

PROTESTANTISM IN QUEBEC AND EASTERN ONTARIO.

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MY information rests upon (a) personal knowledge of a large portion of the area covered by the Synod of Montreal and Ottawa, (b) upon answers received to questions addressed to a large number of members of the Synod, and (c) upon a comparison of the census of 1881 and 1891.

I. THE PRESENT CONDITION OF PROTESTANTISM IN THESE BOUNDS.

In presenting the matter it may be well to consider the two Provinces separately.

1. *Eastern Ontario.*

That part of Ontario within the bounds of our Synod, embracing the counties of Glengarry, Prescott, Stormont, Russell, Dundas, Carleton, Grenville, part of Leeds, Lanark, Renfrew, and a part of the Nipissing district.

In this part of our Synod the Protestant population is, with a few exceptions, holding its own or gradually growing. There are limited portions where a gradual exodus of Protestants is going on. I expected to find this true of Glengarry, Stormont, Prescott and Russell. I am happy to say that the information furnished does not justify that expectation. In several localities the French population is increasing more rapidly than the English, but Protestantism is gaining. In some places it is reported that Protestants are buying farms more freely than formerly. One correspondent assures me that in Eastern Ontario, i. e., the counties named, Protestantism is slowly gaining ground.

In the territory covered by the counties of Carleton, Lanark and Renfrew, with a part of the Nipissing district, Protestantism is gaining in the towns, save at several points where saw-mills are operated; while in a number of country districts there is a gradual exodus of the English portion, the young people especially moving to cities or going West-ward. This exodus is so marked among the Presbyterian element that some of the self-sustaining congregations have been for several years under the necessity of applying for grants from the Augmentation Fund.

Along the C.P.R. route through Nipissing, the Protestant population is said to be slowly increasing. There are large sections of this portion of our Synod where there is a constant and healthy growth of Protestant population, with every prospect of continuance.

2. *The Province of Quebec.*

In this Province generally the Protestant population is not increasing. In a few places it seems stationary, but in many others it is declining.

Of course there are exceptions. A very marked one is the city of Montreal. While the R. C. is far in excess of the Protestant population, the

latter is strong and ever growing, having numbers, wealth and influence, and controlling much of the business. The leading Protestant churches are strong and their congregations numerous, and they use their wealth liberally in church extension in the city and throughout the Dominion, and in sending the Gospel to the heathen.

In Sherbrooke there is progress; a few years ago our congregation there was receiving aid, to-day it is strong and self-sustaining; the town of Richmond has seen like growth, our congregation there was supplemented, now it is self-supporting on a very liberal scale; the large congregation of Leeds, is holding its own; and what is true of these is also true of towns and villages in the Presbyteries of Montreal and Ottawa.

But there are many other portions of the Province of Quebec where different conditions prevail. The Protestant population of the city of Quebec; taking Baptists, Episcopalians, Methodists and Presbyterians, has decreased 1,561 between the census of '81 and that of '91; one Protestant Church has been closed and in many others there is room and to spare. In Three Rivers, the three Protestant congregations, which twenty-five years ago were all strong and flourishing, now struggle for existence, and extinction awaits some, if not all of them.

Throughout the Eastern Townships a diminution of the Protestant population is constantly going on. Several Baptist and Congregational churches have been closed. A member of the Presbytery of Quebec had, ten years ago, over six hundred under his pastoral oversight, to day he has a little over four hundred.

Nor is this depletion confined to the Eastern Townships. Ten years ago the Presbyterian part of the population in the Counties of Huntingdon and Chateauguay was said to be strong and at least stationary. Now there is a reported change. One of my correspondents from the County of Chateauguay, writes:—"There is a gradual decrease of English-speaking Protestants in this vicinity; more marked in the adjacent sections than in — town."

Another from Huntingdon County writes:—"The English-speaking Protestants are unquestionably decreasing every year in this locality; many farms once occupied by families belonging to the Presbyterian Church are now occupied by French Roman Catholics. We can count our young men and women by the score on the other side of the line and in Montreal."

The same is true of Argenteuil County. One of my informants writes:—"Decreasing, I think about ten per cent. in this quarter for the past six or seven years."

Another:—"In the country parts the Protestant population is certainly decreasing. In my own locality the average for the past 15 years would be one family per hundred per year."