

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY.

THURSDAY, February 28.

DEBATE ON MR. HAVILAND'S MOTION FOR THE PRODUCTION OF SIR GEORGE GREY'S DESPATCH.

Mr. HAVILAND, agreeably to notice, would ask the Members of the Government to submit to the House the whole of the Despatch from the Right Honorable Sir George Grey, dated the 17th November last, communicating the intelligence of the Royal Assent having been withheld from the Rent Bill Tax Bill and the Tenants' Compensation Bill.

The Hon. COL. SECRETARY said, that the Government considered that they had submitted all of the Despatch which was conducive to the object of laying before the House the reasons which had influenced the Imperial Government in refusing the Royal allowance to the Bills in question.

Mr. HAVILAND would, in that case, move for a Committee to prepare an Address to His Excellency the Lieut. Governor, requesting that His Excellency would be pleased to furnish the House with a copy of the entire Despatch.

Hon. Mr. WHELAN.—What object is to be gained by the motion?

Mr. HAVILAND.—The natural inference to be deduced from the fact of an extract only having been sent down is, that there is something in the Despatch which the Government do not desire to have made public.

Hon. Mr. PALMER was but lately aware that the motion would be made, and while he would vote for it, he did not think it right to give a silent vote; as he could imagine no good reason for withholding any portion of a public Despatch, on which an important discussion would probably arise. Such being the case, it was but right that the country should be put in possession of the whole contents of the Despatch. That House and the Country could not fairly deliberate on documents, extracts of which had only been submitted to them. Without hazarding any opinion as to the probable nature of the portions withheld, he could apprehend no reason why the Government should refuse to lay before them any part of a public Despatch. Once it would have been considered by certain parties highly objectionable to submit parts, instead of the whole of a Despatch. Often had he heard on the floors of the House expressions of the hope that the day would come when there would be no more keeping back of Despatches. He had listened to strong observations as to the improper treatment of the House by such a course, as they had a right to be furnished with all documents of a public nature affecting their proceedings. Great merit was claimed by his supporters for the late Lieut. Governor, on account that he had stated that he would hold no communication with the Colonial Office by the mode of private or secret Despatches—that the communications between Sir Alexander Bannerman and the then Colonial Secretary were to be open and above board. Those sentiments were hailed by his supporters with great approval. Now, however, when we are under a system of Responsible Government, the Government brings down a mere extract, which, for all we may know to the contrary, may be the smallest and least important part of the document, and the country might receive more instruction from the part which has been withheld than from that which has been transmitted. He had not come here for the purpose of supporting the resolution, personally he had nothing to gain by the motion, if it was carried; but he wished to see the actions of members of the Government to some extent consistent with their professions. The House had been told that they must not suppose the Lieutenant Governor's speech would shadow forth any Government measures to be introduced to the House—that the fewer Government measures introduced into the speech the better. So that it was considered the best way to let the measures of Government find their way here as they best could. It may be perfectly consistent with such a policy to send us mere extracts of Despatches, and if this system is allowed to continue to the end of the session, Responsible Government is merely a dream. Such being the case, in order to ascertain what are really the principles which the Government mean to adopt towards the House, he would vote for the motion.

Hon. COL. SECRETARY.—Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Charlottetown should at least concede to others the privilege of changing their opinions which he claims for himself. It is not very long since he was in the habit of opposing applications to have documents submitted to the House, but to night he has assumed that the minority have the right to have anything they choose to ask for brought down. A strange doctrine indeed! Sir, the Government is responsible to the majority, not to the minority of this House; to the majority only are they responsible for the production or withholding of any communications. There is nothing in their opposition to the present motion inconsistent with Imperial practice. As to the Despatch in question, the House are in possession of all that is applicable to the refusal of the royal assent, and consequently all that is requisite to enable them to form an opinion of the conduct of the Imperial Government in disallowing the Bills. It may be that the late Lieut. Governor had declared that he would hold no communication with the Colonial Office by secret despatches, but there may frequently occur cases in which the public interests would materially suffer by the communication of despatches. We see that reason assigned constantly by members of the Government in the British House of Commons for refusing to accede to motions for the production of papers. With respect to the allusion of the hon. member as to the remark in my hon. friend's (Mr. Whelan) speech, in moving

the Address, that it was not necessary to indicate proposed Government measures, I can only say that the Queen's Speech at the opening of Parliament only mentioned two. The minority had gathered their forces to-night, knowing that some of the majority would be absent, yet they would find that the Government would not submit to their dictation, and would not produce more of the Despatch than they considered requisite.

