

SUBSTANCE OF THE
REPORT ON THE AFFAIRS
OF
BRITISH NORTH AMERICA,
FROM THE EARL OF DURHAM, HER MAJESTY'S
HIGH COMMISSIONER.
(Presented by Her Majesty's Command to both Houses
of Parliament)
TOGETHER WITH THE MOST INTERESTING PARTS OF
LORD DURHAM'S CORRESPONDENCE
WITH LORD GLENELG.
[CONTINUED.]

I cannot pass over this subject without calling particular attention to a peculiarity in the social condition of this people, of which the important bearing on the troubles of Lower Canada has never in my opinion, been properly estimated. The circumstances of a new and unsettled country, the operation of the French laws of inheritance, and the absence of any means of accumulation by commerce or manufactures, have produced a remarkable equality of properties and conditions. A few signiorial families possess large, though not often very valuable properties; the class entirely dependent on wages is very small: the bulk of the population is composed of the hard working yeomanry of the country districts, commonly called *habitants*, and their connexions engaged in other occupations. It is impossible to exaggerate the want of education among the *habitants*; no means of instruction have ever been provided for them, and they are almost universally destitute of the qualifications even of reading and writing. It came to my knowledge, that out of a great number of boys and girls assembled at the school house door of St. Thomas, all but three admitted, on inquiry that they could not read. Yet the children of this large parish attend school regularly, and actually make use of books. They hold the Catechism book in their hand, as if they were reading, while they only repeat its contents, which they know by rote. The common assertion, however, that all classes of the Canadians are equally ignorant, is perfectly erroneous; for I know of no people among whom a larger provision exists for the higher kinds of elementary education, or among whom such education is really extended to a larger proportion of the population. The piety and benevolence of the early possessors of the country founded, in the seminaries that exist in different parts of the province, institutions of which the funds and activity have long been directed to the promotion of education. Seminaries and colleges have been by these bodies, established in the cities and other central points. The education given in these establishments greatly resembles the kind given in the English public schools, though it is rather more varied. It is entirely in the hands of the Catholic clergy. The number of pupils in these establishments is estimated altogether at about a thousand; and they turn out every year, as far as I could ascertain, between two and three hundred young men thus educated. Almost all of these are members of the family of some *habitant*, whom the possession of greater quickness than his brothers has induced the father or the curate of the parish to select and send to the seminary. These young men, possessing a degree of information immeasurably superior to that of their families, are naturally averse to what they regard as descending to the humble occupations of their parents. A few become priests; but as the military and naval professions are closed against the colonist, the greater part can only find a position suited to their notions of their own qualifications in the learned professions of advocate, notary, and surgeon. As from this cause these professions are greatly overstocked, we find every village in Lower Canada filled with notaries and surgeons, with practice to occupy their attention, and living among their own families, or at any rate among exactly the same class. Thus the persons of most education in every village belong to the same families, and the same original station in life, as the illiterate *habitants* whom I have described. They are connected to them by all the associations of early youth, and the ties of blood. The most perfect equality always marks their intercourse; and the superior in education is separated by no barrier of manners, or pride, or distinct interests, from the singularly ignorant peasantry by which he is surrounded. He combines, therefore, the influences of superior knowledge and social equality, and wields a power over the mass, which I do not believe that the educated class of any other portion of the world possess. To this singular state of things I attribute the extraordinary influence of the Canadian demagogues. The most uneducated population anywhere trusted with political power, is thus placed in the hands of a small body of instructed persons, in whom it reposes the confidence which nothing but such domestic connexion with such community of interest could generate. Over the class of persons by whom the peasantry are thus led, the Government has not acquired, or even laboured to acquire, influence; its members have been thrown into opposition by the system of exclusion long prevalent in the colony; and it is by their agency that the leaders of the Assembly have been enabled hitherto to move as one mass, in whatever direction they thought proper, the simple and ductile population of the country. The entire neglect of education by the Government has thus, more than any other cause, contributed to render this people ungovernable, and to invest the agitator with the power which he wields against the laws and the public tranquillity.

THE ENGLISH: OFFICIALS AND SETTLERS.

