

Personalities and Problems

3---Godfroy Langlois, M.P.P., Educational Reformer

Whose Paper, *Le Pays*, was Threatened by Archbishop Bruchesi with a Ban

Extract from the Archbishop's Letter read in the Catholic Pulpits of Montreal on Sunday, June 9, 1912:

"This paper by its character, by its criticisms, by its accustomed tone, by its sarcasms and by its imprudent championing, has become a danger to the integrity of the faith."

THE editor of *Le Pays* was supposed to be a disturber. The French weekly fulminated against a few days ago by the Archbishop of Montreal—you wondered if it was anything like the Calgary *Eye-Opener* or *Jack Canuck*; and what sort of fire-eyed person would the publisher be? Very probably the editor, first of *La Patrie*, and until 1909 of *Le Canada*, would be a fuliginous little Frenchman; perhaps with a studio jacket, a wild mane, splotches of ink all over his table; rolling eyes and a scream in his voice and a lot of disquieting gesticulations that might be full of "to blazes with everything."

But Godfroy Langlois, M.P.P., never saw that kind of person in a looking-glass. *Le Pays*, if you pick it up at a bookstall, has no appearance of dark and deadly recipes for curing the ills of society by violence. In fact it looks like a peculiarly cheerful sheet, even without its jolly cartoon; contains a lot of crisp, breezy articles and snappy little paragraphs which might be done into English and be very palatable. And it has a way of circulating down in St. Louis division where a few weeks ago Godfroy Langlois was re-elected by a large majority with the brother of the Archbishop and another candidate against him, both losing their deposits. *Le Pays* helped that election. The editor took off his coat and wrote the articles that helped to put him back on the firing line in the Quebec Legislature. *Le Pays* is politically Liberal. It is dynamically—Langlois; who is by no means Rouge, and who if to be a Bleu were necessary to promulgate his ideas of modern reform in Quebec, would be a Bleu to the hilt.

He has never said so. But somehow after knowing Langlois you are sure that old-line politics or old-style anything would never suit this luminary who has danced his way into the head row of the torch-bearers in the procession of reformers. And it is not the Church or society or the labour world that Langlois would go through with the lamps and the brooms—but the potential world of the mind. First and foremost he is an educational reformer. Had he lived in the Dark Ages he would have made a bonfire of fusty old canonical books that kept the masses learning things by rote and not by reason.

But living in Montreal, born at Ste. Scholastique, P.Q., educated at the colleges of Ste. Therese and St. Laurent, studying law for three years and afterwards becoming a Liberal journalist—Langlois finds himself head up against all the mediaevalism he needs for purposes of reform. Since quitting the impersonal party-politics side of newspaperdom, he has begun to make of *Le Pays* the torch. So as the State was Louis XIV., *Le Pays* is Langlois—in the interests of modernizing Quebec through the medium of educational reform.

Le Pays was started in 1910 in a gloomy row of stone walls down on St. Francois Xavier St. But some time this spring it moved up nearer the busy swirl of St. James St. and the banks; a few doors west from the big towers of Notre Dame Church, and two doors from the corner where another very modern French-Canadian has a financial office with the name Forget on the windows.

IT was just after the election that I went up to see the editor of *Le Pays*. A small office and a thick crowd. I think he must have been holding an informal levee. There was no getting in to see him that day. On the stairs I met a young man who said Mr. Langlois had promised to meet him. "But he is very busy. He is being congratulated. So he should be. I tell you—we gave him a great victory!"

"Yes, they say the Jews rolled up a big vote for Langlois."

"Did they? Well, I guess I was one that helped. I carried a broom in the parade that night. Oh, the church was against him. But the Jews never will leave Langlois out. He is the only man. He is modern. There is no reactionnaire about him.

By AUGUSTUS BRIDLE

He would get the Jew vote against a Jew candidate—every time!"

This young Jew spoke English fluently and French quite as well. He was from Roumania. He admitted that Jews most naturally became Liberal in Montreal because it was the reactionary element in Europe that gave them most trouble. Besides in Montreal the young Jews learn both French and English if they don't already know these languages when they come out. When Langlois speaks to them in French they understand him. And they read *Le Pays*.

