

"THE CLASH" A Study in Canadian Nationalities

by W. H. MOORE

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THIS is an extremely interesting and a singularly well-written book; though polemical, it has neither of the worst vices of such books—it is neither demagogic nor yet is it perverse. I mean it is not written in the first place with a view to catch the majority of the people who speak its language, and to whom it might naturally appeal; it does not play to the gallery; it is not addressed to the groundlings.

If it appeals to British sentiment, it is only in the sense, to which the London "Spectator" refers, when, in reviewing this book, it remarks that it appeals to the British sense of fair play, to the British sympathy with the under-dog; to the British leaning towards small and oppressed nationalities; it appeals, in short, not to the British and selfish prejudices of British readers, but to all that is generous and unselfish in such readers.

There is no national characteristic more deeply ingrained in our people than this tendency to take the side of the weaker cause. It was present even in the old aristocratic government of Great Britain, when it was called British justice. It is doubly present to-day, when that government has been superseded by democracy; democracy which is simply the government of national character, unmodified and unrestrained by wider knowledge and deeper experience of life, shows the old British good humour, and good nature, and tolerance in excelsis, so that at the present moment we behold the British democracy and the American, which has inherited the same traits, parting company with the equally democratic or even more democratic government of France, in order to parley with, and to seek to come to terms with, the anarchists and Bolsheviks of Russia.

Neither is this book open to the other and opposite charge, that it is merely contradictory, perverse, and in the bad but usual sense, academic.

Writers who hate demagogism, as academic people invariably hate it, continually fall over on the other side; in their effort to walk upright they lean backwards; they are fair to every race except their own; the friends of every country except their own. There are always in Great Britain hosts of such perverse people. It is only during the agony of a great war that they are actively disliked, and actively mischievous; only then that their bias against their own country is a practical nuisance.

Even Mr. George Bernard Shaw was tolerable enough in peace and popular enough; it is only in war that we resent his remarkable likeness to Georg Bernhard. It is too bad, that when we

were struggling for existence, our national dramatist should be indistinguishable in his sentiments from his German homonym. But apart from such times of crisis his readers, if they have any sense of humour, bear with his academic perversities, and prefer them after all to demagogism.

Academic perversities may be a form of false doctrine, heresy, schism and hardness of heart, especially of the last-named quality, the fruitful source of the other three vices. They may be in war more mischievous for the moment even than demagogism; but war, after all, is a temporary and a very brief interlude in our normal life.

Mr. Moore then does not write like a captious Shavian sophist, though he contradicts the popular side; he does not contradict popular ideas just for the sake of writing "shilling shockers," just for the sake of offending the man in the street; just "pour epates le bourgeois." He has read widely, and carefully, and wisely, and gives sober reasons for his conclusions. Perhaps, the weakest part of his book is not any lack of evidence for his immediate conclusions, or any incorrectness in the points he makes, from chapter to chapter, so much as in a certain general irrelevance to the real points at issue.

After all, the real question is not whether Anglo-Canadians or French-Canadians are very different racially, still less whether Anglo-Canadians are better men of business than French-Canadians. One may grant that the greater business capacity of the Anglo-Canadian is partly an accident of the age, and an accident, in addition, of little real significance. That greater business ability, in fact, is only a defect from another and an equally sound point of view. It connotes deficiencies quite equal to its qualities; it connotes spiritual barrenness just as much as material wealth.

But all these large questions are not really the issue; the issue is rather two-fold.

Is Ontario unjust in resisting what some of her people take to be a more or less deliberate hostile scheme for weakening her British or her American spirit? For introducing, artificially and insidiously, another language and religion into portions of the Province which have been, not indeed originally, yet at least latterly—until yesterday—neither French-speaking nor yet Roman Catholic?

So far as the invasion of Ontario by Quebec is natural and spontaneous, the result of the soundest of all forces, a real love of the land and of the farm, which our English-speaking Canadians are deserting for the dollar, and the city, and the movies, how can it be lawfully resisted? How can it be, in fact, resisted at all? To resist it is merely to fight against the laws of life, and of nature, and of God. But so far as it is a political scheme organized by the French-speaking Romanists, why should Ontario submit to it?

That it is, in some degree at least, a political propaganda of this sort, is at least a suspicion emanating by no means only from Orange fanatics. Why, a large part of the resistance to it comes from other Catholics; from the Irish Catholics of Ontario. If they cannot live in peace with the French Catholics of Quebec, if they are driven to shake the dust of Ottawa from their feet and to migrate to Toronto to get University education for their sons, if they are crowding the halls of a Catholic College in Toronto, is it still easy to believe that the French invasion of

Ontario is only the innocent, natural, inevitable thing which Mr. Moore represents it to be? And why is the sinister figure of Monsieur Bourassa behind it? No Orangeman has done more to make Canadian unity impossible. Mr. Moore has mentioned Mr. Bourassa four times in his book; on each occasion he deals very gently with the fanatic mischief-maker. Australia has Archbishop Mannix, Canada has Monsieur Bourassa. In dealing with the general charge of a clerical crusade against British-speaking Canada, Mr. Moore is more successful. He quotes most aptly a circular calling for French-Canadian immigration to New Ontario and referring immigrants to French-Canadian clerical agents; and then he shows triumphantly that the circular was issued by the Dominion Government itself and that the curés were named as the natural agents for reaching French-Canadians expatriated in the United States.

Well then, for the sake of argument, or rather for the sake of peace, let us drop that side of the charge and take the other side, the less venomous and the less bitter side. We said before that the issue was twofold.

Why are the Irish Catholics, once more we may ask, resisting the French movement? Nay more, why, in the last few weeks has a movement arisen in the Quebec legislature itself against the education of the Lower Province? Why have French Catholics protested that the truancy and the illiteracy of Quebec are a danger to the youth of the Province? Is it not possible, is it not reasonable to suppose, that the policy of the Education Office of Ontario, a policy at first sight unnatural for Ontario Liberals and unnatural for Ontario Conservatives, inconsistent, *prima facie*, with the traditions of each party, a break with the principles of Sir Oliver Mowat in Ontario, not less than with the principles of Sir Charles Tupper in Ottawa, is it not reasonable to suppose that a policy so distasteful for obvious reasons to the politicians of either party, was forced in some considerable measure on the Ontario Education Office by the inefficiency, the illiteracy, the truancy of the French Catholic school? Presumably, the directors of French education hold to the highest power the creed common enough in all Churches, and appealing still to members of all Churches, that character, and not education in the narrow sense, is the highest function of the common school. Presumably, they hold that French children acquire character, if not a narrow education, by learning their national creed and a spice of their national language, that so dowered they are happier than they would be with a wider and more modern education. Happier "contented" than haunted by that modern discontent, mis-called "divine." All Churchmen of all Churches understand that argument and have a broad sympathy with it. But there is an equally broad argument against it, once expressed in England by that master of reason and cool judgment, the late Duke of Devonshire, the uncle of the present Governor-General of Canada, "the great refrigerator," as he was once nicknamed, the man who put heated argument into the cold storage of his commonsense, and brought it out again in a form better fitted for wholesome consumption. "It is not a question of happiness," he said, "it is a question of efficiency and ultimately of survival." The world is governed, for this age of experiment at any rate, and especially for this great experiment of democracy, by education and by efficiency. A happy, but inefficient, illiterate democracy can not compete with other democracies, or with any other efficient people, democratic or aristocratic, and will lose first its happiness, then life itself in the struggle for existence. Perhaps, this is the secret weakness of French-Canadian education, at which even regulation 17, however clumsily, is aimed.



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