

The Habitant or Lower Canadian Farmer.

No person can contrast more strongly than the *habitant* of Lower Canada and the farmer of Upper. The latter is enterprising, adventurous, and cosmopolitan in his feelings. He is always ready to change his neighbourhood for a better one; and his homestead of a hundred acres of cleared land is never more dear to him than five hundred acres of wilderness, if he can satisfy himself that the latter would be better for his children. The *habitant*, on the contrary, knows no love stronger than that for his often contracted farm. The place where he was born, though giving him, in many cases, but a slender livelihood, is dearer to him than all the world. In vain for him has the magnificent West been opened up, in vain for him have America and Europe been filled with accounts of prosperity in it. His imagination is bounded by the fences round his arm. He asks no better lot than to live where his father lived, and to die where his father died.

As might naturally be expected, avarice has little to do with such a character. If he knows not the rewards of grasping ambition, he knows not its feverish disappointments or its mortified pride. There is not, in consequence, a more cheerful happy, and contented being in existence than the Lower Canadian *habitant*. His little farm—for, as a general rule, on account of frequent subdivisions, the farms in Lower Canada are small—supplies him with enough to live upon; and he never, by any chance invokes the cares of to-morrow. He has five or six cows, and he knows they should give milk enough for himself and his family, and he never gives himself anxiety about the economy of increasing their number or improving their quality. He has six or eight pigs, and instead of fattening two or three for market—as an old countryman would be sure to do—he takes the blessings of Heaven as they are sent to him, and eats the whole of them. He copies no man's improvements, and imitates no person's mode of living. His life, his food, his enjoyments are regulated by the opportunities of the day. If he fares sumptuously, he thanks Providence, and is happy. If he occasionally fares otherwise, he thinks it is all right, and is equally contented. Simple therefore is his life, but happy in its simplicity. For generations his character has not undergone a perceptible change; but happily, his gentleness, his innocence and his cheerfulness have been equally enduring.

I cannot take leave of the *habitant* of Lower Canada without alluding to his amiable disposition and native politeness. You pass through a country parish in any part of the Province, no matter how remote, and you are saluted on all hands, by both old and young, and so gracefully, yet with so much ease and frankness, that you forget for the moment where you are. You go into a *habitant's* house—always clean, with flowers in the windows, and the walls well whitewashed—and though the man may be the poorest in his parish, his hospitality is dispensed with so much cordiality and refinement, so wholly unembarrassed and unembarrassing, that you can with difficulty believe such people could have always lived in such a place. You speak execrable French—many English people unfortunately do—and make mistakes which would provoke the risibility of a very saint, yet you never see a smile on the faces of your entertainer, nor even on the faces of his children. Of course, after you go away, they enjoy the fun amazingly. Your religion, your politics, or your country, may, from accidental circumstances, be distasteful to him, yet as long as you are under his roof—if it were for months—you would never hear a word that could hurt your feelings, or wound your pride. In enterprise, in that boldness of thought and action which make a people great and a country prosperous, they are unquestionably far behind the rest of America. In not seeking to understand, and sometimes opposing the introduction of palpable improvements and inventions, their conduct is below their own intelligence. But in refinement and good breeding, in all that fascinates the stranger and makes the resident happy among them, they are immeasurably above any similar class on this continent. And all that America can teach them in enterprise would not exceed what they could teach America in the finest features of civilization,—namely, gentleness and good manners.

From these general observations it may be inferred that there has been little improvement in agriculture in this Province. Such, however, is not the case. Of late years, particularly since the Union of the Provinces, the best breeds

of cattle have been gradually finding their way into the settlements of Lower Canada; and Agricultural Societies—the great radiating points of knowledge and practical improvement—have sprung up and are springing up in the more advanced settlements. At an Exhibition held at Quebec last autumn, the show of Durham cattle, of imported swine, and of horses, would have done credit to any part of America. Whilst the vegetables, especially potatoes, beet roots and turnips—for which, however, the land about Quebec is singularly well adapted—were finer than those exhibited in Upper Canada.

If these exhibitions are promoted, and succeed as well in Lower Canada as they have done in Upper,—and there is no reason why they should not,—they will change the whole aspect of Lower Canadian farming in a few years. Bad customs will disappear before them like bad weeds. For people, when they come to contrast the productions of labor and skill, cannot but prefer what brings honor as well as profit, over what entails inconvenience, and invites disrespect. Nor will men long continue to carry errors home with them, when truth is discovered to be a much more valuable commodity. Competition indeed shames error out of its follies; for no person, however dogged he may be, will face the ridicule that is attached to clinging to absurd customs in the midst of universal improvement. To expose folly and ignorance to general condemnation, and to draw general admiration to skill and ingenuity, is, in fact, to have the latter a triumph at once. And Agricultural Societies, with their thousand rewards for the best productions of the country, and their thousand exposures of the systems and prejudices which occasion the worst, strike me as admirable contrivances to make man ashamed of being behind the age, and honored by keeping pace with it.

The feudal tenure, by which the great bulk of the lands in Lower Canada were from their first settlement, held, has been regarded, and I believe will continue a great drawback to the improvement of the country. Where property could not change hands without serious taxes and impediments, and where improvements became but partially the property of those who made them, enterprise shrinks from having anything to do with the land, and the spirit of improvement was almost damped; but the Legislature, by its sitting, wisely and patriotically, has taken this secure way for even and quietness, and can now acquire property with little cost, and hold it in fee simple. In this measure, it is thought, will work a complete revolution in Lower Canada. The knowledge that improvements will be for their own sole benefit, will stimulate the people to make them; and the proud consciousness, that they will become the lords of their own soil, will heighten and humbly desire to acquire it. There is nothing that has exerted so powerful an influence for good in America, as the feeling that a man could win for himself an estate. It has caused pride to spring up in natures where it might have been deemed impossible. It has never so exerted any man an arm that would have otherwise fallen. It has infused the poetry of refinement, respectability and civilization into natures accustomed to all the rudeness of extreme poverty, and all the slavishness incident to long continued and debasing servitude.