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HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY.

DEBATE ON THE ADDRESS IN ANSWER TO THE GOVERNOR'S SPEECH.

Hon. Mr. LONGWORTH—I am amused, Mr. Chairman, at witnessing the various opinions which have been expressed on this subject, some from hon. members whose views have undergone great changes since last session. Without going over the ground so often traversed, by reviewing the past history of the question, I will put the plain question, what does the paragraph mean? We but pledge ourselves to give the subject the consideration which its importance demands. While I readily admit that the report of the Hon. Mr. Thornton, which has been referred to, is well drawn up, there is one important consideration omitted, without which it is impossible to arrive at a just conclusion. It contains no estimate of the probable amount of the working expenses of the Estate. I entertain a high respect for that hon. gentleman, and by no means attribute to him any unworthy motives in preparing that report; which, however, did not justify the purchase of the property, for it contained no estimate of the cost of the staff of officials connected with the management, whose expenses are eating up the receipts. As to the question of Escheat, it will be time enough to go into that question when the despatches are brought down. I shall, however, not allow to go abroad uncontradicted the assertion of the hon. member Mr. Coles, that the possession of a proprietor for any length of time, even 500 years, could not perfect his title. Now the law says that 28 years possession gives title. One argument of the hon. member, Mr. Thornton, for his support of the Loan Bill, was drawn from the cases of hardship and distress which he had known the tenantry to suffer. Without disputing the truth of this statement, they afforded no reason for supporting a measure which was based upon the principle of taxing the freeholders and mechanics of Prince and Queen's Counties for the purchase of farms for the people in King's. Such a principle carried into practice would enable men too indolent to acquire property by their own exertions, to do it at the expense of their more industrious neighbours.

Hon. Mr. WHELAN—The principal objection that has been urged against the amendment is that the agitation for Escheat is unwise because it has so often failed. There is but little force in that argument, for British history, and in fact all history is replete with instances of repeated failures being ultimately crowned with success. Let hon. members bear in mind the old dictum,

He who fights and runs away
May live to fight another day.

I can say with my hon. friend Mr. Thornton, that I have not been an Escheater, but last year I stated in my place, that if the Loan and Reserves Bill were lost, I should support the establishment of a Court of Escheat. The hon. member Mr. Longworth deprecated the discussion of Escheat, until the despatches shall be brought down; but the Government has not promised to introduce any bill or measure on the subject; no allusion to such action is to be found in the speech or address. This discussion might be omitted if the Govt. in the speech or address had promised any specific measure, but not having done so, the present is the proper time for the opinions of the minority to go before the Government and the country. As to the allusion to the failure of the hon. member Mr. Cooper's missions to England, it was easy to account for the want of success. Our claim to the same degree of liberty as our brethren in the mother country possessed was not recognized; the Colonial Office was governed by cliques interested in poisoning the mind of the Colonial Minister. What chance had Prince Edward Island of succeeding at the Colonial Office against such influence, at a time, too, when the Legislative Council of the Colony was crammed with the members of a faction opposed to the wishes of the people, and which looked upon all who were in favor of Escheat as little better than savages. It had been alleged against the minority some 2 or 3 years ago, that in opposing Escheat, they had betrayed their party and forfeited their pledges—that they had in 1851 been returned to support Escheat. I could name some members of the present Government who declared that the opposition had betrayed the people's interests on the subject of the land question, and that the Government party were the only friends on whom the public could rely. The value they place on consistency will be tested by the vote to-night, when we shall see how far the prospectus of the Political Alliance—which insisted on a Court of Enquiry as a *sine qua non*, and to which many members owed their seats—will be adhered to by those who have submitted to its dictation in other matters.

Hon. Mr. HAVILAND—I am glad that you admit its power.

Hon. Mr. WHELAN—I admit your subserviency to its dictation. Two members of the Government, Messrs. Yeo and Laird, years ago voted with Mr. Cooper for Escheat. The latter had always, until his elevation to executive honors, been a consistent Escheater; and the former, on the occasion to which he referred, had justified his vote by the necessity which existed for settling the matter by any means whatever. What has now induced such a change in that hon. member's opinions? Is it, that now that he is a councillor, he has received an intimation from his leader that he now finds it convenient to characterize as a fudge a measure he supported a few years ago? Another member of the Government, Hon. Mr. Haviland, has argued that the British Government were not guilty of a breach of faith, because a direct and unequivocal promise of the guarantee of the Loan had not been made. The despatch of Mr. Labouchere, and the speech of Lord Stanley in the House of Commons, were sufficient answer to that objection. The Go-

