

4/2/2013

Rec'd June, 2013

Dick,

I recently read the novel Maria Chapdelaine by Louis Hemon. It had belonged to my mother. Hemon was French and must have spent some time in Quebec. It was translated in 1921 and is a romance of pioneer life in Quebec. The period was in 1903-1914, based on the fact that two times a picture of Pius X is on the wall of characters. I found the enclosed excerpts, which might be of interest regarding FC life.

Bill

Photo below  
Bill Horn + John Rivard  
Quebec reception 1987



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ran into their eyes, and made their way to the house.

Already the pea-soup smoked in the plates. The five men set themselves at table without haste, as if sensation were somewhat dulled by the heavy work; but as they caught their breath a great hunger awoke, and soon they began to eat with keen appetite. The two women waited upon them, filling the empty plates, carrying about the great dish of pork and boiled potatoes, pouring out the hot tea. When the meat had vanished the diners filled their saucers with molasses in which they soaked large pieces of bread; hunger was quickly appeased, because they had eaten fast and without a word, and then plates were pushed back and chairs tilted with sighs of satisfaction, while hands were thrust into pockets for their pipes, and the pigs' bladders bulging with tobacco.

Edwige Légaré, seating himself on the door-step, proclaimed two or three times:—"I have dined well      I have dined well  
." with the air of a judge who renders an impartial decision; after which he leaned against the post and let the smoke of his



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leaf-tobacco. His face was still smooth as a child's, with immature features and guileless eyes, and one not knowing him would probably have been surprised to hear him speak with all the deliberation of an older and experienced man, and to see him everlastingly charging his wooden pipe; but in the Province of Quebec the boys are looked upon as men when they undertake men's work, and as to their precocity in smoking there is always the excellent excuse that it affords some protection in summer against the attacking swarms of black-flies, mosquitos and sand-flies.

"How nice it would be to live in a country where there is hardly any winter, and where the earth makes provision for man and beast. Up here man himself, by dint of work, must care for his animals and his land. If we did not have Esdras and Da'Bé earning good wages in the woods how could we get along?"

"But the soil is rich in these parts," said Eutrope Gagnon.

"The soil is good but one must battle for it with the forest; and to live at all you must watch every copper, labour from morning to

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was rounded, with well-cut features, eyes gentle and unwavering, hands white; with his head a little on one side he smiled amiably, neither superior nor embarrassed under this concentrated gaze.

"He came here," continued his uncle, "to settle affairs after the death of Elzéar, and to try to sell the farm."

"He has no wish to hold on to the land and cultivate it?" questioned the elder Chapdelaine.

Lorenzo Surprenant's smile broadened and he shook his head. "No, the idea of settling down on the farm does not tempt me, not in the least. I earn good wages where I am and like the place very well; I am used to the work."

He checked himself, but it was plain that after the kind of life he had been living and what he had seen of the world, existence on a farm between a humble little village and the forest seemed a thing insupportable.

"When I was a girl," said mother Chapdelaine, "pretty nearly everyone went off to the States. Farming did not pay as well as it does now, prices were low, we were always hearing of the big wages earned over

if that  
is say 1908  
it would have been  
1860s - 1870s.

there in the factories, and every year one family after another sold out for next to nothing and left Canada. Some made a lot of money, no doubt of that, especially those families with plenty of daughters; but now it is different and they are not going as once they did      So you are selling the farm?"

"Yes, there has been some talk with three Frenchmen who came to Mistook last month. I expect we shall make a bargain."

"And are there many Canadians where you are living? Do the people speak French?"

"At the place I went to first, in the State of Maine, there were more Canadians than Americans or Irish; everyone spoke French; but where I live now, in the State of Massachusetts, there are not so many. A few families however; we call on one another in the evenings."

"Samuel once thought of going West," said Madame Chapdelaine, "but I was never willing. Among people speaking nothing but English I should have been unhappy all the rest of my days. I used to say to him:— 'Samuel, we Canadians are always better off among Canadians.'"

