

PREFACE.

It is now about a century since Thomas Jefferson, in a public deliverance, reminded his countrymen of the necessity and wisdom of frequently returning to the consideration of first principles. It is probable that even at that early period of the American national existence, the keen eye of Jefferson had perceived that tendency on the part of his countrymen, which has since been developed into one of the most distinctive traits of the American national character. We refer to the tendency to regard the abstract or philosophical aspects of questions with a feeling somewhat akin to contempt.

Americans are prone to declare with an air of much self-satisfaction that they care nothing for theories, that they are a pre-eminently practical people. Notwithstanding the great material prosperity of the American people, this intense "practicality" has been the cause of much loss and trouble to them already, and has sown the seeds of social and economic disorder which may yet imperil even their national existence.

It is to be feared that Jefferson's wise advice would be almost as applicable to the people of Canada as to those to whom it was tendered. Our forgetfulness of first principles is shown in our readiness to compromise or "fix up," everything in the nature of a dispute, with regard only to a sordid expediency, and to relief from a present difficulty, the solution of which we are always prepared to bequeath to posterity. This *apres moi le deluge* policy in dealing with political and fiscal difficulties is as immoral as it is pusillanimous. The sacrifice of principle to expediency, and the disregard of theoretical soundness in favor of practical con-