

Personalities and Problems

4---Most Rev. Dr. Paul Bruchesi

The Archbishop of Montreal, an Ecclesiastical Statesman

By AUGUSTUS BRIDLE

THE dome of St. James is a replica, one size smaller, of St. Peter's at Rome. Across the park and just down the street rises the square Norman buttress of the new C. P. R. extension; perhaps the biggest block of transportation offices in the world.

These two, the dome and the square tower, almost dominate Montreal. One stands for just about all the other doesn't—except that the dome of St. James tacitly symbolizes a good many millions of wealth tied up in the city of Montreal. Quite possibly Pope Pius X. has never heard of the C. P. R. But if he has we may surmise that His Grace Monseigneur Paul Bruchesi has told him. For most assuredly the Roman Church and the C. P. R. are two of the greatest systems under the sun.

Apart from its dome, St. James is not particularly handsome—though decidedly imposing. Its twelve apostles over the front facade are quite tawdry. The location is splendid. Some sordid soul may compute its value at so much a square foot, which is the way they measure real estate in Montreal. But if it were a million dollars a foot I suppose the Church would still keep St. James there in the middle of the town. And if one should stand on the tip of St. James dome he might count most of a hundred spires and towers surmounted by crosses.

THE Archbishop lives in one of the ugliest big houses in that part of Canada; the Palace fronting on Lagauchetiere St. over a stone parapet, thrusting its surly red brick right up to the stones of the cathedral. But Monseigneur Bruchesi, much talked about in the newspapers, quite makes up by his charm of personality for the ugliness of the house he lives in. The first time I called to see him he was too busy to be interviewed. The priest who tells you how busy His Grace is happens to be a jovial, very likeable Irishman. The Archbishop likes the Irish. A large number of his priests are Irish, and a good many of his churches have nothing but the "St." to do with anything in France or Italy. Ten years ago on one of his trips to the Vatican, Mgr. Bruchesi being in Dublin, a guest of the Archbishop, visited the tomb of Daniel O'Connell, from which he plucked a sprig of shamrock and sent it to one of his Irish priests on the eve of St. Patrick's Day in the morning. And you can tell from the bubbling enthusiasm of Father McCorry, who makes appointments for His Grace, that the Archbishop is an immensely popular man with the Irish. French, Italian, Irish are the three national ties that bind him to the Church.

He was born in Montreal. Most of his education he got in Canada; at least the part that can't be got by travelling; and the Archbishop travels a good bit, is an excellent linguist, considerably cosmopolitan, at college was brilliant, as a priest a man of hard work, as bishop popular, as Archbishop, succeeding Mgr. Fabre in 1897, the youngest in that office ever known in America. He is still a young man in energy and enthusiasm. Montreal knows him independent of St. James as the brigadier-general of all moral reform movements, as the friend of charity, as the excellent, informal mixer in all functions having to do with the betterment of social and religious conditions where it's neither Catholic nor Protestant nor Jew, but just man to man working for the good of the common weal.

Being Archbishop of Montreal is one of the heaviest jobs that a man might pick out. New parishes are carved out with much the same feverish haste that new towns rise on the prairie. The ordinary ecclesiastical labour is enormous. Montreal is the real chapter of Roman Catholicism in Canada. The Archbishop is the effective head of the Church in this country. His lot is to work like a Trojan at the traditional machinery; as functionary always in demand; as a publicist much studied by the newspapers; adding to all his immense active interest in social and political affairs.

IT was nine a.m., a somewhat bleak morning of new buds when I called to see Mgr. Bruchesi. The hour was his making. Before my arrival he had probably done a good part of a day's work. I waited for him in a tiresome red compartment; wondering what kind of man he was. Once a man

gets mentioned for Cardinal, as Mgr. Bruchesi was a while ago, you begin to associate him with such eagle-eyed dignitaries as Richelieu and Wolsey; men who sit next to kings. I imagined His Grace would be a stickler for form; for profound etiquette; would perhaps be intolerant of any amateurish bungling about doctrines, and surely impatient of any pretense.

