

THE EXODUS.

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Alphonse Bilodeau had been sufficiently impressed by Pierre Martin's speech at Saint Joseph de l'Acadie, to deem it worth while to keep himself informed, casually, as it were, as to the latter's movements.

He accordingly found occasion to write to Monseigneur Demers on some indifferent subject, and, in the course of his letter, enquired, as by an indifferent after thought, as to what had become of our young orator.

The compliment, could Pierre have been aware of it, was no slight one, coming when it did, though Monseigneur Demers, better acquainted with the payer of it, might, possibly, have had his doubts whether after all it was very flattering to the lad's intelligence, whatever it might be to his sincerity and enthusiasm.

That power should rest, ultimately, on wealth, should entail rather the acquirement of riches, was in his estimate of political conditions in Canada inevitable. He had no illusions. Money was the one test of a man's success.

Since his visit to Saint Joseph de l'Acadie the idea of a great movement of repatriation, long entertained, had taken distinct shape, and had become for him a paramount issue. The time, he considered, was ripe for determining, once for all, the place which his people were to hold, or to miss holding in the growth and development of the Northwest.

The unformulated fears of Monsieur le Curé of Pontaux Marais, which pointed to this very possibility of land speculation seemed, therefore, in a fair way to be realized. Yet, could he have seen a little deeper into Senator Bilodeau's mind—either before or after the realization of that which he had dreaded—he might have found cause for hoping that the fears in question had, perhaps, been less well founded than he thought.

It was Senator Bilodeau's intention, indeed, to secure the land needed before any rumor of a possible exodus should go abroad, and in that sense at least, to speculate in it. But just as his political ambition was as much racial as personal, so, he was determined, Jean Baptiste should profit by his land deal to the fullest extent of the price he was to pay for it.

There remained certain other forces, which must, necessarily, be made use of. Money, as was natural, came first, as that on which all else must depend, politics, in the course; also, the organization of the race discords. Complimented as all this might have seemed to Monseigneur Demers, for example, it was simple enough, as he saw it. The exiles must, as he had said at Saint Joseph de l'Acadie, be made to leave the States. It was magnificently simple, he thought, complacently. Pierre's enthusiasm would, doubtless, accomplish all that could be expected of a force on which he, at least, was too wise to set any limit.

Labor, he was wont to say, was an 'unaccountable' as a woman, and just as liable to fits of unreasonable jealousy. Labor, therefore, plus race hatred, could be trusted, if properly managed, to make the exiles only too glad to return to their own land. Either word of itself was sufficient for his purpose; or, combined as he intended that they should be, they would be irresistible. There would be no difficulty, he assured himself, in getting the movement started, when the time came.

Jean Baptiste who was to benefit by repatriation, it was only fair that Jean Baptiste—or his friends in Canada—should pay for it. "C'est toujours Jean Baptiste qui paie," he mused, cynically. And Jean Baptiste should pay him—in many ways. But, if he was out of politics, he knew those who were in. All that was needed was that they should see, as clearly as he did, "what there was to it," as the familiar phrase goes.

Labor, jealousies, money, politics, not forgetting enthusiasm, personal and racial; what more was there to be provided for? Only his personal advantage; the payment he intended to exact from his beneficiary, Jean Baptiste. Power, he was determined to regain; to enter, once more, the arena of the Lower House; to be, at last, as he had hoped to be many years ago, the arbiter of the nation's destinies; of the fate of parties; of the future of his race. Nor, to say truth was this mere mean ambition, nor did he seek only. He realized all the higher, nobler possibilities of such a position, and intended the honestly enough to use them to the best of his ability; if for his own ends first, yet no less for the good of those on whose suffrages and support that power must necessarily depend. His very cynicism of plainness was the best guarantee that he would not be fool enough—so he put it to himself—to openly or even grossly misuse his opportunities.

He was, in a word, sincerely ambitious on behalf of his race, sincerely anxious to ensure for his people the place in the nation's life which he believed was theirs of right. His personal ambition was, in fact, founded largely though by no means exclusively on his conviction that he and he only could bring the task he foresaw to a really successful issue.

That power should rest, ultimately, on wealth, should entail rather the acquirement of riches, was in his estimate of political conditions in Canada inevitable. He had no illusions. Money was the one test of a man's success. And the way to wealth, in this instance as in so many others he had known, lay in land speculation. The Exodus, to be in any real sense a success, must involve the repatriation of at least one hundred thousand families to begin with, say half a million of souls, possibly more. For such a colony sixteen to twenty millions of acres would be needed. It was of the very essence of his scheme for a New Quebec that the exiles should not be scattered, but should settle on a definite area. An outcry would, he knew, be raised against colonization, as contrary to the Government's immigration policy. There could be but one answer possible—the offer of the necessary land.

