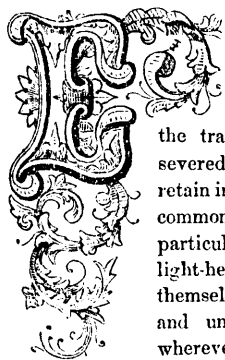


THE OLD MANUSCRIPT; A MÉMOIRE OF THE PAST.

BY H. V. C.



VERY nation possesses some distinctive trait which constitutes its individuality and even the trans-atlantic scions, long severed from the parent stock, retain ineffacable marks of their common origin. The French in particular, preserve a careless light-heartedness, peculiar to themselves, through all changes and under every sun; and wherever the French language

is spoken, or the blood of Frenchmen courses, a certain air of refinement is invariably observed. Even in the cabin of the lowest *habitant*, one's good taste is rarely offended. A graceful veil is cast over poverty, which conceals its grossness, and lends to it a romantic interest. With no other people is there so much genuine, *bon-homme*, such an artistic adaptation of the beautiful.

The French Canadians, as a class, in their rural districts, are singularly insulated. They seldom come in contact with other races in the usual intercourse of life, and hence their habits remain primitive, and their customs date back to the earliest settlement. But if their progress in improvement is slow, their knowledge of evil is also limited. Generation after generation, till their farms and leave them to their sons, precisely as *their* fathers left them; they seldom increase their acres and are rarely compelled to sell them. They labor on their own inheritance and smoke their pipes in happy contentment; the *drap du pays*, clothes the paysan, and the weekly sale of fowls and eggs, provides the few articles of luxury, which female vanity, in the simplicity of rustic life, desires.

But the old aristocracy of the Lower Province has still its representatives, and names which once rung on the battle fields of Europe, or swayed a monarch's councils, are now heard in the courts of law, and the merchant's office,—in the fields of labor, and the workshops of the artizan. Time, in his onward progress, has wrought startling changes, sweeping down the barriers of

feudal prejudice and opening a path for labor and enterprise over the ruins of fallen nobility and decaying grandeur. Right has become might, and the clear head, the strong hand and stubborn will, in these prosaic days, carve out the most substantial fortunes, and dispense the most lasting benefits to humanity. Yet still the chivalrous names which stand prominently in our early history are cherished with honest pride by those to whom they are transmitted, and in almost every village are found heir-looms and relics handed down from father to son since the days of Jacques Cartier and de Vaudreuil.

Such were the observations of a young Englishman, travelling in the depth of winter with despatches to the military commandant at Quebec. The war with the United States was then in progress, and during his long journey from Halifax by land, he was brought into frequent contact with the Canadians in their rural homes, and received from them much friendly and hospitable kindness. Charles Elphinstone was a close observer, and loved to study mankind in every stage of progress; the present opportunity therefore was not lost upon him.

Elphinstone travelled with an experienced guide, and was well prepared for all the exigencies of a long wintry journey. Constant relays of horses provided by the friendly *habitants* carried them on at a rapid pace and the novelty of his situation suggested the most agreeable fancies. Never before had a region of such enchanting magnificence spread before him! Interminable fields of snow presented a dazzling surface,—now smooth, unbroken, blending with the blue horizon;—then piled by the eddying wind into mountain ridges; and again to-seed in light wreaths, and formed into chrystal pyramids, and foliated achitaves, it presented a thousand graceful and fantastic forms, as if moulded in mad caprice by the frolic genii of the season.

Then his course lay through the heart of vast primeval forests, and the stately pines and branching firs were hung with feathery foliage, rose-tinted by the brilliant sunlight or glancing with pearly lustre in the silver moon-beams. Swiftly