

authorities, in the early days of English rule, created much uneasiness in consequence of the efforts of certain fanatics to crush everything French and Catholic. The military regime was continued down to 1774; but, at that date, the Canadians were reassured by the concession of a more equitable form of government to divert them from sympathy with the revolt in the New England colonies. This measure had the desired effect; in 1775, the French Canadians took up arms to repel the American invasion and defend the English flag against the attacks of English colonists.

Political Struggles

The act of 1774 was followed by the constitution of 1791, which divided Canada into two provinces and granted to each a legislative assembly composed of representatives elected by the people. Unfortunately, this governmental system did not carry with it ministerial responsibility and the confidence which it at first inspired soon changed to discontent and distrust, provoked by the arbitrary conduct of some of the governors of the colony. After giving a new proof of their loyalty by the part they took in the war of 1812, during which de Salaberry shed lustre on our race at the famous battle of Chateauguay, the French Canadians protested against the wrong doing of the administration and, as a check upon the fatal influence of the bureaucrats, demanded the control of the public funds, which had been mismanaged or plundered by the favorites of England. This, in other words, was asking for ministerial responsibility as it then and has ever since existed in England. The Canadians were led in this struggle by Bedard, Blanchet, Parent, Papi-neau, Morin, Duvernay and all that galaxy of illustrious patriots, who may have committed certain mistakes and fallen into certain excesses, but who are none the less entitled to the honor of having introduced into America, in all its fullness, the system of responsible government.

After the melancholy events of 1837 and 1838, during which the patriots shed their blood for the conquest of the liberties which they claimed, the constitution of 1791 was temporarily superseded by martial law—which constitutes one of the darkest periods of our history—and finally by the constitution of 1841 granting to Canada the responsible government so long demanded. To neutralize the influence of the French Canadians, however, the constitution of 1841 united the two provinces under one government. This union provoked well grounded apprehensions, which were aggravated by the efforts of the bureaucrats, seconded unfortunately by Lord Metcalfe, to attenuate the privileges guaranteed them by the new constitution; but Lafontaine, the leader of the French Canadians, succeeded in triumphing over these obstacles, in opposing a victorious resistance to the intrigues of the "Family Compact" and in extracting from the constitution, not only all the advantages possible, but even others which its authors had not foreseen.

Encouraged by these successes, some of our representatives overstepped the bounds of prudence, and to better assure the influence of Lower Canada—now the province of Quebec—in the administration of the country, they demanded that the representation of the people in the Legislative Assembly