

## AD BONUM COMMUNE

It was certainly tempting Providence to plant English and French colonists in such close proximity to one another in a new land without a fifty mile channel of salt water between them; and, no such division existing, an attempt to unite the two Canadian peoples has not been very successful. This attempt was the object of Confederation, but the French are so unlike the other in tastes, temperament and ideals, and so diametrically opposed in some of the things which matter most, that it was well-nigh impossible to create out of types so fundamentally different anything approaching unity.

Everyone knows that the progress towards fraternity between the two races has been slow. Some people, having despaired of a reconciliation claim that the race problem would never have existed, that the French would never have become a barrier to national unity, had a firm hand been applied to Quebec. In other words, if these had had the makings of the history of Canada, they would have taken away some of the things which the Frenchman holds sacred, and they would have suppressed the young French growth in America once and for all. All Canada would then be steam-rolled into one beautiful uniformity. It was fortunate, however, for the good name of British justice, that a true statesman in the person of Sir Guy Carleton was at the helm at the critical time, and a policy of justice and toleration prevailed. And so, because of Sir Guy Carleton there has been no repressive policy, nor acts of Prussianism to save us from racial troubles. The French Canadians were allowed to retain their identity and, until to-day, the French have lived as a distinct nation, having very little communication, either social or political, with their English brethren. Nor do we wonder at this, for between two races with such a history of conflict between them, surely nothing short of a miracle could bring about friendly relations within a few generations.

But what are the more recent causes or combination of causes for our slow progress towards fraternity? Potent though the difference of faith must be, both as a social barrier and as a source of prejudice and suspicion it is not the real cause of our present troubles in Canada. The English and French were enemies for some centuries before the reformation was even heard of; and today, with the bulk of these peoples professing different faith, they can be good friends. What, then, are the causes that have so contributed to produce this chronic cleavage between them?

Let us look at the position of our neighbours of Quebec. They are an isolated people, adrift from their motherland, and stranded in a new world, alien to themselves in race and religion, and out of harmony with their ideal; they are a minority, haunted with the tragic possibility of the disappearance from this country of their language and religion. Inspired with an intense devotion to race and tradition, they are waging a fight against forces that make for assimilation.

What are these forces? The attempts of the English speaking people of Ontario for the abolition of the French language in Canada is one of them. They believe that, to build up a nation, all must be welded together by a deep and sincere devotion to a common land, and that this can never be realized, unless there is one language for Canada. But they forget, or they are unable to realize the sacred character of a language with all its associations; they fail to realize that any attempt to suppress it will not promote friendship, but enmity and discord.

It is in the schools of Ontario that the French Canadians find the greatest room for complaint. In 1899, the Ontario government by a policy of anglicization, abolished from the Ontario schools the French language, and denied the French child living in Ontario the right to Education in his mother tongue. The answer of the English speaking people of Ontario to French objection is, that Quebec has



been showered with enough favours and that the linguistic concessions of 1774 and of 1867, by which the use of French was permitted in the Dominion Parliament, the Supreme Court, and in the Legislature, courts and schools of Quebec, far outweigh any possible injustice that may have been done. Yet, is this not an overstatement of facts? To oppose the natural growth and development of a people, can hardly be looked on as a matter of no consequence, and the measure of 1899 aimed directly at the suppression of the French tongue in the provinces just named. It must be remembered that when the existence of a people's language is at stake, it becomes an issue of vital and supreme concern. The relinquishment of one's mother tongue means, in a very real sense, a breaking away from the past with all its associations; it further means the adjustment of one's mental processes to new and alien forms of thought.

We can hardly blame the French for their objections against such a measure, for French Canadians, while they desire and intend that their children should learn and acquire at least a working knowledge of English, the language of the majority yet they are equally determined that they shall learn and preserve the language of their forefathers—the only language spoken, besides the Indian dialects, on the greater part of this northern hemisphere for a century and a half, the language in which was written the history of French civilization and christian evangelization in this continent unparralleled for single-mindedness, heroic endeavour and brilliant achievement. It is their language, a part of themselves and of their very lives. With it, they are better off, better equipped for the duties of life, and its existence neither hinders nor interferes with any right or privilege of others.

And so the matter stands. Watching us, the French have come to believe that they are on the defensive, as they were when French was prohibited in the united parliament of 1840. The French will never be understood

by the English, so long as the latter take it for granted that the French feel indifferent towards Canada. Glaring at one another across the currents of the Ottawa river is no preparation for acquiring a steady, humane, and elevating vision of Canada.

But let us not be too pessimistic. Rather, let us say there is good reason for optimism. Fundamentally we are not enemies. The majority of both peoples harbour no ill-will. They simply continue to live separate existences, knowing little about one another, and nursing subconsciously the usual more or less harmless prejudices against each other. There is ample room in Canada for both French and English. Let the English reconsider their position with regard to the language and civilization of French Canada. They will learn that each race may preserve its identity and regulate its life in its own good way, and that neither will be the less Canadian for it. Moreover, the French Canadians, at closer range, will be found to be less virulent than they were at first supposed to be. Let the English Canadian forget some of his preconceptions and misconceptions and he will look upon Jean Baptiste as a good fellow and one worth having in the country. Let there be that frank recognition by word and by deed, that the French Canadian possesses—a Canadian citizenship equal with our own and that, perhaps, it is well for Canada to have the race of Corneille and Moliere and Millet and Rodin share in the development of our Common Dominion.

Then will the spirit of race antagonism die hard, and let us hope that it will give way more and more to a spirit of peace and good-will that will make for the promotion of the common good.

Have we not in the French Canadian, proof of high culture? A Frechette, a Suzar Cote, an Abbe Cosgrain, a Phillippe Hebert, a Bouthier give us a notion of French Canadian possibilities. In French Canada to-day, there is a rapidly developing native literature, that for

idealistic devotion to race and tradition, is unique in Canada. Moreover we know for a certainty that the Roman Catholic Church in Quebec can be a sympathetic foster-mother of the arts. Will not Canada be richer, if the Laurentain Province can build up for itself a culture of its own—French Canadian, and yet in the truest sense, Canadian? Will not the historian of the future record as good, whatever we may do to-day to encourage diversity of thought and ideals in our national life.

Let no one doubt any longer the spirit of invention, the generosity, the grace, the delicacy and artistic taste of the French. When all these qualities are combined with the practical temperament of the English, who will not say that our dear land of Canada can be fashioned into one of the greatest nations the world has ever known. In order that this may be speedily realized, let the English Canadian learn the language of the "Fleur de Lys," that he may come to regard his neighbours in a whiter light, while the French Canadian, learning the language of the "Rose," will come to see things more "en rose." Then will the inscription on the common monument to Wolfe and Montcalm be forever true.

"Mortem virtus communem,  
Famam historia,  
Monumentum posteritas dedit."

A. Gallant '24

