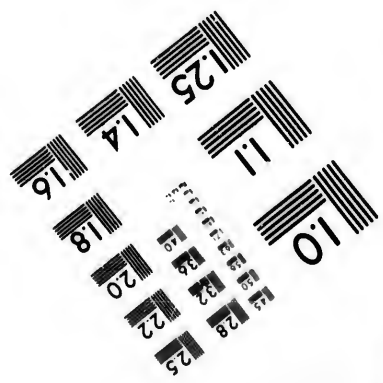
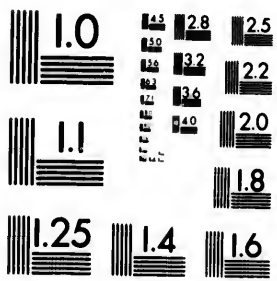


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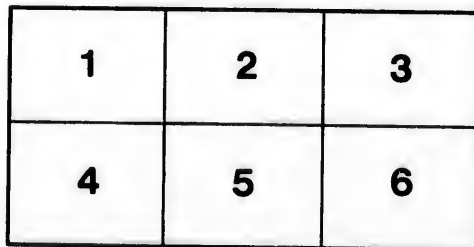
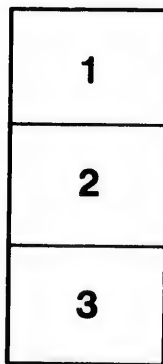
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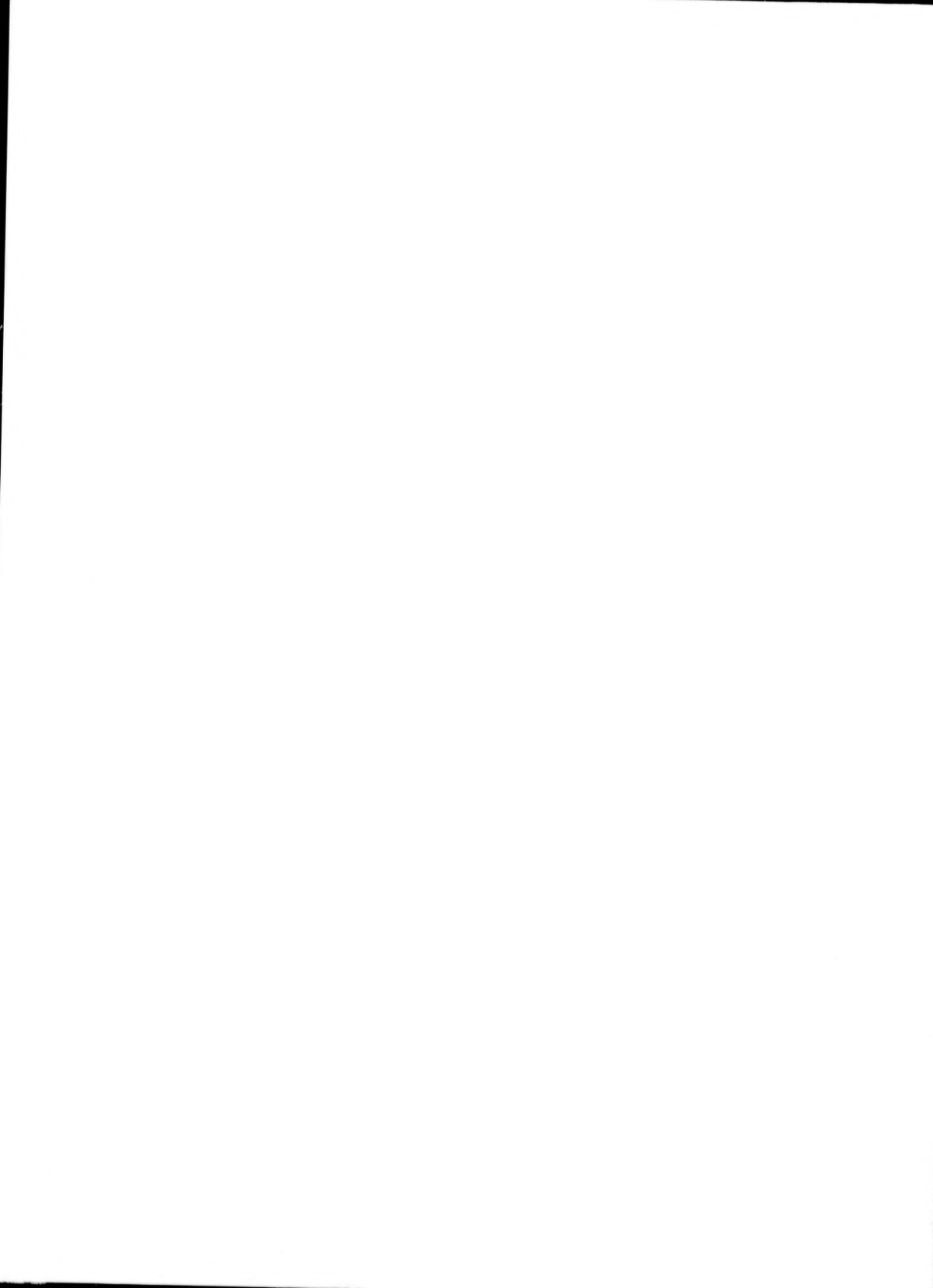
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Magazine of American History - Nov. 1888.

