

(December 15th.)

## The Habitant of Quebec.

BY SIR LOMER GOUIN.

ADDRESSING the Canadian Club, on the subject: "The Habitant of Quebec," Sir Lomer Gouin said:

*Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen,*—The fostering of patriotism by encouraging the study of the institutions, history, arts, literature and resources of Canada, and by endeavoring to unite Canadians in such work for the welfare and progress of the Dominion as may be desirable and expedient, is a work of which any man or body of men may well be proud; and this, as I glean from article 2 of your constitution, is the purpose of the Canadian Club of Toronto.

To be invited to address an association having such desirable and such praiseworthy objects in view is an honor which I greatly appreciate.

One of the first steps towards that desirable union of the various elements of our population for which we are striving appears to me to be the closer acquaintance and more intimate intercourse between neighbors, which conduce to a better mutual understanding.

It was to Quebecers one of the very pleasing incidents of the great Champlain Tercentenary in Quebec in 1908, that our sister province of Ontario was represented by its distinguished Premier, Sir James Whitney, and several of his colleagues; while the generous assistance in promoting the success of that celebration, which was so willingly given by our fellow citizens, Colonel George T. Denison and Mr. Lyon E. Walker, and by the Hon. Colonel Hendrie, representing your Provincial Government on the National Battlefields Commission, is greatly appreciated by the people of my own city and province.

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Sir Lomer Gouin, Premier of the Province of Quebec, is by birth and training specially qualified to speak of the virtues and qualities of the French Canadian Habitant. He has been in public life since 1897, when he was elected to the Provincial Legislature for Montreal. In the following year he was appointed a member of the Public Instruction Council, and in 1900 he was made Minister of Colonization and Public Works. He has been Premier since 1905.

The more that we can have of such interprovincial intercourse, the better shall we become acquainted with each other, and the more shall we be able to appreciate each other's merits. If anything that I can say to you shall tend towards a better understanding between the people of our respective provinces, I shall think myself extremely happy.

With at least one element of our Canadian population I can claim a pretty close acquaintance.

The Habitant of Quebec may be regarded as the original type of my province in very much the same manner as you may claim the United Empire Loyalist as the original type of yours. The Habitant is not without interest to any student of the social conditions and problems of our common country, and perhaps you would like to hear something of his personal characteristics, his aims and his ambitions from one who has known him from earliest childhood. While he has been the subject of much criticism and misrepresentation from some who should know better and from many who have spoken and written in ignorance of his true character, it is a pleasure to me to be able to refer to the appreciative efforts of many English-speaking writers, like the late Dr. Drummond, of Montreal, and your own Professor Wrong, to render justice to the Habitant as they found and knew him.

Let me say at the outset that the very name "Habitant," which strangers to the province of Quebec are sometimes inclined to regard as a term of reproach, is really one of dignity. The original tillers of the soil in Lower Canada, who first assumed the title of "Habitants," while holding their land under feudal tenure, would not accept any designation such as "censitaire," which carried with it some sense of the servile status of the feudal vassal in old France, but preferred to be called a Habitant or inhabitant of the country—a free man and not a vassal. And so the designation obtained official recognition in New France, and has become the characteristic name of the French-Canadian farmer among English-speaking people. When it is remembered that for the first 150 years of the entire 300 of Quebec's history, the only inhabitants of the province were of French birth or extraction, it will be seen that the term Habitant has subsequently served to distinguish the families of original founders of the country from immigrants of a later date from other lands, just as the addition of the letters "U.E.L." to the names of some of your own original settlers from the former English colonies to the south of us served as a title of great distinc-

tion to its proud possessors, from among the later arrivals from Europe in Upper Canada.

