

Legislative Proceedings.

COUNCIL CHAMBER.

TUESDAY, Feb. 21.

The house met at half-past four.
Continued.

Hon. E. White thought that the language of this section, nor that of the corresponding section of the opening speech correctly described the condition and results of the fisheries of the past year. Now it was a well-known fact that the seal fishery last spring was one of the worst on record, viewed in its general bearing. Many of our most enterprising and respectable firms suffered great loss by the seal fishery and he failed to see how we therefore can characterize it as a successful voyage. It is a most extensive and important business, involving immense outlay of capital and affording employment to thousands of the people of the country, and to be regarded as successful to all concerned, the catch should have been more generally distributed, but he repeated, that as regards the catch of young seals especially, the voyage was generally ruinous to capitalists and fishermen. Success was the exception. He might refer to the failure that attended the mercantile firm of Messrs Munn of Harbor Grace and others, owning costly steam fleets for a verification of his statements. Some of the most experienced sealing captains in the colony failed to secure voyages last spring, owing to the jamming of ice upon the northern coast where it was impossible for steamers outside to penetrate, just as we see the Dundee steamers outside of our harbor, powerless to effect an entrance through the ice barrier. He must therefore say he would like to see the language of the address so modified as to more accurately express the correct state of the fishery.

Hon. A. Harvey to a great extent concurred in the remarks of the hon. gentleman who spoke last, and not so much as regards the council's reply as the paragraph of the opening speech to which it responds. Our interests in this country were almost wholly confined to and dependent upon the fisheries, supplemented though they have been by the past few years to a small extent by agricultural, mining and manufacturing operations. Yet while the foundation of our colonial existence is based upon the fisheries, it was with the greatest regret he observed year after year the legislature and government presenting the bare and unpromising reports of the fisheries usually perceptible in opening speeches and the like replies thereto. No hope is foreshadowed as years flow by of any procedure being instituted to elevate the character of our fisheries, to examine into and understand them in their various bearings, so as to render them that enlarged advantage to the colony that no doubt they are susceptible of. These valuable sources of support to every institution and interest of the colony, which give all, from the highest to the lowest, food and raiment, are treated with a persistent neglect almost proving our unworthiness to possess them. We are asked this evening to pass a clause now before the committee which embraces a reference to those staple industries to which we are indebted for our colonial being, all being summed up and expressed of in the small space of lines of as laid, barren a statement as it was possible to conceive. The declaration in the speech, though equally meagre, may as a matter of declaration be correct, but to the minds of Newfoundlanders pursuing it, neither it nor the proposed reply are an accurate description of the results of our fishing industry for the past year. As a matter of fact, as stated by hon Mr. White, the seal fishery was in the majority of cases most disastrous, and in others great loss attended its prosecution. No doubt in some localities the cod fishery was good, while in others it was ruinous, and he therefore thought with the hon. gentleman who spoke last, it would be advisable to make some alteration in the reply more accurate and indicative of more than a transient feeling of interest on the part of this Council in the fisheries of the colony. He was in hopes that the present government after having voted a sum of money a few years ago for the purpose of establishing a scientific investigation of our various fisheries, and the modes adopted in prosecuting them, would have entitled themselves to the honor and credit of consummating the intention thus practically employed. Still seasons are succeeding each other, yet there is no sign made, and remonstrances seem impotent to arouse us from the sluggish apathy of the

past. It was not expected that any individual member of the legislature, no matter how strongly impressed with the necessity of action in this direction nor how pertinacious in the enunciation of his views should initiate measures of an elevation. To have any force or effect such in assurances must be the emanation of Government, and it was especially their duty to enterprise them. And he would remind them that in response to his frequent importunities on this subject, they had promised through their official mouthpieces that steps would be taken to give practical effect to the object he sought for, thus leading to the belief that an effort would at last be made to preserve and increase the produce of our fisheries, but up to this time they received neither attention or regard. With the exception of the small bounty applied to the sustentation of bank fishery, the whole fisheries of the colony are disregarded. Every other and minor industry in the country has received the fostering attention of the government. Large sums in the way of bounties, drawbacks, or otherwise, are yearly bestowed upon manufactures and enterprises of infinitely less value to the general interest; and while from such concessions much good no doubt accrues to many operatives and others in the neighbourhood of St. John's, that upon which the whole population of the island are dependent is treated with indifference and neglect, not one farthing being expended even in their investigation. We rejoice when our fisheries are good, we lament when they are bad, and in yearly giving expression to those feelings we exhausted our efforts in its behalf. Under such circumstances, and in view of these facts, he must confess he should like to see the reply of the council put in a different and more accurate shape, and while he regretted that there were not more gentlemen in this chamber directly concerned with the fisheries to discuss them with that interest they deserve; he should himself take an opportunity later in the session to bring before the council the whole state of the fisheries and urge again the necessity of investigating them systematically.

Hon. R. Thorburn said there was much force in the observations of the hon. gentleman with whom he Mr. T. coincided to a very great extent. He experienced a feeling of curiosity to hear what the ministry would say upon the subject of the fisheries but a new ray of light has been vouchsafed to us, the old well beaten path is still monotonously pursued, the principle adopted evidently being to say as little about them as they possible could. It must be in the recollection of hon. members that during the past year or more some of the public papers of the colony supporting the government, indulged in unlimited abuse of those who by those journals were sneeringly termed the "fisheries party," the "bag and barrel party," the "fishflake party," the "starvation party," and so forth. Such were the choice epithets constantly hurled upon the devoted heads of all connected with the great fishing interests of the colony, and can we then wonder that interest receives such scant consideration at the hands of the government as the hon. Mr. Harvey has so truly pointed out? No one of ordinary intelligence in the community failed to comprehend the significance of those terms which he supposed embraced fishermen and merchants, or the unworthy object for which they have been employed. Every fisherman or other person in Newfoundland knows what a fishflake is, and how intimately it is bound up with the whole business of the country. Though perhaps not so dignified or captivating as the term "railway" yet is a fishflake essential to the very life blood of the vast majority of the population of the island

performing its valued part in maturing the great product of the colony. He himself was a fishflake man, and had been so for the past thirty years, in connection with the prosecution of the fisheries qualified him for the title. If there were any discredit attachable to the position, he confessed his willingness to bear his share of the reproach. It may be replied, in answer to his remarks, that he was inconsistent, inasmuch as being a member of the select committee, he had appended his name to their report now under discussion. It was true he did so, giving his approval in a general way, yet he did not consider himself bound by all the statements it contained. He certainly thought that the present government, with their long employment of office and possession of large revenues, might have entitled themselves to the gratitude of the country by erecting some monument in the way of extensive and lasting improvement in regard to our mainstay. It is true an amount of money was voted a few years ago for the establishment of a thorough scientific examination into the condition of our fisheries, but like many other measures passed by the Legislature it has passed to the shades of oblivion.

To be continued.

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