

THE EXODUS.

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CHAPTER I.

THE CALL OF DUTY.

Saint Joseph de l'Acadie was en fête for it was not the patronal feast of the college, as of the village, that, namely, of the Bon Saint Joseph? Monsiegnor Demers, Superior of the college, had preached at High Mass and there had been music appropriate to the occasion, for it was also Monsieur le Curé's silver jubilee, as well as the jubilee of the new church, built in place of the one destroyed by fire, all those years ago, a church of which the village was justly proud.

And, in the evening, as was only to be expected, under the circumstances, there was a soiree musicale et litteraire in the large hall of the college, in plain English, a lecture, a debate and a concert. The conferencier, lecturer as we would say, was to be no less distinguished a personage than the Provincial Minister of Mines and Colonization, the Hon. Angus McFarlane, whom the country had done itself the honor to send as its representative to the Legislature at Quebec. His subject, moreover, was only fitting in view of the more important concerns of the day, the French-Canadian migration to the United States. How can it be checked? But, what was likely to prove of even greater attraction was that the lecture was to be followed by a discussion, limited to speeches of ten minutes each, wherein four students of the college were to debate, pro and con, Monsieur le Ministre's contentions. For the French Canadian habitant, having his due share of shrewdness, is disposed to discount official views to the basis of his own experience. And the lads chosen, were, in the local estimation, better fitted to deal practically with the matter under discussion than Monsieur le Ministre himself, or any of the gross bonnets—could possibly be expected to do.

Among those chosen, Pierre Martin, of Pont aux Marais, was in the cordial and ungrudging estimate of his fellow students of Monsiegnor Demers himself, and of the faculty generally, far and away the best speaker. A visionary, he might be; an impracticable dreamer, cherishing hopes which none but he could expect to see fulfilled, if, indeed, even he could be said to expect their fulfillment: "Don Quixote," some one had dubbed him, with a not very brilliant originality, though not inaptly but a poet and an orator, none the less, probably, all the more, for that very reason, since to be either, a man must see visions and dream dreams invisible and unintelligible to his more prosaic fellowmen. It was he who was to lead off in controversy of the minister's assertions.

The college hall, Monsiegnor Demers declared, had never in his recollection been so crowded. Monsiegnor le Curé, since it was his fête, had the seat of honor, the minister sat on Monsiegnor's left.

One other guest, present on the occasion, deserves more than passing mention, namely, M. Alphonse Bilodeau, once member for the county of Vaudeuil, and now one of the Federal Senators for the Province of Quebec. Senator Bilodeau, it may be said, held very clear and definite ideas, both as to the causes of French Canadian migration to the New England factories, and also as to the means whereby, alone, it might possibly be checked, and even reversed. Ideas, moreover, gathered at first hand, and by personal experience, and, therefore, very different from those likely to be held by the Honorable Angus McFarlane. They were not, however, necessarily such as he was prepared to advocate, publicly, for the present, at all events, yet, as being not only a senator, but a lifelong friend—so far as it was possible for him to be—of Monsiegnor Demers, it was only natural that he should listen, with a good-humored tolerance, but closely and attentively, for all that, to the Hon. Angus McFarlane's official platitudes, and still more closely and attentively, to Pierre Martin's reply.

For neither of these, however, had the time arrived, when Senator Bilodeau took the seat reserved for him, on Monsiegnor le Curé's right and prepared himself after the customary courtesies to endure the concert without betraying the effort such endurance cost him. Of the concert itself, indeed, all that need be said was that it was much as others of the kind, and did more credit to the local talent taking part in it than possibly Senator Bilodeau had been prepared to accord. Each performer, in short, won his or her due meed of applause, for country audiences are generous of such encouragement to the sons and daughters of friends and neighbors who, naturally, do as much in turn. Then briefly but happily introduced by Monsiegnor Demers, the minister began his speech.

