

THE EXODUS.

FRANCIS W. GREY, LITT. D., AUTHOR OF "The Cure of St. Philippe," "Gilbert Franklin, Curate," etc.

CHAPTER XI.

A SON OF THE GENTILES.

But if Pierre Martin had his own unforeseen problem to deal with, a problem of which Father Gagnon had shown him a solution equally unforeseen and unlooked for, his sister Madeleine, who, as one of his first and most efficient helpers, deserves some place at least in this chronicle, had also, for herself one of a similar nature, and certainly not less difficult, fraught, moreover, with consequences which for her were in their measure no less momentous, since on it depended or seemed to depend her whole life's happiness.

She had been brought face to face with it, indeed, in a way as unexpected as that by which her brother had been brought to the decision of his own. Jean and his wife, with whom she and Pierre continued to live, were the most pitiable of mortals and liked nothing better than to see their kitchen in winter, or their verandah on summer evenings, filled with friends, young and old. Moreover, Jean was a new enthusiastic believer in Pierre's Exodus, and ready, as he was wont to say, to start "demon on apres-demon" (to-morrow or the day after) was naturally, to his house, as to himself, a centre of attraction to others who believed and felt as he did.

Thus it came about that five evenings out of six and on Sundays especially, there was an informal council held to discuss ways, means and possibilities whereby Pierre's dream might be made a reality.

In simple truth and in a very real sense, the dream, if dream it were, was not Pierre's at all, certainly not his solely or exclusively. It was on this fact, of which he was fully aware, in this sense of vague longing and unrest, that is to say, of a new Quebec in the Provinces of the Northwest, Pierre, the Senator felt confident would merely give utterance to this voiceless longing, set in motion this great mass of population which already hung, as he believed, waiting and expectant for just such an impetus towards return to the land whence they had been driven and on which they still looked as home.

Jean, therefore, was only one among many of his race now in Middlehampton and other New England factory towns, who had left their native land not willingly, but out of necessity, against their will.

The causes in each case were sordid, few and all too common, two chiefly, mortgages and scanty harvests, bad times in a word. To these should be added the hope of bettering their circumstances, a betterment, which for most of them was long in coming, and of which the cost, as not a few of them realized, after a year, or two at the longest, was too great.

You can buy money too dear," Jean would remark, almost as a regular part of these councils, and Michel O'Rafferty, the watchman, who was a frequent attendant and a still more frequent speaker—compared with others, would make answer just as surely: "Begorra John ye're right; 'tis not what a man makes that counts, nor what he spends, but what he saves." A saying much applauded, if not practised, by his hearers. What, indeed, could they save?

These then were all in favor of some change in their condition of deliverance from a bondage which had grown intolerable, even before Pierre Martin's return to Middlehampton, for each and all had found the hope for betterment too slow in coming, and far too costly in other terms than that of money, even when seemingly attained. They made more than they could make on their farms, as they were ready to admit, but they spent more, even as they worked harder in tasks wholly ungenial, as they were not long in discovering, and Michel O'Rafferty's rule of political economy, if applied to the majority, would have failed woefully. They saved, in fact, little or nothing. Nor did the easily made charge that this was their own fault after the fact, even where it could be proved as true, which in many instances, as might easily have been shown, it most assuredly could not. The fault, even where it was theirs in any real sense, lay most probably even then more in their circumstances and conditions than in themselves; as it must do when an agricultural population migrate to a factory town. The very process, moreover, of getting used to their conditions costs too much—to the race.

Not that they looked to any possible still less to any proximate deliverance, or that any appreciable number had a definite hope of returning to the land they had left, prior to all events to Pierre's suggestion that they should go back, not to old Quebec, where they had already found it impossible to live, but to a new and more hospitable land in the great Northwest. What, indeed, in the former case had they returned to? Return, they felt, meant simply more bad harvests and fresh mortgages, a renewal of the former struggle in which they had been hopelessly worsted; which they had neither the means nor the courage to resume. If they spent much and saved nothing here in Middlehampton, they at least made what they spent; in the old land, amid the old conditions, they had made too often far less than in these later years it had cost to live, however careful, thrifty and economical they might be and were. It was such conditions that had driven them into exile. What was there to be gained by returning to them even should it prove possible to do so?