"Among this people the progress of emigration has of late years introduced an English population, exhibiting the characteristics with which we are familiar, as those of the most enterprising of every class of our countrymen. The circumstances of the early colonial administration excluded the native Canadian from power, and vested all officers of trust and emolument in the hands of strangers of English origin. The highest posts in the law were conferred to the civil Government, together with the officers of the army, composed a kind of privileged class, occupying the first place in the community, and excluding the higher class of the natives from society, as well as from the

government of their own country. It was not till within a very few years, as was testified by persons who had seen much of the country, that this society of civil and military functionaries ceased to exhibit towards the higher order of Canadians in exclusiveness of demeanour, which was more revolting to a sensitive and polite people than the monopoly of power and profit; nor was this national favouritism discontinued until after repeated complaints and an angry contest, which had excited passions that concession could not allay. The races had become enemies ere a tardy justice was escorted; and even then the Government discovered a mode of distributing its patronage among the Canadians, which was quite as offensive to that people as their previous exclusion.

"It was not long after the conquest that another and a larger class of English settlers began to enter the province. English capital was attached to Canada by the vast quantity and valuable nature of the exportable produce of the country, and the great facilities for commerce presented by the natural means of internal intercourse. The ancient trade of the country was conducted on a much larger and more profitable scale; and new branches of industry were explored. The active and regular habits of the English capitalists drove out of all the more profitable kinds of industry their inert and careless competitors of the French race; but in respect of the greater part (almost the whole) of the commerce and manufactures of the country, the English cannot be said to have encroached on the French; for, in fact, they created employments and profits which had not previously existed. A few of the ancient race snarled under the loss occasioned by the success of English competition; but all felt yet more acutely the gradual increase of a class of strangers in whose hands the wealth of the country appeared to centre, and whose expenditure and influence eclipsed those of the class which had previously occupied the first position in the country. Nor was the intrusion of the English limited to commercial enterprises. By degrees, large portions of land were occupied by them; nor did they confine themselves to the unsettled and distant country of the townships. The wealthy capitalist invested his money in the purchase of seigniorial properties; and it is estimated that at the present moment full half of the more valuable seigniories are actually owned by English proprietors. The seigniorial tenure is one so little adopted to our notions of property rights, that the new seigneur, without any consciousness or intention of injustice, in many instances exercised his rights in a manner which would appear perfectly fair in this country, but which the Canadian settler reasonably regarded as oppressive. The English purchaser found an equally unexpected and just cause of complaint in that uncertainty of the laws, which rendered his possession of property precarious, and in those incidents of the tenure which rendered its alienation or improvement difficult. But an irritation greater than that occasioned by the transfer of the large properties was caused by the competition of the English with the French farmer. The English farmer carried with him the experience and habits of the most improved agriculture in the world. He settled himself to the townships bordering on the seigniories, and brought a fresh soil and improved cultivation to compete with the worn out and slovenly farm of the *habitant*. He often took the very farm which the Canadian settler had abandoned, and by superior management made that a source of profit which had only impoverished his predecessor. The ascendancy which an unjust favouritism had contributed to give to the English race in the government and the legal profession, their own superior energy, skill and capital, secured to them in every branch of industry. They have developed the resources of the country, they have constructed or improved its means of communication, they have created its internal and foreign commerce. The entire wholesale, and a large portion of the retail trade of the Province, with the most profitable and flourishing farms, are now in the hands of this numerical minority of the population.

ANIMOSITIES OF THE WORKING CLASSES NOT
THE RESULT OF A COLLISION OF
INTERESTS.

"In Lower Canada, the mere working class which depends on wages, though proportionally large in comparison with that to be found in any other portion of the American continent, is, according to our ideas, very small. Competition between persons of different origin in this class has not exhibited itself till very recently, and is, even now, almost confined to the cities. The large mass of the labouring population are French, in the employment of English capitalists. The more skilled class of artisans are generally English; but in the general run of the more laborious employments, the French Canadians fully hold their ground against English rivalry. The emigration which took place a few years ago brought in a class which entered into more direct competition with the French in some kinds of employment in the towns; but the individuals affected by this competition were not many. I do not believe that the animosity which exists between the working classes of the two origins is the necessary result of a collision of interests, or of a jealousy of the superior success of English labour. But national prejudices naturally exercise the greatest influence over the most uneducated; the difference of language is less easily overcome, the differences of manners and customs less easily appreciated. The labourers, whom the emigration induced, contained a number of very ignorant, turbulent and demoralized persons, whose conduct and manners alike revolted at the well ordered and courteous natives of the same class. The working men naturally ranged themselves on the side of the educated and wealthy of their own countrymen. When once engaged in the conflict, their passions were less restrained by education and prudence; and the national hostility now rages more fiercely between those whose interests in reality bring them the last in collision.

