

# CANADIENS

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CURIOUS the mental and physical contrasts which this French Canadian Province of Quebec is constantly and obtrusively presenting. At times it reminds one acutely of France; then again it does not. It reminds one of France because, at heart, it is France; and, again, that it is not France because it is French Canada. There is something in the faces of the people that is obstinately and unmistakably Gallic; and something in their manner that oddly differentiates them from the French of the Continent. There is something about the churches, the farms and the townships that reminds one of France; and, again, there is something about these that reminds us that we are not in the France we know, but in a land that is new to us.

The city of Quebec itself presents these contrasts in even more startling degree. Take, for instance, *Sous-le-Cap*, reputed the narrowest street in America. *Sous-le-Cap* reminds one of nothing so much as of one of these twisting, malodorous little alleyways which do similar duty on the *Isola Pescatori* in the Borromeans. It is utterly impossible for two conveyances to pass each other in *Sous-le-Cap*. Should any itinerant refuse gatherer happen along that way with the rickety tumbril that gathers the gold of his dubious harvest, the whole procession of sight, seeing cars and carts and *caleches* that happen to find themselves in the runnel are temporarily held up, and must remain stationary until the protagonist of still life sets himself in motion again and removes himself and his quad-ruped assistant to the wider spaces of the greater beyond. The moment a stoppage occurs, a horde of battered little scally wags rush out upon you and shout in evil English "Only one cent, M'sieu." To be charitable is, in this instance, merely to be weak. Give one of them one single cent, and in a twinkling another clamoring *melee* is at your heels. Women peer at you lazily from the overhanging windows and leer at you from between green painted French shutters; mechanics ply their trade in obscure and dimly lit workshops; cassocked priests haggle grimly in underground grocery stores with gorbellied *proprietaires*; scrawny dogs chase their fleas merrily in the littered gutter; prowling cats explore the dust bins hopefully; drying clothes flap and flutter languidly in the moribund breeze;

pedestrians squeeze close to the dingy walls as they attempt to make their uncertain way past the ever-lengthening procession of cars and *caleches*; horses champ their bits restlessly, kick their stomachs angrily and flick off the mob of tormenting flies nervously; motor engines chug and cough gently, while the American tourists—vaguely suspicious that the whole thing is merely a hold-up—demand the impossible from their charioteers who nod to them reassuringly, guarantee immediate progress, and do absolutely nothing. It is all very continental, very old-world this street, and it garners good American money.

One might very easily imagine himself abroad for the moment. One might easily conceive that he has wandered accidentally into some Breton port. Here are French names, French houses, French faces. The sound of an older French falls pleasantly on the ears; the slender-wheeled, lofty-built *caleches* with their old-fashioned drivers; the delivery and country carts with their big yellow umbrellas; and beyond the city's limits the dog-drawn vehicles, are all so pleasantly continental and French. But when one takes the *Escalator* and looks over the Lower Town from the board walk of Dufferin Terrace, the illusion vanishes. Beneath stretches a wonderful panorama—the silver basin of the River at the narrowing of its waters, a multitude of spires and domes and towers and turrets and cupolas, a medley of schools and convents, churches and cathedrals, ramparts and bastions, monuments and gardens, villas and cottages, *habitants'* homes, and, beyond, the protective rampart of the blue Laurentians. And, then the eye catches sight of such flaring and flamboyant board signs as "*Cigarettes Millbank*" "*Fumez le Tabac de Qualite,*" "*Old Chum, Boswell's Ales and Porter,*" "*Canadian Club Whiskey,*" "*Frontenac Export Ale, Buy it by the Case*", and he realizes with a sudden sense of shock that one is living not in the past but in a modern country where the Almighty Dollar counts pre-eminently, and that the picturesque is merely a "blind." Grain elevators in sombre grey; American newspapers; the familiar features of Jiggs and Maggie; American magazines and novels and "movie" advertisements; American flags above apartment houses and draping, along with the Union Jack, bar-rooms and restaurants; goggles, Palm Beach suitings, knickerbockered women. For a moment one's thoughts go jiggling off into the future; but it is a futile imagining and, with a sigh of relief, one suddenly becomes conscious of the approach of some others and hies back with them into the realm of their intangible reality. . . They at least have been; the future and its protagonists are still merely hypothetical. . . It is with the past and not the future that one can

make contacts. The past is a *fait accompli*; from it we derive our inheritance. We live on its dividends. The future is merely speculative, a ghastly imagining.

