Part I.

Committee on the Petion.

Advantages of the change.

In the first place; to proceed to discuss the merits of an application for a Private Bill at this, the earliest stage in which it is possible to examine it, is contrary to the analogy of the practice with regard to Bills of a public nature. Public Bills, it is well known, are rarely debated or opposed on their presentation or first reading in the House; and this practice is founded on sound principles of justice and expediency, for, to dispute the correctness of the *provisions* of a bill at this stage, is to imply that its *principle* is good, and to question the principle before Members have had an opportunity of examining their printed copies, and weighing its propriety, is, except in peculiar cases of notorious objection, manifestly improper. In like manner, with regard to Private Bills, opposition at this early period operates unfairly, by depriving the promoters of the Bill of the advantage they ought, in justice, to possess, of being allowed every facility to make out their case, and prove, by argument and testimony, its entire reasonableness.

Again; although it is true that no more than a *primâ facie* case, in support of the petition, has ever been required at this stage,—for to admit of more would be to deprive the Committee on the Bill of its chief duty, and enable an adverse Committee to throw out a measure to which they were unfriendly, practically without an appeal from their decision, the House being in possession of no facts respecting it, but such as they might choose to report,—yet it is against the expediency of any examination whatever, of the merits of an application, before the Committee on the Petition, that this argument is directed. In the House of Commons, before the present system was adopted, and while it was still the duty of this Committee to obtain from the petitioners merely the substantiation of a *primâ facie* case in