When the French Canadian speaks of himself it is invariably and simply as a "Canadian"; whereas for all the other races that followed in his footsteps, and peopled the country across to the Pacific, he keeps the name of origin: English, Irish, Polish, Russian; never admitting for a moment that the children of these, albeit born in the country, have an equal title to be called "Canadians." Quite naturally, and without thought of offending, he appropriates the name won in the heroic days of his forefathers.

"And is it a large town where you are?"

"Ninety thousand," said Lorenzo with a little affectation of modesty.

"Ninety thousand! Bigger than Quebec!"

"Yes, and we are only an hour by train from Boston. A really big place, that."

And he set himself to telling of the great American cities and their magnificence, of the life filled with ease and plenty, abounding in refinements beyond imagination, which is the portion of the well paid artisan.

In silence they listened to his words. Framed in the open door-way the last crim-

that related to the sale and the settling of his father's affairs. He greeted Maria very warmly, and seated himself beside her.

The men lit their pipes; they chatted about the weather, the condition of the roads, the country news; but the conversation lagged, as though all were looking for it to take some unusual turn. Their glances sought Lorenzo and the three Frenchmen, expecting strange and marvellous tales of distant lands and unfamiliar manners from an assembly so far out of the common. The Frenchmen, only a few months in the country, apparently felt a like curiosity, for they listened, and spoke but little.

Samuel Chapdelaine, who was meeting them for the first time, deemed himself called upon to put them through a catechism in the ingenuous Canadian fashion.

"So you have come here to till the land. How do you like Canada?"

"It is a beautiful country, new and so vast. In the summer-time there are many flies, and the winters are trying; but I suppose that one gets used to these things in time."

The father it was who made reply, his sons only nodding their heads in assent with eyes glued to the floor. Their appearance alone would have served to distinguish them from the other dwellers in the village, but as they spoke the gap widened, and the words that fell from their lips had a foreign ring. ~~There was none of the slowness of the Canadian speech, nor of that indefinable accent found in no corner of France, which is only a peasant blend of the different pronunciations of former emigrants.~~ They used words and turns of phrase one never hears in Quebec, even in the towns, and which to these simple men seemed fastidious and wonderfully refined.

"Before coming to these parts were you farmers in your own country?"

"No."

"What trade then did you follow?"

The Frenchman hesitated a moment before replying; possibly thinking that what he was about to say would be novel, and hard for them to understand. "I was a tuner myself, a piano-tuner; my two sons here were clerks, Edmond in an office, Pierre in a shop."

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was endlessly patient. In face alone had he anything of the tyrant; it was as though the long rigours of the climate and the fine sense and good humour of the race had refined his heart to a simplicity and kindliness that his formidable aspect seemed to deny.

Da'Bé, also tall, was less heavily built and more lively and merry. He was like his father.

The married couple had given their first children, Esdras and Maria, fine, high-sounding, sonorous names; but they had apparently wearied of these solemnities, for the next two children never heard their real names pronounced; always had they been called by the affectionate diminutives of childhood, Da'Bé and Tit'Bé. With the last pair, however, there had been a return to the earlier ceremonious manner:—Telesphore      Alma  
Rose.

"When the boys get back we are going to make land," the father had promised. And, with the help of Edwige Légaré, their hired man, they set about the task.

In the Province of Quebec there is much uncertainty in the spelling and the use of names. A scattered people in a huge half-

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wild country, unlettered for the most part and with no one to turn to for counsel but the priests, is apt to pay attention only to the sound of names, caring nothing about their appearance when written or the sex to which they pertain. Pronunciation has naturally varied in one mouth or another, in this family or that, and when a formal occasion calls for writing, each takes leave to spell his baptismal name in his own way, without a passing thought that there may be a canonical form. Borrowings from other languages have added to the uncertainties of orthography and gender. Individuals sign indifferently, Denise, Denije or Deneije; Conrad or Courade; men bear such names as Hermenegilde, Aglaë, Edwige.

Edwige Légaré had worked for the Chapdelaines these eleven summers. That is to say, for wages of twenty dollars a month he was in harness each day from four in the morning till nine at night at any and every job that called for doing, bringing to it a sort of frenzied and inexhaustible enthusiasm; for he was one of those men incapable by his nature of working save at the full pitch