

# Priests Block Recruiting in Quebec Province

## French Canadians, Led by Their Clergy, Defy Dominion Government--Hints of Uprising Because of Bilingual Question

**I**F you begin a conversation anywhere in Quebec concerning the admitted fact that that province is not doing anywhere near its share in raising Canadian troops for the war in Europe the talk is bound to switch around to the fight of the French for their own language in the schools of the Province of Ontario, and vice versa. This rule holds good whether the discussion is in the clubs or officers' quarters, or among the factory workers in the cities, or among the farmers and fishermen of the outlying regions of Chicoutimi, Saguenay, and Gaspé.

The two questions are very closely linked. One cause, perhaps the chief cause, why so few men in Quebec are enlisting is that the full demands of the French people in the Province of Ontario for the use of their language in the public schools have been denied in turn by the Ontario courts, by the Ontario Parliament, and, finally, by the Parliament of the Dominion at Ottawa. Now it is pending before the Privy Council in England, where the French expect to win, and the English-speaking Canadians also expect the same outcome, for it seems to be a habit of the British Home Government to grant anything the French in Canada demand and are willing to fight for. They are willing to fight for their language in Ontario. In a moral sense they are already in rebellion, to the extent that they are ignoring the call of the Dominion Government to join the overseas forces.

There are extremists who hint at actual physical rebellion and civil war. Not even those who are not extremists will say that such a disaster is impossible; they refer to it as extremely improbable, but add that all Quebec would welcome an opportunity to secede from the Dominion without bloodshed.

On the boat from Chicoutimi to Quebec the other day Canon Huard of the Basilica of Quebec said this: "We have many things to try before actual rebellion, if the Privy Council in England denies us. We will continue to agitate to get fair play. Civil war would be the last resort. But this French language question in Canada is more serious to us than was the slavery question in the United States. That did lead to civil war."

Canon Huard is not a sensationalist. He is an old man who for twenty-five years was professor in the Catholic College at Chicoutimi. He is also a scientist, editor of *The Canadian Naturalist*, and holds the public office of Provincial Entomologist.

Whatever may be the future outcome of the matter, the bilingual issue in Ontario is easily the most troublesome political tangle in the Dominion today, and while Sir Wilfrid Laurier, the opposition leader of the Liberals, has added something to his previous strength in Quebec by championing the French, (his own people,) he has lost ground with his own party elsewhere. He was abandoned by practically all the English-speaking Liberals when the matter came to a vote at Ottawa. On the other hand, Gouin, the Liberal Premier of Quebec, made such shrewd and successful use of the situation that the Conservative Party in his province is, for the time being, eliminated. Gouin, knowing what would happen in Ottawa, prorogued the Provincial Parliament and timed his call for an election of a new Legislature so that it would come almost immediately after the French had been denied by the Federal body.

An interval was allowed for a campaign in which the war was not a factor at all. It was strictly a French versus English affair and the French won, with the election of seventy-four members as against seven for the Conservatives. In the old Parliament the Conservatives had seventeen.

Canon Huard, in a recent book of his, referring to the size of French families, said that in course of time his people would outnumber the English in Ontario. He put it in as a sort of pleasantry, but

Ontario took it very seriously. When he told me about that in the course of an interview in Quebec after the talk on the boat, I asked him what he would predict now.

"I am no prophet," he replied, "but the French people marry young and have ten or twelve children, sometimes fifteen, eighteen, twenty. The priests urge them to do it, for it is God's command to multiply. The English people in Ontario have only one or two children to a family. There you have a case of simple arithmetic. The English in Ontario are worse in this matter than the people in France, and the war has shown France the calamity of the few children. One or two sons are killed and the family is finished."

It is the French priest in Quebec—there are about 5,000 of them all told—who is blocking the efforts of the Government to get recruits in that province. In the cities of Montreal and Quebec this is not so obvious, for there the clergy are calling attention to the fact that men are needed, but most of them are doing it in the most perfunctory way without making any favorable comment. But in the country regions the minor priest is making it a part of his parish work to advise his people not to enlist. He is telling them that the war is none of their concern, that they should not fight for people who are denying to other Frenchmen the right to have their children taught in their own language. And the hint, even the wink, of a parish priest is far more effective with a French Canadian farmer or fisherman than the most urgent call from Ottawa or the most eloquent appeal of the recruiting agent.

