

# THE RACIAL QUESTION

## THE EVIL AND THE REMEDY

BY JOHN BOYD

### I—THE EVIL.

My dear Mr Bourassa,

As an English-speaking Canadian it has been with the deepest interest that I have read your series of English articles published in the *Devoir* on what may be termed the racial question. Let me first of all congratulate you upon your writing and publishing those articles in English. It was a unique idea and one worthy of imitation. What a splendid thing it would be if some of the English newspapers would reciprocate by publishing an article now and again in French? Nor was there any need for you to apologize at the outset for your English which in clearness and forcibleness leaves nothing to be desired. The bi-lingual school which you attended must have been a superior one.

English speaking Canadians do not object to plain speaking. They rather admire your frankness though they may not accept all your conclusions. That the ignorance of some English-speaking Canadians not only in Montreal but throughout the Dominion in regard to their French-Canadian fellow-countrymen is not only astounding but lamentable cannot be denied. Much of the racial friction is undoubtedly due to that ignorance. There are English speaking Canadians who apparently fail to realize that though the fate of war decided against the army of the brave Montcalm on the PLAINS OF ABRAHAM the sixty thousand French colonists at the time of the Cession have become a people of over two million souls preserving their language, their religion, their institutions and their laws, that moreover the rights which the French-Canadians enjoy are not by sufferance but guaranteed by solemn treaties, by the law of nations and the good faith of the wise and tolerant men who founded the Dominion. When I have therefore heard some people say as has been the case in my visits to other parts of the Dominion that it would be better if there were no French-Canadians but that the whole country should be English I have told them that it was rather late in the day to entertain such an idea, that considering that there are now over two million French-Canadians in the Dominion firmly attached to their faith, their language and their institutions we could not even if we would get rid of them but on the contrary that we must live together. The practical question is how shall we live together, as friends or enemies, as fellow countrymen or as strangers to each other?

You have written frankly about English speaking Canadians and their failings but I am sure you have no intention of being unjust. In pointing out their failings — and neither English speaking or French speaking Canadians you will admit are without their faults — would it not be only justice to also credit them with their virtues? The English speaking Canadian like his French Canadian fellow countrymen is largely the product of hereditary and environment neither can escape those influences. The English speaking Canadian with all his failings also has his virtues. He may not be, generally speaking, as demonstrative, as sympathetic, at least outwardly and if I may use an expressive word as *spirituel* as people of the Latin stock. But is not much of his apparent want of sympathy only on the surface? Does the English speaking Canadian not only occasionally but frequently and systematically show his sympathy for his French and Catholic fellow countrymen in his own practical commonsense way? Does he not freely, nay even generously contribute to the support of French Canadian and Roman Catholic charitable institutions? Do the good Sisters who visit the English business houses of Montreal not often find beneath the brusque exterior of the English speaking business man a kind and sympathetic heart? Whenever there is a call for charity or for good deeds do not these same practical, brusque, matter of fact business men of whom you write ever fail to respond no matter whether the call be from French Canadian and Roman Catholic or from English and Protestant sources? Do they not at least in this respect show their "instinct of social justice"? I will admit that this is not all that is necessary but it is at least something that should not be lost sight of. May we not even question whether the English speaking Canadian's failure to properly appreciate his French Canadian fellow countryman in other ways is not due to ignorance rather than to maliciousness. I will deal with that aspect later.

I have said that the practical question is, shall French Canadians and English speaking Canadians

live as friends or enemies, as fellow countrymen or as strangers. The answer to that question it seems to me is easy if we will only approach the subject in the right spirit. Let us go back to history. It is as a student of history seeking to reap lessons from the past that I would approach this question. For over a year I have been studying everything that appertains to the life of one of the greatest men that the French Canadian race has produced, that research being rendered necessary in connection with the history I am writing of the period covered by that great man's career. I refer of course to George Etienne Cartier. The more I study the lives and principles of Cartier and his illustrious colleagues in the Confederation movement the more I am convinced that they possessed the true solution to the problem you have been discussing so frankly.

In a few months now fifty years will have elapsed since there met in the historic city of Quebec thirty-three statesmen representing the great provinces of British North America. The result of that meeting was Confederation. How was the basis of Confederation arrived at? Was it not by mutual concession, toleration and compromise? What chance would there have been to form a great commonwealth out of such divergent elements if any of those men had been extremists? Listen to the words even of George Brown who previously had been but a sectional leader, a bitter political opponent of Cartier and of French Canadian and Roman catholic interests but whom the crisis had transformed into a patriot and a statesman of broad vision. "The framers of this scheme had immense special difficulties to overcome," said George Brown. "We had the prejudices of race and language and religion to deal with and we had to encounter all the rivalries of trade and commerce and all the jealousies of diversified local interests. To assert that our scheme is without fault would be folly. It was necessarily the work of concession." Again hear Brown — "Whether we ask for parliamentary reform alone or in common with the maritime provinces the French Canadians must have their views consulted as well as us."

