

(November 17, 1930)

The French-Canadian

BY ARTHUR BEAUCHESNE, K.C., M.A., F.R.S.C.

PRESIDENT HENDERSON:—It is three hundred and ninety-six years, since the first Frenchman, Jacques Cartier, stepped foot on Canadian soil. Since that time Frenchmen and latterly through their descendants the French-Canadians have done tremendous things in the building of this Canada of ours. I often feel that Toronto is much the loser by not having a greater proportion of French-Canadian citizens. The only advantage that that has for us is that we are able to give a very very warm welcome to a French-Canadian when he appears here.

Mr. Beauchesne, may I extend to you the sincere thanks of the Canadian Club for gracing our presence here today. We are delighted to have you with us and are delighted you have chosen as your subject, the French-Canadian. Gentlemen, I have much pleasure in introducing Arthur Beauchesne, K.C., M.A.

MR. BEAUCHESNE:—Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, I am very thankful to you, sir, for your very kind introduction. I feel honored in having the privilege of addressing this club. The Canadian Club is doing splendid work in promoting better understanding between various elements of the population. If I am here today to address you as a French-Canadian it is not because public opinion is disturbed about us. There is no real problem to solve. We are living in peace and harmony. There is no French-Canadian question. But I think it is necessary that we should sometimes meet and exchange ideas in a friendly manner.

One evening in August, 1928, in the old City of Quebec I was with Mr. Owen Clough, then clerk of the Senate of

the Union of South Africa. It had been a hot day and there were on these dirty platforms about two thousand people, mostly French-Canadians. The band was playing the usual airs we hear on public squares at ten o'clock. When the program was finished the music struck up the National Anthem, *God Save the King*. The crowd stopped with as much suddenness as if a command had been given. The young men took their hats off and their lady friends observed a respectful silence. The moon shining in the typical Canadian sky threw its silver light on this lovely scene of French loyalty. Clough was astonished. "That is enough for me," he said. "We could not get that in South Africa. This is one of my most impressive experiences." That was the impression of an English gentleman who had spent twenty-eight years in South Africa and was paying a visit to our country. He was moved by a scene I had witnessed several times and taken as a matter of course, because it had seemed natural to me that in the old City of Quebec we should have a sentimental reverence for the British Crown. If perhaps there are any here who challenge or question this statement, I would invite them kindly to look with me into the psychology of French-Canadians.

After the cession of Canada to Great Britain in 1763, after the first treaty of Versailles, all communication between our mother country and the sixty thousand of these kith and kin living in America was stopped. My forefathers were left to themselves and had to seek their own salvation as best they could. Unfortunately the beginnings were fraught with mistakes. Had the British authorities then realized that the habitant found his mode of living improved by the change, many useless conflicts would have been avoided. When the French-Canadian discovered that his farm products could be sold for money and his services paid in cash; when he saw coin that he could possess; when he felt he could some day become the landowner, he welcomed the new British regime. But the soldiers burned his little settlements. Such were then the customs of warfare. We French-Canadians one hundred and seventy-five or one hundred and eighty years after those events hold no rancor in our hearts against Great Britain, for time has taken the

sting from many a fact which caused bitterness in the eighteenth century.

The Canadians refused some years later to listen to Lafayette and his lieutenants when they endeavored to enlist them in the American army. We are not descendants of revolutionary France. The tricolor never was our flag. When the revolution started its work of destruction in our former mother country my forefathers were British subjects and had ceased to be Frenchmen for nearly thirty years. They were, as we are today, staunch Roman Catholics. They were scandalized when they heard of the September massacres. They could not forgive the demons who were assassinating clergymen in the convents of revolutionary France. They developed that antagonism when they heard of the terror and of Robespierre, of the execution of Louis sixteenth, and the activities of the guillotine. They looked upon Fouché and all the rest of them as the embodiment of crime, those who were persecuting the nobility as bleeding France to death and keeping Europe in a state of turmoil. My forefathers then thanked Providence that they were living freely in a British country where they could practice their religion with freedom and teach it in their own language.

