

# The Examiner.

"THIS IS TRUE LIBERTY, WHEN FREEBORN MEN—HAVING TO ADVISE THE PUBLIC, MAY SPEAK FREE."—EURIPIDES.

VOL. I.]

CHARLOTTETOWN, P. E. ISLAND, MONDAY, MARCH 27, 1848.

[No. 34.]

## HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY.

16TH FEBRUARY, 1848.

### LAND TAX.

(Continued.)

Mr. Rae was by no means inclined to push his proposition if the sense of the House were against it; but he hoped something would be done to make the Tax fall upon the Proprietors, as was the intention when the present law was passed; but instead of this being the case, the Proprietors had managed to throw it upon the Tenants. One half of the lands of the Island are under lease, these leases are so worded as to make the tenantry liable to pay all taxes imposed or to be imposed. This was an evil or a grievance, which the House ought to remedy, and in order to do so, a rider should be attached to the Bill, to compel the proprietors to deduct the amount of the tax from the rents of those tenants who now have to pay it: and from recent events relative to leases, in Britain, he thought the scheme which he proposed would not be opposed by the Imperial Government.

Mr. Palmer said, the hon. member for Prince County (Mr. Rae) seemed to have some fears for the fate of the Bill, if an additional tax were to be put upon wilderness land; and yet, if he (Mr. Palmer) understood him aright, he would have no objection to increase the tax on cultivated lands, in the first Bill, and manifest no anxiety about its result,—though he appeared to be anxious that the proprietors should pay both taxes. He (Mr. P.) would ask, why not place both taxes in the second Bill? if the argument used by the hon. member applied in one case, it ought to apply in the other. He, for his own part, saw no necessity for departing from the principle of the present Land Assessment Act: it had operated to the benefit of the Island; and they ought to be content with it; though, were the tax to be increased, he agreed with the hon. Speaker there was no reason to apprehend that the Royal assent would be withheld. As he (Mr. P.) had said before, the existing Act had soon been found to work well; for, immediately after it came into operation, thousands and thousands of acres of wilderness lands were let and settled, which, in all likelihood, would, independently of the coercive operation of the Act, have remained unoccupied and unimproved up to that time. He was, therefore, of opinion, that it would be wise and sound policy to continue the existing Act by a new Bill; more particularly as there was not the slightest danger of its being encountered by any opposition from any quarter, if simply re-enacted: but if it were to be altered in the way proposed by the hon. member for Prince County (Mr. Rae), it certainly should not have his support. That hon. member, he (Mr. P.) was inclined to think, was induced to recommend the alteration which he proposed, by some unexplained motive not arising from any thing which he (Mr. Rae) had perceived in the Despatch of Earl Grey. However, let that hon. member's motive be what it might, he (Mr. P.) could not consent to the adoption of the alteration which he (Mr. Rae) seemed so anxious to effect; for the measure so altered, he (Mr. P.) was convinced would meet with most strenuous opposition. But were the Bill to be framed according to the existing law, it should have his (Mr. P.'s) support; because, from what had come within his knowledge, he could confidently say it would meet with no opposition from the Home Government. As to the proposition for compelling the Proprietors to meet all the impositions, both on cultivated and uncultivated lands, and thereby interfering with nearly all the leases in the Island, he should, if it were persisted in, oppose it with all his might; for such a proposition he held to be contrary to the principles of justice and equity. The hon. member for Prince County (Mr. Rae) might, if he thought proper, bring forward his proposition in a separate Bill; but were he to succeed in causing it to be embodied with the present Tax, he might be sure the whole would be in jeopardy: for he (Mr. P.) would remind him (although he did not seem to require the caution) that the Proprietors had yet some influence at the Colonial Office, though he (Mr. P.) was willing to admit that it was far from being so strong as it formerly was. He perfectly agreed with the hon. Speaker, that a Tax upon land, though of equal amount to the old Quit Rent, was greatly preferable to it, and less arbitrary in the mode of its collection; and that should the present Land Assessment Act be allowed to expire, Her Majesty might again resume the collection of the Quit Rent, to the great detriment of the interests of the Island. What man, he would ask, possessed of reasoning faculties, and enjoying a good farm of 100 acres, would complain of being obliged to contribute three shillings per year to the general revenue of the Colony, if he, at the same time, remembered that commodities of daily consumption in his house would be cheapened, by a reduction of duties, to an amount greatly exceeding

