

TUESDAY, May 5.

The House met at 3 o'clock.

MAIL SERVICE IN NOVA SCOTIA.

Hon. Mr. MACFARLANE moved "That an humble Address be presented to His Excellency the Governor General, praying that His Excellency will cause to be laid before this House a copy of the Contract entered into with Benjamin Blair, for conveyance of Mails between Granville and Wallace, in the County of Cumberland, Nova Scotia, in September, 1873, and subsequently annulled by the Postmaster-General. Also, Copies of all letters, telegrams or other correspondence in reference to such contract and the carriage of the said Mails."

The hon. gentleman said, in explanation, that the mails from Truro to Wallace were carried by a contractor named Blair previous to the opening of the Intercolonial Railway, under a certain agreement. The uncertainty of the time of the opening of the Railway rendered it impossible to effect new contracts for the carriage of the mail, and Blair was requested by the Post Office Department to change his route to the Thompson Station on the Intercolonial. He did so, with the understanding that the mails should subsequently be transferred to the Granville Station, and that a contract would then be entered into at the same rate per mile as he was receiving on his original contract. Blair did carry the mails for two months, when the mails were transferred to Granville, and a formal contract entered into by the Department. This man continued to carry the mails with satisfaction to the public from September, 1873, for some two or three months, when, without any complaint, he was notified by the Department that his contract would be re-let. The fact is the elections were then approaching, when another person by pressing for the contract, induced the Postmaster-General to cancel it in the service or interest of the candidate running for the Government. Blair continued to carry the mails relying upon his contract. At length when he found that the service was re-let, and he was turned out, and dispossessed of his contract, feeling aggrieved, he applied to the Department for redress or recompense for the serious loss he had incurred during the time he had been carrying the mails. He received no redress or satisfaction, his application to the Department not having even elicited a reply.

Hon. Mr. SCOTT said he had no objection to the motion, but as far as he had

been able to gather the facts from Mr. White of the Post Office Department, he found the contract was given out early in September, and not in the usual way of the Department, after advertisements for tenders, but rather in a manner that public opinion had not approved of, for a specific sum agreed upon between an officer in no way authorised to make the contract and Blair. When the subject was brought to the notice of the Post Office Department, Mr. White enquired whether the sum fixed was in excess of fair and reasonable compensation for the work, and he was informed that it was largely in excess of it. He was therefore induced, in the interests of the public, to call for tenders for the service. The result of the application was that one D. Purdy, who was also a carrier on the line with Blair, agreed to do the work for \$298, Blair having obtained the large sum of \$800. The distance was comparatively short—some 20 odd miles; Blair running a stage-line there, therefore he could not have been at a great outlay in carrying the mails and passengers. The Postmaster-General was not aware that he had gone to any extra expense in carrying the mails, and finding that he had, by an improper act on the part of some officers of the Department, secured rather a good thing, and not on a principle that ought to govern the Department, in the interest of the public it was thought justifiable to recall the contract. Nine tenders were put in for the work, ranging from \$298 to \$675, none approaching the \$800. That of course was the best possible evidence that the amount originally granted to Blair was excessive. If, of course, it appeared that in consequence of this action of the Department Blair had suffered loss, after engaging teams or incurring other outlay, he thought it would constitute a fair claim for compensation, but this House would probably not be prepared to sanction a principle of underhand dealing by an officer of a Department, and particularly when productive of considerable loss to the public.

Hon. Mr. MILLER asked if the services in both cases were precisely the same.

Hon. Mr. SCOTT replied that they were, but in the first instance there was no public advertisement for tenders.

Hon. Mr. MACFARLANE stated that he thought the hon. gentleman was not cognizant of the facts. A distinct contract was made with Blair. All the department did was to change the service from one point to another. Blair took it at the same rate per mile, travelling 40 miles a day for \$2.50, which was surely not