POINTS OF OPPOSITION BETWEEN THE RACES.

"The two races, thus distinct, have been brought into the same community under cir-

cumstances which rendered their contact inevitably productive of collision. The difference of language from the first kept them asunder. It is not any where a virtue of the English race to look with complacency on any manners, customs, or laws which appear strange to them; accustomed to form a high estimate of their own superiority, they take no pains to conceal from others their contempt and intolerance of their usages. They found the French Canadians filled with an equal amount of national pride; sensitive, but inactive pride, which disposes that people not to resent insult, but rather to keep aloof from those who would keep them under. The French could not but feel the superiority of English enterprise; they could not shut their eyes to their success in every undertaking in which they came into contact, and to the constant superiority which they were acquiring. They looked upon their rivals with alarm, with jealousy, and finally with hatred. The English repaid them with a scorn, which soon also assumed the same form of hatred. The French complained of the arrogance and injustice of the English; the English accused the French of the vices of a weak and conquered people, and charged them with meanness and perfidy. The entire mistrust which the two races have thus learned to conceive of each other's intentions, induces them to put the worst construction on the most innocent conduct; to judge every word, every act, and every intention unfairly; to attribute the most odious designs, and reject every overture of kindness or fairness, as covering secret designs of treachery and malignity.

Religion formed no bond of intercourse and union. It is, indeed, an admirable feature of Canadian society, that it is entirely devoid of any religious dissensions. Sectarian intolerance is not merely not avowed, but it hardly seems to influence men's feelings. But though the prudence and liberality of both parties has prevented this fruitful source of animosity from embittering their quarrels, the difference of religion has, in fact, tended to keep them asunder. Their priests have been distinct; they have not met even in the same church.

No common education has served to remove and soften the differences of origin and language. The associations of youth, the sports of childhood, and the studies by which the character of manhood is modified, are distinct and totally different. In Montreal and Quebec there are English schools and French schools; the children in these are accustomed to fight nation against nation, and the quarrels that arise among boys in the streets usually exhibit a division into English on one side and French on the other.

As they are taught apart, so are their studies different. The literature with which each is the most conversant is that of the peculiar language of each; and all the ideas which men derive from books, come to each of them from perfectly different sources. The difference of language in this respect produces effects quite apart from those which it has on the mere intercourse of the two races. Those who have reflected on the powerful influence of language on thought, will perceive, in how different a manner, people who speak in different languages are apt to think; and those who are familiar with the literature of France, know that the same opinion will be expressed by an English and French writer of the present day, not merely in different words, but in a style so different as to mark utterly different habits of thought. This difference is very striking in Lower Canada; it exists not merely in the books of most influence and repute, which are of course those of the great writers of France and England, and by which the minds of the respective races are formed, but it is observable in the writings which now issue from the colonial press. The articles in the newspapers of each race are written in a style as widely different as those of France and England at present; and the arguments which convince the one, are calculated to appear utterly unintelligible to the other.

The difference of language produces misconceptions yet more fatal even than those which it occasions with respect to opinions; it aggravates the national animosities, by representing all the events of the day in utterly different lights. The political misrepresentation of facts is one of the incidents of a free press in every free country; but in nations in which all speak the same language, those who receive a misrepresentation from one side, have generally some means of learning the truth from the other. In Lower Canada, however, where the French and English papers represent adverse opinions, and where no large portion of the community can read both languages with ease, those who receive the misrepresentation are rarely able to avail themselves of the means of correction. It is difficult to conceive the perversity with which misrepresentations are habitually made, and the gross delusions which find currency among the people; they thus live in a world of misconceptions, in which each party is set against the other, not only by diversity of feelings and opinions, but by an actual belief in an utterly different set of facts.

The differences thus early occasioned by education and language are in nowise softened by the intercourse of after life; their business and occupations do not bring the two races into friendly contact and co-operation, but only present them to each other in occasional rivalry. A laudable emulation has of late induced the French to enter on the field previously occupied by the English, and to attempt to compete with them in commerce; but it is much to be lamented that this did not commence until the national animosities had arrived almost at the highest pitch, and that the competition has been carried on in such a manner as to widen the pre-existing differences. The establishment of the Banque du Peuple by French capitalists, is an event which may be regarded as a satisfactory indication of an awakening commercial energy among the French; and it is therefore very much to be regretted that the success of the new enterprise was uniformly promoted by direct and illiberal appeals to the national feelings of the race. Some of the French have lately established steamboats to compete with the monopoly which a combination of English capitalists had for some time enjoyed on the St. Lawrence; and small