Then came this boy, this dreamer, this enthusiast, whose eyes seemed to gaze beyond the narrow horizon of their sordid, toilsome lives, who gave utterance in burning, living words to that which for so long they now realized, had been in all their hearts. Some ridiculed, some despaired, having borne the yoke

too long ever to look up again, but many listened; might it not be that le Bon Dieu had sent him just for this? Too young, it might be urged, for such a task? That, they would have answered, was le Bon Dieu's concern. He knew best, after all, and if He had sent this boy, this visionary, to lead them out of bondage, out of bondage he would surely lead them. Whither? That, again, was for le Bon Dieu to settle, he and Pierre.

Monsieur le Curé, see you, would of course be a third member of this council speaking reverently; that was only his right as Curé and le Bon Dieu's way. And Pierre had spoken of a Land of Promise, Quebec? But no. They had no wish now to go back to Quebec. Where then? Why, in the Great Northwest. We discovered it, they would have said, nous autres Canadiens, we have a better right to it than all these heretics, foreigners, tous ces gens là, who were crowding in there. How to get there? That, once more, was for le Bon Dieu to settle; he, Monsieur le Curé and Pierre Martin, qu'ils s'arrangent. All this, be it noted, with the utmost reverence under the semblance of a familiarity to which colder, less fervid races are unaccustomed. Not a word of the seeming fatalism anything but a simple trust in God, simply expressed.

Pierre Martin, then, had merely given expression to that which many felt, and at a moment when they were prepared to listen to them. Not that even yet he looked upon himself as sent in any special way; still less as fit for the task which seemed, nevertheless, to be laid upon him. Father Gagnon, moreover, whom he loved and trusted had said more than once things which pointed to but one conclusion, namely, that this Exodus, of which he dreamed, for which he longed and prayed, was indeed to be his task. As to his own fitness, he had no illusions, but with the same faith and trust these others showed, the faith and trust of his race, he left that and all else to le Bon Dieu. Also, quite naturally, to Monsieur le Curé. An attitude of mind concerning which will be remarked that it was a surer indication of his fitness for leadership than any conscious "vocation"—possibly egotistical—could have them.

Having, however, as he had confessed to Father Gagnon, an attraction elsewhere, the lad was not often present at the councils held in his brother's house. Amable Gosselin, lamed by an accident some years before was more or less a prisoner in his own home once his daily toil in the factory was over. He had told Pierre of his "dream," and had sent for him to "talk it over." That Françoise the eldest daughter with her grave, sweet face and eyes that seemed to read his soul, her whole attitude of one of intelligent interest in what was being said, should be a constant listener as she sat sewing for the younger children with whom she took her dead mother's place, added an unacknowledged, indefinable charm to evenings of conversation and discussion which, in any case, had for Pierre a strong and natural attraction. Later, before very long, indeed, he came to understand wherein the charm consisted, and how much the quiet encouragement of her kindly eyes of her mere presence, meant to him, and acknowledged to himself and to the Curé all its force and sweetness.

Yet if Pierre were absent from the discussions at his brother's house, there were many present, young as well as old, since Jean's kitchen or verandah according to weather and season, had come to be looked on as the gathering place of those who believed in the Exodus, where ever Monsieur le Curé not infrequently put in an appearance. Perhaps, in this instance also, there may have been for one or more an attraction other than the hopes of possible relief from a bondage, which on their shoulders lay not quite so heavily or so hopelessly as on those of their elders.

To two members of the informal committee of ways and means, at all events, there was just such an attraction, for Madeleine, in her own way, was as deserving of attention and devotion as Françoise Gosselin or any girl in Middlehampton. Of these one, Edouard Zay, was nominally of her race and faith, actually more americanized, as to both, than the girl at all approved of, though his professed belief in the Exodus made her hopeful of his return to other and better things than even his own land. It was only her woman's consciousness of her personal responsibility for his zeal in the cause which kept her from unquestioning belief in its reality; a consciousness and a doubt which, with the equally careful to keep to herself. The other, about her own mind, though even in his case she had her uncertainties, was George Toner, an American, and a native of Middlehampton of Puritan descent and such faith as he could lay claim to. But if not very devout, he was a good, honest lad, of clean life and speech; one whom any woman might trust and respect, as Madeleine was ready to admit. Whether, however, she was prepared to trust him with her life's happiness was a question she found it less easy to answer.

Why, he, an American, should take part in discussions concerning a possible return of these aliens to their own land, he might have found it hard to explain satisfactorily, even to himself, still more to Madeleine had it been possible for her to ask him. Not being given, however, to introspection or to self-questioning, he was content to leave the explanation, should it ever become necessary or trouble him in any way, to time and circumstances. Interested in this movement, real or assumed, gave him his first share nor was aware of even if it did not hurt her, "guess 'I'd better go" while I can," he added mentally. But if he had, unwittingly, in his new gloves, hurt or startled her, he made full amends, for with a chivalry, new to him as to her, he raised the thin, toil-worn fingers to his lips and kissed them. Then went at once lest he should spoil all by staying longer.