If I had any way I would have that last saying of George Brown that "foe of the French-Canadians" as he has sometimes been styled printed in bold type, framed and hung in every English school house throughout the Dominion as a lesson to bigots and extremists. George Brown the "foe of the French-Canadians" laid it down as a basis of Confederation that the French-Canadians must have their views consulted as well as English speaking Canadians.

Listen to another illustrious Father of Confederation no less a personage than the great Sir John A. Macdonald: — "We have now a constitution which guarantees absolute equality to all British subjects, having the same rights of every kind, of language, of religion and of property. There is no race superior to another in this country, there is no conquered people. We are all British subjects and those who are not English are none the less for that British subjects." Another striking lesson to extremists!

I have left George-Etienne Cartier to the last because I desired to show first what English-speaking Fathers of Confederation thought of this question of race. Now if ever there was a man of broad views, tolerant spirit and respect for the rights of all it was George-Etienne Cartier. The cardinal principles of Cartier's whole policy were summed up in the notable declaration he made on one occasion: "*My policy and I believe it to be the best is respect for the rights of all.*" That declaration is as applicable to-day as it was when it was made nearly fifty years ago and it offers the true and only solution to the question which you have been discussing. Cartier's desire was that men of all races and of all faiths should live together in harmony in that Dominion which he help so greatly to found. "In our confederation", he said, "there will be Catholics and Protestants, English, French, Irish and Scotch and each by its efforts and success will add to the prosperity of the Dominion, to the glory of the new Confederation. We are of different races not to quarrel but to work together for the common welfare. We cannot by law make the differences of race disappear but I am convinced that the Anglo-Canadian and the French-Canadian will appreciate the advantages of their position. Set side by side like a great family their contact will produce a happy spirit of emulation. The diversity of race will in fact, believe me, contribute to the common pros-

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perity." What words of wisdom! What a spirit of true patriotism, of justice and of toleration they breathe! How regrettable it is to find nearly fifty years after those words were uttered the race question so often obtruding itself.

Of course, my dear Mr Bourassa, you are personally fully aware of all that I have quoted, there is nothing new in it to you. But how many thousands of Canadians there are who unfortunately are ignorant of all of it. I have given these quotations simply to show the breadth and liberality of the founders of the Dominion. They cannot be too often impressed upon all Canadians. As you have yourself remarked somewhere I think equality of rights for all races in this country is the very corner stone of confederation.

## II — THE REMEDY

Now, let us get down to the practical. It is my firm belief that much of the racial friction and misunderstanding are simply due to ignorance. Let us also be frank, my dear Mr Bourassa. I have acknowledged that the ignorance of some English speaking Canadians in regard to French-Canadians is not only astounding but lamentable. But is the fault only on one side? As the great mass of French Canadians are kindly, sympathetic and tolerant the great majority of English speaking Canadians, I am convinced, have no desire to be unjust or unfair. Whenever a spirit of unfairness or injustice manifests itself, it will be found that it is the result of prejudices which have been aroused against the French Canadian people, by extremists, who are the great curse of the country. To any one who knows the French Canadians as I do, the ignorance of even many intelligent and educated English speaking Canadians in other portions of the Dominion in regard to their fellow countrymen of Quebec, is not only regrettable, but ludicrous. I have been simply astounded sometimes during visits to other parts of the country, at the ideas that are entertained of the French Canadians and of the ideals of their leading men. For instance I have been told that your idea is to make the whole of the Dominion French and Catholic, or to establish a French Republic on the banks of the St. Lawrence. The latter bogey is of course not new. It did service in the time of Papineau, it was revived in Mercier's day, and it is now being raised again to excite prejudice. The French Canadians and the Roman Catholic Church are represented in many quarters as having sinister designs against the political and religious liberties of the Dominion. In some quarters it is really believed that the French Canadians would prefer to live under the tricolor of France than under the British flag. Where do English speaking Canadians in other portions of the Dominion get such ideas about French Canadians? Unable as most English speaking Canadians are, to understand French, either when spoken or written, it is impossible for them to follow the trend of French Canadian thought and feeling for themselves. They are obliged to depend upon second hand information, and that information is generally misleading. Extreme utterances of a few irresponsible individuals made for party effect — and I am glad to say that these are rare — are taken hold of, and, grossly exaggerated are spread broadcast throughout the English speaking provinces, as representing French Canadian sentiment, with the result that hostility is aroused against French Canadians in general. This hostility finds expression in attacks on French Canadian and Catholic minorities in the other provinces. The much more general knowledge of the English language amongst French Canadians places them at a decided advantage over English speaking Canadians who generally are utterly ignorant of French. With their knowledge of English the French Canadians are better able to understand and appreciate their English speaking fellow-countrymen. There is therefore great need that English speaking Canadians in other portions of the Dominion should be enlightened as to the real ideas and aspirations of the French Canadians. English speaking Canadians must be made to understand that the French Canadians do not contemplate the sinister designs which are credited to them. French Canadians on the other hand must be made to realize not only by speech but by action that English speaking Canadians have no desire to be unfair or unjust to them.

