

The Quebec Act was very differently received by the two classes of the population which it affected,—the English and the French Canadians. By the English people it was disapproved because of its concessions to the Roman Catholic religion; and because it permitted the introduction of the civil law of France. In the words of a petition presented to the Lords and Commons from His Majesty's loyal and dutiful and ancient subjects, settled in the Province of Quebec, it was said, "The Quebec Act deprives His Majesty's ancient subjects of all their rights and franchises, destroys the Habeas Corpus Act and the inestimable privilege of trial by jury, the only security against the finality of a corrupt judge, and gave unlimited powers to the Governor-in-Council to alter the criminal laws." By the French Canadian the Act was accepted with the greatest cordiality for the very opposite reasons. It gave him religious equality and the status of citizenship; and these were for the moment all he desired.

In the course of time, however, even the French Canadians became uneasy under its administration. As already stated, out of a council of twenty-three they were represented by only eight of their own race, although the French population was at this time said to amount to about 75,000, while the English speaking population did not exceed 1,000. This disparity of representation, together with the fact that the more important places of trust and influence were held by people of British origin, excited a certain amount of jealousy. Again in the other British provinces of the continent it was known that each province had its own legislature and that the people through their representatives were entrusted with all the powers of a Parliament; and made laws with regard to education, the improvement of highways and other matters, which ordinarily affect an organized community. Then why should they be governed by a council in which a majority of the people had only one-third of the governing power; were they not as capable of self-government as the people of the provinces to the south? On the English-speaking side there were complaints of the opposite character. The French Canadian was too highly favoured by the British government; he was not entitled to any distinctive privileges; he was an ordinary British subject, what more should he ask than the ordinary privileges of a British subject? and the struggle soon became, as Lord Durham said fifty years later, "a struggle not of principles but of races."

But something had to be done. The colonists of both races must be appeased and Mr. Pitt to that end introduced the Constitutional Act of 1791 into the British Parliament,