and somewhat uncomfortable as they were, they were regarded with favor on account of their superiority in the essential qualities of certainty and celerity. But this was not considered sufficient to insure their success; an appeal was constantly made to the national feelings of the French for an exclusive preference of the "French" line; and I have known a French newspaper announce with satisfaction the fact, that on the previous day the French steamers to Quebec and Laprairie had arrived at Montreal with a great many passengers, and the English with very few. The English on the other hand, appealed to exactly the same kind of feelings; and used to apply to the French steamboats the epithets of "Radical," "Rebel," and "Disloyal." The introduction of this kind of national preference into this department of business produced a particularly mischievous effect, inasmuch as it separated the two races on some of the few occasions on which they had previously been thrown into each other's society. They rarely met at the inns in the cities; the principal hotels are almost exclusively filled with English and with foreign travellers; and the French are, for the most part, received at each other's houses, or in boarding houses, in which they meet with few English.

Nor do their amusements bring them more in contact. Social intercourse never existed between the two races in any but the higher classes, and it is now almost destroyed. I heard of but one house in Quebec in which both races met on pretty equal and amicable terms; and this was mentioned as a singular instance of good sense on the part of the gentleman to whom it belongs. At the commencement of Lord Aylmer's administration, an entertainment was given to his Lordship by Mr. Papineau, the Speaker of the House of Assembly. It was generally understood to be intended as a mark of confidence and good will towards the Governor, and of a conciliatory disposition. It was given on a very large scale; a very great number of persons were present; and of that number I was informed, by a gentleman who was present, that he and one other were the only English, except the Governor and his suit. Indeed the difference of manners in the two races renders a general social intercourse almost impossible.

A singular instance of national incompatibility was brought before my notice, in an attempt which I made to promote an undertaking in which the French were said to take a great deal of interest. I accepted the office of President of the Agricultural Association of the District of Quebec, and attended the show previous to the distribution of the prizes. I then found that the French farmers would not compete even on this neutral ground with the English; distinct prizes were given in almost every department, to the two races; and the national ploughing matches were carried on in separate and even distant fields.

While such is their social intercourse, it is not to be expected that the animosities of the two races can frequently be softened by the formation of domestic connections. During the first period of the possession of the colony by the English, intermarriages of the two races were by no means uncommon. But they are now very rare; and where such unions occur they are generally formed with members of the French families which I have described as politically, and almost nationally, separated from the bulk of their own race.

I could mention various slight features in the state of society, which show the all-pervading and marked division of the races; but nothing (though it would sound paradoxical) really proves their entire separation so much as the rarity, nay almost total absence, of personal encounters between the two races. Disputes of this kind are almost confined to the ruler of people, and seldom proceed to acts of violence. As respects the other classes, social intercourse between the two races is so limited, that the more prominent or excitable antagonists never meet in the same room. It came to my knowledge that a gentleman who was for some years a most active and determined leader amongst the English population, had never once been under a private roof with French Canadians of his own rank in life, until he met some at table on the invitation of persons attached to my mission, who were in the habit of associating indifferently with French and English. There are, therefore, no political personal controversies. The ordinary occasions of collision never occur; and men must quarrel so publicly, or so deliberately, that prudence restrains them from commencing, individually, what would probably end in a general and bloody conflict of numbers. Their mutual fears restrain personal disputes and riots, even among the lower orders; the French know and dread the superior physical strength of the English in the cities and the English in those places refrain from exhibiting their power, from fear of the revenge that might be taken on their countrymen, who are scattered over the rural parishes.

This feeling of mutual forbearance, extends so far as to produce an apparent calm with respect to public matters, which is calculated to perplex a stranger who has heard much of the animosities of the Province. No trace of them appears in public meetings; and these take place in every direction, in the most excited periods, and go off without disturbance, and almost without dissent. The fact is, that both parties have come to a tacit understanding not in any way to interfere with each other on these occasions; each party knowing that it would always be in the power of the other to prevent its meetings; the French theirs; and neither disturb the other. The complimentary addresses which I received on various occasions, marked the same entire separation, even in a matter in which it might be supposed that party feeling would not be felt, or would from mere prudence and propriety be concealed. I had from the same places French and English addresses; and I never found the two races uniting, except in a few cases, where I met with the names of two or three isolated members of one origin, who happened to dwell in a community almost entirely composed of the other. The two parties combine for no public object; they cannot harmonize even in associations of charity. The only public occasion on which

they ever meet, is in the jury box; and they meet there only to the utter obstruction of justice."