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It was to this effect that he discussed with the member for South Winnipeg, M. Zephirin St. Jacques, his plans for the formation of the Saskatchewan Land and Improvement Company. That gentleman, less farsighted than his veteran acquaintance, was inclined at first to be sceptical as to its practicability. He did not see, that is, where the profits came in, and said so.

But the profits, Monsieur le Sénateur, he protested, "our scheme is magnificent, yes, but a little utopian, not so easy?" This very differentially, and with possibly some misgivings as to whether he was showing himself less perspicacious than he wished the other to think him, which, as a matter of fact, was precisely what he was doing.

omy' in school matters. A large French vote might complicate matters. "Not if they were scattered, as the Government would scatter them," was the answer. "But, par Dieu!" the Senator added, solemnly, almost fiercely, "they shall not! We will make it impossible."

"We will," returned the member for South Winnipeg, with equal earnestness. Thereupon the two men set themselves to discuss the ways and means whereby their plan for a new Quebec might be brought to a successful issue. The tract of land to be acquired must, they agreed, be not less an extent than twenty to thirty million acres, and must moreover, be as near the line of the Transcontinental Railway as possible.

"For the first five years, yes," returned Bilodeau. "Our exiles will have their rent free for that period. Then, they will pay us two, five dollars an acre, extending over a further term of ten years. It will be worth that to them to be in their own land in a year or two at most. Then, with a dozen votes in the Commons and as many in the Provincial House, a change in the Autonomy act in reference to Crown Lands, is always possible."

"And in that case?" The member for South Winnipeg was beginning to see the practical possibility of the plan outlined, practical, that is, in his sense of the word. He was hoping, also, that his friend had not seen how dense he had been in regard to it.

"In that case," was the reply, "we shall apply for a further 'grant' of several million acres, if indeed, we do not get them sooner, in exchange for the land given to the railway. Oh, there are always ways, Monsieur le Député," the Senator concluded, airily, nor was his hearer by any means disposed to doubt him any further.

Certain names were accordingly mentioned, as of those likely to see the possibilities of the Saskatchewan Land and Improvement Company in much the same light as viewed by its originator. The profits, political and pecuniary, were "found money" as a certain West-erner capitalist was pleased to say, when asked to take part in it, it had the further advantage of appealing to 'national' instincts, whether of desire to retain a gravely imperilled place in the destinies of the Dominion, or of a not unattractive anxiety to get the better of 'fellow-citizens,' not distinguished by their consideration of French Canadian sensibilities.

Thereafter, the question of the Exodus itself remained to be considered; its inception, progress and final accomplishment, with the means necessary to each stage. Of Pierre Martin's ability and enthusiasm Bilodeau spoke in the highest terms. "We are always enthusiastic, we Canadians," he said, half mockingly, "and if he can get even a few of them roused, the infection is sure to spread. But labor and race jealousy," he added, with an altogether unwonted plainness, very flattering to his hearer, "are what we must chiefly count on. There must be a strike in all the New England factories, and an outcry against cheap foreign labor. If a little religious bigotry against 'French Papists' tant mieux; it will all serve our purpose. Then, when our people are helpless, we come forward in Parliament, and ask for help to repatriate them. A Government," he concluded, "spends millions on bringing in European immigrants, and dares not refuse to do as much for exiled Canadians, waiting to return to their own country."

"They certainly will not," said St. Jacques with conviction. "And," he went on, "as we shall have the land, thanks to you, Monsieur le Sénateur, they cannot prevent our 'colonizing' the repatriated exiles."

"I don't think they can," he said, smoking leisurely. "His dreams were coming true at last. In a few years, at latest, he should take the place in Federal affairs with his abilities, as he believed, unquestionably entitled him. Nor would it be long, he mused further, watching the smoke from his cigar as it floated lazily upward, before those who had ignored his past services would be suing for his support and assistance. It was New Quebec that should avenge him on his enemies. "I observed the member for South Winnipeg, after a pause, "I think I know the man we want, it is necessary to name him?" he asked, having, even in this brief space, unconsciously learned some of the old man's reticence and caution.

more, that there are no politics where profits are in question. Every conceivable motive, in fact, was appealed to, selfish or otherwise, with conspicuous success. In the last hours of a prolonged session a Bill was passed, granting the Saskatchewan Land and Improvement Company, thirty million acres of contiguous prairie land in Saskatchewan and Alberta, for future settlement. The Company, it was agreed, was to pay one dollar an acre, the payment to be completed within ten years. It was further agreed that, should land ever be required for a railway within the limits of the grant, five acres within, or adjacent to it, were to be given by the Government for every acre yielded by the Company.