For all I knew the interview might end twenty-five minutes before the end of the half-hour he had assigned to it. Lately there had been more than usual newspaper talk affecting the Church in that part of Canada. The elections in Quebec were about to begin. Down in St. Louis division one Godfroy Langlois had been making merry with



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the Jews. Charles Bruchesi, brother of the Archbishop, was one of his opponents. *Le Pays* had been going the rounds; perhaps being more discussed than the church papers. Educational reform was in the air. Day before the Archbishop had received at the Palace part of the French delegation, members of the French Academy, with speeches in the best of French, Mgr. Bruchesi's as polished as any. Two years ago, when the municipal reform movement struck Montreal, His Grace had the Church's position on the movement enunciated from the pulpits. He believes in keeping a firm, statesmanlike grip on bishops, priests and people. For nowadays there is a certain form of populism abroad, that always affects traditions; and the Church in Quebec has always been a powerful factor in politics. The bilingual question had just been given acres of space in special correspondence. The Hebert case had got past Justice Charbonneau and was now on the eve of the Supreme Court.

And to all these perplexing problems the Archbishop of Montreal was a sort of referee. Whichever way the popular movement went in politics and society, in church and school, and the world of labour, the man at the head of the Church in Montreal must make it very clear just how he

stood. Mgr. Bruchesi had never skulked behind the curtain; had never been content with caballing and cloistering. He had been for the most part a plain, obvious man, determined to keep the Church on the firing line. He had been called a reactionary; but he was no mere autocrat on a big chair, handing out dogmas from purple-broidered robes. Often he had been to Rome to see His Holiness the Pope. In the Federal elections last year he was known to be no enemy of Henri Bourassa and the Nationalists.

HERE he came bustling in; a long, black gown with a purple fringe; an elaborate crucifix and a tremendous ring; no stride or stalk or heavy port; no eagle eye and proud chin; a swift, sunshiny, small-bodied man, who at once sat down by the window and genially wanted to know what he was supposed to talk about.

Mgr. Bruchesi is an excellent talker. Though his English is accented by French mixed with Italian, it is by no means broken and is perfectly intelligible with a certain charm of edge to it that comes from a Latin twang. With eloquent gestures he spoke of his busy life in the big city which as sleepy old Montreal he had known as a child playing under the mountain; of the sixty-three parishes to which new ones are being added at the rate of two every month. By an odd movement of both hands he pictured the planting of a new parish whose church, as he said, was but an extension of the home where the father is the first school-master. This was basic. Here was the root. Politics, statecraft and sociological matters all grew out from this. And so far it was the priest rather than the bishop that was talking.

"And I am sure, Archbishop, that you still regard Montreal as essentially a French city?"

Which nowadays might be considered a paradox, when you note how the big city with the churches dotted all over it is ripping out her insides in the name of modern business.

"Yes. In 1763, when Canada became governmentally English, there were 65,000 French in Quebec. Now in Canada there are between two and three millions."

The continuity and expansion of the French in Canada seemed to be to him something like the evolution of the original Thirteen into the United States. I didn't ask him, but it seemed certain that Mgr. Bruchesi was considering Canada as a tree with a French root. Montreal is still more than half French; yet a cosmopolitan city; and he spoke of the Jews numbering more than 40,000 there.

"They are becoming very active. They are very ambitious."

HE didn't condemn the Jews; granting them equal rights with any other citizens of Canada, but not disposed to see them exempt from Christian observances, and unwilling to have them used as a means to an end for political purposes. He made no reference to their religion. It was the social and political aspect of the Hebrew problem that gave him concern. Neither did he mention Godfroy Langlois or *Le Pays*.

"The Jews cannot be considered as a real race," he said, emphatically. "They are as many nationalities as the lands they come from. In this country they reflect many tendencies."

"That is they progress, but do not—fuse?"

"It is not possible to fuse them."

"You do not think so of Germans or Scandinavians?"

"That is a different matter."

"Then is there any similarity between nationalism among the Jews and nationalism in French-Canadians?"

Again he made it very clear:

"The Jews are not, and in this part of the world cannot be, a nation."

There were other matters of more direct concern; and Mgr. Bruchesi has a mind able to deal with many problems. He preferred to go back to the root.

"The French are a case of historical evolution in this country. We should see that the genius of the French race is preserved here."

"And first of all the language?"

"Ah! Fundamental. By the Act of British North America French has equal official value and