

The Canadian Historical Review, XXXII, 4 (Toronto, December, 1951) : 303-314. M. Elizabeth ARTHUR, "French-Canadian Participation in the Government of Canada, 1775-1785"

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The author of this article, we are told, "has received her doctorate from McGill University, and is now teaching at Fort William Collegiate". Instead of accepting the much repeated statements that the Quebec Act (1774) was "the Magna Carta of French-Canadian liberties", and that Governor Guy Carleton who was responsible for the passing of the Act was an enlightened statesman, Dr. Arthur asks a very important question. In what way did the Quebec Act offer guarantees to the French Canadians? She then undertakes, very efficiently, to answer her own question.

She finds, in the first place, that titles had already been collected by the Catholic Church from 1764 to 1774, so that the Quebec Act did not make any real difference in this respect. Secondly she finds that "the entry of Roman Catholic into public life had virtually no effect at all for a number of years", so far as the policy of the Canadian Government was concerned. And finally, she finds that even "French civil law was not really guaranteed", because legislative power in the British sense was given to the Governor and his Council. So much for "the Magna Carta of French-Canadian liberties"!

The truth, then, is that "the value of the Quebec Act for French Canadians depended largely upon the influence they could wield in the Governor's Council". Was Carleton really an enlightened statesman? Dr. Arthur examines the records of the French Canadians whom he chose to appoint to office, and discovers "that Carleton desired obedience and thorough-

going conservatism rather than qualities of leadership". Furthermore, "the number of Roman Catholics in office was astonishingly small in the decade after the Quebec Act, and the strengthening of the forces opposed to French civil law was a much more noticeable characteristic of the period than the organization of French Canadians to protect the rights which they had been guaranteed". These facts "suggest a deliberate policy of giving French Canada only nominal representation".

The conclusion, therefore, is that the Quebec Act "marked not so much an advance for French-Canadian liberty as a point behind which French-Canadian liberty could not be forced to retreat"; and, secondly, that Governor Guy Carleton was not an enlightened emancipator, but merely "a superb manipulator of colonial politics".

This short article speaks very well indeed for the critical approach and the quality of historical investigation which is being produced by the graduate history department of McGill University in Montreal.

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