It may be read, at length, by those curious in such matters, in the *Courrier de St. Joseph*, and even in the Quebec papers of the following day; but, since it had important consequences in the life of one at least among those who listened to him, it may be summarized here, as a strong plea to French Canadians to remain in their own Province. This, the speaker said, and the argument had, or should have had, but that the facts and the experience of his hearers were against him, all the greater force, he being neither French nor Catholic, but a consistent Scottish Presbyterian, and their Promised Land, divinely chosen for them; were, as really as were the Israelites of old, God's chosen people. They had their part to play in the future development and history of Canada, a part no less glorious and heroic than that which their fathers had played in the past. It was they, more than all others, who were called upon to preserve the older, nobler ideals, to be the conservative element in a nation

which must, otherwise, inevitably become Americanized politically as well as socially. It was a dereliction of duty on their part, he insisted, to be disloyal to God and to Canada, to their traditions; it was want of faith, to seek other dwelling places; it was irrepensible wrong, to themselves and to their children, to exchange the free air and sunshine of their farms for the confinement of New England city streets, the unwholesome conditions, moral and physical, of the New England factories.

"Why should you go?" he exclaimed, passionately, with a gesture, always found effective with a popular audience, and which did not fail him here; "is there not room, and to spare, for you in your own land?" Whereupon, with all the art and eloquence at his command he proceeded to draw a brilliant picture of the "possibilities" of New Quebec; a picture, to be sure, all lights, without a shadow; couleur de rose, as the French say; seen thus, it is to be presumed, in his official imagination, probably, also, in a personal imagination as fervid as that of any seer of his native hills, Celtic, that is to say, and wholly impatient of any view other than that which he saw fit to take at the moment. An attitude of mind which may, perhaps, be best described as eminently and characteristically Gladstonian. "I have seen this land!" he continued, "I have been there!" At which point, according to the reporters, duly cognizant of the minister's importance, there was "loud and prolonged applause."

"I have been there!" the speaker repeated, with an almost solemn emphasis, noting the impression he had made, and wishing, naturally enough, to make it as deep as possible. He had in a special car provided among much else, by an enterprising railway president with an eye to freight and Governmental favour. He failed, however, to explain why he had not remained in the paradise he spoke of, perhaps he overlooked a trifle so irrelevant to the matter in hand. Possibly he meant to be the Moses of the Exodus he was preaching, or the Joshua, rather, since he had spied out the land, but he did not apparently deem it necessary to say so.

As a speech it was a succès d'estime, a triumph of oratory—and of special pleading—but hardly convincing. An appeal to sentiment will rouse most audiences, an appeal to national glories, national loyalty, will stir a French Canadian crowd to wild enthusiasm, as why should it not, and the glories and the loyalty being both so real? And Angus McFarlane, as a parliamentary and campaign orator of long experience, being well aware of this, made full use of it—as again, why should he not? It was his métier, his profession. In the past, it had brought him fame, and his present measure of political success, though not as yet to the goal he had marked out for himself. Moreover, it was beyond a doubt, just what his hearers looked for.

Pierre Martin therefore, young, untried and inexperienced, had a hard task before him when he rose to reply, in ten minutes to a speech which had lasted forty. Wisely he indulged in no flights of oratory, wherein, he knew, he could not hope to match himself against the older man. In any case, he had no time for fancy, little enough for facts. Accordingly, he confined himself briefly, to these few:—the natural disadvantages of New Quebec; pointing out that a generation, at least, must elapse before land so cleared, as it must be, could be considered a really valuable return for the labor and expense inevitably involved in clearing it; reminded his hearers that a large migration had already taken place to a life for which, as an agricultural race, and as Monsieur le Ministre had so well told them they were pre-eminently well fitted, and dwelt strongly on the consequent loss to the race itself and to the Dominion at large. "Are these, our brethren to remain in exile?" he demanded passionately; yet they went of their own accord "to the factories because they knew Monsieur le Ministre's New Quebec better, if he will allow me to say so, than Monsiegnor le Ministre himself can ever hope to know it; because most of all they could not afford to go there!"

It was a double point, excellently taken, which his hearers, Senator Bilodeau, most of all appreciated at its full value. The lad, however, passed rapidly to his next point, the success of those who had gone to the Northwest. "They were told," he said, "not to go; that it was a land unfit for human habitation; told me, as you tell me to-day, that it was indispensible, yet they went!" He spoke of their need of help, of the questions of religion, schools and language. "Monsieur le Ministre," he continued, "tells us that we are needed here in the East to preserve ideals, traditions and the rest; are we not more needed in the Great Northwest, where Americans enter by the tens and yearly, and Europe empties the surplus of her heterogeneous population?" "Monsieur le Ministre," he concluded, "would you believe that New Quebec is your land of Promise; your friends have sought for it in the States, but some at least, have found it in 'the vast prairies of the Great Northwest. It is there, with all deference to Monsiegnor le Ministre, that our true Land of Promise lies!"