that tax—the only direct one he would experience. It might be that in some of the cultivated and christianised portions of the globe, less direct taxes were borne by the people; but, if such were the case, he could not then call to mind where those portions were situated. He could, therefore, see nothing startling or unreasonable in what had fallen from the hon. Speaker, relative to an increase of the Tax, and a reduction of the duties upon Tea and other articles of daily consumption. He could scarcely think the hon. member for Prince County (Mr. Rae) serious, when he spoke of imposing, by law, upon the Landlord a Tax which the Tenant had bound himself to pay; when he called to mind that, in many instances, even then, the Tenant, in some way or other, contrived to evade his liability, and it ultimately fell upon the Landlord, who, although the law was decidedly in his favour, of two evils choosing the less submitted to—the payment of the Tax, as the expenses of recovering it would, most probably, greatly exceed that loss.

Mr. Rae. It appears the hon. member for Charlottetown (Mr. Palmer) has mistaken me. All I wished to have was a second Bill, for any additional tax that may be imposed; in order to make it doubly sure that we may not raise up an opposition, and thereby endanger the whole. I well know that, if we are not very careful, what we impose on the Proprietors, will, as heretofore, be shifted to the shoulders of the already over-loaded tenantry; whose burdens I will do all I can to alleviate, but will never agree to increase. I am fully persuaded that, if the people were consulted—if they were asked whether they had felt the benefit they were promised when the tax was substituted for the Quit Rent, their answer would be that they had not. I am perfectly aware that Her Majesty may resume the Quit Rent, if the Land Assessment Act be allowed to expire; but so long as it remains she cannot revive its collection. There are various ways of attaching riders to Bills; and, by such means, I see no difficulty in carrying out my proposition to compel the Proprietors to bear their own burdens, and contribute to the public wants. The tenantry have done all they can for this purpose, and can bear no more. I should like to know whether the continuance of the Tax is for any particular purpose; as the great object for which it was imposed is now accomplished.

The hon. Speaker. I am not a part of the ministry, and am not, therefore, qualified to answer the question of the hon. member who has just sat down; but I take upon myself to say that, when the learned member and myself were at the Colonial Office, the subject was pressed upon the attention of the Colonial Secretary, who expressed his unqualified approval of this means of improving the revenue of the Colony. His Lordship seemed fully aware of the situation of the tenantry; and, I have no doubt, would lend a willing ear to any just and equitable measure for the amelioration of their condition. I, therefore, feel bound to say that we shall be guilty of a great dereliction of our duty, if we do not embrace the opportunity now afforded us, to relieve our trade, by a remission of duties, and, at the same time, to secure a means which would enable us to go a great way towards getting rid of our public debt. If, in some instances, the tenants have paid the Tax, they have seen this building erected with the proceeds; and, during its progress, great numbers of people were employed in its erection, and the farmers in consequence were benefited by meeting a more ready sale for their produce. And it ought not to be forgotten that, had not this imposition existed, a far more grievous one would have been in operation in the shape of Quit Rent; the rigorous mode of the collection of which would have jeopardized the possession of his farm to many an honest man. I cannot agree that it would be consistent with the principles of justice to compel the Proprietors to pay that for which the Tenants have made themselves liable in their leases. The possibility of increasing our Revenue by means of the Land Tax, has been suggested to us. The subject, in my opinion, requires but very little consideration; and I cannot see why we should not, without hesitation, pursue the course indicated to be so much for our benefit.

Mr. Macintosh thought he should vote against any increase whatever, and, therefore, it was needless for him to make any remark as to which he thought preferable—one Bill or two Bills. He grounded his opposition upon the fear that, however cautious the House might be, or however stringent a measure they might adopt to bind the Proprietors, they (the Proprietors) would be sure to escape, and leave the tenants to discharge the obligation: the latter would be sure to suffer in one way or another. Even the present Land Tax had been an evil to them: many of them had been compelled to pay it, though the Proprietors said they did. If an increase were made, and a more stringent law enacted to compel the Proprietors to pay, he much feared it would make

them more rigorous with the Tenants. Under these impressions, he could not consent to lend his assistance to increase the Tax.