The enthusiasm of this young Jew was all on fire for Langlois, whom he regarded as the hope of



"Modern Liberal more than Rouge, a reformer and not a revolutionary."

what he called "cosmopolitan Montreal." Some of his confreres might be found down at the Labour Temple; and in the name of labour, regardless of race or religion, they would endorse Langlois, if not entirely, at least in so far as he openly works for free and compulsory education in Quebec.

NEXT time I went up to see Langlois he was cordoned in again by congratulators. His two clerks in the outer office were busy elucidating in French. The editor's door was shut. Every chair was occupied. In politeness a clerk would give up his own chair to a visitor who was to meet Mr. Langlois by appointment.

"Oh, he is very busy to-day. But he will soon be finished, I think. You will wait?"

Some got tired waiting and went away. Others came up. Presently the door opened and out came two or three more. One had his coat off and a pen over his ear; a little, thickish man with no beard or moustache; dressed with irreproachable neatness,

in a cool, grey suit, with a low, easy collar and a sailor straw. Somehow, with a large number of words shot from one to another of the little crowd, he got them satisfied that for this time at least they had said enough. He would see them again. His office was always open—not only to subscribers of *Le Pays*, but to any and all that could say or do anything in this work of getting modern ideas into the minds of French-Canadians.

"Now if you will come in, I will be glad to tell you anything I can about this fight," he said, speaking in flawless English.

His office was flooded with light from huge windows. The furniture and the rugs were all new. A small bookcase of very useful books against the wall; a few portraits—including one of himself; and his desk had a convenient miscellany of blue books and other dry volumes from which, with the quick certainty of an expert, he has the knack of getting facts and figures that he lights up into catherine wheels of interest.

The shut door was the only sign that the publisher of *Le Pays* had anything to conceal. He was still exuberant over the election; in which, as he said, he had been powerfully opposed by the Church to which he himself belonged.

"But remember, *Le Pays* has never opposed the Church on matters of religion," he said. "We have nothing to do with that, except in so far as the Church in the name of religion blocks the movement for free education in this Province."

No doubt he expected to get further obstruction from the clergy.

"Because I believe in free speech and freedom of thought," he said, flinging a burnt match into a very convenient cuspidor behind the desk. "That is why."

That brass cuspidor and the pipe and the shirt-sleeves, and the pen that he grabbed from his ear when he wanted to make a computation from a blue-book, were the signs of a man who believes in democracy. Godfroy Langlois acted like a man to whom at least one phase of a practical truth had brought the stimulus of a great joy. A few days earlier I had talked with the Archbishop, a man no higher in stature than the editor of *Le Pays*, quite as ardently outspoken from his side of the problem and quite as genial. It seemed at least odd that two men, each so informally aggressive and democratic, and so intent upon the diffusion of truth, should be so radically opposite in this one most vital matter of education. When each believes as ardently as the other in the French-Canadian race; only you feel that somehow Langlois could get along with not so many church towers in Montreal and Quebec; that he would sooner spend people's money on schools, and less on the altars and the cloisters and the convents.

It's all a matter of angle. From his the Archbishop is constitutionally right. From his again, Langlois is right. Each is sincere. But each interprets twentieth-century Quebec in his own way; and it is a matter for personal judgment to say which has more of the necessary modern truth than the other.

"THERE is no freedom of speech in Quebec," said Langlois. "The moment a man expresses himself openly in print on these simple matters, he is regarded by the clergy as a dangerous man and his paper as a thing to be discouraged."

It was only two or three weeks later that the Archbishop's letter was read from the pulpits of Montreal, advising against *Le Pays* and *La Lumiere*—which is something of a free-thought document now getting quite a circulation—and threatening a probable interdiction of *Le Pays*.

"All because of so obvious and elementary a thing as free education," said the editor, grabbing a blue-book.

Swiftly he turned the leaves searching for figures. "We have compulsory vaccination," he said, vigorously. "Isn't it as sensible to have compulsory education? We hire a man to light our street lamps at night, and we expect all the lamps to be lighted. Shouldn't we be as diligent to illuminate the lamps of the mind? We have a Minister of Colonization and of agriculture; why not of education?"

Of course newspapers have slated Langlois for the portfolio of education in Quebec; but the editor