And that was Madeleine's problem which, notwithstanding her protests to her lover, still remained to be solved. Might it not be her duty to say yes, after all, for his sake, not for her own

interest, as expressed; Madeleine, herself, accepted his presence without seeking to analyse his reasons for coming so often, or her own acceptance; pleasure, she would not as yet even to herself acknowledge it to be. Only Madame Jean, busy with her own thoughts and with her children's clothes, drew her own conclusions and spoke of them to nobody, not even to her husband, which was merely a true woman's loyalty to one of her own sex.

Nor were Marie Martin's conclusions by any means wide of the mark, since Madeleine, with true feminine unaccountability, had already made her choice, though so far wholly unaware that she had done so, between the man of her own race and faith and the one who was in both an alien. But when, on one memorable evening, George Toner saw his opportunity and seized it her conscience took alarm.

The young man, who had told the old story in the world-old way, stood waiting for the answer which, he felt, he had every reason to hope for. To his intense surprise, however, Madeleine broke away from him, crying passionately: "No! no! no! I cannot, I cannot!"

"Can't what, dear?" he asked gently, crossing the room to where she was and standing close to her; "can't love me? Is that what you mean?" Some subtle sense, loves intuition, her whole attitude told him it was not so even before she spoke, told him that she loved him. "Oh! it is not that," she said, distressfully, yet not at all intending to move away from him, a fact which encouraged him not a little.

A paused ensued, during which he resolved to try another method of attack. "You do love me, don't you?" he persisted, possessing himself of her hand, which she tried, not very hard as he fancied, to draw away.

"No answer," Madeleine! more softly yet more persistently. "You do love me, don't you?" he repeated, almost in a whisper, to which, as it seemed to her, her very soul swayed, as a reed to the wind. Perhaps he, too, guessed that it did so. "I know you do," he went on, gaining confidence in his new method of pleading his cause. "No! no! no!" she repeated, almost sobbing, "I cannot, I cannot!"

"You must not!" for he had stopped to claim the kiss he felt he had fairly won. "Oh," she exclaimed, sinking weakly into a chair, "can't you understand? I must not love you, must not." Here she stopped suddenly, remembering that, so far, though she could not doubt his meaning, he had not, in so many words, asked her to be his wife. She was all trembling with maidenly confusion when she realized what she had so naively said.

But George Toner, with an honest lover's sympathy, guessed what she wished to convey, even if he could not as yet fully understand what was troubling her, what could possibly stand between them, since she loved him. "You mean you must not marry me? Is that it, little one?" he said, very gently.

Her only answer was an inclination of her head, with its wealth of dark brown hair, the head he loved so dearly; which he had hoped by now to find resting as of right on his shoulder. "Might have guessed it," he continued quietly, "guess I'm a heretic to you; one of the Gentiles, as my old mother used to say. Well, little one, with a cheerfulness he surely did not feel, but which won him fresh love and fresh regret from the girl who longed, more than ever, to give him the answer he hungered for. "If that's so, I'm out of it. I haven't much like other folks change on my mind, I reckon, but I can't be right on that I have got, not right away, at least. Wouldn't make you proud of me, I guess, if I did," he concluded, "would it now?"

"You know it would not," was all that she could say. But she knew, even as she said it, that she loved him all the more for his manly honesty; honesty as the phrase once so familiar to him, must have occurred to him, later, if not at the moment, "to his own hindrance." There was another pause, fraught for both of them with a silent anguish each alone could understand, yet with no less a comfort to each of them from the mere presence and fellowship of the other. Even now, after all that had passed, it was hard to say good-night and leave her, when he had hoped for so different an ending to his venture. Then, timidly, for him, he asked one more question, or rather repeated one already asked.

"You do love me, don't you?" he pleaded, taking her hand again. Why should he not? she said to herself, since this was their good-bye.

"You know I do." Once more a whisper only, but his ears, as a lover's should be, were quick to catch it, as his heart was to draw fresh hope from it.

"Then that's all right," he returned, so cheerfully, that even as she thanked him for it, she wondered a little sadly how he could even seem to take it so lightly.

