

A VISION.

BY THE MOST REV. C. O'BRIEN, ARCHBISHOP OF HALIFAX.

In youth ere my steps did rove,
My mind oft strange fancies wove—
Sitting near my mother's knee,
I thought I saw a dark sea,
Foam flecked in spots; and then calm
Smooth stretches, where winds of balm
Softly murmured by the side
Of loud voiced gales: and each tried
The wide sea to rule. In vain
Wild blasts, bearing in their train
Night and storms, rushed o'er the foam
And waves to the peaceful home
Of the soft Zephyrs: though loud
Their angry cry, dark the cloud
They bore, the soft breezes play
Fearless in the light of day:
Now hide their heads as in sport,
And now, when the loud report
Of storms is o'er, they come out
And gleefully play about,
And charm to a placid mood
The gales, erst loud-voiced and rude.
And there sailed many formed ships
Athwart the sea: here one dips
The foam beneath; another soon,
Hurling, caught by a typhoon,
Breaks the rocks against: and yet
Some float, till the sun has set,
O'er the same tide. In calm spots
Some sport, 'mid forget-me-nots,
Which here and there, fitly strew
The dark stream with their quiet blue.
But as I gazed, a change
Came o'er the vision: a strange
Form appeared the ships among; then
Nor sails nor hulls were seen; men,
Men alone, were floating there,
Some bright, some with sullen air.
They strove: then apace they died,
Some in calm, some in rough tide.
Much I wondered at the sight;
And then, child like, prayed for light.
A voice spake above the strife,
"That sea, O my child, is life."

FIFTY YEARS OF FRENCH-CANADIAN AUTHORSHIP.

BY GEORGE STEWART, JR., D.C.L.

Fifty years ago French Canada had no literature of its own, but a vigorous press and patriotic statesmen exemplified the life, movement, and intellectual and moral activity of the people in a way that commanded attention. Printed books, of course, were to be had in plenty, but though they treated of Lower Canada, and dwelt extensively on her splendid historical past, her noble sacrifices for church and state, her missionary progress and mental development, yet these studies were not the work of native authors, but the result of researches made by foreign students. Most of the books were written by priests and travellers from old France, and though these works are copious enough, very few of them are trustworthy as regards facts. The contents of the periods which they describe developed antagonisms, and prejudice and partisanship color deeply the various narratives. Still the early printed books are not devoid of value, though as true chronicles they hardly claim our respect. Of unity and sympathy there is little, but as expressions of current partisan feeling on the different transactions and movements of the time the books often throw light, which the investigator will not fail to prize. With the aid of official documents, now easy of access, he will find little difficulty to satisfy his mind as regards facts.

Fifty years ago the mental activity of the people of Lower Canada found full expression in the arena of politics. Her public men were engaged in working out the great problem of responsible government, though, at that time, her Papineaus and Nelsons, her Lafontaine and Neilsons, did not dream of the liberty which the people of Canada to-day enjoy. The newspaper and the pamphlet, and occasionally the ballad, formed the literature of the period. There was no great variety in the subject matter of this letter-press, which reached the reader, in one form and another, almost every day. It continually told of the struggle for political life which was going on among the politicians, and romance, poetry, history and philosophy stood aside for statesmanship.

Practical work in French-Canadian authorship may be said to date from the coronation of Queen Victoria, and it must be confessed—and the confession is made with the highest pleasure—that during the half century of Her Majesty's reign the literary activity of the French writers in Canada has been very great. Hardly a branch of authorship has remained untouched. In poetry, perhaps, the highest merit has been reached. Cremazie's flights have never been surpassed by his confidants. His poetry is dignified, graceful in style, and full of fire. Among his compatriots his fame burns brightly, and he is the true exponent of their hopes, aims and aspirations. Of a more rugged type is Frechette, the laureate of the French Academy, whose muse, however, can be as delicate and refined as it often is impassioned and strong. Frechette easily occupies the second place in the affections of his people, though scholars regard his work as more even and more correct when tested by the canons of criticism than that of Cremazie. Neither poet has written a single long poem, short pieces and

sonnets illustrating their methods and literary products for the most part. After Cremazie and Frechette, and I place the names in this order—the accepted rule among French-Canadians themselves—comes a numerous train of poets, occupying the position of minor singers of various grades. Much of the work which is produced by these poets is very good. The texture is not always strong in fibre, but of grace and fancy and music the poems are seldom deficient. The French-Canadian ear is keen for melody, and all poets of the race are musicians to a greater or less extent. They may not all play instruments, but they can sing, and they are quick to detect a false note or a halting line, and their poetry always scans. Of course, the best of them has given us no great poetic drama like Heavyside's "Saul," or Charles Mair's "Tecumseh," but in the way of light and fanciful love songs, sonnets to womanly beauty, and addresses to patriotic sentiment, the French certainly hold ground on which few of our English poets may enter, with the single exceptions of Charles Roberts and John Rende. Of purely classical poetry the French have given us but few exemplars, while of poems which breathe the teachings of Christianity to a superlative degree the verses of Judge Routhier are the best examples.