The attachment of the Habitant to the land is one of his most striking characteristics. In many instances, farm lands are still held by the lineal descendants of those to whom they were first granted by the King of France, or his representatives, in the earliest days of the colony; and when, last year, a committee on the Old Families of the Province of Quebec was formed at Quebec, over 270 of such families claimed and received medals and diplomas of honor, the latter of which testified that those to whom they had been awarded still owned the family homesteads that had come into possession of their ancestors from 200 to 250 years ago, and that they had ever since remained in the occupation of the same families. In every one of these cases satisfactory proof of the correctness of the claims set forth had to be established by official notarial deeds. Is it any wonder that families with such a record are proud of it and that they glory in the title of Habitant?

For many years, of course, and in some instances for several generations, the early occupants of lands in New France suffered all the hardships of new settlers. In addition to those experienced by the pioneers of Upper Canada at a later date, there were the constant dread and frequent depredations of hostile Indians, and the hardships incidental to the French and English wars in North America. Many saw their cattle carried away to feed one or other of the contending armies, and their crops and dwellings destroyed by invading troops.

The cession of Canada to England by the King of France left the Habitant, as it had found him, in undisputed possession of his land and other property. Remaining as French as ever in character, in faith and in speech, as "Habitant" or "Canadian" as ever in his love for the land discovered and colonized by his ancestors, the country of his forefathers' homes and struggles and graves, and of his own and his children's ambitions, hopes and love, his fidelity to the flag "that for a thousand years has braved the battle and the breeze," though to him quite new, has never been called in question, while his loyalty to Canada is that of the most fervent patriot.

The natural increase of the French-Canadian population of North America is little less than miraculous. From the little group of some 60,000 people living here at the end of the French regime in Canada, there has sprung up on this northern half of the continent a French-speaking population estimated at over two millions of people. This continual and wonder-

ful multiplication of this element of our population has become almost proverbial. You have all heard of the many families of fifteen, twenty and even thirty children in the province of Quebec. Cases are on record where the parish priest, whose people pay him with the twenty-sixth part of their farm produce, has also adopted and educated the twenty-sixth child of the family.

Despite the cares and the responsibilities of maternity, there are few more active, more helpful and more light-hearted companions than the Habitant Wife and Mother. "La Belle Canadienne" they call her, and how well she deserves the compliment. How attractive she is, those of you who have travelled in the province of Quebec don't need to be told, and those of you who have not, should come and see. How good she is, time would fail me to sell you. Usually of robust constitution; strong in the religious faith that sustains her under her many burdens and responsibilities and in her sense of duty; domestic, frugal and industrious; a devoted wife and indulgent mother, she appears to be a combination of all the virtues.

The Habitant is prouder of his large family of children than of any of his worldly possessions. The poorer he is, the more delighted he appears to be with them. And the more numerous his family, the greater number of willing workers there are upon the farm. To the good God who gives them so large a progeny, the happy parents will often make the greatest of sacrifices to give back one in return, to be trained for his service in the sanctuary. The brightest and best of the flock is selected, with the approval of the parish priest, for the holy mission, and the height of human ambition and happiness is reached for them, when the old father and mother, occupying the seats of honor in the church, are the first to receive the sacrament at the hands of the child whom they have given to God, when he celebrates his first mass.

In no family are the ties of filial attachment stronger than in that of the Habitant, and not alone in the size of his family are the traditions of patriarchal times perpetuated. One of the most touching customs of some old Canadian families is that observed on New Year's Day, the great social festival of the French-Canadians, known as *La Benediction Paternelle*, the father's blessing of his children. Sometimes it is delivered after Mass. In other families the touching observance takes place much earlier. The historian of Montcalm and Levis, the Late Abbe Casgrain, a brother, by the way, of your own late Senator, Dr. Casgrain, of Windsor, has related how the

New Year was ushered in by the family circle of his late father.