"I think that will suit us," said Senator Bilodeau complacently to the member of South Winnipeg, when the bill had received the Governor's assent. "I think so, too," was the answer, equally complacent. "It marches, Monsieur le Sénateur, it marches."

"It certainly does," rejoined that gentleman. "And that other matter, Monsieur le Député," he added, quietly "our labour friend eh?" "Oh, that marches, too, comme à Québec," answered St. Jacques cheerfully. And the old simile seemed, to both of them, for some cryptic reason, singularly apt.

CHAPTER VI. THE YOKE OF BONDAGE.

Jean Martin was as good as his word. He found, for Pierre, within a week of the latter's arrival in Middlehampton, a place in the factory where he worked himself. The pay was small, of course, since Pierre was wholly without experience, but he was thankful to get work so soon and so easily. According to Jean, indeed, he was lucky beyond what the elder brother had dared to hope, though he had spoken confidently enough. Already, he now confessed, there were rumors of a possible strike, if not of a lock-out; to say nothing of growing murmurs from patriotic Americans against the influx of French Canadian labor.

The rumors as well as the murmurs might, however, had any one thought of doing so, have been traced to certain very definite sources, practically, in fact, to one individual who was not, at the moment, seeking notoriety, whatever might be the case later on. Briefly, in answer to Senator Bilodeau's query as to our labor friend, answered unhesitatingly that things were progressing favorably, he spoke of what he knew. A hint, suitably conveyed, to the retiring gentleman referred to, was amply sufficient. Rumors and murmurs duly buzzed as persistently as those of a swarm of bees. Wherein, to follow out the simile, the modest individual aforesaid may be looked on as playing the part of queen bee. And, meanwhile, those against whom rumors and murmurs were principally directed went on with their work with that quiet, almost fatalistic indifference which distinguishes the French Canadian habitant; may be said, indeed, to be a trait common to agricultural laborers everywhere, due presumably to lack of imagination, perhaps, also, to the practical lessons learned from daily contact with unwholesome, unworshipping beasts and birds.

Pierre, with the best will in the world, with all his wish to have the carpenter's shop at Nazareth always in mind, found his new lot a hard one, at best, to carry; better, he thought, with his knowledge of his racial philosophy, to fit it to his neck with as little delay as might be, and console himself with the reflection that to be without work would be a heavier burden still.

Followed days, weeks and months of drudgery such as he had not deemed possible of endurance, of physical and spiritual weariness, sounds and spritzing with animals lower and more intolerable than the very brutes. But, though the yoke galled him sorely, and the iron entered into his soul, he contrived to endure 'patiently' at least, if not 'cheerfully' according to the counsel of his good friend, Thomas à Kempis. And, for some measure of his patience, more perhaps than he realized he was indebted to a new friend and counselor, the parish priest of Middlehampton, the Abbé Gagnon, whom he had duly gone to see, as his own Curé had bidden him at first sight, knowing something of history and guessing more, knowing, too, that the life of the factories must be for such a nature, a veritable hell on earth, encouraged him to come on an evening and "talk things over" as the priest expressed it.

For, Abbé Gagnon, as has been said, knew all about the factories, or as much as was possible to anyone not actually employed in them, and the knowledge, so far as it affected his own people, weighed on him like a soul-burthen, a cross that crushed him to the earth, a darkness that might be felt. To him, the exile of his people in this land of Egypt, was the veritable tragedy of a race, hopeless irremediably save by a miracle. His only comfort was that he could share the exile, and take his part in the tragedy, lightening both by means not measurable by human intelligence; his only hope that God might even yet send a deliverer. Nor was it long before the hope, dim hitherto took clearer form, and his heart asked, as he looked at Pierre Martin's earnest face: was this indeed the chosen Moses of the desired Exodus?

from the former ones, even as the guest to be differed from those who had responded reluctantly, perfunctorily or not at all. So it came about that in those first few weeks when every hour seemed a day and every day seemed endless, when the long succession of just such hours and days stretched out before like a dull eternity, the burden and his which was beyond his strength and his brave heart almost evening to his friend the priest. And Father Gagnon reading what was in the lad's mind, rather than answering what he was trying to say supplied him with a piece of practical philosophy, old doubtless as humanity itself, but new just then to his hearer.

