

BALDWIN LAFONTAINE HINCKS

the malcontents of New England and Virginia. Such, if not the purpose, was at any rate the effect of the Act. The pulpits of Massachusetts were loud with denunciation of the toleration of popery embodied in the statute. The American congress (September 5th, 1774) expressed its alarm in documentary form, and the small British minority already settled in Lower Canada forwarded to England a petition of energetic protest. The fact that the British government, in the face of bigoted opposition, passed and maintained the statute which stands as the charter of religious liberty for Roman Catholic Canada, may be said to have laid the foundation of that firm attachment of the Canadian French to the Crown, which, after the lapse of four generations, has become one of the fundamental factors of the political life of Canada. The effect of the Act in preventing the adherence of the *habitants* to the cause of the American revolution is undoubted. The clergy of the province threw the whole weight of their influence in favour of the British side. The agitators sent into the country found but few sympathizers of influence, and the attempt at military conquest ended in failure.

The issue of the Revolutionary War and the separation of the revolted colonies from Great Britain had a momentous effect upon the destinies of British North America. That province now became a haven of refuge for the distressed Loyalists, who abandoned the United States in thousands rather than