among them." (13).

7. A French journalist reviewing, in Dec. 1890, the French Canadian press in the columns of the *Electeur*, which passes for one of the most cleverly written papers of Paris, observes as follows: "We find in these (Canadian) papers a great purity of language, a language rich in those good old-fashioned adjectives so delightfully pleasing to the ear. It is, with scarcely an alteration, the language spoken by our forefathers who were the first settlers of New France." (14).

8. Another journalist from France, Mr. Bellay, who, in Oct. 1891, contributed an article (*l'Enseignement des Peres Jesuites au Canada*) for the *Revue Canadienne* of Montreal, said, speaking of the plays occasionally performed before the public by the pupils of St. Mary's, the Jesuit College of Montreal: "It has been our privilege to be present, this very year, at one of these performances; and what struck us most is the actors' correctness of language and relative purity of accent." (15).

9. Mr. J. C. Fleming, then, said nothing but what is strictly true, when he was writing in the *New York Catholic World*, some years ago, that Frenchmen

who visited Canada admit that their tongue has lost none of its beauty on the banks of the St. Lawrence.

10. And finally,—not to multiply beyond all measure similar quotations—when last March, at a literary entertainment, a most beautiful and heart-stirring French play was performed by the pupils of St. Boniface College to do homage to our beloved Archbishop, on the occasion of his consecration, every competent judge, in the crowded audience of ladies, gentlemen, priests, bishops and other ecclesiastical dignitaries from Manitoba, Quebec, Montreal, etc., felt that His Grace gave way to no exaggeration, by noticing with highest praise among the merits of the actors, and many other things, their excellent French pronunciation.

Let me repeat it, therefore: the French-Canadians speak no patois; as a rule they speak pure French. Whoever says the contrary is only giving a glaring proof of his utter ignorance or deep-seated prejudices, or rather of both. I do not pretend, mark well, that there is nothing at all incorrect in the language of the French-Canadians; that their manner of speaking French is absolutely faultless; far from it. And nobody knows better my way of thinking in this respect than the numerous boys I have had under my tuition since 1850, either in Montreal, or New York, or St. Boniface. Nay, I really admit that there are blunders, and not merely a few, in the way my own people speak. Yet it remains perfectly true to say that, if the French-Canadians often sin against the rules of syntax, do not always use words according to the strict laws of propriety, and have a defective pronunciation in more than one respect, they, in spite of all that, do certainly stand far superior to their rivals in point of language, as well as with regard to nobleness of character, genuine-Christian and civic virtues and moral dignity.

I said the French-Canadians, though generally speaking correctly, yet make some mistakes, and who can find this strange? The wonder is that they do not blunder more, considering the various circumstances of their social position since the first settlement in Canada. And compare French-Canadians with other countries, either of Europe or America. How do the common people speak in England, in France, in the neighboring country, the United States? Have we not heard, for instance, the American twang? Do we not know the existence, up to this day, of various rustic, or corrupt dialects in France and England? Why, even in Paris the most elegant among a certain class of the common people a peculiar kind of slang, the famous Parisian argot, as it is called, which is not intelligible to the ordinary Frenchman. And I have known English-speaking Canadians who could not understand at all the language of the people in Yorkshire, Lancashire, Cornwall, etc., even after several years' sojourn in England. And as for the English people of a better class, who speak real English, suffice it to quote the following words of a first-class periodical published in London: "In the art of speaking indistinctly, confounding vowel sounds, slurring consonants, marking only the accented syllable of a word and globbing up all the rest, and in other feats of this sort, we (English) people have not a rival." (16).

But I must not conclude my remarks without saying one word at least of schools. What kind of language or pronunciation is to be found in the schools of France and the public schools of our neighbors, in those schools and public schools held up to us with so much pride by some persons as the very ideal of perfection? Says a school inspector in France: "Enter my class. Listen to any boy reciting his lesson... He rushes through the words, he hesitates, his tongue issing-out, he repeats as many as ten times the end of each sentence. No pauses at periods or commas; no shading; no emphasis; jumbling of clauses and a mixing up of words and ideas. What you have heard is neither Latin nor French; it is not a human language; you have gathered nothing but inarticulate and barbarous sounds." (16).

And the North American Review, speaking of our American neighbors, a few years ago, made bold to say, in the very teeth of the whole tribe of public school admirers, that "according to competent and impartial testimonies, gathered from all parts throughout the country, the bulk of the pupils in our public schools are unable to read understandingly, to spell correctly, to write legibly, to describe in an intelligent manner the geography of the country, in one word, to do what children decently brought up are expected to do with ease."

