

Report from House
of Assembly,
Upper Canada.

communities for which they have had both to administer and legislate. The persons with whom the real management of these affairs has or ought to have rested, have been the permanent but utterly irresponsible members of the office. Thus the real government of the Colony has been entirely dissevered from the slight nominal responsibility which exists. Apart even from this great and primary evil of the system, the pressure of multifarious business thus thrown on the Colonial office, and the repeated changes of its ostensible directors, have produced disorders in the management of public business which have occasioned serious mischief, and very great irritation. This is not my own opinion merely; for I do but repeat that of a Select Committee of the present House of Assembly in Upper Canada, who, in a Report dated February 8, 1838, say, "It appears to your Committee, that one of the chief causes of dissatisfaction with the administration of colonial affairs arises from the frequent changes in the office of Secretary of State, to whom the Colonial department is intrusted. Since the time the late Lord Bathurst retired from that charge, in 1827, your Committee believe there has not been less than eight Colonial Ministers, and that the policy of each successive statesman has been more or less marked by a difference from that of his predecessor. This frequency of change in itself almost necessarily entails two evils; *first*, an imperfect knowledge of the affairs of the Colonies on the part of the Chief Secretary, and the consequent necessity of submitting important details to the subordinate officers of the department; and, *second*, the want of stability and firmness in the general policy of the Government, and which, of course, creates much uneasiness on the part of the Governors, and other officers of the Colonies, as to what measures may be approved.

"But undoubtedly" (continues the Report) "by far the greatest objection to the system is, the impossibility it occasions of any Colonial Minister, unaided by persons possessing local knowledge, becoming acquainted with the wants, wishes, feelings and prejudices of the inhabitants of the Colonies, during his temporary continuance in office, and of deciding satisfactorily upon the conflicting statements and claims that are brought before him. A firm, unflinching resolution to adhere to the principles of the constitution, and to maintain the just and necessary powers of the Crown, would do much towards supplying the want of local information. But it would be performing more than can be reasonably expected from human sagacity, if any man, or set of men, should always decide in an unexceptionable manner on subjects that have their origin thousands of miles from the seat of the Imperial Government, where they reside, and of which they have no personal knowledge whatever; and therefore wrong may be often done to individuals, or a false view taken of some important political question, that in the end may throw a whole community into difficulty and dissension, not from the absence of the most anxious desire to do right, but from an imperfect knowledge of facts upon which to form an opinion.

"To these objections" (adds the Report) "it may be answered, that although the Chief Secretary of State retires with a change of ministers, the Under Secretaries (or at least one of them) and the other subordinate officers of the department, remain and hold their offices permanently, and therefore information upon all subjects can be readily imparted to the superior by the gentlemen who are thus retained; and it may be admitted that the knowledge of this fact ought to lessen the force of the objections that rest on other grounds; but it cannot be disguised that there is a growing impatience and unwillingness on the part of the Colonists, especially in these extensive Provinces, to have the measures of Government, whether connected with their general system of government, legislation, or patronage, controlled by persons who are utter strangers to them, not responsible in any way to themselves or the British Parliament, and who perhaps, being advanced to their office from length of service, or other like cause, are not regarded as competent (perhaps unjustly) to manage and direct measures which they (the Colonists) deem of vital importance. Much of this feeling may be traced to pride; but it is a pride that springs from an honourable and laudable feeling, and always accompanies self-respect, true patriotism, and love of country, and it therefore ought not to be disregarded, nor should any attempt be made to lessen or control it, if it were possible to do so. But the imperfection that exists in the system of colonial government that prevails in England, is rendered more apparent by the want of that confidence that ought to be reposed in the distinguished officers, who from time to time are commissioned as Governors to different Colonies, than by any other fact that can be distinctly pointed out."

Instance of these
evils.

I will now only point out one instance of these evils, and I select it because it is an instance occurring in relation to the most important function of the executive;