Cities, like individuals, have their histories; their ghosts that flit across their stage of the memory; who have played their parts for good or for ill and left their impress. Quebec has not lacked its share in this spiritual plenitude. Its streets are paved with ghosts—ghosts that flit by unseen by the thoughtless, unrecognized by all except their familiars. There, for example, are Cartier, the discoverer of Canada; Champlain, the founder of the city; Laval, after whom the University is named; the gallant Frontenac whose memory is honoured in a city ward, a county, a hotel and a blend of beer; LaSalle, Marquette, Joliette, La Verandry, Breboeuf and Lalemant; Intendant Bigot, the house of whose sentimental mistress, Madame de Péan, is still to be seen in St. Louis Street; small chinned Wolfe and resolute Montcalm; Levis, Montgomery and Arnold. Yonder, too, passes one less known to fame—a certain Major Thomas Scott, late of His Majesty's 70th Regiment, brother of the more famous Sir Walter, whose grave may be seen in the old churchyard of St. Mathew's Episcopal Church. The handsome couple striding down the street are Louis Hébert, the first colonist in Canada, and his wife, Marie Rollet, the first teacher in the country. The young man with them is their son-in-law, Guillaume Couillard, the first tiller of Canadian soil. The distinguished-looking *religieuse* to whom all passers-by pay their respect is Madame de la Peltrie, who founded the famous Convent of the Ursulines as far back as the year 1639, and who is remembered in religious life as Mother Marie de l'Incarnation. The handsome woman whom you see approaching is the Duchess d'Aiguillon, niece of Cardinal Richelieu who brought out the Hospitalieres Nuns from France and placed them in charge of the Hotel Dieu Convent and Hospital in 1693. The fashionable young naval Captain emerging from the door of the famous *Chien d'Or* hostelry is one Captain Nelson, later famous on account of the Trafalgar incident. Doubtless the gallant Captain had never given a moment's thought to the meaning of the inscription—which you may now see above the main entrance to the Post Office—beneath the *Chien d'Or*; but one thing is certain, that he had been thinking very deeply about the charms of its then *chatelaine*. So profoundly, in fact, had the maiden impressed him that he had determined to marry her. Unfortunately, however, a certain Mr. Alexander Davidson got wind of the Captain's intentions, had him forcibly returned to his ship and thereby, no doubt, altered the course of history. That sturdy looking fellow

is one Abraham Martin, the first known pilot of the St. Lawrence. In the *Jesuit Relations*, Martin is called *l'Ecossais* so that he was in all probability a fellow countryman of my own—although merely a Lowland Scot, and it is after him that the famous Plains are named. That stout looking fellow prowling about the *Chien d'Or* is the Duke of Clarence, afterwards William IV, who got the hiding of his life from an angry father, whose daughter his Grace had been pursuing with his unwelcome attentions. . . . But let us leave this numerous and ghostly company, particularly that group of sportive young "middies." Doubtless, the young rascals are up to some devilment or other. They are carrying something. What in Heaven's name is it, and whither are they taking it? Ask the Librarian of the Literary and Historical Society what it was all about. He will, if you catch him in the humour, give you a graphic account of the night's frolic in his own pawky Scots way. But they got the statue back, and it now stands—an ageing, wooden and somewhat tarnished looking Wolfe, on its lofty pedestal in the tranquil atmosphere of the Reading Room of the Morrin Library, holding watch and ward over the newest novels and the modish magazines.

