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NATION BUILDING.—II.*

In his interesting and instructive work, “Words and Places,” the Rev. Isaac Taylor has the following remarks on the ethnological value of American local names: “If we were entirely destitute of any historical records of the actual course of American colonisation, it is evident that, with the aid of the map alone, we might recover many most important facts and put together an outline by no means to be despised, of the early history of the continent; we might successfully investigate the retrocession and extinction of the Indian tribes; we might discover the positions in which the colonies of the several European nations were planted; we might show from the character of the names how the gradually increasing supremacy of the Anglo-American stock must have enabled it to incorporate and overlay with a layer of English names the colonies of other nations, such as the Spanish settlements in Florida and Texas, the Dutch colony in the neighbourhood of New York, and the French settlements on the St. Lawrence and the Mississippi.”

What Mr. Taylor says is not less true of our own Dominion than it is of the rest of the continent. If all written records had perished, the historical inquirer would find in its geographical names no inconsiderable evidence as to the stages by which it reached its present condition. He would have little trouble in discovering that it had once been in possession of nomadic tribes whose languages bore no resemblance to those of the Indo-European group. While he sought a key for those languages, he might seem to hear approaching the voices of an energetic and hopeful civilisation, and to discern a new light in the eyes of the dusky lords of the forest primeval. He would then be aware of other figures on the scene, stately nobles, fair and pious ladies, gentle and zealous priests, and by easily recognised tokens he would know that he was in the presence of the beauty and chivalry and devotion of the fair land of France. For more than a century he might in fancy see the wilderness bursting into bloom and fruit—often at fearful cost—until at last the *Angelus* floated soothingly over hundreds of peaceful hamlets, named thankfully after saints and martyrs. But his reverie is disturbed by the noise of conflict. Far and wide and long the battle rages, and clearer and clearer grow the accents of the intruders. Then there is a hush, and he knows by signs not to be mistaken that France's foes have triumphed. The flag of England flutters above the Citadel of Quebec.

Such a vision of successive predominance—Indian, French, and British—may be conjured up by any gazetteer or post office directory, but its significance is not exactly the same as it would be if the scene were some old world centre of population. In Europe, with rare exceptions, the stage at which the inhabitants, by the contrast of their physique and language, offered clear confirmation of the testimony of topographical nomenclature, has long gone by. It is only after careful study and research that the

limits afforded by names of places are developed into facts. A community of mixed origin, speaking a common composite tongue, is what is generally met with. In Canada it is otherwise. The three successive waves of occupation have blended so slightly that as yet they have given rise to neither a new form of speech nor a new ethnic variety. To this day, with some local exceptions here and there, they remain apart in distinct groups of population. Those exceptions are, nevertheless, of considerable importance from the standpoint of ethnology, as indications of a tendency which almost all races living in close contiguity have, sooner or later, found it impossible to resist. Before calling attention to the illustrations of conformity to that tendency which genealogical research has hitherto unfolded, it will be necessary to say something of the great race divisions of the Canadian aborigines.

When Jacques Cartier landed at Hochelaga, however well disposed he may have been to his kind-hearted hosts, he could hardly have fancied that they were even remotely cognate with the proud nation that obeyed his royal master. He was aware that the Basques had been in the habit of visiting these shores to reap the harvest of the fisheries, but it did not occur to him that in braving the storms of the Atlantic they had been literally exemplifying the truth of the adage that blood is stronger than water. It is, notwithstanding, a theory which some ethnologists have not disdained to accept that the wide-spread race of exaggeratedly agglutinative speech which preceded the Celts in Western Europe was allied to some of the aborigines of this continent. Writers who differ widely on other points are inclined to agree that the early peopling of America took place by the Atlantic as well as by the Pacific. Mr. Horatio Hale urges, in his delightfully instructive work, “The Iroquois Book of Rites,” that the early Europeans, of whom the Basques are the sole survivors, and who have retained their original language, may have been the same stock as the Huron-Iroquois of the Lower St. Lawrence. In certain qualities, he maintains, those primitive West-Europeans (Iberians or Euskarians) were wholly unlike the Aryans, an inland and pastoral people; whereas those whom they conquered were proud, adventurous sailors and hunters. The union of these two races, with the Euskarian element in strong proportion, constituted a people different in many respects, and especially in love of liberty, from the natives of Eastern Europe, in whom that element was weak or wanting. Strange to say, a theory which has the sanction of one of America's foremost ethnologists was, by implication, supported by a man whom his own contemporaries ridiculed as a foolish dreamer. It was, as Charlevoix tells us, one of the vagaries of Guillaume Postal that, in a time which antedated the beginning of the Christian era, the eastern coasts of North America were frequented by the Gauls. Prof. Paul Gaffarel, of Dijon, is inclined to believe that there is some basis of truth in the traditions which credit the Basques and their neighbours on the shores of the Atlantic with a knowledge of America long before the close of the fifteenth century. They were accustomed to make long voyages westward as early as the beginning of the fourteenth. The Rev. M. Harvey, in his “Newfoundland,” writes that seven years after Cabot's discovery the fishermen of Normandy, Brittany, and the Basque Provinces were engaged in the cod fishery on the banks and along the coast of Newfoundland. Not long since attention was directed by Mr. Harvey to a couple of tombstones in an ancient cemetery near Placentia which bore inscriptions in a language unknown to the islanders. Last summer Mr. Courtney Kenny, M.P. for Barnsley, Yorkshire, while on a visit to Newfoundland, copied those inscriptions, and, on his return to England, submitted them to Dr. Robertson Smith, the well-known Orientalist. With little hesitation the learned Professor pronounced them to be Basque. “Who could have expected,” asks Mr. Harvey, in telling the story in the *Montreal Gazette*, “to find such a relic of a world that has passed away in such a remote and little known locality as Placentia? What changes have passed over this new world since those ancient mariners lay down for their long sleep in the Placentia ‘God's acre!’ Their names cut deep in one of our hardest rocks have been able to resist the gnawing tooth of time.” A good many philologists besides Mr. Hale, including Archdeacon Farrar, M. Alf. Maury, and Prof. Whitney, have been struck with the analogies in grammatical structure between the Basque and the American languages. “The Basque language,” says M. Jules Vinson, in the preface to his translation of Rebarry's “*Essai sur la Langue Basque*,” “is one of those forms of

* See THE WEEK of June 23 for I.