Hon. Mr. WHELAN.—I feel compelled, Mr. Speaker, to resist the motion of the hon. member for Georgetown, because there is every reason to believe that it is based on motives of factious hostility to the Government. Feeling convinced that the Government has communicated all of the Despatch which it concerned us to be made acquainted with, the motion is unnecessary; were the case otherwise, I doubt not that His Excellency would have given us the whole Despatch. It may be convenient for the hon. member and his supporters in this House to taunt me with having changed my opinions. I can tell those gentlemen that my opinions are unchanged. I am indeed surprised to hear it announced that I have changed my opinions, because the time was when I may have enlarged on the evil of withholding entire Despatches and carefully avoiding the enunciation of any Government measures. Sir, they who make that charge should know better. Is it necessary to announce in the Speech from the throne every measure which the Government may contemplate introducing? If the Opposition answer in the affirmative, I tell them that they take a view of the duties of Government which is not held in Great Britain or any of the Colonies, and which has no more connection with Responsible or any other system of Government that I am aware of than I have with the man in the moon. If the minority say that it is the duty of the Government to produce any documents they may call for, they may claim the right to have every line of every Despatch submitted to them. Why, Sir, under such a system the power of the minority would be unchecked, and the Government would become a mere nullity. I feel, Mr. Speaker, great pleasure in resisting the motion, because I believe, as I said before, that it arises from factious motives; and the minority, thinking some reflection on members of the Government may be contained in the Despatch, hope to gratify private feelings by creating the impression throughout the country that such is the fact.

Hon. Mr. MONTGOMERY.—The Despatch, Mr. Speaker, is public, and the reasons alleged in it are, no doubt, based upon public grounds. It should therefore, Sir, in my opinion, be laid before the House. I hope it will be. Hon. members have a right to move for a Committee to prepare an Address to His Excellency, praying that he will be pleased to furnish us with the whole document. Such a course has been frequently adopted, and I for one can see nothing improper in it.

Mr. COOPER.—Mr. Speaker, on looking over the Speech of His Excellency the Lieut. Governor, I was led to believe that entire Despatches, not mere garbled extracts, would be laid before the House. The reference to the practice of the British Government is of no weight here. The Government of Great Britain has intimate and most important relations with other countries, and the state of those relations may often render the production of public documents not only prejudicial to the public interests, but destructive of international negotiations, affecting the peace of the world. Here we have nothing of the kind, and I repeat that we should not be content with garbled passages.

Mr. DOUSE.—Mr. Speaker, I have listened to the remarks of the hon. member (Hon. Mr. Whelan), and I have yet to learn why a public Despatch should be withheld from this House. I can tell that hon. member that I can find my way to Downing Street, and there not only see the Despatch, but actually find it printed. I should be wanting in my duty, Sir, as a representative of the people, if I did not vote for the production of a public paper.

Hon. COL. TREASURER.—Mr. Speaker, I have frequently heard of the influence of the proprietors, but have never seen so plain a declaration of it as now. Lord Palmerston is connected with them. If the hon. member, Mr. Douse, has so much influence at Downing Street as to obtain copies of Despatches to the Colonial Governors, let him exert it. It may be that some of the understrappers at the Colonial Office have given copies of Despatches to parties. If such is the case, if the Colonial Governments are to be treated on that principle, it is high time it should be known. The Governor has sent down all of the Despatch which it was necessary for the House to have before them.

Hon. COL. SECRETARY.—Mr. Speaker, it may be as well to test the influence of the proprietors on this question. It may be that such men as the hon. member, Mr. Douse, may have influence with some of the underlings at the Colonial Office, and that he might go there and say, "show me the Despatches about the doings of those rascals in Prince Edward Island." The present may be a good time to try their strength. But, Sir, even if the motion be carried, I will not advise His Excellency to send down the Despatch, if he deems he has given the House sufficient information in the extracts submitted. Why, Sir, the Members of the Executive Council have no right to demand that the Lieut. Governor should lay before them every document he may receive from the Colonial Office. Such a claim would be a practical tyranny on the Lieutenant Governor. I consider the motion an improper one, and I can never acknowledge the right of the House to demand that every Despatch be submitted to them.

Hon. Mr. LONGWORTH.—Mr. Speaker, I consider that the Government are guilty of tyranny in only giving

us garbled extracts. Why do they not submit the whole of the Despatch? Why are we to have a mere extract? I do not deny the right of the Government to withhold any part or the whole of a private Despatch; but, Sir, I consider that under Responsible Government a public Despatch is public property. Is it withheld for the purpose of smothering up something objectionable to the Government?