Eight generations of French-Canadians have been born in this country since 1763. We are French from a racial standpoint only, but not from that of nationality; and that is not the same thing. Neither from the standpoint of temperament are we Frenchmen in our aspirations. We speak French but we do not want to impose that language upon anybody else. English is taught in our schools. We love France and we admire her literature, but we have a greater love for our own country and we also admire English literature and we admire British culture. We are Britishers just as much as if we had been born in the British Isles. When the habitants became British subjects they soon understood that if they expected to survive they had better use their brains. I shall not repeat here historical facts which we have all learned at school. But I am bound to say that taken as a separate element in the population but not individually, we French-Canadians, for the past one hundred and

eighty years, since we have become British, have never committed a single act of disloyalty against the British Crown. The revolt of 1837 was not by any means an unanimous rebellion in the Province of Quebec. Only a handful of habitants took part. Some of the leaders, notably Lafontaine, were opposed to it and it was not limited to our part of the country. There were just as many rebels in Upper as in Lower Canada and some of their descendants have since acquired remarkable success in our parliamentary life. The French Roman Catholic clergy of Quebec was against the so-called rebellion as it had been against the Yankee propaganda in 1766 and 1812.

This brings me to a very timely question, namely, do the Roman Catholic clergy control the French-Canadian? The answer is simple. It is in the negative. Our relations with our priests are the same as those of all Roman Catholics with their priests in other parts of the Dominion. We have the highest regard for them as we have the highest regard for clergymen of any denomination, not only because they are priests but because they are good men, educated men, who are a credit to our population. We were thankful for Goldwin Smith when he said in his book, "Irish History and the Irish Question," "that the morality of the Irish priesthood in the opinion of impartial judges is high, as is that of the priesthood of French-Canada." And he added, "the two are the best things that the Roman Catholics have to show." But in social, political and industrial matters the priests in the Province of Quebec have no more influence than any other professional man. I have heard the late Mr. Monck, member for Jacques Cartier, in Ottawa, Minister of Public Works in Sir Robert Borden's Cabinet, say that if every parish priest in this county canvassed for him in election times he would lose his deposit. In election times priests are not unanimous by any means. Some of them are Liberal, others are Conservative, and a good many are indifferent. We have cases like the late Dominique Monet elected in Laprairie when every curate, and every priest to a man in the county, was against him. And you must remember gentlemen, on what side was the clergy of the Province of Quebec in 1896, and what was

the result of the election? In 1896 the whole clergy of the Province of Quebec was against the Conservatives and Sir Wilfred Laurier carried the province. If our rights are threatened we French-Canadians do not need to be stirred by clergymen in order to defend our cause. The priests would then follow. They would not lead. We are a population of laymen and by laymen we intend to be represented in state matters. And this is also the opinion of a great many priests.

It is a mistake to believe that we are unable to see anything good outside our province. I admit that the people of Quebec are not so keenly interested as they should be in all federal political questions. I know they are not greatly concerned with the wheat pool, the freight rates, the importation of coal, the League of Nations, and perhaps Imperial affairs, but in that respect they do not differ very much from the farmers in other parts of the Dominion. They seem, nevertheless, to have understood the effect of the New Zealand treaty on the price of butter. Who will pretend that men working on the farm from dawn to evening are sufficiently informed to give a reasoned opinion on political matters? I do not think we are worse than the provincial population of Great Britain, if we are to judge by newspaper comments after the last British election. I do not deny that French-Canadians are slow sometimes in joining English-speaking Canadians in many social movements, but you must remember we are not an entirely homogenous nation. Neither is the British Empire. Ireland is split in twain.

The Dominion is a Confederation of provinces. The British North America Act is a compromise between two elements. Each province was then given its complete autonomy in the most important factors of its existence. I do not suppose it could be avoided, but there is the origin of all the conflicts that we have had in Canada. The Province of Quebec, with its little seminaries, started to propagate a Latin culture whilst the other provinces cultivated the ideals of the United Kingdom. How could you expect unity with such a system? Yet, in spite of that great handicap, I say we have accomplished wonders and there is at present

harmony in this country. We are actually lessening the differences between the other provinces and Quebec. Schools other than little seminaries have been opened in our province. We have now a score of Normal Schools, industrial schools, commercial schools, and a good system of public schools in which the program, accepted and followed is about the same as the program set in all other provinces. And that there is certainly a great advantage in knowing how to speak French seems to be appreciated in all the provinces. Some provinces, perhaps, would like to speak French but unofficially. We do not mind. And there is certainly an increase in the number of French-Canadians who maintain friendly relations with English-speaking Canadians and that is noticeable especially in Ottawa, the capital of the Dominion. This will continue. We are at the beginning of a new era and we must bend every effort to foster the unity of this country.