That deadly political strife should result from such a state of social feeling, was unavoidable. The different objects of the two races brought them into constant collision.

COMMENCEMENT AND PROGRESS OF THE POLITICAL STRUGGLE.

The hostility which thus pervades society, was some time growing before it became of prominent importance in the politics of the province. It was inevitable that such social feeling must end in a deadly political strife. The French regarded with jealousy the influence in politics of a daily increasing body of strangers whom they so much disliked and dreaded; the wealthy English were offended at finding that their property gave them no influence over their French dependents, who were acting under the guidance of leaders of their own race; and the farmers and traders of the same race were not long before they began to bear with impatience their utter political nullity in the midst of the majority of a population whose ignorance they contemned, and whose political views and conduct seemed utterly at variance with their own notions of the principles and practice of self government. The superior political and practical intelligence of the English cannot be for a moment disputed. The great mass of the Canadian population, who cannot read or write, and have found in view of the instructions of their country even the elements of political education, were obviously inferior to the English settlers, of whom a large proportion had received a considerable amount of education, and had been trained in their own country to take a part in public business of one kind or another. With respect to the more educated classes, the superiority is not so general or so apparent; indeed from all the information that I could collect, I incline to think that the greater amount of refinement, of speculative thought, and of knowledge that books can give is, with some brilliant exceptions, to be found among the French. But I have no hesitation in stating, even more decidedly, that the circumstances in which the English have been placed in Lower Canada, acting on their original political education, have endowed the leaders of that population with much of that practical sagacity, tact, and energy in politics, in which I must say that the bad instructions of the colony have, in my opinion, rendered the leaders of the French deplorably deficient. That a race which felt itself thus superior in political activity and intelligence should submit with patience to the rule of a majority which it could not respect, was impossible. At what time and from what particular cause the hostility between such a majority and such a minority, which was sure sooner or later to break out, actually became of paramount importance, it is difficult to say. The hostility between the Assembly and the British Government had long given a tendency to attacks on the part of the popular leaders on the nation to which that government belonged. It is said that the appeals to the national pride and animosities of the French became more direct and general on the occasion of the abortive attempt to reunite Upper and Lower Canada in 1822, which the leaders of the Assembly viewed or represented as a blow aimed at the institutions of their province. The anger of the English was excited by the denunciations of themselves, which, subsequently to this period, they were in the habit of hearing. They had possibly some little sympathy with the members of the Provincial Government of their own race; and their feelings were probably, yet more strongly excited in favor of the connexion of the colony with Great Britain, which the proceedings of the Assembly appear to endanger. But the abuses existing under the Provincial Government gave such inducements to remain in opposition to it, that the representatives of each race continued for a long time to act together against it. And as the bulk of the English population in the townships and on the Ottawa were brought into very little personal contact with the French, I am inclined to think that it might have been some time longer ere the disputes of origin would have assumed an importance paramount to all others, had not the Assembly come into collision with the whole English population by its policy with respect to internal improvements, and to the old and defective laws which operated as a bar to the alienation of land and to the formation of associations for commercial purposes.

"The English population—an immigrant and enterprising population—looked on the American provinces as a vast field of settlements and speculation; and, in the common spirit of the Anglo-Saxon inhabitants of that continent, regarded it as the chief business of the Government to promote, by all possible use of its legislative and administrative powers, the increase of population and the accumulation of property. They found the laws of real property exceedingly adverse to the easy alienation of land, its settlement and improvement; they found the greatest deficiency in the internal communications of the country; and the utter want of local self government rendered it necessary for them to apply to the Assembly for every road or bridge or other public work that was needed. They wished to form themselves into companies for the establishment of banks and the construction of railroads and canals, and to obtain the powers necessary for the completion of such works with funds of their own; and, as the first requisite for the improvement of the country, they desired that a large proportion of the revenue should be applied to the completion of that great series of public works by which it was proposed to render the Saint Lawrence and the Ottawa navigable throughout their whole extent.

"Without going so far as to accuse the Assembly of a deliberate design to check the settlement and improvement of Lower Canada, it cannot be denied that they looked with considerable jealousy and dislike on the increase and prosperity of what they regarded as a foreign and hostile race; they looked on the Province as the patrimony of their own race; they viewed it not as a country to be settled, but as one already settled; and, instead of

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