

Songs of the French Canadian Children



YOUNG Jean Baptiste is fortunate in his songs and nursery rhymes. Most of them came over from old France with his forefathers, who cherished these ballads as they loved their church and mother land. A musical and a light-hearted people the early settlers of Canada were, and their descendants to-day have lost none of the old characteristics of the race. Hard work and privation do not discourage them, and at the close of a trying day's toil, after the tea-things have been carefully laid away, and the head of the household has smoked his pipeful of home-grown tobacco, it is no uncommon custom for him to take down his violin, and play a programme of dances for the young people. Sometimes he takes a hand in the dance himself, doing his share with the nimblest of them. At ten, the impromptu ball comes to an end, and all retire from the merry scene, to seek repose against the next day's labor.

The ballads brought over the sea, by the soldiers, sailors and peasants, from Provence, Normandy, Brittany and other parts of France, have been well preserved all these years. Few of them had names, and fewer still had been printed, until Mr. Ernest Gagnon made his journey among the people, and took down the words and the tunes, which had been transmitted from one generation to another with little mutation. But, while in the parent land, many of these old songs have disappeared entirely, and are no longer known among the peasantry, it is curious to observe that they continue to exist in Canada, and are sung to the same ancient airs, in vogue three centuries ago. An occasional change in the words may be noted, and some Anglicisms have doubtless crept in, but, for the most part, the ballad is the same. A student of folklore, living in France, not long ago, collected, in Quebec province, several specimens, of which, for years, all trace had been lost in the country of their origin. M. Gagnon gives the history of many of these *Chansons Populaires du Canada*, in his entertaining volume of that name, together with the music and words of the more striking exemplars. To this work the reader is referred, should he desire to know more of this subject.

Young Jean Baptiste, born and bred in a musical home, however, humble in its surroundings, is not many weeks old before he finds his infant slumbers lulled by this touching distich, which is repeated over and over again, until the drooping eyelids close, and the last rock to the cradle is given by the friendly elder sister.

"Dors, Bébé, dors, fermez tes beaux yeux,
Dors, Bébé, dors, dormons tous les deux."

Should he awake, his ears are greeted with the musical refrain :—

"Ma petite Jacqueline de se Marie
Jean,
Dors et mon fils fait dodo,
Derange donc point ta mère,
De la carrote au choux.
Dors, Dors, Dors, mon fils,
Fait dodo, dodiche, dodo."

As age increases, and the cradle comes to be occupied by another, for French Canadian families run from ten to twenty-eight,—our baby, at eventide, is walked about the room, in the strong arms of the mater, who sings softly, in a low, crooning voice :—

"Papa est en haut, il nous fait des Sabots.
Mama est en bas nous tricote des p'tit bas.
Fait dodo la pinoche, pinoche, fait dodo, fait dodo, la pinoche."

The most popular of the sleepy songs is the famous "*Poulette Grise*," which is still sung in both Old and New France.

La Poulette Grise