And the surprising thing is that the priests of Quebec admit the truth of many of these statements, not accepting them as charges or reproaches against themselves and their system, but as the outsider's version of an entirely justifiable state of affairs. There was one, however, who not only said "Yes" to all that the anti-Catholics had told me, but he joined in denouncing the ways of his own Church in the Quebec country parishes. He was the Rev. N. W. Bergeron of Ogdensburg, N. Y., where he has a large French Catholic parish. But Bergeron is a French Canadian, born and educated for the priesthood in Quebec, and he still owns property in his native village of Les Emboulements in that province, to which he frequently goes. He was coming from there on a Sunday morning when I met him, just after he had preached in his old church in the absence of the parish priest.

"He will not ask me to preach for him again," remarked Bergeron with a grin. "I gave his people some strange stuff. They stood up to listen with their hands to their ears. I told them that the Church was humbugging them. I told them not to spend any more of their hard-earned money on building new churches, but to invest it in the education of their children so that they would have a chance in the world with the Protestants and with the Catholics who speak English. I told them all to learn English and to make their children speak it. I told them a great many other things they never had heard before, and if I could talk to them every Sunday I might be able to do some good in this country."

"It is true that the people are kept in ignorance, that they are obliged to mortgage their farms to give money when the Bishop or the priest decides to build a great, magnificent church that these people have no need of, and such a mortgage becomes a first mortgage, no matter how many precede it, for it is recognized by the law of Quebec as security for a sacred loan which always comes before a profane loan. And if the poor farmer does not pay, the Church takes his property away from him."

"I am not anti-Catholic. I uphold my faith, but I am against mediaevalism on the North American Continent in the twentieth century. Living and working in the United States have opened my eyes."

There are 2,138 people in Les Emboulements. All but thirty-eight are French Catholics. There is one lone Baptist, one Anglican, with thirty-six unclassified. Density of the population is 28 to the square mile and every family has a house. There are 243 heads of families in Les Emboulements who are farmers. Two hundred and thirty-eight of them own their farms, with an aggregate of 33,169 acres. The other five are tenants, renting, all told, 590 acres.

Records for the entire Province of Quebec show an area of 218,723,687 acres, of which about 16,000,000 acres or 7 per cent. of the whole is being farmed. Twenty per cent. of the whole is capable of cultivation. The total value of the farm property in the province is \$787,754,494. And, here is the important fact, 92 per cent. of all the occupiers of this farmland are the owners of the farms they work. The farms average about 100 acres, and the average annual yield per farm is about \$500.

Statistics of illiteracy do not put the population and the priests in such a good light as the farm records. For all Canada the percentage of those above the age of 5 who cannot read and write is 10.5; for all Quebec it is 12.66. In Ontario it is 6.51, but in the maritime province of New Brunswick it is 14.05.

Away from the cities of Quebec, however, the figures make a much worse showing.

As in everything else concerning their people, the clergy find something in the very illiteracy record to commend, particularly in the non-use of English.

"We insist on the use of the French language in Ontario," Canon Huard said to me, "because it is necessary to hold the children to the Catholic faith. Experience has taught us that the Church loses when its people are obliged to use some language other than its own and to mingle with people of another language and faith. If the Irish of the United States had a language of their own we

would have 25,000,000 Catholics in that country. As it is, I believe we have only about 10,000,000. We teach English in the Quebec schools, but the people have no use for it and therefore forget it. We give the children schooling up to ten or twelve years of age. They learn to read and write and figure enough to keep their farm accounts. Then they go to work. They have enough education to read their prayer books and their newspapers on Sundays and that is sufficient for those who are to stay on the farms.

"They have no time for other reading because the work is hard. Suppose we had a lot of high schools. What would be the result? We would produce a crowd of young men who would not be content to stay on the farms and for whom there would not be enough of proper employment off the farms. We believe in education, but only enough for the needs of the people and no more. Too much may be an evil. At the tercentenary of Quebec in 1909 I was on a committee to award silver medals to families that had been on the same farms in the Province of Quebec for 200 years or more. It was necessary to give 273 such medals. Some of the family records for the same farms ran back as far as 1655. We printed them all in a volume we call 'The Book of Gold of the Rural Nobility.'

"It is true that we like to have beautiful churches that cost money, but why not? They are for God and nothing is too good for Him. They ruin nobody."

"As to the war, we are not telling our young men to enlist because we do not think there is any obligation on the individual in Canada to fight in France. Of course, we are proud to be British subjects. It is a great empire, and England is generous to us when we cannot get justice from Canada. But we do not love England. We have great affection for France, but not for the French Government. We make a distinction there. We love Quebec. We would fight for Quebec."