In fiction Lower Canada takes fair rank, but like English Canada—if I may use the term for purposes of comparison—she is still looking for her great novelist. Of story-tellers she has more than we have, and in merit they will compare well with ours, though she has not yet produced a Haliburton or even a James DeMille. "Charles Guerin," by Dr. P. J. J. Chauveau, is chiefly noted for its excellent descriptions of the manners and customs of French Canada. As a novel it lacks many essential elements of success. The movement is not brisk, and the character-drawing is done by an artist of the second class. As an early contribution to the fiction of the country, however, it proved a pretty good beginning, and if Dr. Chauveau has written no more stories since then, but has turned his attention to history and stronger literary food, the same thing may be said of Francis Parkman and John Lothrop Motley, whose entrance on the field of romance and adventure ended with one venture each. Still, as a picture of our home life, "Charles Guerin" has its usefulness. "Jacques et Marie," by Napoleon Bourassa, artist and litterateur, is a story of a much higher type. It deals with war, sacrifice, patriotism and banishment, and in parts is remarkably well done, notwithstanding the fact that its author lacks style. Style, of course, he has, but it is not easy, and his story reads sometimes like an essay. As it treats of the banishment of the Acadians, from the Abbe-Raynal point of view, the reader must be prepared to accept a good deal on trust. Mr. Longfellow's beautiful poem, too, has had its influence on Mr. Bourassa's mind, and we have, in his tale, the poetic rather than the sternly historical aspect of the situation. His materials were ample and full of color, and he has told a very pretty, though sad, story, of the life and adventures of a people who will always fill a picturesque position in our history. Joseph Marmette's early novels lacked spontaneity and knowledge of the social life with which he attempted to deal. He took up historical subjects, such as the Intendant Ligo's career in Quebec, and the fortunes and vicissitudes of Count Frontenac. It is not always easy to invest an historical novel with the sort of interest which commends fiction to the reader of high-spiced romance. Mr. Marmette had many difficulties to overcome. He was a student, and he learned of men and women in society through books and memoirs. He had travelled little. The outer world was to him a sealed book, and the gay *salon* of gilded high-born dames, and the intrigues of a peculiarly vicious court, though not lacking in attractiveness as studies, proved beyond his strength to depict. His stories of fifteen or more years ago, are deficient in grace and form, and though dramatic enough in a way, they do not interest the reader deeply. Of later years he has done better, though his diction is still stilted, and his characters want body and artistic movement. *Francois de Bienville*, which furnishes a romantic picture of Frontenac's time, is, perhaps, Marmette's best novel, and is freer from mannerisms than others from his pen. One other novelist I may mention, who has represented Canadian life and episode in a somewhat striking way. Mr. Pamphile Le May, the poet, and translator of Longfellow's "Evangeline," has written about half-a-dozen long stories. "L'Affaire Sougraine," which is founded on fact, and was really in the reader's hands while the Indian "Sougraine" was undergoing his trial at the assizes for the murder of his wife, is the most dramatic of the series. It is a tolerably clever piece of work, and highly realistic, but the author fails in making his characters talk in an interesting manner. Mr. Le May is singularly scanty in his vocabulary, and his descriptions of scenery seldom rise above the commonplace. "Picouoc Le Maudit" is a less sombre romance, but none of our French-Canadian novelists write with the dash and nerve of their brothers in France, who affect every school of fiction, and do their work with spirit and vivacity at least. Quebec has yet to welcome her Cable, her "Charles Egbert Craddock," and her Bret Harte.

In historical writing French Canada has done very well under the reign of the Queen. M. Abbe Faillon we cannot claim. He was a Sulpician priest of very great ability, and his really remarkable work, the *Histoire de la Colonie Francaise en Canada*, though a monument to the labors and trials of his order in Montreal, is a book of powerful interest and value. On three separate occasions the Abbe visited Canada, living in the country several years, and consulting materials wherever he found them. The archives of the Propaganda at Rome, and the various departments in Paris, readily yielded their treasures to him also. But though Faillon cannot be claimed by the French-Canadians, they can point with pride to two of their sons, the Abbe Ferland, who furnishes the best ecclesiastical history of the country, and Francois Xavier Garneau, the distinctively national