vernment had asserted that His Excellency the Lieut. Governor had been misinformed by his late advisers on the subject of the finances of the Colony. That assertion makes his alleged ignorance bear the charge of his fidelity to his public duties, for all the accounts were open to his inspection, and it is unlikely that under such circumstances he would be misled by any set of advisers. Had Canada, Nova Scotia, or New Brunswick, been treated as we have been on the subject of the Loan, every town and hamlet would have resounded with denunciations of the parties who had held out such promises only to break them; but here the voice of remonstrance must be silenced amid the conflict of passion. I have been told that if I advocated Escheat, I might ride into the House on the strength of it; but I have always stated that I would not support Escheat while there was a probability of the remedial measures of the liberal party being crowned with success. We are told to wait till the despatches are brought down. The despatches are here though not officially, and the minority are not to be blinded by such a quibble as that. The Colonial Minister is, I am aware, a brilliant novelist, but as a despatch writer is not admired by any class of politicians—but this despatch has probably been written by some understrapper at the Colonial Office. Suppose that the Government acted on the suggestion for a Commission, and appointed five proprietors and an equal number of tenants, regular fire-eating Escheaters? No report would be made, for the proprietors would not admit that their titles were bad; the others would not allow that they were good; a heavy expense would thus be fruitlessly incurred.

Hon. Mr. PALMER—The position of the opposition is very peculiar, and, I believe, unprecedented in the annals of Colonial politics. I have always understood that where the object in debating the address was to damage the Government, some reasons ought to be adduced and arguments shown, that the Government should not stand because their policy did not commend itself to the good will of the people. It is impossible that the Government could have matured important measures in the short time since they came into power; during which they have been occupied in filling the offices and making other necessary arrangements. The opposition advance nothing to shew why the Government should forfeit their position; but their course resembled that of a party who, at his arraignment, pleaded guilty, and when brought up for sentence wished to withdraw the plea, pretending that he ought not to have admitted his guilt. When the late Government went out of office, they resigned only when the country had pronounced against them so unmistakably that they could no longer hold on. His Excellency's speech says that certain measures mooted in the Colony have been laid before Her Majesty's government, and that despatches on the subjects of them will be laid before the House. Why then should it be sought to compel the Government at this period of their tenure of office, and at this early part of the session, to disclose what measures they may have in contemplation? When the despatches shall have been laid before the House, then it will be ample time to discuss the measures which may be proposed. Members of the opposition are so over-charged with their political steam that they are blowing it off rather prematurely, and each of them thinks himself victimised to a greater extent than his neighbour. I regret that so much time has been consumed in the discussion of the Loan and Reserves Bills at this stage of the session, as the same ground will be gone over again when the despatches are before us; and in the long discussion not a single new idea has been propounded, not a new principle advocated—the debate on the part of the opposition has been but a rehash of the arguments and assertions which have been repeated over and over again until patience is exhausted. I ask how long is this to last? It is well understood that several important measures await our action. The disputed seats, the Revenue and appropriation Bills, and others. That portion of the discussion which referred to the Fishery Reserves is legitimate enough, because the paragraph referred to that question, but all the rest is irrelevant. The amendment proposes to pledge the House to a certain course, and threatens a Court of Escheat. Now, sir, how can the opposition know the course which the Government may purpose to adopt, with reference to the questions which have been dragged into this discussion? Had the speech recommended any particular measure, and the address had embodied an opinion on such measure, the opposition would then have had a fair opportunity of testing their strength against the Government, which at present has to come down to the House, with the remnants left in the Cabinet box of the late Government. I have taken several pages of notes, of which, however, it is unnecessary that I should make any use, as the arguments and assertions of the minority have been so well answered by my honorable colleagues. The Government will be prepared to submit certain measures for the adoption of the House; if they should fail in carrying them, they will be able to justify themselves to the country.

After a few remarks from Hon. Mr. Coles and Mr. Cooper, on the antecedents of the Escheat agitation, the amendment was lost and the original paragraph was carried.

The next and final paragraph having been read—
Hon. Mr. WHELAN—In submitting the amendment which I have prepared, I think it improper to allow the Committee to rise without the expression of an opinion as to the change in the constitution of the Colony by the present Government. If they did so, their conduct might be considered as a tacit acquiescence in the infraction of the constitution. The amendment states that the system recently inaugurated is contrary to the law of the land and the British constitution. The preamble of our Civil list Bill, in exchange for which we obtained the concession of Responsible Government, states that we had asked for a system similar to that in force in Canada, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. If we have such system, the amendment falls to the ground; if we have it not, the world should know it. If the present system shall be continued, it is better that the Act should be repealed than that the new doctrine dictated by the Political Alliance should be maintained in defiance of the law of the land. The late Government were twitted with having

been unduly influenced by the possession of officers on the floor of the House, which, their opponents alleged, destroyed their independence. But what is the present condition of the House? At no previous time were there more than six members of the Executive in the House, now there are no less than seven.

Hon. Mr. YEO—The House consists of 30 members now.