"How long have you to live?" he asked quietly. Pierre looked up, he had been sitting with his head bent, the picture of despondency. "I don't know Monsieur le Curé," he answered simply, somewhat surprised it may be at the unexpected question. "Till to-morrow?" Father Gagnon's tone was as quiet and matter of fact as ever, and Pierre still more astonished as doubtless the priest intended that he should be answered just as simply as before: "I don't know, Monsieur le Curé."

"Then don't worry about next week," was the rejoinder: "you may never see it. Ask for your daily bread now, cheer, and leave to-morrow and next week to le Bon Dieu. He will look after them and you."

"Yes, Monsieur le Curé." Just the three words but from Pierre's way of saying them, Father Gagnon judged that the lesson was in a fair way to being learned. As indeed it was, Pierre having already mastered many preliminary ones, as they may be called; yet neither those nor this latest in a day. But the philosophy, as in harmony with that of his race was helpful. In truth, he had need of all the help he could derive from it. To a country lad, a nature lover—which are not by any means synonymous—keenly alive to the influences and delights of the Great Mother who keeps for her favorites, even the college at Saint Joseph de l'Acadie had seemed in some sense a confinement. There, however, he had had his studies and his hopes for compensation here in the noisy factory he had only one—the sense of a duty to be done. Which is much—all perhaps—that a man may dare to ask for, but, if wholesome somewhat Spartan to be honest. There, he had always his homelike look forward to, the long summer of farm of brief storms, of full rich glory of existence. Here he was but one of a crowd, a part of a machine, that knew no weariness, it knew no joy and had no heart, no color, no variety. And Pierre saw, as in a vision, men, women even children of his race, drawn yearly from the calm havens of their fields and villages into the whirling vortex of industrialism, into the noise and tumult of machinery, the narrow lanes and streets of sordid cities; saw, in a word, the tragedy of his people wherein he too, and those he loved best were involved. And the cross weighed him down as well, the cross, not of his own sorrow but of his people's; the darkness closed about him, as it was closing about them. Was there no light, no hope, no escape.

So, though he would not admit it, as was his way, and tried honestly to forget his own sorrow in sorrow for his people, there were times when philosophy and compensation both failed him, as, no doubt, they failed Father Gagnon's self, which was no reason why he should distrust the philosophy, at least, or the compensation. It was himself, rather, of whom he must be diffident, as again was Father Gagnon's case, that, indeed, he wished to see how the old philosophy would work in a new life and under conditions as in a temperament differing from his own.

Be that as it may, there was one occasion in the first spring Pierre spent in Middlehampton. Such a spring! When his new-found philosophy, the compensation of a day's duty faithfully done, when he, himself, failed him utterly. The wild longing for the woods and fields that is like the Highlander's longing for his hills and glens, which comes to the French Canadian with the first birds, the breaking up of ice-bound streams and rivers, the warm spring sunshine. Nature's resurrection had assailed him even at the college. How much more strongly it beset him by the "waters of Babylon," no words can say. Saint Joseph de l'Acadie was country after all, but Middlehampton! Here were miles of streets and houses, narrow, mean and noisy, for wide fields and woods; the canopy of factory smoke for the blue skies of his own land, the evil odors of chemicals for the perfumes of trailing arbutus and new spring leaves and grass; the din of traffic, the harsh sounds of a foreign speech for the music of the birds and streams. So, when a fellow-workman, a French-Canadian, passing his window, on a mild, spring evening chanted gaily, carelessly:

Que j'aime voir les hirondelles
Sous nos fenêtres, tous les ans,
Venir m'apporter des nouvelles
De l'arrivée du printemps.

the homesick lad, who, in happier times, had sung the words many a time, fairly broke down and burst into tears. Super flumina Babilonis. The song was, perhaps, hardly one of the songs of Sion, but it at least carried him back, as only such songs can, to the old days, when, in the home he loved, the swallows had brought him, year by year, the tidings of the coming of spring. Had the singer, he wondered, forgotten his exile; grown indifferent to it? That, he thought, would be worse than all else; that his people should forget their own land, and be content to remain by the waters of Babylon. Surely, he said to himself, they would not be allowed to do so, would even, should it prove needful, be driven back to the Land of Promise. And, meanwhile, though he, of course, was wholly unaware of it, the causes that should lead to this very end were already preparing.

growing manhood, probably did him good. Father Gagnon's philosophy, though sound and helpful, was not all he needed. So, while he kept the good priest's "one day's life" clear in view, he set himself to study earnestly and carefully the conditions under which his daily life was to be spent. He would not, indeed, look beyond the momentary present, not even to the morrow still less to any possibility beyond the present actuality. The duty that lay to his hand demanded his immediate attention, but he might, at least, study the circumstances and surroundings in which he was called upon to fulfill the task allotted to him.

