

FRENCH-CANADIAN LIFE AND CHARACTER.

EDITED BY J. VROOM.

The debt which the empire owes to the French-Canadians, Roberts asserts in his recent work,¹ is immeasurably greater than we at present realize. By their rejection of the proposals of the revolted colonies, he argues, the northern half of the continent was preserved to Great Britain; but for them, there would, in all likelihood, be no Canada to-day.

Other writers have sketched for us, with more or less friendly touch, the French-Canadian gentleman of rank; often poor, but not wretched; at home with his tenants, at home among the Indians, at home in the forays of the border wars, yet never forgetting his station in life; and the simple *habitant*, poorer still, who followed his seigneur in war and honored him in peace, made the most of the fleeting pleasures of life, and took no thought for the morrow. Roberts delights to fill in the picture with descriptions of the dwellings of the people and of their dress and social customs.

To condense from his pages :

The houses of the *habitans* were small cabins; humble, but warm; with wide, overhanging eaves. The walls within, to the height of a man's shoulders, were worn smooth by the backs that leaned against them. Solid wooden boxes and benches usually took the place of chairs. A clumsy loom, on which the women wove their coarse homespun of wool or flax, occupied one corner of the main room; and a deep, box-like cradle, always rocking, stood beside the ample fireplace. Over the fire stood the long, black arms of a crane, on which was done most of the cooking; though the "bake-kettle" sometimes relieved its labors, and the brick oven was a stand-by in houses of the rich *habitans*, as well as of the gentry. For the roasting of meats, the spit was much in use; and there was a gridiron with legs, to stand on the hearth with a heap of hot coals raked under it. The houses even of the upper classes were seldom two stories in height; but they were generally furnished with a good deal of luxury, and in the cities they were sometimes built of stone. A typical country mansion, the dwelling of a seigneur on his own domain, was usually of the following fashion: The main building, one storey in height, but perhaps a hundred feet long, was surmounted by lofty gables and a very steep roof, built

¹ History of Canada, Chapter XII.