

Bilingualism in Canada—A Parallelism in Norman England

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[In a recent lecture to the students of the Faculty of Letters of the University of Montreal, Professor William Henry Atherton analyzed some of the features of the Norman Conquest of 1066 in its bearings on Philology and Ethnology, and, paralleling what had been accomplished seven centuries later by another invasion, the counterpart in a measure of the first, the English Conquest of Norman Canada in 1760, he concluded by an appeal for good-fellowship and mutual forbearance between the two great ethnical groups of this country. The following are thoughts inspired by Dr. Atherton's lecture.]

The Norman Conquest of England.

A cursory glance at the Norman period of English history will impress even the casual reader with this basic fact: no matter by whom undertaken, the subjugation of an island kingdom and of a language racy of the soil, will prove a difficult task. Renowned tacticians had attempted it heretofore and had miserably failed. No less a genius than Julius Caesar soon found out that these liberty-loving Britishers were not to be coerced; and even while William of Normandy, at the head of a formidable armada is awaiting a favorable southern gale to dash his troops against England's rugged shores, another army of invasion—Danish pirates under a fierce chieftain, Harold Hardrada,—are learning to their own sorrow that the easy-going Saxon does not tamely yield when fighting with his back to the wall. This is the tale told by the battle of Stamford Bridge.

But William of Normandy was no ordinary soldier. The historian Green has this to say of him: "In William, the wild impulses of the Northman's blood mingled strangely with the cool temper of the modern statesman. As he was the last, so he was the most terrible outcome of the northern race. The very spirit of the sea-robbers from whom he sprang seemed embodied in his gigantic form, his enormous strength, his desperate bravery, the fury of his wrath, the ruthlessness of his revenge. Boy as he was at Val-es-dunes, horse and man went down before his lance. All the fierce gayety of his youth, in his rout of fifteen Angevins with but five men at his back, in his defiant ride with hawk on fist as if war and chase were one. No man could bend his bow. His mace crashed its way through the ring of English warriors to the foot of the standard. He rose to his greatest height at moments when other men despaired.

THE TAXATION PROBLEM (Continued).

ness being run with the revenue fluctuating in this absurd manner. The Dominion and Provincial Governments at will, may through their acts, exempt any land from taxation as was done in the case of the C. N. R. and P. G. E., and large revenues thus disappear with no reduction in the expenditures necessary by the municipality. The plea, that such exemption is justified because the construction of these lines and of public works benefits the municipalities, is an absurd one as it is obvious that such works are not primarily for the benefit of the municipalities, and any benefits carry with them a corresponding responsibility and expense to the municipality.

The time has surely come when we should abandon such unbusinesslike methods.

A conference of Federal, Provincial and Municipal representatives might result in a fair division of revenue and expenditure with increased efficiency and decreased cost. Only our extreme conservatism and tendency to reverence our ancestors by holding to their methods keep us from putting into the discard theories and methods which have outlived their usefulness.

Thus his voice rang out as a trumpet when his soldiers fled before the English charge at Senlac, and his battle cry turned into victory what seemed utter defeat." And this William of Normandy is the man who has made up his mind to bring England under his domination. Eventually, he succeeds; but at the cost of a mighty host of followers.

Throughout the spring and summer of 1066, all the sea-ports of Normandy, Picardy, and Brittany ring with the busy sound of preparation. "Nightly toils the subject of the land, whose sore task divides not the Sunday from the week." And as early as August, the whole of his shipping is assembled at the mouth of the Dive, 400 large sailing and more than a thousand transports. His army numbers sixty thousand men, well equipped and officered. Adverse winds retain them for several weeks and they smart with impatience, little surmising that it is this bit of ill-luck which will really help them win at Hastings. For in the meantime Harold of England was losing the flower of his army against Hardrada the Dane, and when William landed his troops at Pevensey, Harold had but a half organized army to meet him. Even then his troops fought so well that he nearly won the day. But when he was wounded by a Norman arrow and a sudden breach was wrought in the Saxon line chiefly through the rallying cry of William himself, the islanders grew panicky and towards nightfall turned and fled, leaving the Norman in possession of the field. Sad as was the plight of the defenders, they had as yet but sipped the bitter cup of woe. Under their new masters, they will have much to suffer; and many will empty the chalice of bitterness to its very dregs. A merciful Providence spared the French of Canada in 1760 from a like humiliation at the hands of the English invaders.

Norman Bilingualism.

The Frankish conqueror had come with the intention of annihilating everything Saxon; even the very language of the people was condemned to disappear; the conquest was to be complete. In a measure the dream of the invader is realized; the rude Teutonic tongue is cast aside, the lower orders alone clinging to its use; the language of the Court is French—not the polished French of a later day, but an outgrowth of the Latin dialect of the Roman legions in Gaul and of the Frankish hordes who had settled in Northern France about the year 486 A.D.;—the Norman lords in their Saxon mansions and the gentry in their feudatory holdings will suffer no other tongue to be spoken; apparently, French will soon be the dominant language of the country and the Saxon idiom is doomed to oblivion. But such will not be the outcome; the Anglo-Saxon language will survive and the foreign tongue will gradually die out as the main vehicle of literary expression or of social intercourse, though it will remain for long as the language of diplomacy and never entirely lost by the educated classes, as a fertile source of literary culture.

At first the French foreigners disdain to learn the crude Germanic idiom; but intercourse and marriage between Norman lord and Saxon lady gradually lessen this dislike for the language of the vanquished, and each learns the other's speech; first as a means of communication, and then as a medium of intellectual culture. English will not only survive, but it will emerge from the ordeal with added excellencies. First, many of the old Saxon inflections will disappear; the genitive ending will be replaced by "of"; and a wealth of words will be added to our vocabulary. Secondly, in metrical composition, a compromise will be reached between the two forms of poetry.

(To be continued.)