

THE WEEK.

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THE ADVANCE OF THE FRENCH.

WHILE the Provincial Election was raging it was impossible to discuss with calmness the question of French encroachment. But that contest brought two important facts to light. It showed us, in the first place, that the French were advancing in the eastern part of Ontario, extending the domain of their religion, and forcing their language upon the schools. In the second place, it showed us that they might reckon on having a subservient ally and an instrument of their aggrandisement in whichever of the two British factions might be at the time excluded from power. The ruin of the Imperial race by its own factions, which alternately sell it into the hands of its enemies, seems likely to be the sum and moral of the present series of events alike in Canada and in the United Kingdom.

The reason why British conquest has appeared to be specially unpopular is not that the British conqueror has been cruel; for, compared with other conquerors, he has been humane and mild. It is that he has not been a thoroughgoing conqueror. He has not, like the Roman conqueror, completed his stern work by effectually extinguishing resistance, and suppressing the voice of complaint. Had he, when he took Quebec, done as the Roman would have done—had he introduced his own language, and thoroughly Anglicised the colony—French nationality would probably have expired without a pang or groan. The handful of French who then formed the colony could have made no opposition, and would in reality have lost nothing by the change. Their language was to them not literary, for the mass of them could not read or write; it was not the breath of intellectual life, as it is to the highly educated: it was simply a vehicle of speech, and a gradual change to the language of the conqueror would have inflicted on the *habitant* no more of mental suffering than was inflicted on the Gallic or Iberian natives of a Roman Province by the introduction of the Imperial Latin. As a compensation, the French would have received an honest government, better laws, trustworthy tribunals, and protection for their industry, in place of the infamously corrupt tyranny which they had endured under Louis XV., or rather under his mistresses, and which would, probably, in a few years have brought the colony to ruin. It is very likely that the change of language and of institutions would have been followed by a spontaneous change of religion. Nor ought political power to have been put into the hands of the conquered until they had been thoroughly assimilated and become loyal members of the Empire. Prematurely conceded to them, it was sure to be used simply as a weapon for the purpose of insurrection against the dominant race. That this would, after all, have been rough work, is true; but, then, conquest altogether is rough work. It is rough work in Algeria, in Tonquin, in Alsace-Lorraine. Strong measures were still familiar to the military Europe of those days; nor would any protest have been raised by the public morality of the time. Louis XIV., when the Palatinate came for a time into his hands, thrust his religion upon the people, and perpetuated their enforced conversion by a clause in the Treaty of Ryswick. If Quebec was not to be made a British colony, what was the use of conquering it at all?

The result of the policy actually adopted has been one of the strangest

things in history. Left to itself, the French colony would very likely have come to nothing. It would certainly have been separated from the Mother Country at the time of the French Revolution; and would then, in all probability, have been merged in the English-speaking population of its own continent. But under British tutelage it has grown into a French-Canadian nation, to the increase of which there seem to be no bounds. Races, in the less advanced stage of civilisation, multiply faster than those in the more advanced state; because their standard of comfort is lower, and they are not restrained from adding to their families by economical forecast or by social pride. In their natural state, there are checks to their multiplication, which, by the tutelage of a highly civilised race, are removed, as in India, where British rule has caused an immense increase of population. In the case of the French-Canadians, too, as in that of the Irish, the Church actively encourages early marriages, which, as she holds, tend to morality, and which, unquestionably, increase the number of her liegemen. The consequences we see. There are now not above six thousand British left in the city of Quebec: the Eastern Townships, once British, are fast becoming French, and now the French are encroaching on Ontario. Mercantile energy being the appanage of the British, the commercial and wealthy quarter of Montreal remains in their hands; but it will soon be completely surrounded by French territory, and it remains to be seen how long British commerce will be able to flourish under a Government, both political and municipal, alien, if not antagonistic, to British interests. The overflow into the States is also, as we know, immense; and the Americans, who are always descanting on the danger with which their civilisation is threatened by Irish, German, and Italian immigration, may become aware, if they turn their eyes to the north, that there is a fourth invader, more formidable, perhaps, than any one of the other three, inasmuch as the hive from which the swarms issue is in this case on the continent itself, and not separated from it by an ocean. In Boston, the Irish already predominate. The Irish tide is met by the French, and it seems not impossible that before many years are passed the home of the Puritans may have passed into strange hands.

There is an important resemblance between the case of French-Canada and that of Ireland. Were Quebec surrounded by sea, instead of having a ready outlet for its surplus population on all sides, there would be dearth and occasional famine in Quebec as there is in Ireland; and it would be seen that the Union is not the sole cause of Irish misery. The action of the Roman Catholic Church in both countries is the same, and in both countries it exerts upon industry, commercial progress, and national well-being an influence similar to that which it has exerted on them in Italy, Spain, and the South American Republics. The same share is taken in each case by the Church of the earnings of the people. The analogy holds with regard to the concession of political power to a conquered but unassimilated race, which, alike in Ireland and in French-Canada, forthwith used its votes as weapons of insurrection. That Cromwell intended to extirpate the Irish is an exploded calumny. What he did intend to extirpate was Irishry. He meant to put an end to tribalism, lawlessness, roving habits, the empire of superstition, and to introduce English civilisation in their place. His methods would have been those of a stern time, but of a humane and large-minded man, and incomparably milder than those of the Roman Catholic powers; but from the progress which even in his short reign he made, it is pretty clear that they would have been successful. His premature death opened a fresh chapter of conflict between races, religions, and social systems analogous to that which was opened in Canada by the failure of the conqueror to use the rights of conquest. The weaker race now, by sheer physical fecundity, in its turn becomes the conqueror; and, as Carlyle said, the Englishman, whom no armed invader could ever dispossess of his land, is being thrust out of it by Irish immigration.

When the ill-starred union of British with French Canada took place the hope of assimilation probably lingered, though the grounds for it even then were weak indeed. It has now finally fled, and with it, apparently, all prospects of blending the British and French Provinces into a united nation. Politicians of Ontario and Quebec may combine for their party purposes, but this indicates no approximation between the masses. It is not likely that the French peasant has any ambitious ideas, or harbours any aggressive designs: he spreads and carries with him his French language, character, and beliefs. But the absence of any definite purpose on the part of the coral insect does not prevent the coral reef from growing,