

Woodstock Journal.

Mechanic Month 762

"He is a Freeman whom the Truth makes Free, And all are Slaves beside."

VOLUME 5.

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OUR PAPER.

The Woodstock Journal is a large eight-page weekly, devoted to the advancement of the industrial, commercial, social and moral interests of New Brunswick.

The objects at which it particularly aims in the present circumstances of the country are the promotion of immigration, the settlement of the wild lands, the opening of the country by means of railroads, &c., an increase of the representation in the Assembly, and Free Education, schools of all grades, from the lowest to the highest being open to all without money and without price, and supported by Direct Taxation.

The Journal is published every Thursday at Woodstock, N. B., by Wm. R. Melville for Wm. Edgar, Proprietor.

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The Editor of the Journal, Woodstock, N. B.

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House of Assembly.

Debate on the Post Office Bill.

(Reported for the Journal.)

TUESDAY, Feb. 22.

Mr. Botsford in the chair.
On the question put that the Bill be read section by section.

Mr. Williston said that in bringing forward this Bill for the abolition of the office of political Postmaster General he was actuated by no feeling against either the present occupant or the two former occupants of this office, but by a desire to abolish an useless encumbrance upon the body politic. Members would agree with him that there was too much Executive influence on the floor of the House. With only forty-one members in the House, they had at the beginning of the session seven Executive Councilors. He did not find fault with the Government for filling up all these offices, for he believed that were the opposition to go into power they would do precisely the same thing; the office of Postmaster General, he regretted to say, had been first filled by the party with whom he usually acted. The Post Office is the most intricate and important of the departments. Take the most able and astute member on the floor of the House; would he be able in the short time any one Government remained in power to grapple successfully with the duties of the office? He believed not; and the office should therefore be in the hands of a man bred up to it. In no other colony except Canada was there a political Postmaster General; there was none in Nova Scotia, and none in the great colonies of Australia. It was an unfortunate day for New Brunswick when the department was taken from the hands of Mr. Howe, a man

who had been bred up to it from his infancy.—The cost of the department last year was £1430; and this was taken out of the hard earnings of the people of a country which was poor and not progressing. The financial state of the Province was a matter of serious importance. We had now a debt of £330,000; upon which we paid an annual interest of £50,000; a daily interest of £137. This was a debt of four pounds on every man, woman, and child in New Brunswick. And yet we paid £1400 a year to keep up this fifth wheel of the Government coach! About £70,000 was required to meet the permanent grants fixed by law. Here was at once a sum of £120,000 fixed upon us; while our whole Revenue last year was but £120,000; and people are leaving the Province instead of coming into it. It was really a most serious question how the expenditures of future years are to be met. He believed that the result would be that we should have to force Municipal institutions on the people whether they liked them or not, and to make the various Municipalities support their roads, bridges, and schools by direct taxation; or else the Government would have to impose a land tax. Looking upon what we were coming to he was prepared to go farther than to abolish this useless office; he would get rid of the office of Solicitor General, and with even more of them. Three Executive Councilors were enough on the floor of the House. The Executive had now too much influence there. These seven Executive Councilors had probably seven thick-and-thin supporters; then there were seven expectants of these offices, who probably had their other seven. This made twenty-eight in all; where then was the independence of the House!

Hon. Mr. Smith.—O, there's a "Third Party!" (Great Laughter.)
Mr. Williston.—It was the wish of the country that the office should be abolished. The press on both sides were for the abolition. And were they to set themselves up in opposition to the wishes of the people? They must meet their engagements; and in order to do this it was their duty to lop off all useless offices. He would warn gentlemen from the rural districts that unless means were taken they would have to submit to a land tax for the payment of the interest on the Railway money.

Mr. End would like to hear from the hon. member from Kent (Mr. M'Phelim) on this Bill. As he was the first Postmaster General he should commence; and then the second, or late, Postmaster General, should follow; and the third, or present, Postmaster General top off (Laughter.)

Mr. M'Phelim said that he declined speaking just at present.

Mr. Wilmot said that he had never been very favorable to the original establishment of this office. He was one of three who voted against the passing of the Act in the first place. But that its repeal would save the country from ruin he very much doubted. He felt as Mr. Williston did about the financial condition of the country. He felt that there never was in this Province so injurious a measure passed as that which bought out Jackson and authorized the building of the Shediac Railroad. Our condition was bad, and we were going downwards. He believed the Shediac line would not pay working expenses. But unless they were prepared to adopt some course of policy beyond this Bill he did not see that it would be of any service to pass it. The responsibility resting now upon a Government was very great; he should be sorry to take upon himself the responsibility of a Government at this time. Unless some means were taken to avoid it the Province would fall into ruin.