These questions cannot be settled by extremists on either side. The times call for men of broad views, tolerance and good will, for statesmen like Macdonald, Cartier and the other great men who established the Dominion upon the sure foundation of equity and of justice. As you truly remarked it is upon that foundation alone that Confederation can endure. English speaking public men should get into closer touch with the French Canadian people and French Canadian public men should more often visit the English provinces and frankly enlighten their people as to the real sentiments of the French Canadians.

This brings me to the all-important question — have either French Canadians or English speaking Canadians done their full part in subordinating racial issues to the creation of a true Canadian national sentiment? Have French Canadians always been ungod-whilst holding, as they have a right to do,

to their language and to their faith, to be above all Canadians in the broad meaning of that term, with pride in the mighty Dominion? That too was the ideal of George Etienne Cartier.

Now for the remedy. If we are ever to have a Canadian nationality or a Canadian national sentiment we must start at the very foundation, we must begin with the children in the schools. Why should not the French language be made a part of instruction in every English school in the Dominion and the English language taught in every French school? There is no time to learn a language like when one is young and in association with others. In addition to this there should be a much extensive and thorough teaching of Canadian history. English speaking pupils should be made to know how much all Canadians owe to French Canadians, how they were the pioneers of civilization in this country, how Papineau fought for political freedom, how LaFontaine in association with Baldwin won responsible government, how George Etienne Cartier was one of the greatest Fathers of Confederation. Similarly French Canadian children should be told of William Lyon Mackenzie, of Robert Baldwin, John A. Macdonald, George Brown, Charles Tupper, Leonard Tilley, A. T. Galt, Thomas D'Arcy McGee and other great English speaking Canadians. Young Canadians should be made to feel proud of all these men whether they were French speaking or English speaking as great Canadians. It is because I believe in this that I have devoted over a year of my life to write the history of the life and times of George Etienne Cartier which will be published in English as well as in French to show English speaking Canadians what a great French Canadian in particular and French Canadians in general have done for their country. I trust for that reason that the work will find a place in every English school in the country.

The great day for all Canadians whether English speaking or French speaking should be the first day of July, the day that witnessed the birth of the great Dominion just as the fourth of July is the great day for the people of the United States. With such a system of instruction as I have indicated when Canadian youth grew to manhood they would be ardent Canadians, able to speak the two great languages and thoroughly posted on the events of Canadian history. With such a system of instruction much of not all the racial friction I am convinced would disappear and a true Canadian national sentiment be created. French Canadians and English speaking Canadians must be taught to come together nationally not to diverge. Are these ideas utopian? If so farewell to all thought of a Canadian nationality. But for one I do not believe they are. To what is the strength of the national sentiment of the United States due if not to the fact that from their earliest years the children are taught to be Americans before all, no matter what their origin may be. Let us teach the Canadian youth to be Canadians before all. "Avant tout soyons Canadien," as George Etienne Cartier said.

French Canadians and English speaking Canadians must not be enemies but friends, not strangers but brethren working together for the welfare of their common country. To use the words of another great French Canadian, Sir Wilfrid Laurier: "We are a new nation, we are attempting to unite the different conflicting elements which we have into a nation. Shall we ever succeed if the bond of union is to be revenge, if we are to raise up the old sores and launch them at the head of one another." Heaven forbid! It is not by recrimination and bitterness that the problem will be solved but by mutual toleration and good-will by — to use Cartier's expression: "Respect for the rights of all".

Canadian youth above all must be taught the lessons of patriotism and liberality. Strike at the root and you will eradicate the evil.

JOHN BOYD.

# Un second

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DE M. BOYD

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