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SKETCHES FROM CANADIAN HISTORY.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL ACT, 1791.

The Quebec Act of 1774, however agreeable to Lord Dorchester and welcome to the upper class among the French-Canadians, was not destined permanently to rule the destinies of Canada. Not only was the measure singularly crude and unconsidered, but it was moreover a direct breach of a solemn promise contained in a royal proclamation. It doubtless proved agreeable to the conquered race, or new subjects, as they were then called, because, though only affording a semblance of liberty, still it was a more free rule than they ever had experienced under the days of the *Fleur-de-Lis*. To those, however, who had been brought up under the protecting influence of England's noble constitution, there were many features in the measure which appeared very objectionable and seemed fraught with trouble and danger for the future. The true friends of liberty trembled; but, as Burke had forcibly pointed out during the debates on the Quebec Act, the sympathies of the French, as shown by their numerous petitions, had ever been in favor of despotism and against constitutional liberty. To the *habeas corpus*, the greatest palladium of personal freedom, they attached no value, representative institutions they objected to, trial by jury they would not hear of. Their wishes unfortunately prevailed over those of their more enlightened though less numerous fellow subjects of British origin. The Quebec Act was forcibly carried through, and may be considered chiefly due to the strenuous efforts of Lord Dorchester, aided by the desire, openly proclaimed by the Solicitor-General on the floor of the House, to discourage British emigration to Canada as much as possible. A change had become imperative for various reasons, the most marked being the successful revolt of the colonies in America since the passing of the Quebec Act. The dissatisfaction of the English provinces had gradually, by the short-sighted policy of the Government and the dogged obstinacy of the King, been ripened into rebellion. The Americans had fought for and won their independence, and thousands of sturdy Loyalists, rather than live under the stars and stripes, had emigrated into the vast forests of Canada. These men, many of whom were the pick and flower of the American settlements, distinguished not less for their hardy, uncompromising loyalty, than for their energy, honesty and learning, brought with