

SESSIONAL PAPER No. 18

FINLAY TO NEPEAN.¹QUEBEC 22^d October 1784.

SIR,

The Advocates for a House of Assembly in this Province take it for granted that the people in general wish to be represented ; but that is only a guess, for I will venture to affirm that not a Canadian landholder in fifty ever once thought on the subject and were it to be proposed to him, he would readily declare his incapacity to Judge of the matter. Although the Canadian Peasants are far from being a stupid race, they are at present an ignorant people, from want of instruction—not a man in five hundred among them can read ; perhaps it has been the Policy of the Clergy to keep them in the dark, as it is a favourite tenet with the Roman Catholic Priests, ignorance is the mother of devotion. The Females in this Country have great advantage over the males in point of Education. The Sisters of the Congregation, or grey Sisters as they are called, are settled in the Country Parishes here and there to teach girls to read, write, sew, & knit Stockings : there's only a few of that Sisterhood—they are the most useful of any of the religious orders in Canada.

Before we think of a house of Assembly for this Country, let us lay a foundation for useful knowledge to fit the people to Judge of their Situation, and deliberate for the future well-being of the Province. The first step towards this desirable end, is to have a free School in every Parish—Let the schoolmasters be English if we would make Englishmen of the Canadians; let the Masters be Roman Catholics if it is necessary, for perhaps the people, at the instigation of the Priests, would not put their children under the tuition of a Protestant.

The natural born subjects say, that they settled in Canada under the Kings promise to call a house of Assembly as soon as the circumstances of the Province would permit. The time is now come, say they ; they likewise state many privileges that they hoped to enjoy on the faith of the Royal proclamation, of which they were deprived by the Quebec Act.

It is not yet ascertain'd that the people wish for a house of Assembly! —Is it not the very essence of representation that the members of the

¹ Canadian Archives, Q 23, p. 441. Mr. Hugh Finlay, as already indicated (see note 1, p. 708) was Deputy Postmaster General and a member of the Council. Evan, afterwards Sir Evan Nepean was appointed the first Permanent Under Secretary of State for the Home Department, in 1782. This office was created in consequence of the readjustment of a number of offices of state. The office of Secretary of State for the Colonies, created in 1768, was abolished along with the Board of Trade and Plantations, in 1782, under the Act of 22nd Geo. III, cap. 82, the preamble to which states: "Whereas his Majesty, from his paternal regard to the welfare of his faithful people, from his desire to discharge the debt on his civil list, without any new burthen to the publick, for preventing the growth of a like debt for the future, as well as for introducing a better order and economy in the civil list establishments, and for the better security of the liberty and independency of parliament, has been pleased to order, that the office commonly called or known by the name of Third Secretary of State, or Secretary of State for the Colonies; the office or establishment commonly known by the name and description of The Board of Trade and Plantations; the offices of lords of police in Scotland;" &c., &c., "shall be, and are hereby utterly suppressed, abolished, and taken away." Statutes at Large, vol. 34, p. 143. The former duties of the Board of Trade and Plantations were to be executed by a Committee of the Privy Council. See sec. 15 of the Act. The work of the Colonial Secretary was transferred to the Home Department, formerly the Southern Department, in which there was also a Parliamentary Under Secretary.