

FROM HALIFAX TO OTTAWA.

A DIARY. (Continued.)

May 23rd.—In every way you look at it, Montreal is a fine city, and has the promise of a great future. Its quays, warehouses, and steamers, are on a scale suited to a city of half a million instead of an eighth of a million of inhabitants; and the enterprise and liberality of its merchants have the flavour of London or New York. The French element in the population is very large, but it mixes little with the Irish or British elements.—It is a world of itself, and, like our own big world, has its two hemispheres,—the docile, peaceable thousands, with few wants and simple tastes, in complete subjection to their priests, whose one great ambition in every case seems to be to have a monster church,—and the *rouge* party, who are radical and republican in politics, and infidels in religion, and who include a great proportion of the educated young men, the lawyers, and the talkers and loungers at the “Institut Canadien.” The Irish contingent is, as a whole, very respectable;—more alive to its own real Canadian interests than to the imaginary wrongs of Erin. Fenians there must be wherever the Irish are; for if a people desire a thing, they are pretty sure to get it; and so, as long as they pay men to humbug them, they will be humbugged. But I don’t think that Fenians are much more numerous in Montreal now than they are in Halifax, where it is questionable if, on special muster, they could fill one bar-room.

Montreal, however, owes more to its Scotchmen than to any other class. Its sugar-refineries, factories, steamboat lines, owe their origin to them, and are in their hands. These men began the world with little or nothing but Scotch blood and training, and most of them rightly glory in the fact; but a few, the real “*nouveaux riches*” feel acutely that it is incumbent on them to “keep up their position.” The agonies they have sometimes to go through in the attempt, the snubs they have to take as if they liked them, no tongue can tell, and Mrs. Harris herself could scarcely understand. Passing through fire and through water are as nothing in comparison. But the flunky spirit is very resolute, and to achieve its great ends will submit to any sacrifice of manhood or womanhood. It will place smilingly on the shrine of fashion poor relations, domestic comfort, the welfare of the children, old associations, the old church, in fact anything that it is hidden to sacrifice. “No nuns, no monks, no fakeers,” says Thackeray, “take whippings more kindly than some devotees of the world,” and not from a motive of “noble pride,” but only of “shabby swindling.” But while there are such exceptions, I believe that there is no city in America where so much genuine whole-hearted Scottish feeling and hospitality is to be found.

May 24th to 31st.—The Queen’s birthday celebration in Montreal was disturbed by news from a dozen directions that the Fenians were gathering along the frontier, and that this time they meant business. The volunteers flew to arms, and young men threw up their situations to join popular companies and rush to the fray. There was little excitement because the cry had been “wolf!” too often, and the cooler heads of the community predicted that nothing more was intended than to quicken the coming in of subscriptions from the Biddies who form the great *corps de reserve* of “the Irish Republican Army.” The numbers of the Fenians are always exaggerated, and not one in a dozen of them means to go further than speechifying, hurrahing, and marching in processions with green flags, sunbursts, and so forth. Disraeli’s aphorism in “Lothair” about them reads now like a prophecy: “Their treason is a fairy tale, and their sedition a child talking in his sleep.” In the late raid, not more than two or three thousand in all came to the front, though their organs spoke fluently of 50,000. But even two or three thousand armed vagabonds could do a great deal of damage if they got well in at some unprotected point; and therefore