Let us not be discouraged if success is not brought about as speedily as we would like. The ideas of a race are not changed overnight. Treaties and statutes do not alter the soul of a people. Friendships are not made by contract. They are the result of mutual attraction, coupled with mutual confidence. If, instead of being scattered on a narrow strip of three thousand miles, our ten millions lived in a territory about the size of Ontario we would understand each other very much better. We do not meet often enough and our intercourse is sometimes impaired by an apparent lack of consideration. We are apt to forget that according to an old saying, "Flies are not attracted by vinegar." Mutual respect will make very much less headway by speeches, magazine articles, and editorials than if it is started in the home, in the schools and in the pulpit. What is the use of French-Canadians teaching *Bonne Entente* if they call Henry VIII a scoundrel, Queen Elizabeth a bad woman, and say the English dispersed the Acadians and hanged a few Canadians in 1827? What is the use of an Englishman protesting his friendship for his French-Canadian brothers if when he takes his dinner with his family he tells them the Pope is anti-Christ and that the French-Canadians are an inferior element in this country? Such

conduct on both sides is nothing but stark hypocrisy. Mutual understanding between races will only be brought about if we sincerely desire it. We must accept it as a basic principle or as a guiding star in our existence. Unless we do, and I speak of all of us, there will always be a certain amount of distrust between us. Our friendship should be warm, sincere and brotherly. The game of politics has not always been played with tact and diplomacy necessary in a bilingual country like the Dominion of Canada. Most of our dissensions, nay, all of them, have been political and they found their origin in the lack of brains of some minister or the lack of control and the ambitions of some leaders of the opposition.

What is the attitude of the French-Canadian toward his compatriot, the English-Canadian? This is a pertinent question. Let us first analyze our relations with our coreligionists the Irish Catholics. Do you know, in spite of many misunderstandings, we get along with the Irish people better perhaps than we do with many other elements in the population. I am glad to say that although there is not a single county with an Irish majority, our French-Canadians—and I am glad they do—send five or six Irish members to Ottawa to represent them. Frank Cahill, member for Pontiac; Charles G. Power, in Quebec; another from St. Anne, which is now French-Canadian because they put a part of another riding in it. We have had two Irishmen as Lieutenant-Governors, Fitzpatrick and Carroll, so you will see there is nothing serious between the Irish Catholics and the French Catholics, at least in the Province of Quebec. I do not know whether they put it all over us or whether we have a soft spot in our hearts for them, but I think there is a little of both. As to the English-speaking Protestant, let me say without the slightest hesitation that it is our most ardent desire to keep with them in all circumstances the most friendly relations possible. We like them and though in cities like Montreal we have our separate institutions, our own clubs, and our own social activities, it does not necessarily mean that we avoid them. We like them and when we occasionally meet we certainly enjoy ourselves, and those of us who have had dealings with you have

always become most friendly disposed toward you. We like your sense of fair play and we admire your business ability. We know you have founded the great industrial centers of the Dominion and those of you who visit the province of Quebec know they are always well received.

Take my own experience. I am always well received in any English province and I do not find any difference in cities when I happen to travel. In the country where I spend my summers I have heard many French-Canadian farmers speaking in the highest terms of *Les Anglais*. Many of our French-Canadian municipalities elect English-speaking Protestant Mayors and councillors. We help send them to the House of Commons. At present Mr. Howard sits for Sherbrooke and Sir George Perley for Argenteuil. An English-speaking Canadian defeated all the French candidates who came against him in the County of Beauharnois. Two weeks ago in a by-election in Huntingdon for the purpose of giving representation to the English-speaking Protestants in the Cabinet, the majority of the French in that election voted in favor of the Protestant candidate, Mr. Scott, but he was defeated by the Protestant vote. And Mr. Taschereau, in order to show that he wished the minority in the Province to be represented in his cabinet appointed Mr. Scott a legislative councillor and made him minister without portfolio. A clearer example of our desire to remain friendly with you cannot be found. The French-Canadian attitude toward the British Crown is more than loyalty. It is reverence. We are the offspring of a Royalist race. Respect for authority comes natural to us. We admired Queen Victoria. The Royal family in the minds of the rural population of Quebec is the embodiment of nobility, almost too high to be approached by human beings. There is a feeling in Quebec that as long as there will be a King of Great Britain our constitutional minority shall never be jeopardized. Our people think that His Majesty would always influence his own government and British parliament if any measure were ever introduced against the terms of the treaty under which we became British subjects. I suppose you know that in our churches we recite prayers for the King of Great Britain.

