

fall to be asked for till after the lapse of a considerable period, as in the case of this Galway Contract, which was entered into in February 1859, but the service under which does not commence till June 1860; so that no occasion for a vote of money could arise till the Estimates for the year now current should come before the House. In the interval, however, between the execution of a contract and the vote, contractors necessarily go on with their preparations; building ships, and making different arrangements, involving expense, and, it may be, obligations of a serious nature; so that when the question is raised on the vote, it is obviously impossible for the House of Commons to exercise its power of control with that freedom which is absolutely essential for the public interest, and the right performance of its high functions.

Your Committee are fully alive to the evils that might result from any course of procedure which would open a door to a Parliamentary canvass, on behalf of competing offerers for a public contract; but any risk of that kind is far more than counterbalanced by the necessity of Parliamentary control not being practically excluded in regard to so large a branch of public expenditure.

The amount of subsidies paid for postal packet service is now nearly a million a year, and the addition of the Galway subsidy would raise it above the million, while the whole corresponding postal revenue, as stated by the Post Office, is only about 393,500 *l.* Under particular contracts, too, the payment is very large; in one case, that of the West India service, it reaches 268,500 *l.*, and it seems repugnant to the principles of the Constitution, that the Executive Government should be left to enter into contracts, binding the country for prolonged periods of future time, and that, it may be, by anticipation, in the payment of sums so vast, without the possibility of any effective Parliamentary check, beyond a disapproval after the evil is done, and when, it may be, the Ministers by whom the contract has been entered into are no longer in office.

The risk also of a Parliamentary canvass may be, as Your Committee think, in a great measure, if not altogether avoided, by arrangements which would, at the same time, accomplish another, and, in itself, a most desirable object, namely, that of leaving on the Executive its full responsibility, in regard to the formation of these contracts.

Your Committee would suggest that the whole transaction should be, as at present, fully completed by the Executive Government; that the contract should be entered into with the offerers preferred by them, and that it should be executed; but that a clause should be inserted in every such contract, providing expressly that it should not be binding until it has lain on the table of the House of Commons for a month without disapproval, unless it has been previously approved by a Resolution of The House.

In reality and strictly such contracts are, at present, subject to the approval of the House; and the very proper practice introduced, by the late Government, of declaring the subsidies to be payable out of monies to be voted by Parliament has warned contractors of the real state of the case. Any plea, however, of ignorance or misapprehension should be excluded by the insertion of the clause above suggested; and the contract, when executed, should at once, and without waiting till a vote under it is required to be asked, be laid on the table of the House, accompanied by a minute of the Treasury setting forth the grounds on which the Government has proceeded.

Had the practice now recommended been in observance when the contracts which have formed the chief subject of the Committee's remarks were entered into, Your Committee do not believe it possible that those evils could have occurred which they have brought under the notice of The House.

It is true that emergencies might occasionally arise, by the unexpected breaking down, for instance, of an existing service, or the sudden bursting out of a war, which might require new arrangements, necessary to be entered upon without the delay that would ensue, if Parliament were not sitting, before these could be brought under its consideration. But the postal service is not in this respect different from the other services of the empire, in which, in special emergencies, expenditure unauthorised by Parliament becomes absolutely essential. In all such cases the Executive must take the responsibility of sanctioning whatever immediate urgency requires; and it has never been found that Parliament exhibited any reluctance to supply the means of meeting such expenditure. There are no