

A MODERN HOAX

Pierre Laporte was born near the little village of Dechambault. It was a typical French Canadian village with the silver spire of the parish Church rising amid the humble dwellings of the French Canadian habitants. Until comparatively recent times the "Canadien", whether seigneur or habitant, was a man of the country rather than of the town. His sudden turn to the city, his effort to adjust himself to new conditions while the world has changed around him, has resulted in the creation of an unsettled class, consisting very largely of country people, led astray by the vain attraction of the city and who have never been able to make a place for themselves in the city.

Pierre was the third child born to M. and Mme. Laporte. His father was a habitant who eked out a humble living for himself and his family from his small farm. He, as the other people along the road, were the descendants of the original Canadians—still frugal, God-fearing, French-speaking habitants. The farm had been in the hands of the family for generations and had been passed down from father to son. Each in his turn had tilled, sown and reaped from these precious fields a thousand times over. Each had settled, married and raised a family on the benevolence of these fields. When the father of one generation became too old to carry on, he would pass on to his oldest son that which was as dear to him as life itself—the land which had sustained him and his family.

Pierre obtained his limited education at the local school. When the school day was over he worked with his father and brother in the fields until sunset. He liked this after-school work so much, in fact, that at the age of sixteen he had no desire to continue going to school. His week came to consist of three parts—work, the Saturday night dance in the village and Mass on Sunday morning.

One day when Pierre was working in the barn, his brother came in seeming rather troubled.

"Pierre," he interrupted, "father wants to see us. It must be something important."

Pierre knew it was important, something which he had been expecting but wished would never come. He knew that today Andre, his older brother, would become the

owner of the farm. Andre and Pierre got along well together and their differences had been kept stifled but now Pierre knew that one bond had been severed. After this incident, work became burdensome and his mind was not at peace.

One evening after supper Andre seated himself next to Pierre and said:

"Pierre, I'm getting married soon."

Pierre could not say anything.

"Everything will be all right," Andre assured him. "You can still work on the farm and I will pay you wages and maybe in a couple of years you will be able to buy a farm of your own. I will help you to pay for it. Then you can get married and settle down just like me."

Pierre knew that things would not work out as Andre had planned. Yet he agreed with him.

In the following months more occasions for disagreement between the brothers arose and finally what seemed to Pierre the crucial moment came. Andre announced that his mother-in-law was coming to live with them, that the house was small and, in addition, his wife was expecting a baby. It was plain that there would not be room enough for them all.

On Saturday night Pierre went to the dance as usual. Here he met a friend whom he had not seen for five years. At first he did not recognize him. "Such fine clothes compared to what I'm wearing", he thought.

"Hello Pierre!" beamed Roger Peron as they met.

In the course of the conversation which followed, Roger spoke of a lot of things—things that held Pierre spell-bound, things that seemed fantastic, incredible to him. The money that was to be made in the city, the fine clothes that everyone wore, the modern conveniences, the movie-houses, all the entertainments, these things and many more held the poor, humble habitant in ecstasy. Could not Roger prove it? Had he not a new convertible parked outside the door? Indeed he had!

At last Pierre had found a solution to his troubles; Roger had just asked him to go back to the city with him. Roger had assured him that it would not be difficult

to find employment and that in a few years Pierre would be as prosperous as he.

That night as they drove along the highway towards the city, Pierre's heart was light and gay in the anticipation of the good things that were to come, and the leaving behind of all the miseries that had plagued him for some time. As they drove into the city Roger pointed to the right:

"Up there," he said pointing to the hill, which now glistened like a jewel from the myriad of lighted windows, "Up there, is where the rich live. Down here in these dark cold tenement houses is where the rest live."

The car came to a stop in front of a tenement house.

"Pierre, you sleep here tonight and tomorrow we will look for a rooming house for you. The landlord should know where you will be able to get a job as he is well informed on that sort of thing."

Pierre was introduced to the landlord, a thick-set man with a deep voice and rather rough-looking. When Roger asked him where Pierre would look for work, he said:

"My young man, when one has experience it is not hard to get work, but you being a country lad—well, it is different."

