

own opinion, as it seems to be that of most persons conversant with the state of affairs in Newfoundland, that it would be a hazardous experiment to call together a new House of Assembly without some modification of the existing constitution. Such modifications, if undertaken at all, can only be so by an Act of the Imperial Parliament; and my present purpose is, to invite your attention to the changes which you may be disposed to recommend, to some of which you advert in the despatch to which I am now replying. The alterations to which you seem disposed to direct the consideration of Her Majesty's Government are,—1. A qualification for members of the Assembly. 2. A subdivision of the electoral districts, with an increase of the number of members. 3. Simultaneous elections. 4. A slight modification in the qualification of electors. 5. A separation of the Legislative and Executive Councils.

So far as my attention has yet been called to the difficulties connected with the administration of the affairs of Newfoundland, they appear to me to arise mainly from three causes:—1st. The interference of the Roman Catholic priesthood with election matters, which has led to feelings of religious animosity previously unknown in the colony, and to scenes of a scandalous character, shocking to religious and well-disposed Roman Catholics. 2d. The undefined and exaggerated notions which the two Houses, and especially the House of Assembly, entertain of their peculiar rights and privileges; and 3dly. The conflicting interests of two great parties in the island, the resident and the mercantile portion of the community.

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* With respect to the first of these causes, I much doubt the efficacy of any legislative remedy consistent with the maintenance of those free institutions, the withdrawal of which, unless under circumstances of more urgent necessity than at present exist, I am not prepared to advise. Something may, perhaps, be done towards mitigating the evil by an increase of the qualification of the electors, so as to afford a more really independent constituency; but I am aware that this attempt is surrounded by great difficulties, arising out of the minute subdivision of property, the scattered character of the population (except in the great towns), and the absence of any considerable middle class between the opulent, or, at least, prosperous merchant, and the lowest class of occupiers. It is clear that these difficulties would be rather enhanced than diminished, if your suggestion be acted on, of increasing the numbers and narrowing the limits of the present electoral divisions. I must own I do not precisely understand the object with which this suggestion is made; but it is one upon which I should be glad to be favoured more at large with your views as to the object to be attained, and the details of the arrangement by which you think that it can be effected. From the migratory character of a great part of the population, I do not doubt that requiring two years' residence would increase the respectability of the constituent body; but you will oblige me by furnishing any details which you are able to procure, as to the extent of change which this regulation would produce, and also as to the effect upon the constituency which would result from raising the household franchise in towns to 5*l.*, or even 10*l.* Unless I am misinformed, it would be very difficult to establish an uniform franchise, with any considerable increase on the present amount, as in the country districts a very trifling increase would operate a very large disfranchisement, while the high rate of house-rent in St. John's would there leave the constituency, even at 10*l.*, not materially altered, unless some alteration were made with regard to the state of the law as to separate occupiers under one roof. The subject is one involving so much of detail, that I should be glad to receive from you such calculations as you may be able to give of the effects which would be produced, in different localities, by different alterations of the franchise, giving the present proportions of the constituency to the population, with the proportions which would subsist under the different modifications. You will also have the goodness to send me your scheme for a new division of the electoral districts, with the grounds on which you recommend it. A qualification for members of the Assembly, I think, is right in principle, and would probably have the effect of inducing a superior class of men to offer their services, and thus raise the tone and character of the Assembly.

There is, however, another change, of a more important character, to which you do not advert, and to which I am aware that many plausible objections may be urged, but from which, could it be introduced without creating great dissatisfaction, I conceive that much advantage would result,—I mean, the abandonment of the fancied analogy to the Imperial Parliament, and the union,