A NEW FRANCE IN NEW ENGLAND

One of the most remarkable immigration movements, within the last twenty-five years, is that of the French Canadians into the United States, and especially into New England. Although French Canadians could be found in the lumbering districts of the West and in the more important manufacturing centres of New England prior to the Civil War, no decided inflow had been noticed, certainly none of a kind to deserve the name of a wholesale, systematic immigration. The late war was the first great inviting agency to this race, some of whose representatives assert that 35,000 of their fellow countrymen fought for the North. But it is principally within the last fifteen years that the great bulk of the French Canadian population has noiselessly settled in this country, to share its fortunes and take part in the national development. Our northeastern cities and rural districts are constantly attracting more of this element, notwithstanding the cheapness of land, especially government land, in their own province.

Could a more striking illustration of the wonderful changes of our time be found? No longer are invasions of Canada from New England the popular cry; not even the most war-like or ambitious of our military youths dream of forcibly annexing the vast, sparsely settled region to the North, nor are any aggressive colonization projects entertained with a view to its absorption. The tide of national feeling on each side of the boundary is turned into different, more honorable and fruitful channels, each race striving after nobler objects than to vex or destroy the other. The French Canadians pour into the traditional enemy's country, not for war or spoil, but to find homes in their most thriving cities, and to aid in the cultivation of their most fertile fields. The descendants of the old combatants now mingle in peace, to work amicably together in the promotion of American civilization.

In contemplating this modern marvel, the greatest cause of astonishment is the progress so speedily made, with the moral certainty of its continuance. Unconscious, itself, of the importance of the movement, this modest but vigorous national element has struck for the very centres of American culture, capital and political influence, determined to permanently establish itself therein. This is one of the most significant natural movements yet attempted. Great results often flow from modest begin-

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nings, such as Plymouth Rock settlement and Jacques Cartier pioneer scheme.

A brief glance at the surprising progress of the French Canadians in their own country during the last century, will enable one to form an estimate of the probable development of this people in the Northern states, under more favorable educational and other influences. Despite the loss of life in the two American wars, with the serious injury to trade and property, also the stoppage of immigration to Canada, this remote community, chiefly agricultural, backward in education and primitive in habit, increased from 65,000 at the time of the Cession—1759-60—to a million and seven hundred thousand to-day, and this does not include the outflow to adjoining provinces and United States.

Where can a parallel to such astonishing increase be found? This spread of the French supplies one of the impressive phenomena of our time.

But rapidly as the French element has multiplied, its political influence has exceeded the proportion properly belonging to its numbers, in the affairs of Canada, a state of things that contributed materially to the formation of the existing larger Union, the present Confederation. In 1861, by the census report of that year, the western province, Upper Canada, possessed 285,000 more population than the eastern. Lower Canada, the difference probably reaching nearly half a million by 1866, when the present larger Union had to be effected, mainly to prevent continued party agitation and sectional heartburning and disorder, which must have ended, ere long, in the break-up of the old Union, with every probability of annexation to this country soon following it. The larger Union, embracing the maritime provinces with the Northwest as an enormous valuable background, accompanied as it was by an amalgamation of the long hostile parties, did get rid of the old Canadian difficulty, but only for a while.