Hon. Mr. WHELAN—That does not affect the question. The argument for the increase in the number of representatives was that it would neutralize the influence of the Government; but now we see nearly one fourth part of the House composed of members of the Government, and the popular control over the office-holders removed. And what do we see with reference to the appointments to office? One prominent member of the Government, in every respect entitled to take office, was prevented by the Alliance, and his cousin appointed. The hon. member for Charlottetown, Mr. Palmer, who has faithfully served his party for a number of years, and who was in every way entitled to, and qualified for it, has been by a secret association, prevented from occupying a position which was his due. Another councillor has not taken office, it is true, but dame rumour assigns to a brother of his the speedy assumption of an official character. When the late Government was in power, the then opposition harped upon the fact of the Road Correspondent and Mr. Pope Welsh being connected with the leader of that Government, as evidencing conclusively the existence of a family compact. But now we see one councillor with his cousin in office, as Attorney General; another with a brother still to be appointed; a third with a son-in-law in office, and another with a brother in the Excise office, and another related to nearly the whole of them. What reason is there to suppose that those offices would be better filled by those who at present hold them, than they would be by members of the House? It would be more constitutional and more satisfactory to the country if the officers referred to were here. It has been said that the people sanctioned the change, and that the Government majority was returned to effect it. Mr. Chairman, I believe that if ledger influence and religious bigotry had not been active elements in the late elections, the result would have been very different. Besides these, the Political Alliance had dictated imperiously to their slaves, and had claimed to express the well understood wishes of the people; and their nominees were prepared to give effect to their assumption, and probably would do so, if they wished the stars and stripes to float over us. This plan of appointing relatives and connections to office is exciting bickering and contention among the supporters of Government, which could not exist under the former system, as it made those whom the people confided in the recipients of office. And this state of affairs has been occasioned by the violation of a law of the land, as is the case also with the Registrar of Deeds, who is not to be found. That gentleman received his appointment in consideration of his being able to bring a goodly number of his co-religionists to the hustings to vote for a supporter of the Government. Of a surety, the Snatchers are on the other side now.

Mr. DAVIES—They are not in the House, however.

Hon. Mr. WHELAN—It is worse, now that the snatching is for the benefit of cousins, brothers, and other relatives; and it is not an unfair inference, that pecuniary consideration has influenced some of the appointments.

Mr. HOWAT—Mr. Chairman, if country members were as long-winded as town, I do not know when we would get through the business of the country. The hon. gentleman, who has just sat down talks like an idiot, notwithstanding his very great eloquence. He says that we are the slaves of a party—that we have violated the constitution—annihilated Responsible Government. Now, Sir, what is Responsible Government? I shall not attempt to define it. Mr. Johnston, of Nova Scotia, was asked what it meant, but felt himself unable to answer the question; but lo! a greater than he is here in the person of the Hon. Mr. Whelan. Sir, my opinion is, that Responsible Government is whatever the people choose to make it—like a field, it can be ploughed lengthwise or across. The hon. member says we are the slaves of the Political Alliance—that we must submit to its dictates—acknowledge its behests—vote that right which we know to be wrong, and thus run the race of Clark. No, Sir, it exercises no power over me, it has no influence in our part of the country. The Liberals have told us that His Excellency the Governor would not allow us to sit in the House, without submitting to their mode of Responsible Government. But, Sir, His Excellency has shown his wisdom in not interposing any obstacle to the formation of the Government. Thus, Sir, the gentlemen on the other side, and their friends, have proved themselves very bad authorities in this matter. Their principles are almost dead, and they themselves are dying very hard, and they must die—their policy must cease in future to afflict the country with its pernicious influence. We have pledged ourselves to our constituents to carry out the principles of wise and judicious reforms, and I, for one, am determined to do so.

Hon. Mr. COLES—Under the present mongrel system of Government, every member of it is as much bound to support it as was any head of a department under the previous system, so that the argument about the greater freedom from improper influences fell to the ground. There should be three or four heads of departments in the House, and I regret that the leader of the Government has not accepted the office to which he was so fairly entitled; and I believe, that sooner than have allowed him to retire as a representative, had he taken office, a majority of his friends would have returned him here as an official. I should like to see every member of the Executive holding office, and I would rather see their number reduced to five, with offices, than as at present. This Government is a disgrace to the Colony, and a laughing stock to our neighbors. I say not this in reference to the individuals composing it, but to the principle on which it is constituted. The people will not remain long satisfied with the system of dispensing the patronage among the relatives of members of the Executive. Such has not been the course pursued in the other Colonies; and in Nova Scotia, Mr. Johnston, to whom the hon. member has referred, did not adopt it when he succeeded to power, but carried out the constitutional system, which is as near an approximation to the British as the difference between Imperial and Colonial institutions will admit. At present, a person coming from the country, having business with the Government, may be unable to see members of the Council; while, until recently, if the Governor was in his office, a Council could be formed at once from the officers in the building; but now the Governor cannot hold confidential communication with his principal officers, because they are not his advisers.

Hon. Mr. WHELAN—The principal defender of the Government appears to be the hon. member, Mr. Howat, who is put forward as a stalking-horse, when the members of the Executive do not wish to make themselves appear ridiculous. He said that the opposition were dying hard; if such be the case, they are dying in defence of the liberties of the people, which the