

CHAPTER XIV.

OF THE MOTION TO LIE ON THE TABLE.

Jefferson says, "that when the House has something else which claims its present attention, but would be willing to reserve in their power to take up a proposition whenever it shall suit them, they order it to lie on their table, and it may then be called for at any time."

This was, undoubtedly, the original intention, under the parliamentary law, of the motion to lie on the table. With this view it was often made by the friends of a proposition, who, however desirous of entertaining it, were unable at that moment to consider it. But now this object is much better attained by a motion to postpone to a time certain. In modern American usage, the motion to lie on the table is made by the enemies of a proposition, and, as Barclay says, is intended to give it its "death blow," for the measure so laid on the table is very rarely ever taken up again.

The motion to lie on the table takes precedence of all other motions, and when made the question must be immediately put without debate.

The motion to lie on the table is not debatable, because to permit debate on it would be to frustrate the very object for which the motion was made. It is moved to lay a proposition on the table, because it is supposed that the entertaining of that proposition would impede or postpone the consideration of other and more pressing business. Whatever may now be the intention of the motion, such was certainly, originally, its object. The motion to lie on the table is then made to prevent an interruption of the regular business. Now, to go into a prolonged discussion on the merits of this subsidiary question, would be only to prolong the delay and interruption, the very inconvenience sought to be avoided. Hence, the motion to lie on the table is to be put at once without debate.

When a motion to lie on the table has been rejected, it cannot be renewed unless some new matter shall have been introduced. Thus, if on the failure of the motion to lie on the table, a new amendment is offered to the original proposition, then the motion to lie on the table may be again made, but not until then.

The adoption of the motion to lie on the table not only carries with it the immediate subject to which it had been directed, but also everything that, in parliamentary phrase, adheres to it: thus, a substantive proposition being before the assembly, an amendment has been offered to that proposition, and then an amendment is moved to that amendment. It is now moved that the amendment to the amendment lie on the table. If this motion is adopted, not only the amendment to the amendment, but the first amendment also, as well as the original proposition, go to the table.

The reason for this rule, if not immediately obvious, will be understood after a very brief consideration. Let us represent the original motion by the letter A; let the amendment be represented by B; and the amendment to the amendment by C. Now, when the amendment B is offered, the proposition before the assembly ceases to be A, and becomes by the proposed addition or incorporation of the amendment B, a new proposition, which may be represented by the form A B. Again: if to this amended form of A another amendment (C) is offered, then a new proposition, differing both from A and from A B, is presented for consideration and for action; and this new proposition, by the addition of C to A B, assumes the form which may be represented by A B C.