Each point was driven home in a few well-chosen words, and that each point told was evidenced by the applause which the minister was charmed, when he will go far, that one there, he whispered to Monsiegnor Demers, in excellent French and an accented Glasgow accent, which his hearers, to say truth, had found somewhat trying; "he has a better case than mine." Which, if generous, was the generosity of one who feared no rivalry from such a quarter.

Monsiegnor, delighted, smiled his acknowledgments. Perhaps he had higher hopes, with better reasons, than those which the minister expressed so courteously, for his loved pupil, if so they were of honor in the Church, or labor for the souls of men, rather than of honor in the State, or of labor for political advantage. Still, for a few brief moments, as he listened to Pierre's im-

passioned, yet telling and logical oratory, he had feared less the charm of words, he believed, had already set his hand to the plough, to turn back. Then, as he looked once more at Pierre, he dismissed them, laughing at his own folly. It was the face of a priest, he told himself, not of a politician. He knew both types intimately, and could tell readily wherein they differed. As indeed they do. Not necessarily the men at heart; since statesmanship, the even politics in? may be a highly honorable calling. But evidently, so Monsiegnor was convinced, Pierre's was an even higher one, the highest that a man may aspire to. Doubtless he had reasons for his conviction, seeing he had known Pierre now for five years and more.

It was Pierre's hour, the proudest surely of his young life hitherto, and as Monsiegnor Demers, without its dangers, promised, without its duties, was pleased with him, his comrades and the audience cheered him, the minister, when the evening ended, shook hands with him and complimented him. "You will be heard in parliament, some day," he said, graciously, if a little obviously, but Pierre shook his head.

"You are very good, Monsiegnor le Ministre," he answered respectfully, "but I hope to be a priest some day, if the Bon Dieu pleases."

And Monsiegnor Demers, as he listened to the brief colloquy, felt once again how absolutely unfounded his momentary fear had been.

"Oh," said the great man, turning away, "a very noble calling, I wish you all success in it." A remark which showed, to Monsiegnor at least, that the speaker regarded the priesthood as, technically, than that of politics, but certainly less profitable and much less interesting.

Senator Bilodeau also had his tribute of congratulation to offer, not less cordially, but possibly somewhat less patronizingly conveyed, showing therein a better knowledge of his fellowman than the Hon. Angus McFarlane either possessed or perhaps cared to exhibit, mortal so bitterly resents as patronage. Pierre moreover in the hour of his victory, as he justly deemed it, over Monsiegnor le Ministre was likely as Senator shrewdly reflected, to be more than ordinarily sensitive to the attitude of others. He felt indeed that the young man honestly deserved all possible encouragement, the more that he had, all unwittingly, given forcible and telling expression to the very view which Bilodeau, for reasons satisfactory to himself, was not, as we have seen, inclined to give utterance to in public for a while at all events.

Presently turning to Monsiegnor Demers, he said casually, "I should like to have a chat with you, presently, mon cher, when you are more at leisure." The priest glanced at his watch, then at the still assembled company. "In an hour in my study," he answered, "I will talk to you."

"Perfectly," returned Bilodeau, and proceeded to talk lightly with one of his many acquaintances present, on any or every subject other than that which had been discussed that evening.

Monsiegnor who had long since guessed Pierre's desire, was none the less pleased that he should profess it openly, seeing that under the circumstances it required no small measure of moral courage to do so.

"So you really wish to be a priest?" he said kindly, drawing the lad a little to one side.

"Yes, Monsiegnor," returned Pierre, modestly, "if you think I am fit for it."

"Well, you shall see," was the reply. "Come to me in the morning, and we will talk about it." And Pierre, as he knelt to say his night prayers, felt that his heart's desire was about to be granted him, and thanked God and the Blessed Mother for so great a favor.

a soul brought to the drinking of a cup of sorrow, to the hearing of a heavy cross. "Leave that to God and to Our Dear Lady," was the answer. "Christ," the priest added, reverently, worked for eighteen years as a village carpenter, before He began His mission. Will you not wait, too?"

