

ADDRESS.

Mr. SPEAKER: On behalf of a number of proprietors of Seigniories in Lower Canada, I appear before you, to represent certain objections which they feel themselves justified in urging, to the further progress of the Bill, which has just been called up before this Honorable House. And I do not say anything extraordinary, when I say that I so appear with a good deal of embarrassment, and even of regret. I am before a tribunal, certainly of an extraordinary—certainly also of a very high—character; and I have to contend against strong prepossessions and powerful interests. I have to speak on behalf of clients, few in number, and of extremely small influence in the community; and I feel that I labour under difficulties of a peculiar character, as well from the physical impossibility of speaking in both the languages used by Members of this Honorable House, as from other causes. I should be happy, were I able to do so, to address the House in both languages; but I know that those Members whose language I do not use, will be capable of understanding me; and I trust they will feel that my failure to address them in their own tongue, proceeds from no disrespect. Another regret also that I feel on this occasion, is, that I am obliged to stand here alone. The season of the year, and the indolent health of the learned Counsel—greatly my superior—who is associated with me, have prevented him from appearing before you; and no one more than myself feels how impossible it is for me to fill his place. But I have not felt that I had a right to decline on this account to give my services when required. I have not shrunk from the duty; because, though I feel my inadequacy, I also feel confidence in the fairness of this high tribunal. I believe that its members will listen patiently, honestly, and impartially, because of their high position, and in spite of the insignificance of him who speaks; and I am, besides, so convinced of the truth of what I have to say, that I do not believe I shall speak in vain.

Let me say here, and say earnestly, that I do not stand here as the apologist for the Seigniorial Tenure. I have nothing to do with its merits, if it have any; nor with its demerits, be they what they may. I am not here the partizan of a system; but the Advocate of individuals, whose misfortune it is that their property is of a peculiar character. As their Advocate, I speak merely of law; I have to convince you that these my clients are really proprietors, who have entered into contracts, who have rights recognized and guarded by the law, which rights this measure will most injuriously affect. When I take this position, I speak under sanction of the Speech at the opening of this Session, from the Throne, and of the reply of this Honorable House. I know that it is a position to which every branch of this Parliament is pledged; that it is admitted, that no rights of property must be disregarded, nor legal decisions of Courts set aside. Thus speaking then, under these sanctions, in spite of the prepossessions and interests against which I have to strive, notwithstanding the measure I oppose is introduced by an Honorable Member of an Administration generally understood to be strong enough in the confidence of this House to carry its measures,—I still have confidence in the justice of my cause, and in this High Tribunal; I believe that I shall not labour in vain.

I have to lay before this House and the country, facts not generally known. Much has been published to the world, since this subject was last discussed, which had previously been obscure. Several volumes have been printed, which contain the greater part of the titles of the Seigniories of Lower Canada; and besides these, reports, in both languages, of a number of *Arrêts* which had never previously seen the light. There have also been published important extracts from the correspondence of high officers of the French Government, of the Governors and Intendants in Canada, the Ministers of State, and even of the Sovereign. And it is my belief—my full and firm belief—that from these titles now first placed in a position to be understood, these *Arrêts* now first made known, this correspondence now first opened to historical research and legal deduction, a case can be made out, which could never before have been made out. I have not the vanity to hope that I shall be