"At early morn," he says, "our mother woke us up, attired us in our best Sunday suit, and gathered us all together, with the house servants following, in the parlor: she then thrust open the bed-room door of our father, who, from his couch invoked a blessing on all of us kneeling around him, while emotion used to bring tears to the eyes of our dear mother. Our father, in an impressive manner accompanied his blessing with a few words to us, raising his hands heavenwards. Of course the crowning part of the ceremony to us was the distribution of the New Year's gifts, which he had at first kept concealed behind him." Another record of older date tells of Pierre Boucher, who was Governor of Three Rivers in 1653, the father of fifteen children,—he died in 1717 at the age of 95—blessing on New Year's Day the kneeling group of sons and daughters, all listening to the words of wisdom and kindness falling from his venerable lips. For many years afterwards, on the anniversary of the old patriarch's death, there was annually read, in the presence of the assembled family, all kneeling, his last will, entitled "The Legacy of Grandfather Boucher." In this memorable testament, each member of the family was addressed in turn, while the wisest counsels mingled with the effusions of paternal affection. Concluding, was this general leave-taking of all: "Love one another sincerely for the love of God; remember that you will one day be called, like me, to appear before God, to render an account of your actions; hence, do nothing of which you will later have cause to repent. I do not leave you great riches, but what I do leave has been honestly acquired. I would willingly have left you more, but God is the master of all things. I have no enemy to my knowledge. I have done what lay in my power to live without reproach. Try to do the same."

In olden times the seigneur, or lord of the Manor, was usually godfather to the first-born of the children of his tenants, and to him, as to a parent, his god-children were wont to go on New Year's Day, and we have it from M. de Gaspé, in his memoirs, that on one occasion he saw no less than a hundred children go to call upon the seigneur at the manor house.

Some of these old customs have now passed away, and others are less frequent than formerly, but the family affection and respect for authority which they illustrate still

remain as a part of the heritage handed down to the present generation by their forefathers.

Happy in his home and contented with his lot, the Habitant's light-heartedness and freedom from worry displays itself in a variety of picturesque and innocent amusements. He is a born raconteur, and nobody is fonder than he of music, song and story. Some of his folk songs, like his Christmas carols, came with his forefathers from the land of his origin. Others are fragrant of the soil of Canada.

A country wedding in the province of Quebec often involves two or three days' rounds of festivities, which are sometimes continued from the house of one relative to that of another, till the whole string of family connections has been visited.

The New Year season is specially devoted to visiting, and to the personal tendering of good wishes, not only to family connections, nor yet alone to intimate friends, but to the entire round of neighbors and acquaintances.

Not all the children of the Habitant remain upon the land. Some are sent to college, and entering one or other of the learned professions, or a merchant's office, often rival in their subsequent success, the careers of the more highly favored classes.

French Canada, as it has been called, is naturally proud of those of her sons who have rendered distinguished services to Canada and the Empire. De Salaberry, the victor of Chateauguay, is a national hero in Quebec. Sir Percy Girouard is only one of the many distinguished British officers to spring from French-Canadian stock. The people of my province are proud to have given Sir Wilfrid Laurier to the Dominion and Empire, to have furnished Lieutenant-Governors for Manitoba, British Columbia and the Northwest Territories, to have given a Cardinal to their church, Chief Justices and other Judges to the Supreme Court of Canada, and statesmen like Chapleau, Mercier, Papineau, Lafontaine, Cartier and Dorion, to the political leadership of their country and their own Province.

Counties composed almost entirely of French-Canadian electors have been glad to show their liberality by electing to Parliament Sir Henri Joly de Lotbiniere, the late Hon. George Irvine, the late Colonel Rhodes, the late Hon. William Price, the late Judge Aylwin, and other English-speaking representatives; and when the Hon. Robert Baldwin was rejected by his old Upper Canada constituency, it was the purely French-Canadian county of Rimouski that gave him a seat in parliament.

It was the late Mr. Mercier's government that asked and obtained from the Legislature of Quebec the vote of a subscription to Toronto University, after its disastrous fire, and Quebec will not soon forget the generous vote of \$100,000 last year by the Legislature of Ontario to the funds of the National Battlefields Commission.

In the ranks of finance and commerce many sons of Habitants are occupying prominent positions to-day, both in the Province of Quebec and elsewhere.