Undoubtedly the dominant factor in Quebec is religion. The Church penetrates and saturates life; it touches it at every angle and modifies it at every turning. The smallest village or hamlet boasts its handsome church; convents, monasteries, oratories, bishops' palaces or shrines meet the eye at every turn. Enter a pulp-wood factory in the Laurentians; the first object that attracts the attention is a statue of the Christ, looking down at you with outstretched hands from His niche. Mount the hill-tops; pause at the cross roads leading into a village, and you find yourself almost certainly standing beside a crucifix or a shrine. Enter the house of the *habitant*, and what are the most striking things you see? Cheap prints of the Sacred Heart of Christ or Mary or a crucifix on the wall. Attend any University function and, along with the Lieutenant-Governor and representatives from the Protestant Universities are seated His Grace and his co-adjutor, a bevy of prelates, priests and Fathers. Among the students who come to receive their diplomas and medals are Trappists and Franciscans, *abbes* and brothers, black, white and brown garbed men. Look at these crowds of grey and black nuns you meet on the streets; see the zeal and devotion with which the people observe their feast days and saints' days; how they flock in pilgrimages to basilica and holy man; do penance and absolution. Everything in Quebec points to the Church as the dominant factor in the life of the people.

And yet, when you come to think of it, the "Catholic" church in Quebec is a curious anomaly; for "catholic" it is only in the narrower meaning of the word. In reality it is French-Canadian, and bears the unmistakable stamp of racialism. Catholic, in the wider sense of the term, it is not. The French Canadian stock has remained exceptionally pure, the race sentiment solid; the people, a people apart. This holds in the case of the Church between which and the state there exists and always has existed a spirit of close co-operation, which has and always has had one definite and specific aim in view—the maintenance of race solidarity. Doubtless the barrier of language has helped to perpetuate the spirit of racialism—but in an unique manner the Catholic Church in Quebec is the Church of the people.

The association between Church and state in Quebec is no new thing. When Jacques Cartier landed at Gaspé on the 24th of July, 1534, he immediately erected a great cross with a shield on which were the lilies of France and these words inscribed, *Vive le Roi de France*, the ceremony signifying that the explorer took possession of the land of New France in the name not merely of an earthly but of a heavenly King. When Samuel de Champlain founded Quebec in 1608, he called the Church to help in the work of civilising the Hurons and in 1615 he brought out three Recollet Fathers from France. Ten years later came the first of the Jesuit missionaries, Fathers Massé, Breboeuf and Lalement. . . . But to mention even the names of those who worked hand in hand with the Church in New France would mean the writing of a history of Canada; Marquette, the Jesuit who set out with Joliet from Sault Ste. Marie to discover the Southern Seas and found instead the Mississippi . . . . the subject is tempting, but we must stop here. I merely wished to point out and to emphasize the peculiar and age long relationship that has existed between Church and state in Quebec. Unless one understands that, it is impossible even to begin to understand Quebec.

I admit that it is not invariably easy to understand another's point of view; and what holds in the case of the individual holds equally in the case of their aggregations. Some time ago I spent part of my vacation in a religious community—the Fathers of the Holy Cross—when the force of the truism about people finding it difficult to understand one another's point of view was very forcefully brought home to me. The Fathers were a genial crowd of priests; but between them and myself was a great gulf fixed.

I had a room in the College and dined with the Philosophers— young students who were taking what we should call a classical