Mr. End said that before the debate proceeded farther he would to prevent members falling into a quagmire read the

votes upon the Act establishing the office when first introduced.—The hon. member then read them from the Journals, and concluded with some facetious remarks upon the expansive quality of members' consciences, which he likened to Conomara stockings—which fitted alike snugly the leg of an infant and of a full grown man.

Hon. Provincial Secretary Tilley said that as both Mr. Williston and Mr. Wilmot had referred to financial matters he should do so too. Even if there was £60,000 interest on the debt to pay the people would not have to pay the amount provided by the Revenue Bill of 1854 of the Government of Mr. Wilmot—£209,000. This year there would be required but £164,000. He referred to this because these bugbears which they had just heard would go broad and hurt our credit. Members when speaking of these matters should not give them a color which did not belong to them. The fears which had been expressed he considered groundless. He did not think facts bore out Williston's remarks respecting members being thick-and-thin supporters of either side of the House.—He would not anticipate his financial statements, which he hoped to make before the end of the week; but he would say that he should be able to show that the Government would be able to meet their engagements without adding much to the burdens of the country. Mr. Williston, in order to prevent the ruin of the country proposed to do away with a few heads of departments. Now with respect to the Post Office, the excess of expenditure over revenue in 1856 was £6,000. In 1858, notwithstanding the creation of the Postmaster Generalship, the excess was but £6,200, while the mail accommodation to the public was greatly increased. Mr. Kerr had alluded the other day to the time at which the Post Office was self-sustaining. But look at the accommodation now offered to the public. Every week some thirty or forty thousand newspapers were carried through the Province free; while in every section of the Province, even the most remote and hidden, Post or Way Offices were now established; supplied by weekly, tri-weekly, or even daily mails.—The sum drawn from the general revenue for the support of the Post Office was large; but the accommodation afforded, especially in the rural districts, was also great.—Mr. Williston said that the change in the department cost annually £1400. This sum included the salaries of the Clerks.—But there had been no increase in the number of the clerks; when the office was first filled Mr. M'Phelim brought three clerks from the office in St. John.—All the increase was the salary and travelling expenses of the Postmaster General. He (Mr. Tilley) appreciated Mr. Howe; but it was impossible for the same man to discharge the duties of the local office in St. John and of the Postmaster General in the Government or in opposition—in the House or out of it, he should be prepared to defend the change which had made the Postmaster General a political officer and member of the Government.—No department in the Province required more of the time of its chief. His whole time and energy should be devoted to it. In view of all the uncertainties of public life, alluded to by Mr. Williston, he was still in favor of the new system.

Mr. Gray said that he never had any doubt about the propriety of making the Post Office political. On every occasion he had sustained the principle, and he was prepared now to sustain it. He did not believe that every little inconvenience which maladministration in the office might cause should be allowed to militate against the general principle. It was a sound principle that the public officers should be directly responsible to the public through this House. He wanted to see the Executive Councilors filling the heads

of departments, and occupying seats on the floor of the House. The system carried within itself the remedy for any evils which might spring out of it. Most of the complaints against the Post Office arose from irregular delivery of mails, and the cause was in the conduct of the Governments of the adjoining Provinces. He did not know that the increased expense in the department exceeded the increase in convenience to the public. One reason urged for the creation of the office was the number of applications from Postmasters for increase of salary. Members might call to mind, as an example, of how little attention a non-political officer met in the House, of an instance in which Mr. Howe was called upon for advice concerning increase of these salaries, and in which his recommendation, though founded upon, and accompanied with, the fullest and most reliable and valuable information, was treated by the House with the most perfect contempt. After all the question was not so much what the department costs, as to what extent it promotes the public convenience.—Mr. Gray went on to remark in view of the financial topics admitted into the speeches of preceding speakers, that it would be better should all extraneous matter be banished. In opposing this Bill he did not express any support of the Government. He believed that the departmental system would ultimately work well. Instead of turning the heads of departments off the floor of the House he would increase the representation; for he considered this House a school of politics and for the study of public affairs.—The man who spent a few years here in retiring again to their respective localities would carry with them a most valuable political training and knowledge of public affairs.