With the recent establishment in our Province, by the Government over which I have the honor to preside, of technical and commercial schools, many more careers than formerly will be opened up for the younger generation of our people.

We owe much, however, to our classical colleges and universities. They furnished the necessary education and training to our parliamentary leaders who would otherwise have been poorly equipped for supporting the struggle for a constitutional and parliamentary system of government, which was waged in this part of the country by Baldwin and the Upper Canadian reformers.

In an indirect manner the classical and theological colleges of old French Canada contributed to the strengthening of the ties between Great Britain and Canada. They provided the Roman Catholic church in Canada with priests and with bishops who were sons of the soil and devotedly attached to the material as well as the spiritual welfare and future of their native land. Loving French as the land of their ancestry, but fully realizing the extent of the popular liberties guaranteed them under the present regime, they have ever been the most stalwart supporters of the British connection with Canada. But on this point I prefer that one of your own historians should testify. Professor Wrong, who spends his summer holidays among us at Murray Bay, and knows the Habitant almost as well as if he had gone to school with him, says:

"When the American Revolution began, the bishops were strenuous for British connection, and from the pulpits came solemn warnings against the Americans. Again in Britain's war on Revolutionary France the Canadian Bishops were with her, heart and soul. They ordered Te Deums when Nelson destroyed the French fleet at the battle of the Nile, and over Trafalgar there were great rejoicings. After Waterloo we find in French Canada perhaps the most curious of all the thanksgivings; Te Deums were sung and the people were told

in glowing terms of the victory of the "immortal Wellington" which had covered "our army" with glory and ended a cruel war. Later, in the days of Papineau, the church opposed rebellion; she has since opposed annexation to the United States."

It is quite easy to explain why no element of Canada's population is more intensely loyal to Canada than the Habitant, for unlike the Englishman, the Scotchman or the Irishman in Canada, the French-Canadian has no longer any racial affiliation in a political sense with any old-world power. Canada is essentially "son pays et ses amours," the object alike of his affection and his pride, and the subject of his most patriotic songs.

Of these I know of none more touching, not only in its language, but because of the circumstances attending the closing years of the poet's life, than the address to Canada by Octave Cremazie, whose sad fate it was to end his days a mourning exile from the Canada he so much loved, although it was in sunny France of his forefathers.

Addressing Canada he says:

"Heureux qui le connaît, plus heureux qui l'habite,  
"Et, ne quittant jamais pour chercher d'autres cieux  
"Les rives du grand fleuve où le bonheur l'invite,  
"Sait vivre et sait mourir où dorment ses aïeux."

Happy, he says, are those who know her, happier still are those who inhabit her, and who, never deserting the banks of the magnificent river where happiness always invites them, to seek fortune under other skies, know how to live and die where sleep the remains of their ancestors.

Such is the French-Canadian's attachment to Canada that nothing that is Canadian can fail to interest him. To me it is a matter of much gratification to have been asked to address the Canadian Club of Toronto. If anything that I have said to you shall tend towards that more intimate knowledge of each other that should exist between the people of our respective provinces, and that will facilitate your patriotic mission of bringing about a close union of the various elements of our population, I shall not have spoken in vain.

Let me close by assuring you, gentlemen of Toronto, that we of the Province of Quebec, as you are, are fellow-subjects of one King, one Crown, one Throne. The same flag that you fly floats above the central tower of our Parliament House in Québec. I do not need to recall to you any of the names

of my many fellow-countrymen who have fought in its defence, not only in Canada but across the seas as well. And you are not likely to forget that it was a French-Canadian Premier who declared that the last gun in defence of British sovereignty in Canada will be fired by a French-Canadian.

The Habitant makes no effort to conceal his affection for France. His love of her is for the land of his origin and his early ancestors. His love of Canada is for his own, his native land. He recognizes kindred affections on the part of Canadians of other origins. So may it continue; Shakespeare makes Brutus say: "Not that I love Cæsar less, but that I love Rome more." Thus may it be with all of us! May we not love the land of our respective origins less, but may we love Canada more!