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### OLD FRANCE IN THE NEW WORLD

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*"A churchly and official race could not win America."*—  
WOODROW WILSON, "Colonies and Nations."

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Influences which Retarded Colonization in Canada—History of  
the Movement—Church and State

**E**VEN to-day there are few bits of the world more filled with surprises for the traveller than Lower Canada. Within a few hours from Boston or New York, we arrive, on the banks of the St. Lawrence, in the midst of a peasant population clustered in villages from the midst of each of which rises the shining tin roof of a Roman Catholic church. Instead of the lean Congregational minister hurrying in his light buggy, we raise our hat to "Monsieur le Curé," a rotund, genial old gentleman already familiar to us from the pages of "Evangeline." He travels in a solid old gig or "calèche," as the Canadians call it; his horse, a sleek, slow-gaited, much petted animal who shares with his master strong dislike for Yankee hurry and restlessness. In quaint old Quebec we put up at an inn in the Rue de la Montagne, where nearly every detail recalls the shores of Normandy, from the huge four-poster bed, to the conversation in the coffee-room.

Hence, down the majestic St. Lawrence and up to

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the Saguenay to Chicoutimi, we are on the trail of Frenchmen, very little changed in their language, their religion, or even their customs. When they move to-day it is still with the priest as their pathfinder, and their social organization bears upon it the stamp of weakness placed there by Louis XIV.

That monarch was the founder of modern Canada, thanks to the tact and courage of Champlain,\* who, in 1628, secured a charter which was very liberal, for those times, of Richelieu and Louis XIII.

Up to this time Canada had attracted to itself merely a few adventurers who united the profession of arms with that of traffic with the Indians. A French writer of the times complained that while Maryland in the first twenty years of her settlement had attracted 12,000 Europeans, Canada in seven corresponding years, under an earlier charter, had a total population of only forty.

Yet Canada was a part of the French Crown in 1535, when a brave sailor of St. Malo, Jacques Cartier, sailed up the St. Lawrence and claimed for Francis I. the whole of the western world north of Mexico and Florida. At that time no English or Dutch interference was apprehended, and France was offered an opportunity vastly eclipsing anything ever offered by the Pope to Spain and Portugal. But, unfortunately,

\* Champlain was born in France in 1567, and died at Quebec in 1635. Of him Parkman wrote, in his *Pioneers of France*: "Samuel de Champlain has been fitly called the Father of New France. In him were embodied her religious zeal and romantic spirit of adventure. Before the close of his career, purged of heresy, she took the posture which she held to the day of her death—in one hand the Crucifix, in the other the sword. His life, full of significance, is the true beginning of her eventful history."

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the religious intolerance of the mother-country, which manifested itself in the bloody suppression of Protestantism, reflected itself in the measure taken for extending her colonial empire. The noble mind of Coligny \* conceived the idea of opening the land of the New World to settlement by French refugees from political or religious persecution; but the Crown would not entertain any such plan, and, consequently, the vigorous Frenchmen who should have colonized Canada found their way ultimately, some to the Cape of Good Hope, and many more to the English colonies in America.

For nearly a century after the acquisition of Canada (1535-1628), Canadian history is superbly romantic, but colonially barren. France developed a large number of roving and reckless adventurers—men who had incurred legal disabilities; who chafed under home restrictions; whose creditors were pressing; who thirsted for glory—who possibly hoped for more favorable times should they absent themselves for a few years—this was the element which carried the French flag and the missionary cross far into the wilderness, and captivated the imagination of their compatriots by a chain of conquest so rapid as to rival that of the early Portuguese navigators. But it is one thing to plant sign-boards over the wilderness and quite another

\* Admiral Coligny was born in 1517, and was murdered in Paris in the presence of the Duke of Guise in 1572—the first victim of the St. Bartholomew Massacre. The spirit which produced that horrible butchery is by no means dead. In Toulouse, a city in the south of France, there were riots in 1872 because the Republican Government attempted to prevent the citizens from celebrating the three hundredth anniversary of that disgraceful episode in Roman Catholic history. Paris has a monument to Coligny, it is carefully guarded against fanatical violence.

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to plant colonies, and that explains why, after more than two centuries of French occupation, one battle on the heights of Quebec (1759) wrested this whole country from France, and turned her over as an additional asset of the Anglo-Saxon world.

Yet, at the opening of the seventeenth century, France had, on the maps at least, a larger colonial empire than either England or Holland. She had a splendid colonial outfit, so far as priests, soldiers, and sailors were concerned—she lacked only colonists. The French have ever shown a strong disinclination to leave their own country, and it is worth noting that the only people who in those days desired to emigrate were by law forbidden to do so—for the early charters carefully provided that only *good Catholics* should be tolerated in French colonies. Protestants were assumed to be disloyal to the Government. Thus, the very element which was the backbone of England beyond the ocean, was, by the Crown, forbidden to assist in building up a French empire in America.

When we reflect upon the excellent results which the few French colonists did achieve in Canada between the charter of 1628 and the death of Wolfe in 1759—that all this was accomplished in spite of a legislation which excluded the best French element from Canada—there is good ground for a Frenchman's thinking that, under a more liberal home government, French would have become the ruling language from the St. Lawrence to the Gulf of Mexico.

