

RED & BLUE RANCH

Formal excommunications are rarely mentioned in the history of Canada. In his interesting work, "A Travers les Régistres," Monseigneur Tanguay gives an instance of such a sentence being pronounced under extraordinary circumstances. It occurs on page 156, under the date February, 1754, in the following terms:—

"Le 15—Mariage à la gominie et excommunication:— Les nommés Pierre Benard et Catherine Laviolette, s'étant mariés, le 15 février, à la gominie, pendant l'élévation de la Sainte-Hostie, le mandement de Mgr. de Saint-Valier, contre ces détestables mariages, a été lu au prône, le dimanche après, 24^{me} jour du même mois, sur l'ordonnance de Mr. Lenormant, Vicaire-général du diocèse, et les prétendus mariés ont été déclarés, en conséquence, excommuniés."

(*Rég. de la Pointe-aux-Trembles, Montréal.*)

In another work of great interest, "Les Anciens Canadiens," by the late Philippe Aubert de Gaspé, we find among the "Notes et Eclaircissements," the statement that several of the *habitants*, who, during the Revolutionary War, persisted in siding with the Americans, in the expectation that, through the French allies of the latter, Canada would be restored to France, had, after frequent, though fruitless, warnings, been regretfully excommunicated by their *curés*. Many graves of these unfortunates were formerly, says De Gaspé, to be seen on the south side of the St. Lawrence, below Quebec. He also mentions that one of these rebels, being approached by his priest when on his death-bed and exhorted to confess his error, the dying man, raising himself and regarding his adviser with a look of contempt, reproached him with his English sympathies, then turned to the wall and expired.

Our Laureate, Dr. Fréchette, has made "Les Excommuniés" the subject of a pathetic poem, of which we have just received a translation from an always welcome and greatly venerated contributor, Mr. Wicksteed, Q.C., whose portrait and biography were published some months ago in our columns. It closely follows the original, both in letter and spirit, the only departure being the use of blank verse instead of the rhymed couplet. We present our readers with the closing and most touching portion of the poem, in Mr. Wicksteed's version:

Five only braved the blow;—but these resembled
In their proud folly, the unshaken rock;
They let the thunder growl above their heads,
And in despite of insult and of fears
Sublimely mad, in holy ignorance,
Refused to bow to any God but France!
Old age crept on them,—death came in its turn,—
And without priest, or cross, in that rough plot,
Close by the muddy road, where cattle browse,
These stubborn souls lay down in turn to sleep.

One yet remained, a broken-down old man,
A shadow; five and twenty years had passed
Since on his head the anathema had fallen.
Bowed on his trembling staff, with whited lip,
On the deserted road he oft was seen
At twilight, wandering in the rain and storm,
Spectre-like,—turning oft his eyes away,
To shun the child that pelted him with stones,
He plunged alone into the shades of night.
And more than one affirmed to having seen him,
—The village women crossed themselves in fright—
Kneeling in darkness by the unblessed graves.

One day they found him frozen stiff; his hand
Had in its weakness on the road let fall
An ancient rusted gun,—his old-time weapon,
His friend in the brave days,—his war companion,
His latest comrade and his supreme hope.

They dug into the black and hardened soil,
And laid in that new grave, and side by side,
The old French musket and the old-time rebel.

The people cherish yet this sad remembrance;
And when the sunset gold fades into grey,
The passer through St. Michel de Bellechasse,
Belated at his sport with rod or gun,
Fearing to see some sheeted spectre rise,
Turns trembling from the fatal spot away.

So these five peasants had for burial place,
Five little mounds where cattle seek their food!
Deserved it,—yes—perhaps! Yet men will say
They were in truth five heroes after all!

I bow, no doubt, to the decree that struck them,
Yet, when by chance I pass along that road,
—Not asking God if I be right or wrong—
I pause—uncovered—near those lowly graves!

In the early days of THE DOMINION ILLUSTRATED, we were favoured with the copy of a poem on the Battle of Marathon by a learned judge of the Ontario Bench. Our attention is again called to it by "G. W. W.," who writes:

"Your talented and highly esteemed literary editor, Laclède, noticed it in enthusiastic terms, saying very truly that, in its thirty-five pages, he found every line faultless and most interestingly poetical. It was our intention, with Laclède's assistance, to give a further account of the poem, with extracts from it, and to say something about the incidents by which

"Marathon became a magic name"—

and

"Saved Progress, Genius, Arts in mature glow,
"From sinking in barbaric overflow."

But we must now content ourselves with two extracts—one relating to the Religion of the Greeks, the victors, and the other to that of the Persians, the vanquished, in this battle, on which the fate of Greece and Europe depended. Our poet thus sings of the Religion of the Greeks and its origin:—

"The old Greek, dreaming in the shade
And bower, beside some limpid wave,
Drank the sweet sounds its music made,
As voice the local Genius gave.
The cataract leaped joyous down,—
The red bolt clove the thunder cloud—
The tempest smote the forest crown—
The mountain rose through misty shroud,—
Vision and Power and thunder sound
Took Godhead's form and altar found."

It was a creed for Earth's fresh prime.
Her Morning-land of young romance,
Tuneful with earliest minstrel's rhyme,—
Flushed in her Sun-god's kindling glance.
It was a web of earthly frame
Lit by a glory downward given;
Its roof was Valour, Beauty, Fame,
Its hues what poets dreamed of heaven,
And kindling eye and bended knee,
Worship'd in rapt idolatry.