Pierre was fortunate enough to find work. It was not hard work—in fact it was so easy it was tedious. He was now working in a textile mill. The wages were not exactly what Rogers had said they would be, but yet there was always the possibility that one might be promoted.

As time passed, Pierre noticed that the rest of the men with whom he worked took little interest in their work and that they were always grumbling about their wages and the bosses.

One day after being there over a year, Pierre thought that the time had come and passed when he ought to have had a promotion and a raise and so he went to see the manager. Having presented his grievance as best he could to his English speaking boss, he waited for the response.

"Pierre," said the boss after some hesitation, "we have a lot of men employed here; most of them have been here longer than you. Giving you a promotion would not be fair to those who have been here longer than a year."

I know that you are a very conscientious worker and have a very good record while in our service and really you deserve a promotion but these men would protest. Keep up the good work you have been doing and I assure you that you will get your promotion in the near future. As for raising your salary, you know the rule of the company, raises only with promotion."

Pierre began to sputter and mumble but he knew there was no use so he got up and walked out sullenly.

For five years Pierre tried to adapt himself to his surroundings but he always had a nostalgia for his home village. For months now he had been dreaming of all the fun he used to have around the village and he resolved that this summer he would spend his vacation there. Despite his unsettled situation, despite the emptiness and unnaturalness which characterized the things of his new life and retained him in his dissatisfied state of mind, despite these factors, Pierre had worked diligently and saved as much money as he could. He had still retained these habits of youth. For this reason he had at least acquired the "appearance of being prosperous" and had been able to purchase a car similar to Roger's. Mulling over this aspect of his success influenced him more and more to return to visit his home village.

It was on a Saturday evening that he arrived home just five years after he had left. While he was passing the garage which was once a blacksmith's shop, he saw walking up the other side of the street, Therese, the girl he used to take to the Saturday night dances and he immediately called out to her. He and Therese had planned to be married but he had left for the city without even telling her. He had thought of her many times and this was another reason why he wanted to return to the village. Now the two of them laughed and chatted together as they did in former years.

"Let's go to the dance tonight, Therese," Pierre ventured at last.

Therese stood motionless looking at the ground.

"Pierre," she said, "I'm married."

Pierre was stunned by the words. He drove off in haste but resolved that, after visiting his family, he would relive his former practice and attend the Saturday night dance.

That night Pierre was the center of attraction. All his former friends thronged around him and complimented him on how well he looked, and how he must have prospered. Seized, as it were, by the same frenzy that Roger Peron had experienced just five years before, he told them of the wonderful time he was having in the city, the great wages that were paid to the workers, the fine clothes that people wore and so on. He knew that he was deceiving them but yet he had not the courage to tell them the complete story.

At one point in the gaiety of square-dancing, Pierre eluded his friends and made his way outside. As he seated himself on the railing of the steps and gazed across the road at his auto, a resonant thought flashed across his mind, one which changed the expression on his face: "Have I, by my exaggerations and misrepresentations, influenced any of these people to abandon the full life they are enjoying in the peace and quiet of their farmlands for one, the very thought of which, bores me at this instant?"

—Ralph Gaudet '55.

BOOKS

The plenteous food of the hungry mind,
The delight of the rapturous soul,
The knowledge that feeds, the thoughts that bind,
The copious splendours wherein we find
The path to that final goal.

The pages filled with generous thought,
Of our predecessors long since passed
To that Blissful Seat so dearly bought,
Ever renowned and ever sought,
Where they found their eternal reward at last.

We reap the harvest, they sowed the seed;
We gather the fruits of their toil;
Truths quickly consumed by the mind in its greed,
As the replenishing rains that succour and feed
The parched, the drought-ridden soil.

Voices heard with the sense of sight,
Ideas aroused or inspired;
Lessons bedecked with the spirit of fight,
Ennobled therein what is good and right,
Providing the knowledge required.

—William Quinn '55.