The immense influence of the French in Canadian politics, notwithstanding their disadvantages in numbers and education, both previous and subsequent to 1866, was and is one of the wonders of the times. In view of the excitable nature of this element, and the ease with which it can be stirred by keen politicians and prejudiced agitators, as evinced by the recent change in the Quebec local government by means of the Riel cry, great care has to be exercised in dealing with any question affecting its feelings or interests, particularly in a union of which it forms so large a part as the existing Confederation. Constant care and extreme delicacy in handling those perilous "national" questions must be resorted to if they are to live together in peace. The Union is yet only a sapling, occasionally

tried sharply enough, requiring especially favoring material conditions, including greater prosperity than most of the provinces or branches have the last five years enjoyed, to form into a healthy and a vigorous tree.

The French have hitherto enjoyed the advantage of leaders, shrewd, diplomatic and far-seeing, with manners which give decided advantage over men otherwise as able. Sir George Cartier and Sir Etienne Taché vigorously and successfully opposed, with the aid of the present Premier of the Dominion, Sir John A. Macdonald, their opponents led by Hon. George Browne, L. H. Holton and Sir Antoine Aimée Dorion, all of them remarkably clever men. Their actual leaders in the Dominion at present are men of respectable talents. Sir Hector Langevin, political successor to the late Sir George Cartier, the oldest and ablest colleague of Sir John A. Macdonald, is sagacious and temperate. He is a good worker and a friend of peace and order. One of his colleagues, Mr. Chapleau, is a fair rhetorician, but however ambitious and energetic he cannot be ranked with the statesmen or orators, while his lack of principle and doubtful political morality cause him to be shunned by many of his party. The only French Canadian in public life in the Dominion truly an orator is the Hon. Wilfred Laurier, the leader of the Liberal opposition. This gentleman is indeed a very able man, refined, broad-minded, thoroughly fair and liberal. In the domain of provincial politics there is the Hon. Mr. Mercier, a gifted politician and a skillful debater, possessing much tact and a good knowledge of men. But however sentimental on festive or national occasions, the French Canadian politician can be thoroughly practical. He is generally a ready and fluent speaker, easily arousing the masses and securing their assistance in schemes of every kind, worthy or otherwise.

Let us observe next, what impression has been already made upon the social and industrial condition of the Northeastern states by this productive race. The census of Massachusetts for 1885 gives in the whole State a French Canadian population of 64,503. But the total reported by French agents sent to discover the actual number of their fellow-countrymen reaches 120,000. This discrepancy is easily explained. By the former enumeration, the French Canadian population of Fall River is set down at but 10,785, while it is actually over 14,000. Of course three years elapsed between the two counts, and it is well known that the immigration of this race was considerable in that period. But many departures from that city would also have been made, more or less affecting the final result. I am informed by a distinguished lawyer of Fall River, Massachusetts, Mr. V. H. Dubuque, who is specially interested in the movements and experiences

of his race in the New England states, that careful calculation on the part of official representatives, fix the total French Canadian population of New England and New York at nearly 500,000. It appears that the only state that classifies them under this heading is Massachusetts. In the other state censuses hitherto published, and notably in that of the United States for 1880, the French Canadians are recorded under the heading of "British Provinces." Of course the contribution of the maritime provinces includes many Acadians, who should appear under the heading of French Canadians. It is customary, besides, with the children born in the United States to report themselves Americans. Reliable authorities estimate the total population in this republic, of French Canadian origin, immigrants and descendants, at about 800,000, an astounding aggregate for this people and the brief period of their immigration and the extent of the sources of supply. This result far exceeds proportionately that to the credit of either Ireland or Germany.

In considering the progress of these people in this country, it must be remembered that it is chiefly the poorest and least instructed who come hither, persons for whom the small and well-worn paternal farm could make no provision, and the laborers from town or country. Some years ago they came with the intention usually of returning to the native parish when they had earned enough to cancel the mortgages on their farm or to enable them to start in some small business. Many did carry out such a programme, which accorded with the "repatriation" schemes of the Roman Catholic clergy and sympathetic politicians, but most of those frequently returned to the republic, allured by wages unattainable at home and by other influences. Now a new and different system prevails: most of them regard this country as their permanent home. They soon become useful as farm or factory hands, easily adaptable to all work, making quiet, industrious citizens; and many by dint of energy, intelligence and probity rise to positions of trust, emolument and honor. One very deserving feature characterizes them; they all impose upon themselves great sacrifices to give their children the best education, to make clergymen or professional men of them.