Was that the answer? If not where was it to be found? Certainly not in her own heart, which pleaded, passionately, incessantly, on his behalf; nor in his conscience, whose impartiality she could no longer trust. Wisely, therefore, she did not attempt a task which, she saw at once, was far beyond her strength; but just as Pierre had done went to Father Gagnon, as she would have gone to her own father had he been living, for the help and counsel she felt sure of getting.

How or in what words she told her story she could never afterwards tell. All that she knew was that the good priest Pierre—though this, of course, he did not tell her—to faith, prayer and patience.

"Wait, my daughter," he said, gently, after much that she would keep in mind she knew to her dying day: "love comes from le Bon Dieu, and returns to Him. But it takes us with it." "You love this man?" he continued quietly, "and trust him?" She seemed to take her answer for granted, but he bent her head. "Eh! bien! trust le Bon Dieu, for I know you love Him."

"Do I?" she asked, humbly; a humility which he could not doubt or question, any more than he had doubted Pierre's.

"Yes," he returned, gravely but kindly, "or you would not be here now. You would have followed your own will, not God's. . . . And, if you had," he added, "you would have lost your lover's love." "Should I?" She was surprised, but even more so at her own lack of belief, her astonishment she thought she ought to feel. Yet some intuitive love-knowledge of her lover's nature, told her that the priest was right.

"Yes, for the man is honest," was the answer, "and would, in time, very soon, perhaps, have come to despise you for your want of loyalty to duty. . . . And that, you know, kills all real love."

"Yes, Father," she made answer, smiling bravely. And bravely set herself to do as Monsieur le Curé had bidden her, not without hope, though that, indeed, she did not admit even to herself.

CHAPTER XII. THE HAND OF GOD.

The dull, sweltering weather of that memorable summer, instead of growing more endurable, grew daily more oppressive, until Dr. Terry's worst epidemic of cholera broke out. The epidemic seemed only too likely to be realized, and about the middle of July there were, as he had anticipated, a certain number of cases with an unusually high percentage of death. At the beginning of August the cases were more numerous, with a still higher relative mortality, till finally his report that they were dying "like flies in a frost" was nearer to truth than to exaggeration.

That he had plenty of willing helpers, most of all when older children, growing lads and girls, began to sicken in turn, does not need to be told. Side by side, Father Gagnon, the various denominations and the ministers of various religions, were called to help and comfort those upon whom God had laid His hand thus heavily. In the Catholic Church in all places where men and women met to pray, petitions were offered, the burden of which was the same in every instance: "Spare, O Lord! Spare Thy people!" a prayer for pity, for removal of the chastisement that had fallen upon them.

And if in many a heart which in its perplexity had forgotten the deeper, deeper, reaching sense of sin, of personal rector, there was raised a tender, more than fearful pity for the suffering, perishing little ones. This epidemic was from the Hand of God; a punishment for the transgression of His laws. But there were many who repeated David's question, even as Father Gagnon had asked it, when Dr. Terry first warned him of the impending trouble: "As for these sheep, what have they done?"

Indeed, there could be few if any who at such a time could realize that the poor city-borne babies, the ill-developed, over-worked children of the streets, slums and factories, were being "taken away from the evil to come," evil physical as well as moral and spiritual. They were fewer yet who saw that this toll of wasted lives was practically the cost to the race of industrial as compared with agricultural labor.

didn't say what law, though. May be Nature's, as you say, may be God's, as Father Gagnon says; may be both. Anyway, it's the only kind of 'sin' I know, just now, and it's bad enough, in all conscience, judging by the way we are paying for it."

"I did not think you would believe in sin," answered the minister, not quite sure what to make of such a profession of faith on the part of a free-thinker. "But the fact remains," he continued, reverting to his first assertion, "that this epidemic is merely the result of unsanitary modes of living, of a violation of the laws of Nature."

"Just so," returned the doctor, placidly, "a sin against Nature; a transgression of the law." "Then you admit that it is not a question of 'sin against God,' as these orthodox priests and parsons preach, but the confident rejoinder, as of a man who feels that at last he has gained his point.

"No, I don't." The reply was prompt and not lacking in decision. "I guess Nature's laws are God's laws—if I guess is what you say He is." There was just the slightest emphasis on the personal, the slightest emphasis on the personal, as if a man violates the laws of Nature, that is 'sin' so far as he is concerned, and he's going to pay for it, sure and fully, sooner or later. And he can't plead ignorance, either. This time, it's the children who are paying, first and worst, as they always do. Presently it'll be the grown ups. You can't fool Nature, Mister Minister, no; and you can't fool God Almighty."

