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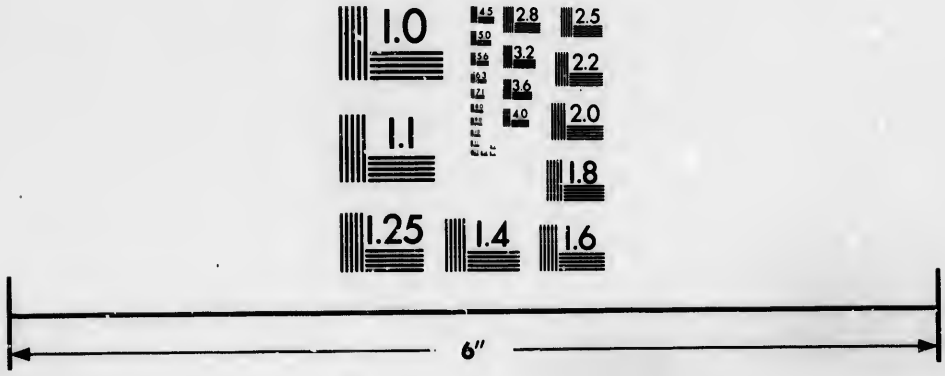

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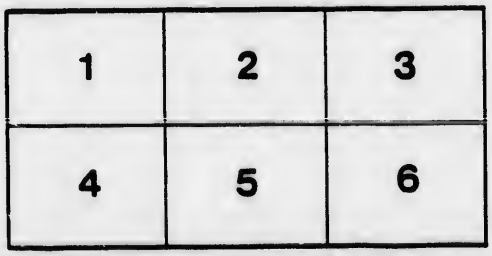

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"Spes, spes, spes,
Sine nihil."

A LETTER

FROM

WILLIAM SMITH, OF MONTREAL

TO HIS FRIEND

JOHN BROWN, OF LONDON,

IN WHICH IS DETAILED

SOME OF THE GRIEVANCES

UNDER WHICH CANADA LABORS.

MONTREAL:
PRINTED BY JOHN LOVELL, ST. NICHOLAS STREET.
1860.

TO THE PUBLISHER.

MONTREAL, *February* 1860.

SIR,

A few days since I paid a visit to my friend, Mr. William Smith, of this city. I found him in a rather excited mood, inveighing heavily against some of those laws and customs of our country, which, to say the least, do not tend much to facilitate enterprise, or extend commerce. After some conversation, I discovered that he had been writing on the subject, to a friend of his in London, and got him to allow me to see the letter.

Sketchy, patently open to the most simple criticism, both as regards matter and style, still it struck me as being typical of much that at the present time is seething in the minds of many of our fellow Colonists, and I persuaded my friend to let me have it for publication, giving him as my reason, the same that I now do to you, that I wished to launch it as one of the "floating straws" that he speaks of, hoping that other and stronger straws may be sent after it, to show how vigorously the undercurrent of public opinion runs towards the fact that a great and sweeping change must be made, ere Canada fulfils great destinies, nearer at hand, perhaps, than may be at once apparent.

I am, Sir,

Yours Obediently,

COLIN CLAXTON.

A Letter from WILLIAM SMITH, *of Montreal, to his Friend,* JOHN BROWN, *of London.*

MONTREAL, *February* 1860.

In your last letter, my dear John, you say that Canadai rather "enquired" about at home just at present, that our Railways, our Ocean Steamers, and our Bridge, have brought us prominently forward, and that we poor Colonists were "ne'er more bruited in men's mouths than now," so that you, wishing to be *au fait* on one of the topics of the day, and possibly having an eye to a future investment in Canadian Consols, write to me to know how we are getting on, how our new protection principles seem to work, what are those "crying evils" that I alluded to in my last, and what the ideas of plain men like myself, who have thrown their little fortunes and efforts into the game, as to the remedies that should be applied.

John, you have asked me more in those few lines, than hours and days of incessant toil could answer, and for more than able heads, and clever financiers have as yet found themselves competent to solve. You have shown me too, how little we are known in England, how ignorant you are of the difficulties we are hemmed in by, of the numberless shades of politics and politicians that exist, of our imperfect legislature, of our worse than imperfect judicature, of our diverse interests, religions, and sects, and of the continual struggle that has to be made, against these and other misfortunes, to progress, instead of retrograde,—I say, John, your questions lead me to the conclusion, that you are ignorant of these things, or you would not have asked me to answer in the space of a letter, what volumes and the pen of a ready writer would fail to describe. I cannot pretend to do this, or to answer categorically to your questions, but I will from

the point of view taken by myself and others, and they are very many, who are at present standing by, sketch to you the events that are occurring, the facts, sad facts, that exist, and the hopes that we entertain for the future.

