

The utter want of municipal institutions giving the people any control over their local affairs, may indeed be considered as one of the main causes of the failure of representative government, and of the bad administration of the country. If the wise example of those countries in which a free representative government has alone worked well, had been in all respects followed in Lower Canada, care would have been taken that, at the same time that a Parliamentary system, based on a very extended suffrage, was introduced into the country, the people should have been entrusted with a complete control over their own local affairs, and been trained for taking their part in the concerns of the Province, by their experience in the management of that local business which was most interesting and most easily intelligible to them. But the inhabitants of Lower Canada were unhappily initiated into self-government at exactly the wrong end, and those who were not trusted with the management of a parish, were enabled, by their votes, to influence the destinies of a State. During my stay in the Province, I appointed a commission to inquire into its municipal institutions, and the practicability of introducing an effective and free system for the management of local affairs. The gentlemen entrusted with this inquiry had, when they were interrupted in their labours, made considerable progress towards preparing a report, which will, I hope, develope, in a full and satisfactory manner, the extent of the existing evil, and the nature of the practicable remedies.

Want of municipal institutions.

There never has been, in fact, any institution in Lower Canada, in which any portion of the French population have been brought together for any administrative purpose, nor is there among the divisions of the country any one which has been constituted with a view to such an end. The larger divisions, called "districts," are purely judicial divisions. The counties may be called merely Parliamentary divisions; for I know of no purpose for which they appear to have been constituted, except for the election of members for the House of Assembly; and during the present suspension of representative government, they are merely arbitrary and useless geographical divisions. There are no hundreds, or corresponding sub-divisions of counties. The parishes are purely ecclesiastical divisions, and may be altered by the Catholic Bishops. The only institution in the nature of local management, in which the people have any voice, is the *fabrique*, by which provision is made for the repairs of the Catholic churches.

No French institutions for administrative purposes.

The townships are inhabited entirely by a population of British and American origin; and may be said to be divisions established for surveying, rather than any other purposes. The eastern townships present a lamentable contrast in the management of all local matters to the bordering state of Vermont, in which the municipal institutions are the most complete, it is said, of any part even of New England. In any new settled district of New England, a small number of families settling within a certain distance of each other, are immediately empowered by law to assess themselves for local purposes, and to elect local officers. The settlers in the eastern townships, many of whom are natives of New England, and all of whom can contrast the state of things on their own with that which is to be seen on the other side of the line, have a serious and general cause of discontent in the very inferior management of all their own local concerns. The Government appears even to have discouraged the American settlers from introducing their own municipal institutions by common assent. "I understood," says Mr. Richards, in a Report to the Secretary of State of the Colonies, ordered by the House of Commons to be printed in March 1832, "that the Vermonters had crossed the line, and partially occupied several townships, bringing with them their own municipal customs; and that when the impropriety of electing their own officers was pointed out to them, they had quickly given them up, and promised to conform to those of Canada."

System of townships.

But the want of municipal institutions has been and is most glaringly remarkable in Quebec and Montreal. These cities were incorporated a few years ago by a temporary provincial Act, of which the renewal was rejected in 1836. Since that time these cities have been without any municipal government; and the disgraceful state of the streets, and the utter absence of lighting, are consequences which arrest the attention of all, and seriously affect the comfort and security of the inhabitants.

Want of municipal institutions in Quebec and Montreal.