

Your Committee would, at the same time, heartily approve of whatever facility and encouragement the Government may see fit to give, for effecting a suitable arrangement, on the part of the contractors, by which the claims of Canada may be satisfied, while the expectations raised in the minds of the people of Ireland are realised.

From a review of the proceedings above detailed, the conclusion seems to Your Committee irresistible, that great defects exist in the means provided, under the present system, for bringing under the notice of the parties by whom such contracts are to be authorised all the materials and considerations which are essential to a right judgment being come to. If these defects do not altogether excuse, they in a great measure account for the circumstance, that in sanctioning the contracts in question, such highly important considerations as have been above adverted to were entirely overlooked; and they call for an immediate and effective remedy.

Such a remedy will, in the opinion of Your Committee, be greatly facilitated by the Act passed in the present Session of Parliament, since the Committee began its sittings, for transferring the enforcement of postal packet service contracts from the Admiralty to the Postmaster General, and by the arrangements entered into between the Treasury and the Post Office, with a view to the exercise, by the Postmaster General, of his new functions under it. 23 Vict., c. 6.

The chief remedy, however, for the evils of the existing system will, in their opinion, be found in a more efficient control by Parliament, at a stage when that control can be freely exercised.

At present, no opportunity arises for any consideration of a postal contract till a vote is proposed for the first payment under it. Even, however, when that vote comes on shortly after the contract is entered into, there is nothing, if it be a renewal of an existing contract at the same subsidy (though in anticipation, by many years, of its natural term of expiry), to warn the House that any change has taken place; nor does an increased subsidy necessarily make the House aware of the fact, as the addition may be for a supplemental service merely grafted on that under the original contract. If, again, it be for a new service for which extensive preparation requires to be made, the vote may not fall to be asked for till after the lapse of a considerable period; as in the case of this very 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 is only about 393,500 *l.* Under particular contracts, too, the payment 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