Hon. Mr. Speaker said that he had had experience enough in the department to teach him two things; first, that we must have a political Postmaster Generalship; secondly, that it would never do for him to hold it. (Great laughter.) "His own interest taught him the latter." Mr. Williston had given two reasons for the abolition of the office. The first was that there were too many Executive Councilors in the House. But if there were seven Executive Councilors here without office, and they could appoint seven more persons to the public department, would not they have more influence than the Executive at present exert. The influence would be greater, while the labor and responsibilities would be less. To carry out Mr. Williston's principle the Executive Councilor's must be entirely removed from the floor of the House. Mr. Williston had been unhappy in his reference to Nova Scotia as being without a political Postmaster General. This Province had been suffering from that very fact. The Post office in Nova Scotia instead of being governed by a responsible chief, was governed by the contractors who carried the mails (hear hear.) The Postmaster General dare not stir to anything for fear of the contractors, who were in the Assembly or had influence in it. It was well known that we had been paying Nova Scotia £1000 a year for which we got no return. Bags containing the New Brunswick mails were loaded by the Cunard Steamer at Halifax, and although they did not require to be opened, but merely to be checked, yet they were delayed in the Halifax Post office until their own mails had been opened, sorted, made up, and dispatched over all Nova Scotia, and then our mails were forwarded three hours after and then sent by express at our expense (Shame! Shame!) For carrying the mails across the Bay of Fundy the arrangement was that we should pay £500 and Nova Scotia £500. But because we carried the through correspondence of Nova Scotia—their correspondence with Canada and the United States—their receipts on this account were twelve times ours. None of these things were attended

to until the appointment of a political Postmaster General. Then we had been carrying the British mail for Canada back and forward through the Province, and had received nothing in return.

Mr. End.—Don't they carry ours in return?

Hon. Mr. Speaker.—He would show that they could not. The Canadian mails to Britain had to go through New Brunswick, particularly in winter. Now it was evident that if Canada carried its New Brunswick mail to the boundary line between the two Provinces, and we carried our Canada mail in the same way to the boundary between the two Provinces, the arrangement would be fair and just. But we not only carried our own Canada mail to the borders of Canada, and carried back the mails from Canada for distribution throughout the Province, but we also carried the through mails of Canada—the mails going to that country from Great Britain, and the mails coming from Great Britain to that country. And Canada made no return by carrying through mails for us, because we had none to send through her. When in Canada he had called the attention of the Canadian Postmaster General to this injustice. That gentleman did not attempt to justify it, but said that the fault was in the Imperial Government, which required the mails to be carried through New Brunswick. Then a change took place; the mails were forwarded to Canada in summer by the St. Lawrence Steamers. Still the winter mails were carried through New Brunswick. Within a few months another change has taken place by which the mails were sent through the United States, so that we were relieved from the burden. He had no doubt but that the Canadian Government would have made us a compensation had the old arrangement continued. But he could not say as much for Nova Scotia. The difference arose from the fact that in Canada he applied to a Postmaster General who was a member of that Govt. and responsible to the Assembly, and who would be supported by the weight of the Govt., while in Nova Scotia he applied to a man who had no political position and power, who was under the direction chiefly of a committee of the House, and who dared not turn this way or that for fear of the contractors. At the time of his resignation he was about to address the Govt. of Nova Scotia directly on the subject; and believed that his successor would have to adopt that plan.—Mr. Speaker ridiculed the notion of Mr. Howe being bred up to his work from infancy. Without finding fault he would say that he thought him too good natured to deal with sharpness with the men with whom he came in contact. The press had said a great deal about his (Mr. Speaker's) neglect of the office. But he did not care for these attacks; he could allow them to pass, and when the proper time arrived he prepared to answer for himself. When he went into the office he thought it his duty before making any organic changes to learn the routine of the department. He had prepared a set of Regulations in which every instruction in every branch of the service that could be required by postmasters and Way Office keepers was set forth. The expense of the department had not been increased by the change more than twenty or thirty pounds above the salary of the chief. The papers had said a great deal about the postage imposed on magazines. But the Act authorized the charging of three times as much as had been exacted. Mr. Howe had let them pass through the office free with a law to the contrary staring him in the face. The Government could diminish the rate, but could not abolish it. Nineteen twentieths of the weight of our mails were newspapers and printed matter which were carried free. How was it with respect to magazines? The Steamer Admiral would bring over from Boston trunk loads of them as freight. The booksellers

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