"Yes, Father." It was almost a whisper, but Monsiegnor knew that the victory was won. Nor did he, under the circumstances, deem it wise to suggest however remotely, that other work, not less useful than that of a parish priest, a work full of immense possibilities of good to his race and country, might, conceivably, be in store for one so ready to respond to the demand thus suddenly and unexpectedly made upon him. Still, with all his faith in God, with all his experience, it was unquestionably a source of astonishment to him that Alphonse Bilodeau should have been the one to point all this out to him. Truly, his view had been not only narrower than that of his friend, not only less prudent, but, also, indicative of less trust in an overruling Providence.

Yet, even so, and while remembering all that had been said, in that same room, the previous day, by the man whom he had known, yet not known, for so long a space of time, the man who had come so near attaining his ambition, yet had seemed to fail, Monsiegnor Demers thanked God that the lad he loved, in whom he took so deep an interest, had, indeed, chosen the better part, that of duty and self-renunciation; even though, like his Master, he should seem to wait many years for the accomplishment, or even for the very beginning of the task he had undertaken.

CHAPTER II. THE VIEWS OF SENATOR ALPHONSE BILODEAU.

Monsiegnor Oesime Demers, though he had known Alphonse Bilodeau for more years than perhaps even so devoted a priest might have cared to count, least the tale of wasted days should be found to far outnumber that of those well spent, would have been the first to admit, readily enough, that concerning the real man, he knew not a thing. Of Bilodeau's course in 1896, Monsiegnor le Chanoine, as he then was, and an intimate friend of Mgr. Perros, Bishop of Richelieu, disapproved utterly, as it was only natural, that he should do. No! it need hardly be said, from any political predilections, since he had, literally, none whatever, but from a conscientious dislike, amounting in fact to what may well be called a holy horror of dragging religion and education, or, indeed, any matter affecting the real welfare, spiritual, moral or material, of his people, into the sordid cockpit of party strife. He was, however, at the same time, scrupulously careful not only not to express, but, so far as it was humanly possible, which in his case was very far indeed, not to feel any reproach of his friend's conduct; it was, he would have said, strictly no concern of his; it was Bilodeau, and not he, who would be held accountable for what might come of it. And Alphonse Bilodeau, who certainly understood the one man he cared to call a friend, and on whose friendship he set a value not to be expressed in mere words, would, as certainly, have understood what his friend meant. More, it was an attitude of mind, if such it may be called, rather than of spirit, which Alphonse Bilodeau, agreeing, and dis-

appointed of what he honestly deemed his lawful ambition, was not a little inclined to envy, however little he might think himself likely ever to attain to it.

It is hardly to be wondered at, therefore, if to his nominal party, whom he had served only too well at an important crisis as his nominal opponent whom on the same memorable occasion he had served equally ill, there was a certain sphinxlike incomprehensibility about Senator Alphonse Bilodeau, when they would gladly have dispensed with—or better still, with himself. It was a quality, in fact, which made him, so to speak, a possible unknown quantity in every conceivable or remotest political calculation. Such unknown quantities have proverbially, a tendency to vitiate the nicest and most careful reckonings, Senator Alphonse Bilodeau was most assuredly the least popular, as he was the least trusted member of the august assembly which he adorned by his presence. One of his colleagues indeed, familiar it would seem with country affairs, likened him, in a moment of not unnatural irritation, to a thimble-ripper's pea. "You never know," he grumbled, "where he will turn up next."

Fortunately, under the circumstances, Alphonse Bilodeau cared very little, if at all, for either the good-will or the confidence of his fellow politicians, on which, it is to be presumed, he set his own value, at a heavy discount on their nominal worth, of the advantages accruing, however, or which might possibly accrue from this very condition of affairs, he may well be supposed to have been keenly aware and not unprepared to make use of them should occasion offer.

