

VII.—*The Historical and Miscellaneous Literature of Quebec—
1764 to 1830.*

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The literature of all nations began with poetry, or, at least, with versification, and the form of song is generally the first to appear. Such was the case amongst the French Canadian people.

Their settlement on this side of the ocean is altogether confined to the period of 1633–1680, when books were rather scarce throughout Europe, especially in country places, and it is well known that Canada received only few families from towns and cities at that time. Curious enough, though most of the women who came during those fifty years could read and write, and before thirty of them were here, they had a school open for girls. The men, as a rule, were indifferent in that line of business.

The literary knowledge imported by that little group of toilers of the soil was merely the popular current songs of the northern and north-western (Brittany sent no settlers to Canada) parts of France, where they came from, but they were songsters themselves, and all loved to sing and to play some kind of musical instruments. It is still one of the most remarkable features of that race.

The fur trade started about the same date as colonization, and the "habitant," or actual settler, soon got interested in that new life. The songs of old France were carried to the Great Lakes; they passed afterwards to the Mississippi and the Northwest plains, where they are to be found nowadays, wherever the French Canadians have penetrated through this continent. Their number is immense. One would think that if he knows the series of those that have been printed in book form or other publications he has nothing more to learn in that direction, but every week will bring to his ear a fresh supplement of that inexhaustible stock.

A people who is given to such culture may be expected to produce many works of merit, and stamp them with its own peculiar mark, as, for instance, the characteristic traits belonging to a colony. We could here mention what several high critics in modern France have said about the literary capacities of the French Canadians, but the compliments paid to the latter only reflect on the present writers, and the critics referred to have never read any of our productions previous to 1850.

We wish to draw attention to even an older period, that of 1764–1830, the very infancy of our small literary world. The germs that existed in the domain of the song-makers of the 17th and 18th centuries have only

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