The conquest of Canada has shown that the French Canadian can not only rise above ancient prejudices and forgive old injuries, but learn of his conquerors valuable lessons, including the love of liberty. While cherishing the virtues of his own race, he has cultivated the good qualities of the Anglo-Saxon. In this way suspicions have been banished, respect and confidence won, and the road paved to amicable co-operation with alien races in the labors and sacrifices of citizenship. Among the ignorant and

prejudiced he is thought to be "slow," antiquated in his notions, and unenterprising, but considering his isolated condition, till the end of the first half of this century, in a region of long, hard winters, together with his home-loving feelings, his contented disposition and modest wants, it is a wonder not that he has accomplished so little, but that he has achieved so much.

Formerly the inferiority of the common school system, particularly in country parishes, was a great drawback to them, and this was due, partly to want of means and to the lack of interest in those indispensable institutions. But the present generation is better equipped in this respect than its predecessors, although there is still room for further improvement. The high schools, colleges and universities are excellent and effective, as the crowded condition of the professions in Quebec shows conclusively. The French Canadians can boast of not a few learned and eloquent men in the various professions, many of them being adorned with names of notable reputation.

In Canada the working classes do not realize the great importance of education, but in the United States they soon feel the necessity of self-improvement, learning rapidly the fact that their class may rise by merit in the social scale. Stimulated by this brave hope, they become steady newspaper readers, members of political and literary societies, and participants in studies and discussions of state and national affairs, the better to discharge their duties of citizenship. They send their children to the public schools, while preferring the parochial in which both languages are taught, thus exhibiting a proper, a creditable estimate of the value of education.

They usually cluster in bodies of a few hundred to ten or twelve thousand, for mutual help and sympathy, as generally the newcomers do not understand English. The acquisition of the English language soon prompts material dispersions. Those who came here when adults prefer speaking French among themselves, but their children, who command both languages, mingle largely with English speaking people. A remarkable fact is that they marry Americans far more frequently than their British fellow-creatures. Many of their children born in this country speak but little French, to the great regret of the seniors, still retaining some share of national pride. They form Canadian parishes with churches and priests of their own nationality, become attached to this country by affectionate bonds which but gain strength with time.

Of late years a significant movement of these people is that in favor of naturalization. They have not, like the Irish or Germans, shown haste in

this matter, one reason being their nearness to their native land, in which the French language is so largely spoken and their religion so widely professed; another being the absence of exciting political or material objects. They have 45 naturalization clubs, with many others in course of formation, in which lectures in French are given on the privileges and duties of citizenship. It is believed that within ten years there will be few if any of them not naturalized, all being of late fully alive to the importance of this step. Many have been successful in business, and several have entered the New England legislatures: one, the Massachusetts; four, the Maine; two, the Connecticut; two, the New Hampshire; and two, the New York; and they are found among municipal councillors, aldermen, etc. They support in New England and New York, 9 newspapers; have 287 French societies, with a total membership of 43,051. This is a most creditable showing, in so brief a period, showing capacity for union and political management.

These emigrants manifest judicious interest in their present and future welfare, by holding conventions in different parts of the country, to which each society or parish, where they are tolerably numerous, sends three delegates. Questions affecting the condition of their race are here discussed, especially education, political and domestic economy, naturalization, the best method of preserving the French language, and so forth. Every second year a general meeting of all the French Canadian societies is also convened. The last was held in Nashua, New Hampshire, last June, and a very important and creditable one it proved to be, when 30,000 people participated in the proceedings. They hope thus to secure even greater unity, mutual sympathy and co-operation. There is nothing secret about these meetings; the discussions however are always carried on in French.

The French Canadian in this republic readily adopts the thoughts and habits of the people about him, while retaining some of his original tastes, such as the love of dress and parade. This conversion of the foreign element into the material of good American citizenship evidences the wonderful molding and assimilating influence of American society and institutions. Their lively habits and cheerful spirits lighten their toil, dispelling the gloom of discontent and care from all around; this cheery disposition blossoms out in varied games and pastimes. They love holidays and observe them with great mirth, proving their title to the children of gay France.