None the less on accepting a senatorship he had tacitly if not professedly retired from active politics. The reward, indeed, had been immeasurably short of that to which he felt himself justly entitled for his services in 1896. But trifling as it was, he did not on that account refuse it, as possibly it was hoped he might do; in which case the party conscience would, of course, be clear of all burden of obligation towards him, to say nothing of being rid of him once for all. On the contrary he accepted it with a certain suave gravity of recognition from which the personage authorized to offer it to him augured anything but favorably, saying, indeed, in a burst of unalloyed candor, "that he was too damned grateful not to get even, some day," yet so far, at all events, had kept to his tacit understanding and had proved in a party sense the very model of all that a senator should be.

Events had, however, during the few months, and even during the few weeks prior to his visit to Saint Joseph de l'Acadie moved somewhat more rapidly

than even he, perhaps, had anticipated, in a direction which, nevertheless, he had long foreseen. Two matters, distinct yet essentially inseparable, public works and immigration, the question of the day. They were, moreover, such as, if they did not exclude political partisanship, certainly ran diagonally, as it were, across the straight ruled lines of party divisions, and, in certain phases of its migration, especially, seemed likely to raise acute divergences, not only between the older provinces as the newer, but between the Dominion and a certain Asiatic nation, lately risen to the rank—and to the sensitiveness—of a world power.

The Northwest, too, was increasing in population at a rate which, but a few years since, would have seemed incredible and not, perhaps, wholly desirable. Yet in that very Northwest, which, to all intents and purposes, they might be said to have discovered, in some parts earliest settlers, the French Canadians, as Alphonse Bilodeau was the first to recognize clearly, failed utterly, hitherto, of taking the place that they rightfully belonged to them. Others doubtless, were coming, or must soon come to see the matter in the same light; Pierre Martin as we have seen had in deed spoken of the matter in a fashion which met with Bilodeau's entire concurrence and approval. But the Senator had he cared, or thought it worth while to do so, might hardly have claimed priority, regarding the recognition of its supreme importance.

As to the political possibilities dependent on the presence of a large French Canadian population in the new provinces of the Northwest, he was, of course, under no illusion. His whole course, in respect to the Manitoba school question had, indeed, been largely influenced by this very clearness of vision, this just estimate of facts and contingencies. The time, he was then convinced, had not yet come to put the matter of French rights to a conclusive, but certainly premature test. Those who had deemed otherwise had, he would have said, not only "manqué leur coup," failed of attaining their end, but had materially and seriously hindered its ultimate accomplishment. But the possibilities he contemplated, the Exodus to the Land of Promise which Pierre Martin had spoken of, might be felt to be considered as practically limitless. And it was these very possibilities which he had sometimes thought of late, it might be his task to convert into realities. Of his own ability to do so, he had no doubt whatever. That Pierre Martin might, not improbably, prove a fitting and useful instrument to his purpose, had also occurred to him. He knew better perhaps, than any man in Canada, the motive force of personal and of national enthusiasm.

He realized, moreover, that the position hitherto held by Quebec in the Federal Parliament of Ottawa was one to which he could not hope to hold much longer, if indeed, it were not already a thing of the past. He did not, however, by any means look on it as irretrievably lost, provided always that the men of his race could be made to see wherein lay their sole chance of retaining, or rather, regaining it. In a word, the sixty-five votes of the old province, which could no longer be considered as holding the balance of power, must, he felt, be reinforced by some thirty or forty straight "national" votes from a New Quebec in the Northwest, in which case the total hundred would, unquestionably, continue to be the determinant, if not the dominant factor in Canadian affairs for an indefinite period, if not, indeed, for all time, and since his race could be trusted to hold its own in the new Land of Promise as it had done in the old.

When, therefore, he learned from his old friend Monsiegnor Demers, that the Provincial minister of mines and colonization was to speak at Saint Joseph de l'Acadie, on "French Canadian Migration," he came to the prompt conclusion that he might learn something by being present, if not perhaps, from the minister, at least from the mere attitude of the audience, which, he maintained, was full of information—to those who could read it aright.

Accordingly he sat and studied, not the speakers only, but the hearers, as well, saying, as he was resolved to do, never a word that should give a clue to his real opinions on the matter under discussion. But to Monsiegnor Demers, whom, alone of all men living, he could trust implicitly, even as he trusted himself, he spoke openly enough, in Monsiegnor's study, when the latter was finally at leisure.

"Monsiegnor le Ministre still holds the old views, I see," he began, after some desultory chat on indifferent, or merely personal matters.

