

French and English they are that are brought in contact, and in what proportions they meet.

Characteristics of
the French
Canadians.

The institutions of France, during the period of the colonization of Canada, were, perhaps, more than those of any other European nation, calculated to repress the intelligence and freedom of the great mass of the people. These institutions followed the Canadian colonist across the Atlantic. The same central, ill-organized, unimproving and repressive despotism extended over him. Not merely was he allowed no voice in the government of his Province, or the choice of his rulers, but he was not even permitted to associate with his neighbours for the regulation of those municipal affairs, which the central authority neglected under the pretext of managing. He obtained his land on a tenure singularly calculated to promote his immediate comfort, and to check his desire to better his condition; he was placed at once in a life of constant and unvarying labour, of great material comfort, and feudal dependence. The ecclesiastical authority to which he had been accustomed established its institutions around him, and the priest continued to exercise over him his ancient influence. No general provision was made for education; and, as its necessity was not appreciated, the colonist made no attempt to repair the negligence of his government. It need not surprise us that, under such circumstances, a race of men habituated to the incessant labour of a rude and unskilled agriculture, and habitually fond of social enjoyments, congregated together in rural communities, occupying portions of the wholly unappropriated soil, sufficient to provide each family with material comforts, far beyond their ancient means, or almost their conceptions; that they made little advance beyond the first progress in comfort, which the bounty of the soil absolutely forced upon them; that under the same institutions they remained the same uninstructed, inactive, unprogressive people. Along the alluvial banks of the St. Lawrence, and its tributaries, they have cleared two or three strips of land, cultivated them in the worst method of small farming, and established a series of continuous villages, which give the country of the seignories the appearance of a never-ending street. Besides the cities which were the seats of government, no towns were established; the rude manufactures of the country were, and still are, carried on in the cottage by the family of the habitant; and an insignificant proportion of the population derived their subsistence from the scarcely discernible commerce of the Province. Whatever energy existed among the population was employed in the fur trade, and the occupations of hunting, which they and their descendants have carried beyond the Rocky Mountains, and still, in great measure, monopolize in the whole valley of the Mississippi. The mass of the community exhibited in the New World the characteristics of the peasantry of Europe. Society was dense; and even the wants and the poverty which the pressure of population occasions in the Old World, became not to be wholly unknown. They clung to ancient prejudices, ancient customs and ancient laws, not from any strong sense of their beneficial effects, but with the unreasoning tenacity of an uneducated and unprogressive people. Nor were they wanting in the virtues of a simple and industrious life, or in those which common consent attributes to the nation from which they spring. The temptations which, in other states of society, lead to offences against property, and the passions which prompt to violence, were little known among them. They are mild and kindly, frugal, industrious and honest, very sociable, cheerful and hospitable, and distinguished for a courtesy and real politeness, which pervades every class of society. The conquest has changed them but little. The higher classes, and the inhabitants of the towns, have adopted some English customs and feelings; but the continued negligence of the British Government left the mass of the people without any of the institutions which would have elevated them in freedom and civilization. It has left them without the education and without the institutions of local self-government, that would have assimilated their character and habits, in the easiest and best way, to those of the Empire of which they became a part. They remain an old and stationary society, in a new and progressive world. In all essentials they are still French; but French in every respect dissimilar to those of France in the present day. They resemble rather the French of the provinces under the old regime.

Their peculiar
social condition.

I cannot pass over this subject without calling particular attention to a peculiarity in the social condition of this people, of which the important bearing on the troubles of Lower Canada has never, in my opinion, been properly estimated. The circumstances of a new and unsettled country, the operation of the French laws