

the majority were French Canadians, then sullen and discontented, believing that the union was a part of a sinister scheme to destroy their national institutions and place them in a position of inferiority to the English-speaking people. A feeling of unrest was still abroad and no one was ready to speak confidently of the future. If there was ever in this country a small number of men inclined to favor annexation to the United States, they might have been found at that time, when they compared the prosperity and enterprise of the neighboring Republic and its large measure of self-government with the condition of matters in the struggling communities of British North America. But then, as always, the great body of the people were true to themselves and to British connection, and the same spirit of devotion that had carried them through the miseries of war and dangerous political agitation gained strength when they saw that England at last recognized the errors of procrastination and negligence, which had too long been the features of colonial administration, and was ready to concede to the provinces those rights and privileges which they had every reason to expect as free, self-respecting communities animated by the spirit of English institutions. With a recognition of the right of Canada to self-government came a sense of large responsibility. Canadians had to prove themselves worthy of the trust at last reposed in them, and they did so in a manner which has frequently in later times evoked the praise of the wisest English statesmen and publicists. The quarter of a century that elapsed from 1842 to 1867 was the crucial period of Canadian political development; for then the principles of our present system of self-government were firmly established and a new, industrious population flowed steadily into the country, the original population became more self-reliant and pursued their vocations with renewed energy, and confidence increased on all sides in our ability to hold our own against the competition of a wonderfully enterprising neighbor. Cities, towns, and villages were built up with a rapidity not exceeded even on the other side of the border, and the ambition of our statesmen, even years before confederation, began to see in the northwest an opportunity for still greater expansion for the energy and enterprise of the people. The French Canadian learned that he was treated in a spirit of justice, and, instead of his influence diminishing under the régime of responsible government, he had become the potent factor in political affairs.