

THE UPLIFT IN QUEBEC

By J. C. Walsh, Editor Montreal Herald

THE session of the Legislature at Quebec, which marked the year 1908, will deserve to be remembered for the way the Government has grappled with problems that have long called in vain for attention. Quebec has been, in some respects, a backward province. Perhaps it would be more exact to say that French-speaking Quebec is in an earlier stage of economic development than some of the other provinces. Intellectually, nobody has the right to claim that the people who compose the majority in Quebec are inferior. Their professional men, and their public men, have at all times shown themselves able to hold their own. In all the learned professions they have had opportunity, and in all they have distinguished themselves. They have not, until recently, gone extensively into commerce or manufacture, but the fact involves no reproach to them. They were not ready for that phase of economic development; it begins to look now as though they had grown up to it and were reaching out to take their share.

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS.

At the conquest, as we are so frequently reminded, there were but sixty thousand or so of peasants left behind in Canada. For a hundred and fifty years there has been practically no infusion of new blood. The sixty thousand poor peasants, in a new country, working under the most primitive conditions, might well be forgiven if their sole contribution to the country, when they left it for good and all, was an increase in the number of strong arms and warm hearts. Commerce did, indeed, grow up in the midst of them, but their part in it was very humble. England wanted the lumber from the trees they felled, but it was men from England who came with the money and who conducted the operations. An English aristocracy of commerce at old Quebec city was the outgrowth of this condition. Later on, men brought ships to Montreal, stored with wares from Europe, with which to supply the wants of the English-speaking people who were going in their tens of thousands into Ontario. There was no place in all this for the man whose farm might be within sight of the ship, or even of the warehouse. He had not the capital, he had not the training, he had not the business connection where the goods were bought in Europe, and he could not speak the language of those to whom they must be sold in Canada. The current of trade swept past him, but it left him untouched. His aim, or rather his necessity, until very recently, was to make his own farm supply all his wants, food, raiment, warmth and shelter. His ambition was to settle his sons upon new farms, on the land just beyond what was in cultivation. For commerce he was restricted to the barter of live stock at the church door. For specialised industry he looked to his women-folk at their spindles. For his other relations of life he could command the services of the notary, the doctor and the priest.

SUCCESS IN COMMERCE.

Before the next stage of economic progress could be reached, numbers was the prime necessity. What use to be a lawyer, without clients? How become a merchant, without customers? The instrument of progress, all this time, was the classical college. Designed, undoubtedly, for the training of priests, these classical colleges had from the first the devoted and unselfish service of hundreds of men of fine mind and scholarly attainments. By their self-sacrifice poor young men were enabled to face the world with well trained minds. They studied law, and found their clientele in the thousands of their compatriots who had by this time been attracted to the cities by the provision of employment. When this latter class had become numerous enough, it was time for the next forward step, which was taken when men undertook to supply, in the ordinary course of commerce, the more common needs of their people. First in a small way, then in a larger way, they seized upon this opportunity. In Quebec, some of the largest and best known shops bear French names. In Montreal, the wholesale grocery trade has come to be almost wholly in the hands of French-Canadians, and any newspaper reader can see with half an eye how steady is the progress they are making in other branches of trade. Their little political journals have become metro-

politan newspapers. Long ago they made their entry into the field of finance by means of their savings banks. Now they are engaged in general banking business, and their efforts, for the most part conservatively directed, are producing encouraging results.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT STEP UP.

It was a community in this state of economic development that Mr. Gouin found under his hand when he became Prime Minister. And there had been other conditions which had produced their effects. There had been periods of railway bonusing and other expenditures, which had left the province much in debt. There had been a long record of deficits in the provincial finances. It was a struggle to make ends meet. On the other hand, the development of the dairy export business, the building of railways, the activity in the timber areas, and the development of water powers, had brought the whole province under the influence of commerce, under the spell of skilled industry. It was evident that the time was ripe to encourage the youth of the province to grapple with its most inviting problems, all the more so because, thanks to electricity and the railways, Quebec is no longer a community set apart, but one whose interests are associated in a hundred ways with those of other parts of the Dominion, and with exterior countries. The time had plainly gone by when the humble classical college could serve all the needs of the community. Already a numerous corps had got themselves trained as engineers, as architects, as chemists. Nevertheless, the sustained impulse of many years was still driving unheeded hundreds of the brightest young men in the province into the study of law and of medicine. Mr. Gouin's first move was to endeavour to obtain, through the long deferred readjustment of the Dominion subsidy, a better financial establishment. His almost immediate success in this regard marked the beginning of the uplift. Not quite, though, for without waiting for that success, he had given a new impetus to the Polytechnic School in Montreal. It will probably surprise most people to learn that there are in this institution already fifty per cent. more pupils than follow the same applied science courses at McGill. Next came provision for the School of Higher Commercial Studies, and the Technical School, both of which will be under construction within a few weeks. It goes without saying that the influence of these three schools upon the progress of the community cannot fail to be here what the influence of such institutions has been elsewhere.

