

INTRODUCTION.

ENGLAND and France started in a fair race for the magnificent prize of supremacy in America. The advantages and difficulties of each were much alike, but the systems by which they improved those advantages and met those difficulties were essentially different. New France was colonised by a government, New England by a people. In Canada the men of intellect, influence, and wealth, were only the agents of the mother country: they fulfilled, it is true, their colonial duties with zeal and ability, but they ever looked to France for honour and approbation, and longed for a return to her shores as their best reward: they were in the colony, but not of it; they strove vigorously to repel invasion, to improve agriculture, and to encourage commerce for the sake of France, but not for Canada.

The mass of the population of New France were descended from settlers sent out within a short time after the first occupation of the country, and who were not selected for any peculiar qualifications. They were not led to emigrate from the spirit of adventure, disappointed ambition, or political discontent; by far the larger proportion left their native country under the pressure of extreme want or in blind obedience to the will of their superiors. They were then established in points best suited to the interests of France, not those best suited to their own. The physical condition of the humbler emigrant, however, became better than that of his countrymen in the Old World; the fertile soil repaid his labour with competence; independence fostered self-reliance, and the unchecked range of forest and prairie inspired him with thoughts of freedom. But all these elevating tendencies were fatally counteracted by the blighting influence of feudal organisation. Restrictions, humiliating as well as injurious, pressed upon the person and property of the Canadian. Every avenue to wealth and influence was closed to him and thrown open to the children of Old France. He saw whole tracts of the magnificent country lavished upon the favourites and military followers of the court, and, through corrupt or capricious influences, the privilege of exclusive trade granted for the aggrandisement of strangers at his expense.

France founded a state in Canada: she established a feudal and ecclesiastical frame-work for the young nation, and into that Procrustean bed the growth of population and the proportions of society were forced. The State fixed governments at Montreal, Three Rivers, and Quebec; there towns arose: she divided the rich banks of the St. Lawrence and of the Richelieu into seigneuries; there population spread: she placed posts on the lakes and rivers of the far west; there the fur-traders congregated: she divided the land into dioceses and parishes, and appointed