It was a creed of light and grace,
Of soaring thought and strain sublime,
Meet for an old heroic race,
For dwellers in a sun-lit clime.
It scattered o'er their glorious land
Fair shrines, earth's fairer haunts to bless,
Where—grav'n by Art's immortal hand,
Rose crowned, each wandering Loveliness.
And o'er truth's dazzled eyes it threw
A fairy veil of golden hue.

Scorn not the visions of the Past,—
Their erring votaries' vows and prayers;
Their heaven in earthly mould was cast,
But Faith—impassioned Faith—was theirs.
O'er altar crushed,—o'er ruined fane
Some heart of poet-mould might yearn,
To hail the world's fresh youth again,—
Its Morning-land of Faith return,—
The old fair dream—Life, flowers and smiles
And o'er Death's wave, the blessed Isles."

And then our poet sings of the sun-worshipping Persians in this fashion:—

"Knowest thou those ancient rites?
No vaulted arch their praise confines.
Not theirs the pomp of laboured shrines;
Their Sun-God boasts a nobler home,
His own broad Heaven's illumined dome,—
His shrines, the mountain heights,
Green earth and dawn-flushed sea.

Bold the rude creed their founder taught,
From Reason's simple childhood caught;
An erring Faith, yet half divine,
Wandering from Truth's eternal line.
But scarce Idolatry!

Simple the rites—Each white-stoled Priest
Stands gazing on the Sun-flushed East,
Whence radiant from his ocean dawn,
Their glorious King comes journeying on;
Tow'rd's his bright car each hand lifts up
To the blue heaven the golden cup,—
On high the rich libations poured,—
Their Flame, God's mounting orb's adored,—
Sinks to the earth the mighty host
In breathless adoration lost;
And vows are breathed and prayer is said,
Till the dread rites are told;
And the awed spirit felt that hour
The influence of a present power,—
His God above him rolled!

And thus the great battle is ushered in by the prayers of each host after its fashion. The incidents are magnificently told. The Greeks are victorious and the Persians seek shelter in their ships. Euclès, the hero of the story, is sent as herald to announce the victory to the Athenians. He has been sorely wounded, but runs the twenty-three miles between Marathon and the city and falls exhausted when he reaches it, unable to announce the victory. His betrothed, the daughter of the Athenian commander, Callimachus, kneels beside him,—

"And then a new found voice
From the tired life last effort makes
Though in the strife the brave heart breaks,—
'Victory! Rejoice! Rejoice!'

Slow on the white arm droops the youthful head,
The soldier sleeps—the living clasps the dead!"

The following extract from "Mary of Nazareth," a poem recently published in England, of which Sir J. C. Barrow, Bart., is the author, will probably be new to most of our readers:

LEGENDS OF EGYPT.

Tradition tells how once at daily toil,
Near golden-gated Heliopolis—
No water lying on the sun-burnt soil—
How, sore athirst, the Infant Jesus wept,
Till Mary offered up her tears with His;
When, on a sudden, at her feet there leapt
A spring of virgin water from the ground;
And as in showers the crystal drops fell round
They wed themselves together in a well,
By side whereof she might with Jesus dwell—
A well that sprang—the Arab still avers—
From that same mingling of His tears with hers.

Tradition tells, moreover, how there stood
A giant tree beside the golden gate
Of that same city—tree of ancient date,
And worshipped by the worshippers of Wood—
A tree which ever and anon, 'twas said,
When men drew near, bowed down its leaf-crowned
head;
And how, when Mary brought her Jesus there,
It bowed its branches downwards through the air,
Until they kissed the ground she trod, and then
Uprose, and never more bowed down to men.

THE ROMANCE OF CHESS.

The great game has its tender, its romantic, side, as no game can have at which more than two people play. It smiles on lovers, and can even be the cause of love. Only a few years ago a chess player condemned to live in the country solaced his solitude by playing games by correspondence. Post cards daily brought or daily took his move. His antagonist was a lady; before the contest was over he had got to know this lady, and their acquaintance ripened into intimacy, intimacy into love, and love was crowned with marriage. And this couple, not unmindful of the kindly influence which had brought them together, determined that the very rites of their marriage should "something savour" of the game. So they invited from London a certain clergyman whose genial face—"the front of Mars himself"—is well known in chess circles; none but a chess player of his eminence should celebrate their union. And when bridegroom and bride rose from the wedding breakfast it was only to sit down to a game of chess—the first of their wedded life. Ah! happy, happy pair, under what happy auspices did you start on the highway of marriage! What a fine air of romance, of sweet tenderness, lingers round these lines of Lord Lytton:

"My little love, do you remember,
Ere we were grown so sadly wise,
Those evenings in the bleak December,
Curtained warm from the snowy weather
When you and I played chess together,
Checkmated by each other's eyes?
Ah! still I see your soft white hand
Hovering warm o'er queen and knight."

And so on to the sad close when the poet laments:

"That never, never, never more,
As in those old still nights of yore,
Ere we were grown so sadly wise,
Can you and I shut out the skies;
Shut out the world and wintry weather,
And eyes exchanging warmth with eyes,
Play chess as then we played together."

—The Gentleman's Magazine.