To do this, I must carry back your historical recollections to just one hundred years years gone by, to the date when the *drapeau blanc* was hauled down, and was replaced by the British banner, since that date the Anglo-Saxon race in Canada have, in comparison to their fellow countrymen of French extraction, increased in more than double ratio, and since the union of the Provinces, represent in the Upper House just two to one, (36 to 18,) and in the Lower nearly the same proportion, in the figures 85 to 45; yet with this fact staring you in the face, does it not seem incredible, it is however no less true, that the British majority, an immense majority too, as regards not only numbers, but wealth and still more intelligence, (and I speak with all due respect of my French countrymen) should be under the domination of French institutions, submit to French customs, be legislated for in the French tongue, and bow down to French laws, laws too, of which the bases are not of the present day, but were designed for a handful of colonists, and petty traders one hundred years ago; let these laws have been pruned and altered, let it be, that these institutions have been modified: can these laws, can these institutions, blackletter in their spirit as in their type, be fitted either root or branch, for the merchants, British merchants, who now champ at them; or for the striving British farmer, who from between his ploughstilts, curses the exactions that he has to submit to?

It would be vain, John, to cite to you the daily examples of the evils to which these things give rise, they must be apparent; or to the grinding and gnashing of teeth of those, who see themselves, a vast majority, subjected to foreign customs and legislation, in a land where the flag of their fathers claims dominion, that flag of England around which, whatever betides, old associations or the tales of their sires still command them to rally, or if need be to die. Among the more intelligent of the French population, there are many who acknowledge the existing evils, there are many who would strive to eradicate it, they see with us, John,

that we should no longer live in the shadow of the past, but in the light of the present, and the hope of the future.

How then, you will ask, have these things arisen, how is it that they are not changed? To answer, I must again lead you back a hundred years, to the date when conquering Britain tried the experiment of grafting the English oak on the French jargonelle, instead of planting the offshoot of her royal tree in ground, where, in process of time, expanding branches would shelter its weaker neighbour; expediency has gone on confirming the error then committed, and expediency at the present day, in the shape of (so called) responsible Government, shrinks from applying the necessary remedies which might cure the evil, but would risk the alienation of a numerous body, who, bound by the most intimate ties of nationality and religion, generally vote together, and whose very ideas have to be propitiated, to sustain in power whatever ministry may chance to be in the ascendant; this is the plain sad fact, as well known, as it is openly admitted. Thus we have here, in Lower Canada, as our primary evil, what may be summed up in three or four words which our brethren of French extraction are continually dinning into our ears: "*Lois, langue, et institutions.*"

Do not imagine, John, that what I have sketched to you are the whole of our crying evils, here, in "Bas Canada," (concerning which alone I have been speaking at present); we have many more, both here and in the Upper Province; there, as here, paid legislation, corrupt elections, party politics, and sectional strife rear their heads rampant (although there indeed, the drag of the *ancien regime* presses not, as on us,) there, difficult doubtless as it is to patch up evils, there may be amelioration; not so however with us; not changed, not modified, but swept away must be our abuses; we must have laws and institutions which, superseding the rotten fabrics at present existing, and which more in accordance with British feelings and British enterprise, will be competent to render justice, punish fraud, and establish mercantile security.

From what I have briefly described to you, John, and knowing as I have hinted, that other ills are behind, you may fancy that I am despairing of the country in which I have fixed my lot, and that I have no hope

for better things to come. Far from correct would be this conclusion. What the country has done, fettered as she is, is the foreshadowing of what she is still to do, and of the great destinies that await her. Straws, floating straws, are showing the direction of men's thoughts; the party, aye, the great party of the country, the one which setting aside religion or sect, vested interests or different nationality, goes for Queen, Country, and Progress: that party I say is arousing; changes have taken place, greater ones are preparing; woe be to those who resist that stream of progress which now dammed up by a frail barrier must soon burst forth. Our rottenness is on the bark, the heart of the tree is sound, its vitality is unimpaired, a hundred years clogged as they have been, have brought forth great results, what may not the next cycle untrammelled produce?

Invest then our Consols, John, do it with confidence and security; for the old country, my idea was as you know Free Trade, for this new country, Protection. Judicious protection is our necessity; the grown man requires stronger meats than the growing child; protection will establish our manufactures, increase our immigration, and provide, John, for the payment of your Consol's interest, and then when you and other Britons on your side of the water, having a direct interest in the Britons on this side, hear, which you soon will, their great cry to the Imperial government to aid in loosing the irons that are now eating into them, then you at home will enforce the cry that we make out here, and turn our dream of the future into a glorious reality.

I will trespass on you no longer at present, John, with our grievances and our hopes, but asking you to note and help our "good time coming,"

Believe me,

Your atttached friend,

WILLIAM SMITH.