My last word is, if some people in this Canada of ours have reason to hang down their heads in shame for their uncharitableness, their haughty bearing, spirit of intolerance, rudeness, ignorance, or lack of real genuine patriotism, they are not the French Canadians.

A TIMELY REPROOF. MR. JUSTICE JETTE'S REMARKS TO LAVAL STUDENTS. Some days ago, certain members of the "Parliament Model" expressed the desire of forming a new radical party. Last Wednesday morning, Mr. Justice Jette, Dean of the Faculty of Law at Laval, after lecturing for about half an hour on civil law at Laval University, went on to say that one of the objects of the study of law was to render the minds moderate, and not to take extreme means in difficulties. He was sorry to ascertain that among the students there existed a party which promulgated ideas more advanced than those of any political party in the country. His Honor further stated that, in his younger days, they did not mix in politics as early as they do now, and that they waited until they had been practicing for some years before doing so.

"Your ideas will become more mature with age, and you will see things in a more philosophical way. I have been always known as a good Liberal, but never have Liberals thought for a moment to promulgate such ideas as some of you tried to do."

He then quoted Jules Simon, who cannot be taken with being an Ultramontane, who said that liberty should be given to priests as well as to anybody else.

"I understand," said Judge Jette, "that, in the heat of a discussion, one is

liable to let slip a word he will be sorry for afterwards, but, in this instance, it appears that some of you have written a programme, which has been published by a newspaper. In this case, you cannot pretend it has been done in thoughtlessness, or when one writes something, he is supposed to have thought and weighed the matter before doing so. I doubly regret that, in this programme, you had an article which prohibited the priest to write about, or take part in, politics, thirty days before the elections. Some complaints have been made already against us, to the effect that we could not properly discipline our students. I hope you will take this warning into very serious consideration, as it is prompted by considerations for your greatest interest."

The authorities of Laval University, after having been made cognizant of the Radical programme of certain members of the "Parliament Model," have deemed prudent to suspend the sittings of this institution in the Laval University Hall, without fixing any definite period.

ST. PATRICK'S DAY. THE ROUTE OF THE PROCESSION DECIDED UPON.

A meeting of the delegates of the various Irish Catholic societies was held at St. Patrick's, yesterday last Wednesday evening for the purpose of arranging the ceremonies and order of procession for the annual St. Patrick's day celebration. Rev. Father Quinivan, parish priest, presided, and among those present were the following:—Dr. Guerin and Dr. Kennedy, St. Patrick's Society; Messrs. M. Sharkey and John Walsh, St. Patrick's T. A. and B. Society; Messrs. J. J. Paterson and John Kennedy, Catholic Young Men's Society; Messrs. A. Jones and D. O'Neill, Irish Catholic Benefit Society; Messrs. M. A. O'Brien and E. Tobin, Young Irishmen's Land and Association; Messrs. James Burns and J. A. McGee, St. Gabriel's T. A. and B. Society; Messrs. J. K. Keenan and John McDevitt, St. Ann's T. A. and B. Society; Messrs. J. E. Brennan and K. W. Kearns, St. Mary's Young Men's Society; Messrs. E. Quinn and J. Whitty, St. Ann's Young Men's Society; Messrs. George Clarke and M. Lynch, Ancient Order of Hibernians.

After some discussion, the following programme was decided upon. The various societies will meet, as usual, on Craig street, at nine o'clock, and will proceed direct to St. Patrick's Church where Grand High Mass will be celebrated. After the Mass, the procession will proceed on LaGauchette street, and will proceed east by way of the west side of Victoria square to Place d'Armes, returning by way of St. James, McGill, LaGauchette, and Alexander streets, to St. Patrick's Hill, where the procession will disperse, after the usual speeches have been made. Mr. Bernard McDonald, of Division No. 4, A. O. H., was elected marsh of the day.

Before adjourning the delegates adopted a resolution of condolence and sympathy with the family of the late Sen. Murphy in their recent bereavement.

DEATH OF ARCHBISHOP KENRICK. A MESSY LIFE.

St. Louis, Mo., March 11.—The Most Rev. Peter Richard Kenrick, the veteran archbishop of the diocese of St. Louis, died suddenly at the archiepiscopal residence at 1:50 o'clock this afternoon. The Archbishop was taken sick suddenly this forenoon and Dr. Gregory was summoned. The doctor was at the bedside of the dying prelate for less than half an hour, and soon ascertained that but a few hours of life remained. Archbishop Kenrick was notified, and together with the members of the household, the Archbishop's faithful nurse, assembled around the bedside.