Though the past cannot be altered, the lessons of the past, if taken to heart by Republican France, can undo much of what is now a drawback to her colonial

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success. Richelieu, in 1628, introduced into Canada a religious domination, almost as oppressive as what existed at home, and parcelled the land out to French noblemen. Naturally, none but the serf-like peasants would permit themselves to be enrolled in a colonizing venture of this kind, and it required all the influence of the Crown, backed by that of the parish priests—to say nothing of local misery—in order to start the small stream of emigration whose results we now see on the lower St. Lawrence. A company which had the Canadian monopoly, engaged itself to send out three hundred colonists in 1628, and 4,000 more within the following fifteen years. Not only were the colonists to be Catholic, but there were to be at least three missionaries to every settlement.

The Church, however, not satisfied with ministering to the needs of its parishioners and converting Indians, immediately appropriated valuable land to itself, built monasteries and nunneries, and by exacting tithes, saddled the struggling peasants with still further burdens. From the outset, Canada presented a picture of feudal aristocracy and religious domination sustained by the labor of ignorant and industrious peasants. These had little in common with the adventurers who explored the great lakes or fought the Spaniards in the West Indies.

The early years of colonies are of infinite interest to us for the degree to which they reflect the qualities of the mother-country, and it is interesting to note how naturally a colony evolves according to the character of the first settlers, or of the administration which controlled its origin. We have seen how the Spaniards

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crowded to the New World, thirsting merely for wealth and plunder, building monasteries and cities rather than establishing plantations; and reflecting throughout the Spanish Main the official centralization of Madrid. We have seen the superiority of Brazil growing out of the happy accident that a handful of refugee political prisoners and Jews organized self-government at a time when popular representation had long since ceased in the Iberian Peninsula. The rebellious Dutch and Huguenots of the Cape did more for the colonial glory of Holland than two centuries of her Great East India Company, and England's noblest colonial monument was reared not by a Clive or a Warren Hastings, a Drake or a Raleigh, but by a boat-load of Puritan rebels who accepted the risks of a settlement in the wilderness rather than surrender one tittle of controverted doctrine. We need not then be surprised if to-day the French in Canada represent the least enterprising white element in the northern half of America. They show still the effects of their early tutelage. In search of wages they cross the Canadian border into Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont. They drift to the lowest level of the manufacturing population, along with the Irish and Italians, instead of to the top with the German, Scandinavian, and Anglo-Saxon. The great tide of English colonization has swept up the St. Lawrence, past the monasteries of the clergy and the castles of *grands seigneurs*, beyond Quebec and Montreal, to Toronto, Winnipeg, Vancouver, and the Klondike. The French have followed timidly in the pay of the more adventurous Briton. But all hope of restoring Canada to France passed away

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when it was clearly demonstrated that the Frenchman of Canada could not even spread himself abroad without the priest preceding him. No greater national contrast is offered by history than the helplessness of the French Canadian peasant, and the resourceful courage of the French Huguenot in South Africa.

France's day of greatest military glory followed, as did that of Spain, close upon the heels of a centralization which succeeded in effectually suppressing representative institutions. The France which had produced adventurers like Jacques Cartier was a France in which a certain degree of popular liberty permitted strong individual characters to develop and find public employment. With the consolidation of all political power in the hands of a monarch who was himself but an instrument of another political machine—the Papacy—free thought became rebellion, and free action was possible only to those who became buccaneers in the West Indies, or sought other adventure among the Indians of the Canadian Northwest.

Before the end of the seventeenth century, when Canada did not yet count 10,000 colonists, French adventurers had planted flags and military posts all the way from the St. Lawrence to the head waters of the Mississippi; and down that stream to the Gulf of Mexico—claiming it all in the name of the King of France. Yet, throughout that great sphere, there was not then a single settlement worthy to compare with the feeblest of Massachusetts.

Even in 1759 all Canada had but 82,000 white inhabitants—after two centuries of artificial and very costly “protection.” At that rate it is pretty safe to

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surmise that it would inevitably have fallen to the New England colonies or the United States, even without the blow which Wolfe administered in 1759.

The seizure of Canada by England proved of great benefit, for it immediately revived commerce, and gave the people more political liberty than they had ever known before. When the American War broke out in 1776, the French settlers repaid this good treatment by refusing to cast in their lot with the United States, and, consequently, when that war closed, Canada became a refuge to a large number of Americans who had remained loyal to the mother-country during the war.

Down to our day we find in Canada a large community speaking French and practising the Roman Catholic religion, without interference from the Protestant English Government. French is used in the Legislature, and the two languages are on a practical equality. The people of French descent cling to their language and religion with the tenacity of peasants—but they learn English in proportion as they develop enough intelligence to desire an improvement in their social position. The same transformation is progressing in Canada as in Dutch South Africa—English is supplanting all other languages, not because the police are interfering on its behalf, but because the people themselves, as they improve in education, realize that the English language is a more useful one.