The court records of the different states show a considerably smaller proportion of arrests for every kind of offense, than other nationalities can boast. While fond of diversions, as stated above, they study to keep within the bounds of law and order. There is abundant evidence of their

industrious, quiet and orderly habits in the Report on "The Canadian French in New England" (from the 13th Annual Report of the Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics of Labor, by Carroll D. Wright). Witnesses of good standing, lay and clerical, testified on this and kindred subjects in a way to sufficiently explain the eagerness of New England employers to engage a large amount of help among them.

Many of the French Canadian leaders believe that unless their countrymen preserve their national language, they will become so assimilated to the Americans as to be absorbed in the great, preponderating mass, a result which they would deprecate. While admiring the republic and loyally discharging all their duties to it, many would prefer to set up a sort of autonomous system, or maintain a distinctive nationality within a nation, as in the Dominion. I shall not attempt to argue at present whether this would be desirable or wise, but I confess my doubts as to its practicability, at any rate to anything like the extent witnessed across the northern boundary.

Whether it be due to the aggressive, all-conquering character of the Anglo-Saxon race itself, to its wonderful spread in all parts of the world, or to the richness and vigor of the language, or all these combined, our penetrating, absorbing speech has a knack of making its way into other languages and assimilating not a little of their most useful and marked features. French people, in Canada, rapidly come under the spell of the imperial language, the uneducated often, in conversation, making use of suggestive as well as comical combinations of French and English words. The working classes often use the English names of the tools they handle, articles, inventions, establishments, institutions, and so forth, of British and United States origin, being frequently designated by their English name. A few examples will suffice: *le horse car, le railroad, le steamboat, le sidewalk*, etc. Remarkable and whimsical combinations of both languages are indulged in, such as *l'enjine a bursté, je vais au store cri des groceries, c'est ma business maintenant*, etc. Some, to conceal their origin, have foolishly anglicised their names: Greenwood for Boisvert, Shortsleeves for Courtemauche, Winner for Gagné, Miller for Meunier, White for Le Blanc, etc. Some of them who have resided in the republic for some years have an accent as marked as that of the regular down-Easter. This denationalization, this self-incorporation with the vast ever-growing American population is one of the wonders of the modern world.

At the last Presidential election, the vote of this element told effectively in not a few districts. It is stated that in Clinton county, New York, 5,000 who formerly voted the Republican ticket voted for Cleveland, and

in many other places a great many supported him, although the majority, influenced by their employers, voted for Blaine. The majority are Republicans, though a good many are Democrats. They are naturally conservative. They favor order, discountenance radical views or experiments, and oppose strikes and secret societies, except the Knights of Labor. Unlike their kindred of the mother country they are not eager for change for its own sake. Their affection for France is as strong to-day as of yore, notwithstanding her political whims and melancholy experiments: they rejoice in her victories and mourn her defeats.

Who then need wonder at the prediction of an able New England statistician, that before the end of the first quarter of the next century that the French Canadians in the New England States will outnumber the Anglo-Saxon population! Why, we have in them already considerably more than England conquered in Canada, with thousands coming yearly from Quebec to join them. With such extraordinary progress achieved under so many disadvantages, the above prediction is far from improbable. The social philosopher and American patriot can find abundant food for speculation in the fact that against the Yankee family of one or two children, and often none, the French Canadian will count his flock of from half a dozen to a dozen and a half.* And the Anglo-Saxon will doubtless continue to "go west" to a large extent, while the French Canadian will probably maintain and increase the movement to the southeast. So we shall have history repeating itself. We shall see the Normans overrunning and taking possession of another England by the worthy and beneficent arts of peace, and the judicious employment of manners and powers which have enabled this people, from insignificant beginnings, under most unfavorable and discouraging circumstances, to build one vigorous State in North America within a century, and then undertake the rapid formation of another.

The thoughtful observer of each race, as well as the patriot and philanthropist will await the events following this peaceful rivalry with the greatest interest.

Prosper Bender

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS.

* According to the census of 1885, the population of Massachusetts is 1,042,141—native, 1,415,274, and foreign born, 526,867—the percentage of foreign born, 27 1/3 per cent. There are 68 cities and towns in the State in which is found an excess of persons having a foreign parentage.

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