

Part I.
 Committee
 on the Pe-
 tition.

favour of the Bill, so as to justify its introduction, there existed a Standing Order, prohibiting any petitioners to be heard against the application until after the Report of this Committee. But, notwithstanding the obvious intention of this Order, it appears to have been, not unfrequently, evaded, by adverse parties supplying some Member inimical to the Bill with such questions as they would have put, were they permitted to oppose it, and who, by availing himself of his privilege as a Member of the Committee to ask any questions and call for any evidence he thought proper, would raise an opposition at this stage of the business, which it was the express object of this Order to prevent^(a).

By confining the Committee on the Petition to the simple question of fact, as to the compliance of the applicants with the Standing Orders, affecting their petitions, all these objections are obviated.

Benefits to
 local le-
 gislation of
 present
 practice.

But there is another, and still more important reason, to justify this restriction of the powers of the Committee; and one, moreover, having a direct bearing on the general question of the improvement of the management of Private Business. The House, it should be observed, in matters of local legislation, has a two-fold duty to perform; first, as regards the individual application before it; and secondly, with reference to the Rules, Orders and Practice, whereby that and every similar application must be governed and determined. Too great a stress cannot be laid on the necessity for a plain and obvious meaning in the Standing Orders of the House, regulating Petitions for Private Bills, and the Proceedings thereon; and for an impartial and undeviating construction of those Orders on all points of doubt and difficulty that may

(a) Sherwood on Private Bills, 8, 9