

AN ESSAY

*On the expediency of Educating the people of Lower Canada, written in the year 1810, with the view of recommending the establishment of Schools throughout the Province.*

NEXT to the desire that our countrymen should be virtuous and good, ought to be the wish that they should possess some portion of knowledge; of that knowledge which gives a man resources within himself; which discovers to him the certain, though remote, consequences of vile conduct; and which enables him to employ his talents, to the greatest advantage for himself, his family, and his country.

We cannot, then, without regret, contemplate the state of knowledge in this Province. That there should, in this enlightened age, be numbers of persons, proprietors of land, who cannot write their names—would, in many parts of Europe, appear incredible. What would be the astonishment of a Swiss peasant, if he saw, as may often be seen here, the proprietor of two hundred acres of land, undertake a journey of four or five miles to get a letter read? In some parishes, there are probably not more than half a dozen persons who can read. Such is the difficulty of procuring instruction; that the country merchants, those persons who conduct the river craft, and others who necessarily require some knowledge of writing and arithmetic, are obliged to send their children to a great distance, to one of the few places in which they can be educated; or to engage some poor and illiterate pedagogue to reside in their houses for that purpose. The expence, in either case, is such as few are able, and still fewer are willing, to incur.

The seventeenth act of the first session of the third Provincial Parliament, enabled the majority of the inhabitants of any parish, to erect a school-house and a house for a teacher, at the joint expence of the parish. And the liberality of the British Government has, in every instance in which these accommodations have been provided, discovered itself in granting a salary for the support of the teacher. But, though nine years have elapsed since this law was enacted, twelve parishes only have yet availed themselves of the assistance which it offered them. Those who, like me, have been accustomed to estimate knowledge above all price, will be astonished at this fact. But, without inquiring into the causes of past neglect, I would only recommend the utmost efforts in future, to remove as soon as possible, this stigma from the country.

Much has been said in favour of knowledge in all ages. And, after the encomiums that have been bestowed upon it by the immortal writers of other times, it cannot be expected that I should advance much that is new, or any thing that is better than has formerly been said in its praise. This circumstance, however, forms no objection to the propriety of the present address on that subject. To render the observations of these illustrious writers useful to ourselves or our contemporaries, they must be adapted to the peculiar circumstances of our own times. They must