"Seems to me," was the retort, "that's just what they are trying to do." The minister had his vanity, and more interested in a subject which, if wholly novel, was yet wholly fascinating to a man who loved his kind, French Papists not excepted, as he did.

"Why should they? Quebec, I reckon, is pretty much like New England, a country that needs clearing, scientific farming, fertilizers, God knows what all. That means capital, which they haven't got."

"But there is plenty of cleared land in both surly." The minister spoke more as one anxious for information, than as disputing the doctor's conclusions.

"Yes, plenty, as you say, but it's mostly small farms, and they're mostly mortgaged. That is what has sent them to the factories; that is what is turning much of New England, or will soon, into waste land again. At the best, the small eastern farmer can no more hold his own, in cereals, anyway, against the west than John Hammond can fight the New England Cotton Company. He's bound to go under—that is the farmer, anyway—if he is two thousand miles nearer the market, or change his methods, which is just what he can't or won't do. No, sir, the West is the poor man's country, you take it from me. Lots of cleared land, plenty water, fresh soil, railroads handy, better climate, everything in its favor."

"I suppose you're right," was the answer, as each went his way; the minister to think over what he had heard, the doctor to arrange about Pierre's journey, first to Ottawa and then to Saskatchewan, way back of beyond, as he had put it. Also, to impart certain information to Father Gagnon, concerning the plans and proposals of the Saskatchewan Land and Improvement Company lately supplied by John Hammond senior, details of which will be given in their proper place.

Thus it came about that some days later there was a meeting at the priest's house of those chiefly and most keenly interested in the Exodus, women as well as men, for the minister, as well as the Padre, as Dr. Terry was wont to call him, what women's influence, women's enthusiasm and women's prayers can bring about, even to the seemingly impossible. The doctor himself was there, as a matter of course, since to his generosity Pierre was to owe the means of taking him to his destination. Equally of course Pierre, the Joshua, as Dr. Terry said laughingly, was to see to it that when he returned how good and fair he had found it to be. "Pity we haven't two other spies to go with you," he went on.

communicative as a clan just now, may be the hand of man'll help to set things going. Micky's too quiet to be natural; he knows something or I miss my guess."

"What do you mean by the hand of man?" asked the minister, a perfectly natural question, as the doctor readily admitted. Moreover, his reverence was felt sure, one to be safely trusted as discreet.

"Well," he answered, "we're not talking about it just yet but I mean that there'll be a strike or a lockout pretty soon. Depends who hustles most, the labor union or the New England Cotton Company. One or the other'll knock old John Hammond out, sure's you're living, if he don't get ahead of them and make the first move, which is not so unlikely as they seem to think."

"May be he'll surprise them!" Dr. Terry chuckled. The notion appealed to his sense of poetic justice probably. "Anyway," he resumed, "the mills will close down, which ever way it goes. Then these Canucks will just have to 'get up and git,' as we say. There won't be anything else then, no. The labor union don't love 'em, you can swear to that, and they'll make no terms with the Company so long as they employ 'cheap foreign labor.' That's the way they put it, ain't it?"

"Yes. . . . Then you think the Canadians will have to go?" "Think? I don't think!" was the rejoinder. "I'm sure of it. That's why I'm paying Pierre Martin's way to find a place for them to go to."

"Why not back to their own Province of Quebec?" enquired the minister who grew every moment more and more interested in a subject which, if wholly novel, was yet wholly fascinating to a man who loved his kind, French Papists not excepted, as he did.

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"but I guess you'll ly as some of you the Jordan ahead."

"Yes," said Fatherly, "some as you al that we didn't al referring to him from Job to him from Job, you doctor, 'you a Hammond to Le Monsieur le Curé. You have already not?" he asked.

"Yes, Monsieur Pierre, at Saint How indeed could beginning of his spoken to be as proved by his strangely infatu resuming will go to him to has to say. It se for getting land Canadian parliament things much en continued," you Abbe Provost, at chevan—M. Bilo to get there—no me. Then you will him and he But chiefly you sieur Bilodeau."

"Yes, Monsieur again, adding vidence rare in ot showed how deec whole subject, How much an selves I mean. "In that, wa be guided by Mo the priest went give him some selves, as you s "How many a applicant?" pu point. Then a rupture.

"Not at all, cordially," in just about to ash a hundred and the usual grant. The doctor n first, however, facts as might l "How many a he enquired. "Three thou about fifteen "Then Pierre ator man for s with," resumed time had worka fact. "You wa."

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