Peter Richard Kenrick was born in the city of Dublin, Ireland, Aug. 17, 1807, being a younger brother of the late Right Rev. Francis Kenrick, Archbishop of Baltimore, one of the ablest theologians the country has produced. Educated in Maynooth, Peter Richard Kenrick was ordained as a priest, March 6, 1832. After a year spent as a curate in Baltimore, his brother, then coadjutor bishop of Philadelphia, induced him to come to the United States, and in October, 1833, he settled in Philadelphia, where he took charge of the theological seminary of the diocese. Bishop Rosati, of St. Louis, feeling the need of a coadjutor, went to Philadelphia to consult with the bishop of that city on the subject. While there he made the acquaintance of Father Kenrick, and was so favorably impressed with the young priest that he petitioned Rome for his appointment, and was pleased to find his petition granted. Father Kenrick was consecrated Nov. 30, 1841, titular bishop of Drusa in partibus and coadjutor of St. Louis. On the death of Bishop Rosati in 1843, Dr. Kenrick succeeded to the office, and when in 1847, St. Louis was erected into an archdiocese he became metropolitan. During the civil war the Archbishop upheld the Union cause but devoted his energies to the relief of the sick and wounded of both sides. When, after the close of the war, a constitution was adopted by the State of Missouri, one of whose articles required all teachers and clergymen to take a stringent oath, he forbade his priests to do so, and the oath was afterwards declared unconstitutional. His golden jubilee was celebrated on the fiftieth anniversary of his consecration as bishop, and was attended by Cardinal Gibbons, Archbishops Ireland and Keane and most of the prominent prelates of the country. Dr. Rooker, of the American College in Rome, was present as the bearer of a special message of congratulation from Pope Leo.—R. I. P.

RELIGION IN NEW ENGLAND. (From the New York Sun Editorial.)

A speaker at a conference of the Baptist ministers of this city on Monday warned the meeting that "an organized stand is necessary against the aggressive missionary work of the Roman Catholic Church," saying that if, for instance, "the Baptists were satisfied to stand still, the Roman Catholics would make a New France of the New England States."

This reference to the Roman Catholics in the New England States is undoubtedly true so far as concerns their present

numerical superiority there. In those six States they had 1,004,605 communicants in 1890 out of a total church membership of 1,769,202; or in other words, the Roman Catholics were more than half the Protestants by 31,000. In Massachusetts and Rhode Island they comprised about two-thirds of the whole number of church communicants. In Connecticut they were nearly one-half; and even in Vermont, formerly almost wholly Protestant, they were two-fifths of the total church membership. In every New England State there were at least the most numerous of the various communions.

This preponderance of Roman Catholics in New England, once the very citadel of Protestantism, is due, of course, to the great immigration of recent years; but it has also occurred, evidently, because of the falling off of religious faith and convictions among the Protestant population. In 1890 only about one-quarter of the inhabitants were of foreign birth, and probably at least one-quarter of these were Protestants by rearing; yet nearly three-fifths of the whole church membership was Roman Catholic.

Hence we must conclude that proportionately to the entire non-Catholic population the number of Protestant communicants was very small. That is, the Roman Catholics have held their own better than the Protestants have done. Their communicants have increased proportionately to the Protestants not merely because they have received so many new recruits by immigration, but because so many of the Protestants have dropped away from all faith and are either infidels or in different religions.

This would seem to indicate that the true course of the Protestant denominations in New England would be to start a movement to revive the faith of their own people, instead of following the advice of this Baptist speaker to make resistance to the progress of the Roman Catholics. It is not so much that the one are going ahead as that the others are falling behind. If the Protestant churches succeeded in holding their own as well as do the Roman Catholics, they would be no longer in so serious a minority among the church communions.

It is hopeless then, the reformer to look at home and spend their missionary efforts in their own religious households rather than to waste their time in concentrating against the Roman Catholics. They have too much to do to count at the increase of infidelity to have any time spare for fighting against a Christian faith simply because it differs in form from their own.

IMMIGRATION PROSPECTS. SAID TO BE UNUSUALLY BRIGHT FOR THE COMING SEASON.

Immigration prospects for Manitoba and the Northwest during the coming season are said by those who speak know to be unusually bright. Enquiries from the States are numerous as to a great many persons it is anticipated will this year cross the line and settle in the Canadian West. Every inducement is being offered by the Canadian Pacific Railway Company and Dominion Government to all who have connections with the provinces.

The first large foreign party to arrive will probably be that of Mr. M. M. McLean from England, which is being sent out through the Manitoba Government's "settlers' work." The party is expected in April. It will also be a party of about sixty families from Brazil to the Canadian West.

At the same time, however, there has been received information that leads to believe that a very large party of agriculturalists from Eastern Austria will arrive this year and take up land.

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