GOOD SCHOOLS AND GOOD ROADS.

With this ample provision for education at the top of the scale, the next step was to make better provision for primary education. Before the ultimate attainment in this direction has been reached many loose ends may have to be gathered in, but meantime a good start has been made. At this and previous sessions grants have been made for the improvement of school buildings in poor districts; for the special encouragement of school districts which strain a point to pay a decent salary to the teacher; for encouraging capable teachers to stay at the work; for improved and extended normal training of the teachers; and generally for the improvement of the system of primary instruction so far as the grant of money by the province can be expected to influence that result.

It is worth remembering, however, that it is not alone to education that the work of uplift applies. An important part of the economic equipment of the province is found in the country roads, the first and in some respects the most important part of the transportation system. It is easy to comprehend that the roads which did very well in the days of all-sustaining farms will not answer the purpose in these days when farm produce has to be shipped across the ocean. The Legislature has taken three important steps this season, at the instance of the Government. Provision is made to overhaul the municipal code, which in respect of its clauses concerning roads is based upon the conditions which existed prior to Confederation; financial encouragement is offered, in amounts that will probably be considered worth while, to municipalities that will improve their roads in accordance with up-to-date

plans; and grants are offered to encourage municipalities to substitute iron or steel bridges for wooden ones. With all this, goes an extension of the work of instruction in improved agricultural methods, and promotion of increased efficiency in agricultural colleges. When it is remembered that during the past ten or twelve years the farmers of Quebec have passed, as a rule, into the well-to-do class, it is not difficult to foresee what may presently be the effect of this kind of campaign in the older settled sections of the province.

SPREADING OUT.

Finally, an intelligent effort is being made to obtain the best results from the colonisation of new areas. In the past much of this has been left to haphazard, or to the initiative of the lumbermen and owners of timber limits, with the consequence that, following the line of least resistance, the boys who moved off the old farm went down to the New England factory towns. Hereafter, even though they chafe under the ruling, the lumber men are to receive only second consideration; their interests will be properly safeguarded, but the welfare of the settler is to be paramount. The pioneer will not be required to break into the wilderness by himself, or to wait until place is made for him around some lumber camp. Sections will be definitely set apart and surveyed, and roads will be made. The pioneer will always be within easy reach of the last settlement before his. Provision is made, therefore, for the steady, orderly extension of the province's inhabited area, as rapidly as the population required for such extension becomes available.

It is fairly obvious that in all this there is a coherent plan. As the years pass, and the revenues of the province are found to afford it, we may expect to see other phases of the work of uplift taken up. To-day nothing is more certain than that this old and populous province is finding new access of strength, and is equipping itself for the work the future has in store. With the finest timber areas left on the eastern slope of the continent, and with the greatest wealth of water powers, alongside which new towns are continually springing up, with a vigorous, industrious population and an inexhaustible reserve of wealth in its fine farm lands, Quebec may yet surprise those sister provinces which have got into the way of measuring her by the commercial standard and finding her efficiency relatively small. A little prosperity and a good deal of intelligent direction are all the situation calls for, and just now both are in evidence.

A Curious Tablet

A STEAMER from Shanghai recently brought to this continent the only replica of the famous Nestorian stone. This tablet, peculiar and mysterious, has been a subject of much discussion among scholars. The copy weighs two tons, and was executed by eleven Chinese artists. The young Danish explorer who brought it obtained the chance to have it made in the face of much opposition, and spent two years in the labour. The late Francis H. Nichols gave a description of the tablet in his "Through Hidden Shensi."

It is the only object in Sian which has considerably attracted the attention of the Western World. This tall granite slab, known as the Nestorian Tablet, has been discussed by such men as Voltaire, Renan, Legge, and so forth. An American professor pronounced it a forgery, but recent investigations have established its veracity as a truthful account of the first Christian mission in China. It stands as a proof that Christianity is not a new religion to China, but was introduced in 635, by the Nestorian priests.

The monument was discovered in 1625 by some workmen. The governor of the province had it firmly placed on a pedestal. The inscription on the stone consists of three columns of Chinese characters, with a few Syriac paragraphs, the latter language being now unknown to China. It is a long exposition of Christian doctrines of the period.

Chinese antiquarians have long held the stone in great veneration. The style is terse, but not easily understood. Were one hundred Chinese students employed in the translation, probably each would give a different interpretation of some part of the inscription.—*Youth's Companion*.