course. My room was close to the Chapel, and at first I used to be wakened by the grim, almost menacing hammering and shuffling of hundreds of feet as the pupils filed into early Mass. I could hear the organ, the murmuring voice of the priest, the chants, the responses and the final prayers. Being on vacation I came down late for breakfast and my wants were attended to by a delicate looking, waxen-faced Sister. At first the *portier*—a red-faced, clean shaven little fellow, dressed from head to foot in black, who wore an absurd little cap on the back of his head, like an English public school-boy, used to usher me into the dining hall, but desisted when he found that I was perfectly capable of making my wants known in French; An odd myopic little man, with the thickest glasses I have ever seen on mortal man, the *portier* was quite a character in his way. Beneath my window—which faced the back and gave on a sort of lane—the Sisters moved about constantly, coming from and entering the kitchen, interviewing men who drove up with cart-loads of provisions, supervising maids and boys at the more menial tasks such as peeling rhubarb and potatoes and gutting fish. After lunch we lounged on the benches around the baseball field or watched some of the Fathers playing croquet or tennis. At croquet they smoked and wrangled like so many school-boys, and stirred up a fearful dust with their trailing cassocks. Tennis they played in their cumbersome petticoats, and presently their tonsured heads and shaven faces gleamed liberally with beads of perspiration. After the recreation hour classes were resumed, and silence fell over the place until the evening when again the baseball field and the croquet pitch became merry and animated. Some of the Fathers promenaded for their exercise at this hour; others were content to sit and talk or to watch the others. One old priest had lived there for fifty-seven years. He was a dignified, hearty old man with a keen sense of humour and an excellent knowledge of the happenings in the world. He was an Irishman, and in the course of his journey he had stored up a fund of out-of-the-way knowledge and anecdote. "And what would your Protestant friends say now," he used to ask me, "if they were to see ye sitting here among a crowd of black Papists?" While no doubt curious to know what a Protestant should be doing in their midst, not one of my hosts made the slightest attempt to pry into my private affairs or to question me as to my motives. A little microcosm were these Fathers—devout but very human. One was a natural ascetic; another a born churchman. One was a scholar in the narrower sense of the term, another an educationalist in the broader. While they were in the world they were not of it, and consequently knew nothing of the minor

worries to which ordinary humanity is subjected. When it was necessary to travel they were provided with the sum necessary, or with their ticket. When they were sick, they went to the hospital; and when they were old and likely to die they had no care on the score of doctors' bills, but were cared for by the Community until their hour arrived when they were decently interred in the churchyard beside the baseball field within sound of the merry voices and the jovial laughter of their quondam fellows.

But one evening as I strolled up and down the promenade with one of the Fathers—an ageing man—we unconsciously stumbled on the vexed and difficult problem of the relationships between the French Canadians and their kinsmen in France.

"I simply cannot understand France", the Father was saying; "France contains some of the very best Catholics in the world and some of the very worst. And it was for this same France that expelled the monastic orders—many of whose members are now here in Canada—exiled and persecuted them—for this same France that has done this thing to the Church that our young men were sent overseas to fight and to die. It is true that they are the same people, but we Catholics in Canada—we *Canadiens*—cannot be expected to feel the same for a country that has done this great wrong to the Church. We are sorry for France; we grieve over the sufferings of the French; but, until France has righted the great wrong she has done to the Church, we cannot feel for her as you do in England. I sometimes think they are not the same people as ourselves. When I was in France many years ago as a young priest—I sometimes found the people could not understand me when I spoke. They looked upon me as a foreigner. They no longer speak a pure French. They have changed our language in all its purity. *This* is our France—this Canada of ours where we will keep our religion and our language pure."

The soft voice of the Father, with its curious French-Canadian intonation and turns of phrasing, rolled gently on. An inspection of the College cadet corps was being held that evening, and a large crowd of the curious had assembled. It was odd to hear the commands being delivered in English—everything else being in French. The inspecting officer took the salute beside the Father Superior. The whole thing suddenly struck me as odd. Why were these young men being trained as cadets? Why all this military display? Whom would they ever fight? I asked the Father the name of the officer who was responsible for their training: "*Le Colonel Papineau*" he said, halting for a moment in his steps to watch the march past. "*Le Colonel Papineau*" I repeated after him, and suddenly the name