Mr. D. Maclean was of opinion that a greater Tax should be levied from the land, and believed it could not be applied to a better purpose than the encouragement of education. Look at Scotland, said the hon. member, and compare the large salaries of school masters there with the miserable pittance of those in Prince Edward Island. In many parts of the Island, where school masters are engaged, they find, at the end of the year, that their labours have, in a great measure, been thrown away, for the people cannot pay them. In short, they are—instead of being a respectable class of persons—a roving, half-clad, and half-starved one. An entire new system ought to be created for the encouragement of education, and thirty or forty pounds per annum ought to be as little as each master should receive from Government. Then we might expect to see education increase, and a fresh and better qualified class of masters spring up. Under the present system, it is deplorable and grievous to see, how small a part of the rising generation receive any education at all. The hon. member continued, he verily believed not one-third of them could read, and not half of those understood what they did read. It was, therefore, the bounden duty of the House to look to this question of all questions, and endeavour to do their utmost to bring about a better system.

Dr. Conroy. Sir, I agree with every word that has fallen from the hon. member who has just sat down. It is far better to educate the child, than to pay for the ignorance of the man. Where the people, Sir, are educated, it is in vain to attempt to coerce them. Napoleon's plan may be brought to bear; but it would be useless to try coercion. Again, Sir, where the people are educated no tyrannical Government can have more than an ephemeral existence; and in no other way, than by sowing the seeds of knowledge in the minds of the rising generation, can true civilization be promoted or secured. The school-master of this country is so little thought of or cared for, that, in many instances, he is bandied about and looked upon rather as an infliction than a benefit, and one upon whom the future welfare and happiness of thousands depend. I see no other source than the land, from which we can raise the means to bring about and accomplish the all-important measure, the required improvement in our general educational system. Let us put our shoulders to the wheel, and endeavour to establish something more like the educational system of Ireland and Scotland—something that will do credit to the Colony, and prevent hereafter any Secretary of State from tauntingly observing to us, that, in consequence of the deficiency of education amongst us, we are not prepared for the practice and enjoyment of Responsible Government. Let me not, however, be misunderstood whilst alluding to the noble Secretary's taunt; for I am very far from admitting that he had sufficient grounds for making it. Indeed, I believe some of the agricultural districts at home are as far behind in education as the generality of the people of this Island, and less intelligent than they are. I, therefore, consider the insinuation as a most unmerited one. It is strange, Sir, that the heads of families are not more alive to the importance of education to their children. I know several who neglect it, and who cannot plead poverty as an excuse: and I speak it to their shame; for it is unparental, and a gross neglect of a father's duty to his child. I will, therefore, go for an increased Tax, and I hope to see it applied for the purposes of education.

Mr. F. Longworth said, the question was not that of education, but whether or not, the land will bear an increased tax. He thought it would be good policy to raise it 50 per cent., and to reduce the duty on Tea and other articles of daily consumption. Notwithstanding what had fallen from the hon. members, Messrs. Rae and D. McLean, he contended it would save the pocket of the farmer more than the amount of the Land Tax, even if he had to pay it. He would vote for an increase of one shilling on cultivated, and of two shillings upon uncultivated land; because, after the allusion to the subject by Earl Grey and the repetition thereof in the speech from His Excellency which they were then considering, and after the assurance which had been given by the hon. members, the Speaker and Mr. Palmer, he did not see the shadow of a shade of danger that the Royal assent would be withheld from the Bill; for he took it for granted that the Home Government fully expected to see a larger revenue raised from this source. However desirable it might be to pay every regard to the great question of education, hon. members who exclaimed, "Forward! forward!" had, he feared, much to learn themselves before their wholesale plans could be realized. They ought to remember that this Colony is not Scotland, where so many charitable endowed Institutions for education exist. They should bear in mind