

THROUGH A MONOCLE

CANADA AND THE FRENCH TONGUE.

ONE of the most remarkable things in Canada to me is the fear which some of us of English speech seem to have of the French language. We are inclined to treat it as we do a contagious disease. We want to isolate it—quarantine it—vaccinate against it—make it the modern version of a penal offence to be found propagating a pernicious knowledge of it. Now I do not imagine that it would hurt us to know more French or more of anything else which makes for culture. Education will not spoil us—bitterly as we fight against some of its more obvious manifestations. No Englishmen of standing who comes amongst us, thinks of himself as a educated man unless he can speak French. The representatives of the Crown invariably delight our fellow-Canadians of French origin by addressing them in their own language; and they seem to be entirely oblivious of the fact that thereby they are “shattering Confederation to its foundations,” and turning this young nation aside from a great and glorious and homogenous—and homeopathic—future.

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NOW the French language will not bite. Its liquid beauty embalms much of the best literature in existence. French drama is a copious stream which never runs dry—as does the English river-bed. Any language is a more or less clumsy and loose vehicle for elusive human thought; but the French fits much more snugly to certain of our more delicate and involved conceptions than any other—especially than any Northern speech. If I were making the laws, I would be far more apt to make it compulsory for every Canadian school to teach French as well as English in practical and workable fashion, than to enact that coronation of contented and bigotted ignorance which discourages the teaching of literary French to children who too often cannot get that quality at home. And if I were going to extend State assistance to either language, I would not give it to the language which finance and commerce and industry and all the professions unite to “boom” on this Continent.

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THIS dread of French is a purely mediaeval and obsolete survival of a day when “race lines” meant national division. There was a time—there are countries now—where a struggle for race supremacy went on, and it made a very great difference which won. That gave us an instinctive feeling against the spread of any language save our own. But that instinct is about as applicable to modern conditions in this country as the instinct which leads a horse to jump out of his skin at the rustle of a piece of paper by the roadside. Once it meant a tiger creeping in the dry grasses to leap upon his back; but tigers are a bit scarce on our city-streets these days. The horse shivers and starts at nothing. So it is with English people who think they see danger in the spread of the French language. They are living yet in the days of their far-ancestors.

IT is time for a little plain talk on this subject. We all know that there is absolutely no chance for the French race ever to become the dominant race in Canada or on this Continent. I am not discussing now whether it would be good, bad or indifferent to have that happen. I am only saying that it cannot happen; and that there is no dreamer of French stock who imagines that it can. The English-speaking peoples have got far too long a lead. There will never be any “French domination.” I wish I were as sure that there would never be any “English domination.” The English people are absolutely secure in their position; and yet they use their majority at times to ostracise and pillory and brand with the stamp of inferiority and constructive treason the language of a loyal and patriotic and friendly section of our people who are engaged with us in building up a great nation in the most absolute good faith.

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OF course, I am quite aware that some of us who have the philanthropic bent—who never satisfy our own selfish desires without pretending that we do so reluctantly for the sole benefit of some one else—are awfully sorry for “the poor little French children” who do not get the sort of education which we think is good for them, and so are deprived of the superior advantages enjoyed by ourselves. They are liable to be left behind in the wearing race of life because their parents will not give them the practical education which we give to our children. So we set out to rescue them from their parents and teach them to compete with our boys—thus reaching the climax of self-sacrifice. But would we be willing to be done unto as we propose to do unto these others? There are people in the world—and they speak French, too—who think that we handicap our children in the race of life by teaching them what they call “the Christian legend.” These other French people banish “God”—as we understand Him—from the schools altogether, and practically teach “free thought.” Now if they were in a majority in this country, would we like them to give our children “a better chance in life” by taking them out of the hands of their “benighted parents” and giving them the free and enlightened education of Paris?

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IT is a dangerous precedent to deprive parents of the right to choose the education of their own children. The parents may be wrong; but, after all, parental responsibility for the training of the child is a very essential part of the institution of the family. Moreover, the parents are bound to exercise the greatest amount of influence in any case. The home does ten times as much to mould the child as the school. And the influence of both is greatly weakened and thwarted when they are openly at cross-purposes. No one will dispute that it pays any child in Canada to be conversant with English. English “pays” much better than French. All the tremendous forces of gain and advancement are fighting for English. Where French parents are

left alone, and are not forced into an attitude of hostility toward English as an instrument of oppression and the symbol of a crusade against their home life, they are eager for their children to learn the language of trade. But they still are parents; and they still can be deeply wounded by a State movement to prove to their children that their parents are old-fashioned and their homes unprogressive.

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HOWEVER, what I started out to say was simply that it is silly and cowardly and mal-adroit and anything but frank for us of English speech to pretend to be “afraid” of the spread of French. There is nothing to fear. The language of this Continent was permanently settled long ago. When we move against the French tongue, we are not on the defensive—we are persecutors. Moreover, we are depriving life on this Continent of one of its too few picturesque features—of an opportunity and an incentive to the rest of us to learn the language of Moliere, of Balzac, of Hugo, of many a great name in the world's College of Culture. And, in doing this, we are not “helping the country” or saving our own tongue, but feeding with savage satisfaction a remnant of belated barbarism that still soils the “substance of our souls.”

THE MONOCLE MAN.

Newspapers and Charity

ONE of the most distinctive features of the recent holiday season was the enthusiasm with which the newspapers engaged in charitable work. It is said that charity covers a multitude of sins, but of course no one would insinuate that this was the reason for newspaper activity. The gentlemen of the Fourth Estate are interested in public movements which include charitable work.

One of the newest ideas in spreading Christmas joy has been worked out by the Montreal Herald. It was labelled “Mr. Goodfellow.” The basic idea was that the Herald should call for the names of a thousand good-fellows, each of whom was willing to play Santa Claus to some less fortunate individual or family. In this way they hoped to benefit not only the recipient of charity, but also the giver. During their four weeks of effort the Herald collected the names of a thousand goodfellows and told each one what he should do. There was much work in getting the right goodfellow for the right family, but certain general principles were followed which proved to be a success. Each goodfellow had to make a personal visit to the family to whom he was supposed to bring some measure of Christmas joy, and in all probability it will not be his only one.

When all the goodfellows had been given their special tasks, some five hundred cases were left over to be provided for out of a general fund. This left an opportunity for those who for some reason or other were unable to make personal visits. Their contributions went into a general fund and provided five hundred well-filled baskets for the left-overs. Apparently the scheme was a great success. Mr. J. S. Brierley, Managing Director of the Herald, and his staff, are most enthusiastic as to the success of the campaign. They do not claim to have done more than any other newspaper in Canada with similar opportunities, but they think that “Mr. Goodfellow” represents the broadest form of Christmas cheer.

THE FOURTH ESTATE DISTRIBUTES GOOD CHEER



A picture taken at the Montreal Herald office the day before Christmas, when Mr. Goodfellow was getting busy.