These, then, were the conditions, as he had come to know them, after some nine months spent in Middlehampton. They may be given, briefly here, since they had much to do with his life's work, not indeed, as he saw it then, but, as he was to see it, in due course, when the horizon dark and narrow now, should have grown wider, clearer, full of hope and promise. Messrs. Mills and Hammond, in whose factory he worked, were the oldest and most respected firm in Middlehampton, one might almost say, in all New England. Strictly, the firm consisted of John Hammond, senior, only for the present at all events, his friend and partner, Robert Mills, having died some years previously. The son, Robert, junior, was to be taken into partnership when the man the father trusted as himself, should think it to the interest of the business to do so. Meanwhile the young man was assistant manager, under a trusted servant of the firm, old Peter Meadogate, John Hammond's own son, commonly known as Johnny being a clerk in his father's office. This ensured that the methods which for over a century had brought success and credit to the firm, would in all probability, be continued for as long a period.

Just now, however, though of his Pierre was only becoming vaguely aware—the fact was no secret to the member for South Winnipeg, seeing he had done his best to bring it about—the firm was between the upper millstone of a Cotton Trust and the nether one of the Labor Union, with the financial stringency, due to a panic, to complicate the situation. Fortunately for all concerned, its own workmen were outwardly loyal—so far. Murmurs and rumors there had doubtless been and still were, but no overt action yet. John Hammond's brief address to a delegation, shortly before Pierre Martin's arrival in Middlehampton had probably more than a little contributed to this temporary truce. "See here," he had said, holding up a letter received some days previously and so far unanswered: "This is an offer from the New England Cotton Company—the Trust. It's a fair price but I'm in no mind to take it, unless you make it impossible for me to say no. If you get this increase you're asking for we can't fight them. If I sell out to them you know what will happen." The delegation did know. Your big boss, the mill-owner continued, says there shall be no reduction of wages. Well, he may be able to beat the law of supply and demand, but I guess he won't beat the Cotton Company. Anyway I can't—unless you help me.

Once more the delegation, for the time being at all events, were of the speaker's way of thinking and said so through their leader. Mills and Hammond could not of course 'whip' the union. That they knew and derived presumably, such satisfaction from the knowledge as it was calculated to afford. But the Cotton Company could as they were constrained to admit, would; but already done so, the law of supply and demand, diplomatically but decidedly to the union managers. These latter gentlemen mindful of their late defeat at the hands of the Cotton Company, wisely came to the conclusion not to 'order' the employees of Messrs. Mills and Hammond for the present. The decision was duly announced as by one high contracting party to another both to John Hammond, and, less formally, to the member for South Winnipeg. The latter, it may be supposed, expressed an acquiescence which under the circumstances was more or less a matter of course. As for John Hammond, what his men might or might not do, at some future period did not greatly trouble him. He could always, he knew, sell out to the Trust for whom his business would have a steadily increasing value, and let them wrestle with the union. Which if cynical was 'strictly' justifiable, in his opinion, practically inevitable, things were they were. It would be a grand fight he thought. If the men got the worst of it as he believed they must, his men among the number, they would have only themselves to thank.

All this, however, did not, definitely, come at the moment within the scope of Pierre Martin's study of the conditions wherein he found himself, though he was conscious of it as a factor which might, ultimately, materially affect the situation. Might indeed, prove the motive force which should set his people on their way back to their own land. Wherein, it will be seen, he was once more all unconscious of Alphonse Bilodeau's way of thinking.

His immediate attention was, therefore, more especially directed to the lives and conditions of his fellow-workmen of his own race, and of his sister-in-law, he took his case among many, differing he felt sure in no material degree from that of others, unless it were in their simple faith, their sobriety, industry and honesty all the good old-fashioned, typical virtues of the French Canadian habitant. But, young as he was, he understood after a brief residence, that once in these new surroundings, that once in these new surroundings, believed, they were, as he had always believed, distinctly unfavorable, not wholly inimical to these very qualities. One point struck him very forcibly—the small families of the French Canadians. Even Jean and Marie had only four children. One day, he spoke to Jean about it.

"But, mon cher," said his brother, shrugging his shoulders, "what would we are not on a farm here. Children in a city are a burthen, on a farm they are wealth." Pierre quoted certain ancient words about "a heritage and a gift" familiar to both of them.