

THE FRENCH-CANADIAN PEASANTRY

LANGUAGE, CUSTOMS, MODE OF LIFE, FOOD, DRESS

While the forces of change and progress are rapidly obliterating the ways of our ancestors, and civilization with giant footsteps is trampling out of sight even the ancient landmarks, the French-Canadian peasant still preserves the same old customs and habits which his progenitors from Brittany and Normandy transplanted to Canadian soil. The traveler through the province of Quebec may, amid many of its surviving cherished memorials, easily fancy himself among the romantic scenes and striking events of French colonial life of more than a century ago. Not only are the old fortifications which protected the city of Champlain from the assaults of Wolfe, Levy, Montgomery, and Arnold still extant to challenge the admiration of the sight-seer, but the children of their defenders, the same race with the same characteristics, mental and physical, and speaking the same language, may be seen walking the streets of the old rock-built city.

Intelligent observers familiar with the provinces of France, whence the ancestors of this people came, have frequently noted and commented upon the fact. The descendants of the Bretons, for instance, can easily be distinguished by their features, loyal disposition, and strength of will even to obstinacy. Their marked bodily vigor and fervent piety are other traits. The Normans are equally conspicuous for somewhat different physical and mental qualities. They are shrewder in business, gayer, and of more sociable disposition. They also are loyal and pious, but less excitable than their fellow countrymen of Breton extraction.

The French-Canadian peasant, *habitant*, is generally of small or medium size, of compact well-knit frame; his powers of endurance against fatigue and cold are simply astonishing. He is usually of dark complexion, with sparkling brown eyes. His quiet, thoughtful face, often dull, wears a contented expression, but he brightens quickly in merry response to a joke or a lively remark, chatting easily and with animation. If at all educated or a politician, he puts his powers to effective use and makes for his side or party a strong case. His head, in size and contents, is a good one. Along the north shore of the St. Lawrence one meets with varied types, for the original settlers intermarried with Indians, English, and Irish, with such physical results as might be expected. Thus you will often see peasants