conjured up a clear though distant memory, and I wished that the Father could have seen the France I knew and had been with me on that drear November day when the Canadiens took over from us on Vimy, and I took Captain Papineau around our front line, and we ran into all manner of scrapes from which, on that occasion, we emerged scathless. Captain Papineau. . . Later, I heard that he had been given command of his battalion and returned to the line. . . The next I heard of him was that he had been killed at Passchendaele—Notre Dame de Lorette. . . facing Vimy Ridge. . . the queer twisted little alleys of trenches dug into the solid chalkstone, the water in them coagulated into a semi-solid state. The dug-outs mere jagged clefts in the hill-side. The immediate country bleak and withered, a *Via Dolorosa* of iron and steel strewn and littered with the wreckage of once glad human life. A trench running through the former site of the chapel and the graveyard. . . Unburied dead from the earlier fighting; the crunch of my foot through the ribs of some unknown German soldier who lay where he had fallen, now covered with the long rank grass. . . perhaps a quondam friend. . . A boot, rotten and rusty with the jagged bone projecting, rising to the muddy surface of the water—scum in the trench catching me sharply on the shin. . . Rusted rifles, twisted bayonets, broken carbines, unexploded shells, fragments of shell cases, scraps of rotting uniform, discarded packs, waterlogged shell holes, dilapidated dug-outs with the name of the former German occupants scrawled on the lintel. . . here and there a broken, unpainted wooden cross with the simple inscription *Français Inconnu* printed on a strip of aluminum or rudely scribbled in faded pencil.

Beyond, far as the eye could see, the fertile plains of Artois with their pretty wooded villages and the cathedral of Douai glimmering through the haze. In the foreground—Lens—silent chimneys, desolate slag heaps, rows of deserted miners' cottages; a ruined electric power station with its riddled zinc reservoir; a Church clock set to German time; mile on mile of billowy trenches, showing clear in the chalky soil—the German third line of defence. . . Overhead, the bursting shrapnel; the drone of the planes; the cackle of machine gun fire. To the North, Loos with its tragic memories; to the South, the scattered ruins of Albain St. Lazaire with its shell whipt *Chausee*, the tumbled scrap heap of its *Sucrerie*, the tottering ruin of its spire, the bones of the violated dead in its shell torn cemetery. . . .

The inspection was over and a firework display had begun. Rockets and Verey lights soared in the sky.

"*Tiens*", said the Father, "I have never seen such an illumination."

"They remind me of France," I murmured vaguely. And I saw it all again—the slow methodical cutting of the enemy's wire; the silent assembling of the raiding party; the sudden fierce concentrated artillery barrage supported by trench mortar fire; the hurried clambering over the parapet; the dash across No Man's Land; the hacking, bombing, stabbing; the furious discharge of Verey lights; the return under the hostile barrage; a jubilant group of blackamoors, shepherding a handful of stunned and woebegone grey-clad tatterdemalions. . . . The skeleton of Neuville St. Vaast looming gauntly in the blackness. . . . The withered branches of the stripped and dying trees, creaking and flapping listlessly in the ravished gardens. . . . A jagged road, stretching ghostlike in the direction of the enemy's lines. . . . a revetted trench, partially covered, leading to Brigade Head-quarters, rabbit netting spread on the duck boards to prevent slipping. . . . A rain sodden country, seamed by the horrible wrinkles of war; shell-pocked walls; a leaden sky; a scurrying over-fed rat; the yellowish slime on the furrowed roads; the angry spit of a gathering storm. . . . Lined along the trench leading to Brigade Headquarters are the prisoners, red eyed, weary, caps gone as souvenirs or lost in the fray. Two of them huddle in mud-stained greatcoats. Our fellows have given them cigarettes. They come to attention as I pass—a tragic and ludicrous effort. One of them has a good face, but the others are a grotesque commentary on the Superman. . . .

"Now if France would only," the Father was saying; and my thoughts flew off at a tangent again. . . . It had grown quite dark; the crowd was dispersing; there was a chill in the air.

"*C'est magnifique*" the Father was saying as the last light flared and flickered in the night.

"*Mais, ce n'est pas la guerre*" I concluded. . . . Then we bade each other a courteous *Bon Soir* and sought our respective quarters.