"Yes," answered the priest gravely, "and our people still continue to emigrate to the States, as they have done for so many years past."

"And will do, until we can persuade them to migrate to the Northwest," was the rejoinder. "Or force them," the Senator added, almost to himself.

Monsiegnor Demers sighed. "That, mon ami," he said, "is just what you can not hope to do. Persuasion is of no avail: force—where are you to find it? They are weary, so weary," he continued sadly, "of the toil and drudgery of farming, and make money, so easily, as it seems to them, in the factories. Why should they return, say you, to the harder life? Can you blame them?"

"Not I," returned Bilodeau. "But as to force, mon cher Demers, I count on two, want of money and pride of race. You see, I put the stronger motive first," he laughed, "if you are a priest. They are weary, so weary, it is not that they are to return to those old conditions, but to other and better ones. Dieu!" he ejaculated, "do I not know them, those old conditions?" He leaned forward, and put his hand in a familiar, friendly fashion on the other's arm. "Forgive me, mon ami," he said, "if I speak plainly, as one man to another, but it is not just possible, think you, that they were a little tired, also, of a social and ecclesiastical system better suited to the seventeenth than to the twentieth century? Not of the faith, Dieu merci! nor of the

Church—do you wonder to hear me say it, me Alphonse Bilodeau—but of the methods and conditions by which both found practical expression in the life of a small community of voluntary exiles? Have we not, in short, lived or tried to live, too much in the past, and too little in the present; been content with what our fathers did, rather than striving to do even better? The world, mon cher Demers, belongs to those who look forward, not to those who look back."

"Do I not know it?" replied Monsiegnor, quickly. "Have I not always known it? But what can I do?" He spread out his hands with a gesture significant of utter if not hopeless impotence, which the Senator instantly interpreted in its full meaning. "I were to preach so," the priest continued, more calmly, should I not be accused of disloyalty to my race, to my Church to God knows what? Could it keep those people whom I love, I added sadly, "whom I have baptized, married, absolved, whose sons I have taught since I came here, from going to the factories of a foreign land, to a life for which racially, socially, and physically they are wholly unfit?" What do you think then, is the remedy, if there is one?" enquired Bilodeau, who, though he had his own views on the matter was anxious to learn those of one who would naturally approach it, so to speak, from a different direction.

"The remedy, mon cher," was the reverent answer, "rests first, as it must always do, with the Bon Dieu, then with the younger men, possibly with you."

"With me?" Senator Alphonse Bilodeau, confident as he might be to deal effectively with the problem under discussion, had hardly, to say truth, expected his friend to take this view of it. It was a tribute to his ability of which he was not insensible; but it was something more. It was a view which, he knew, he taken into account if he wished to enlist on his side, when the time came, the only force he recognized as more powerful than money, race or politics, the influence, namely, of the Church. The habitants might, as he had said, have grown restive under certain conditions and restraints imposed by churchmen, they had not yet, nor were they ever likely to set themselves in serious opposition to the Church, least of all, he reflected, in a matter where, as he hoped to show them to be their temporal as well as to their spiritual advantage. In any case, there were always ways he thought grimly, though what these might be he had not so far formulated to himself much less than to Monsiegnor Demers. So he merely said, "with me," and waited to hear what more his friend might have to say.

"Yes," was the rejoinder, "with you. We shall need some day help from Parliament, and who shall win it for us better than you? Oh! You are out of politics, you say, but they fear you, at least, even now. How much more shall they fear you when you speak, as you shall soon, perhaps, if the Bon Dieu pleases, for a hundred thousand, two hundred thousand, yes, and a million French Canadians waiting to return home, asking for some of the land so freely given to those who claim to it is as nothing when compared with theirs?"

Once more Bilodeau was conscious of an unwonted sense of satisfaction at hearing his own views expressed by some one else, even as Pierre Martin had expressed them in his speech. But of Pierre Martin we know nothing as yet, though indeed he might be, and probably was one of those younger men to whom his friend had just now referred, whereas of that friend's judgment of his keenness of insight in matters social and political, he held the very highest opinion, not less, of course, that his views coincided with his own. It may be said, however, that he would have held no less an opinion of his friend from him as completely as he evidently agreed with him.

"A good deal more," he said quietly, referring to the fear he should certainly inspire in his opponents, in such an

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