I sincerely believe that if the British Commonwealth, instead of being presided over by a King-Emperor, was presided over by a President, it would not have such a hold as it now has on the province of Quebec. The French-Canadians were amongst the British subjects who refused to take up arms against the King of Great Britain in the latter part of the eighteenth century. My forefathers were steadfast in their idea that monarchy was the only legitimate form of Government, and they would not fight the King of Great Britain for the sake of the American insurgents. We remained faithful to our allegiance. We have never regretted it. We like to think that the King of Great Britain feels his heart beating a little faster when he reads that page of Canadian history. We are sure there is a link of friendship between the King of England and the Province of Quebec. We could not be more loyal to His Majesty if we were of English origin.

It is wrong to say that self-interest is the only motive for our determination to remain in the British Empire. Self-interest gave way in 1776 but not in the case of French-Canadians, when thirteen shining, British colonies took down the Union Jack and put up the Stars and Stripes in its place. We, French-Canadians kept the Union Jack at the top of the mast. Our forefathers were then on the same side as the United Empire Loyalists. The dissensions that subsequently took place were caused by local mistakes which were not properly understood in the Home Government when we did not have our autonomy. The trouble was finally settled after both sides had been heard. But there again the influence of the Crown was exercised in our favor. In our fight for political liberty we were then supported by a proportion of the English-Canadians and when we obtained what we had fought for, the victory was not one of French-Canada against English-Canadians. It was the triumph of freedom against oligarchy. Once more British genius for Government had made its contribution toward the civilization of the world.

The time is past when we had to go to London for the settlement of our difficulties. Canada is a good-sized country. Her people have acquired experience; the majority

and the minority know each other better, and I know that you do not even think of depriving us of our rights. Because we feel grateful to His Majesty, to the Home authorities, for past deeds, it does not necessarily follow that we do not trust you. The best-minded French-Canadians know very well that the leaders of the English-speaking Canada would not tolerate for a moment that the French-Canadians be unfairly treated if any amendment were made to our constitution. Please let us leave out of the picture the fanatics of both sides. But can you imagine that men like Mr. Bennett, Mr. Mackenzie King, Mr. Meighen, Sir Robert Borden, Mr. Guthrie, Lieutenant Governor Ross, Sir Allan Aylesworth, would lay sacrilegious hands on minority rights. We trust you and we want you to trust us.

We are all Canadians. But do we cultivate Canadianism as much as we ought to? We celebrate St. George's day; St. Andrews Day; St. Patrick's Day, St. Jean Baptiste's Day, but we do very little on Dominion Day. There are not very many demonstrations in Canada on the First of July compared with the jamborees that take place across the border line on the Glorious Fourth, from San Francisco to New York. People go into a frenzy. Fireworks are heard from morning until night and on the fifth the morning papers give us a list of the casualties. There are no casualties to refer to in Canada on the 2nd of July, unless they be caused by sleeping sickness. Do you not think that of all days this is the one which should be used to foster unity in the Dominion? Why are there not in great cities like Toronto, Montreal, and the provincial capitals, or Ottawa, great functions on that day? Why do we not organize popular picnics in the respective districts? No better season could be chosen for outdoor demonstration. What a spectacle it would be if you could bring together in a large hotel like this the best of your people, the most representative people of your city, to a banquet on July 1st, where Canadianism could be fostered and national pride magnified! Is there enough Canadianism taught in our schools? Is it not a duty of the Department of Education to see that the whole atmosphere of the school-room is saturated with the

idea that Canada is the best country in the world and our children should be proud to live in it?

And the school is not enough. In the United States they use advertisements, they use amusements and everything they can think of to bolster up the country. Here, not only do we neglect that, but we open our doors to all the jazz Yankee literature that can be dumped over the border line. Some of our people even go Yankee and wait until the Fourth of July for their celebration. Americanism is filtering through our country to such an extent that William Donald Munroe said the Dominion of Canada is a by-product of the United States. Professor Trotter in his book, "American Influences on the Canadian Government," says that the infiltration has been most marked in Ontario, if you please, and in the western provinces. It has been less marked in the Maritime Provinces and in Quebec not at all. The question of language, of course, explains that. It is useless to put us French-Canadians in the melting pot. We do not melt. Is there not in this characteristic, coupled with our affection for the British royal family, sufficient guarantee that we will resist all efforts to make Canada an annex to the United States. We want to be Canadians without having to sacrifice our racial origin. We are intent on joining you in all movements for the industrial, intellectual development of the Dominion, but we feel that you should not consider our French origin as a handicap.