Hon. COL. SECRETARY.—No.
Hon. Mr. LONGWORTH.—It must be so. Four or five years ago the hon. member, Hon. Mr. Whelan, would not have argued as he has done to-night. There is no longer a House of Assembly. At present whatever is decided on in the Executive Council, is agreed to in the House. The Governor and his Council may do as they like. They are as despotic as the Czar of Russia. It is indeed extraordinary that we should not get the whole of the Despatch.

Mr. HAVILAND.—Mr. Speaker, labouring as I am under a severe cold, I cannot treat this question as fully as I otherwise would, or as its importance deserves; but I must express my surprise that such arguments should have been made use of to defeat the motion, under Responsible Government—a system which was to operate as a breakwater between the people and Her Majesty's Government. No doubt the Government may rely on the fact that they have a majority, but the side that is uppermost to-day may be down to-morrow, and the majority have no right to ride rough-shod over the minority. What is the presumption from the opposition of the Government party in this House to the motion for a Committee to prepare an Address? Why not allow the refusal to come from the Lieut. Governor himself? I trust, Sir, that there will be found sufficient good sense in the House to sink all party feeling on a question of this nature, and to make common cause in asking for that which we are entitled to receive.

Hon. Mr. MOONEY thought there were before the House all the documents required. There was no trace in the Journals to shew that when the Opposition were in power they yielded to the minority of the day. There was no desire on the part of the Government to withhold any information of use to the House. As far as he was personally concerned, he thought there was enough to shew the under-current which was at work against the people of the Colony.

Mr. DOUSE referred to the statements of the Hon. Col. Secretary merely to shew how ignorant that gentleman was of the mode of doing business at the Colonial Office. There every public Despatch is printed in full, and is considered public property. No member, desirous of doing his duty to his country, can refuse his support to the motion. He spoke thus plainly in order that his sentiments and those of his colleagues on this question might go forth to their constituents.

Hon. Mr. WHELAN.—Mr. Speaker, it is my intention to vote against the motion if it shall be pressed to a division. We have been told that we should comply with the demands of the minority. Most puissant minority! This question is to be made a trial of strength between the Government and its opponents. This is a legitimate inference from the unusual numbers of the minority in their places to-night. They ask for the Despatch, not because they want it, not that they believe the portion not communicated would be of the slightest service to them, but solely that they may endeavour to wrest the reins of power from the present Government. The hon. member who had moved the resolution had complained of suffering from a cold. In that complaint, I sympathise with him, but his malady had not prevented his dilating on the liberties of the people and deprecating the action of party feeling. Sir, did that hon. member sink party feeling himself? Did not his very motion tend to provoke a discussion which would naturally give rise to party feeling? I conceive it to be an essential principle of Government, that the Lieut. Governor and his Council are the sole judges of what should be communicated to this House, to which the Council are responsible for the exercise of a proper discretion. If, Sir, I were as unconnected with the Government as any other member of this House, I would, on this question, support the course pursued by the Government in withholding what they deemed it unnecessary to communicate. The hon. member has decried about his and his party's regard for the liberties of the people, but the votes recorded on many pages of the Journals will afford conclusive indications of the different opinions and views of the party at present in power and of their opponents. I have no fear but that justice will be done to my conduct in voting as I shall, when I know that the object of the motion is not to obtain information, but to take advantage of this opportunity to place the Government in a false position, in the absence of some of its supporters, while the opposition are in full feather.

(To be continued.)

Politics, however they make the intellect active sagacious, and inventive, within a certain sphere, generally extinguish its thirst for universal truth, paralyze sentiment and imagination, corrupt the simplicity of the mind, destroy that confidence in human virtue which lies at the foundation of philanthropy and generous sacrifices, and end in cold and prudent selfishness.—Channing.

KISSING, IN ALL ITS VARIETIES.—Buss, to kiss, to buss, to kiss again; pluribus, to kiss without touching; to sex; sillybus, the hand instead of the lips; derbuss, to kiss the wrong person; bussing, to kiss all the persons in the room; bussing, to kiss the hand of a dark; buss the boiler, to kiss the boiler.

Highly recommended by the Hon. Mr. Secretary of State for the Colonies, and the Hon. Mr. Secretary of State for the War, as a most valuable and interesting work. The Glasgow edition is the most complete and correct. It is now published by Messrs. James Macdonald & Co., 10, South Street, Glasgow.