That we have both virtues and defects, nobody will deny. But if it is good policy to recall our virtues, it is a mistake to dwell on our defects. We should put greater guard on the expression of our opinion about the shortcomings of each of us. We are both sensitive. Disparaging remarks, sometimes made to our faces, the unsympathetic attitude, the cold look, and the air of superiority may perhaps seem to pass unnoticed; but they are never missed and they hurt and cause bad feelings between people who have to live together in this country. I have heard men describe French-Canadians by reciting parts of the book, "The Habitant." Why didn't that writer, who was a friend of ours, write his poems in English. They are used in a good many places to ridicule our language; and there are people

who think we speak nothing else but that language in our homes, even that combination of horrible French and bad English. I think that book should be taken out of circulation. It does more harm than all the immoral literature from the United States.

We have wasted lots of energy in racial and religious conflicts. If our leaders instead of fighting each other on questions of language and religion had spent their lives developing our resources, Canada would be richer and probably more extensively populated today. Our mines, our forests, our fisheries, our farm lands have remained unexplored, whilst we have practised electioneering, running charity balls, parading with Masonic regulations and waving the flag. We are now beginning to realize that our energies must be directed in more practical channels. We must now rise to the measure of our increased responsibility. It is our duty to release the minds of the people from old Shibboleths, and direct them in practical matters, and to cultivate a sane public opinion if we desire Canada to become a home worthy of the best traditions and the greatness of the British Empire. Now that national conscience is being felt in Canada it is important that all trace of suspicion should disappear between the main elements of the population.

But you might ask, are the French Canadians for or against Imperialism? This is a fair question. In order to answer, one must first know what is meant by Imperialism. No definition has yet been given. We of Quebec, hard-headed sons of Brittany, want to know what the thing is before we either accept or refuse it. Unscrupulous politicians have told us in the past that contribution to the navy meant compulsory enlistment, and some people have been scared. Others have stated that Imperialism meant centralization at Westminster and an obligation to take part in all European wars, whether just or unjust. On the whole Imperialism has been used in the past as a political war cry, raised at election times for the purpose of getting votes. The trick was successful for a while but it finally became worn out. When aeroplanes were substituted for ships as our contribution to British defence, French-Can-

dians did not object and a great many of our young men took up flying. But if by Imperialism we mean federation of all the Dominions and Great Britain, all striving to secure the highest power and glory for the British world, I say unhesitatingly that French-Canadians will not be lagging behind. Nay, we will be glad to belong to such a commonwealth. The question of self-government is paramount with us. As long as Canadians keep the management of our national affairs in Parliament in which we are represented, we are in favor of Imperialism, and in this we do not differ at all from English-Canadians. You will note at the bottom of all our attitude the fear that our rights be imperilled. Take that fear away and you will find we are far from being anti-Imperialist. This feeling is natural to minorities. I dare say if you, the majority in Canada, thought that Imperialism would lessen your freedom you would not be very enthusiastic for it. If real and wholesome Imperialism were discussed before the Province of Quebec in a statesmanlike manner, without appeals to old prejudices, I am sure it would be approved by a large majority.

In conclusion I submit that Canada is not a bad country to live in at present. Compare it with India or with South Africa, or with Malta and its suspended constitution and you will admit that after all the French-Canadians are not very troublesome. The population of Quebec will always be against radicalism in all its forms. Its most urgent desire is to labor to the end that all elevating influences which make for civilization may be diffused among all classes and that we may ardently desire and cherish ideals which go with peace, liberty, equality and fraternity.

THE PRESIDENT:—Mr. Beauchesne, there is not a gentleman in this room who does not envy me my position in thanking you today for this inspiring address. If, in our weakness of mind we ever had any question as to whether French-Canadians were loyal to Canada or the British Empire, certainly it is dispelled now. We have had a real lesson in Canadian loyalty. On their behalf may I extend to you their very sincere thanks.