

From the *Novascotian*.

PROVINCIAL PARLIAMENT.

FRIDAY, February 4.

Mr Speaker, this morning, read a letter from His Excellency the Governor, enclosing the answer of His Majesty's Government to the address of the House on the subject of franking, from which it appeared the Government were not inclined to concede the privilege which it was the object of the address to attain.

Duration of Parliament.

On the motion of *Mr Doyle*, the House resolved itself into a Committee of the whole House, to take into consideration the subject of Bills; and *Mr Kavanagh* being called to the Chair, the Committee took up *Mr Doyle's* Bill, with respect to the duration of Parliament.

Mr Rudolf expressed his opposition to the Bill, but, in so low a tone of voice, as to be almost inaudible in the gallery. We understood him to say that his principal objection to the measure was, his aversion to breaking down established institutions.

Mr Fairbanks saw no necessity for hurrying through the measure. He thought it one of great importance, and conceived that every gentleman ought to have an opportunity to express his sentiments. He had not altogether made up his mind upon the subject, and thought that there was a general wish on the part of members to have an opportunity of considering it in every bearing and point of view.

Mr Doyle was unwilling to allow any delay. By the regular practice of the House, if there was any opposition to the principle of the Bill, it should have been exhibited on the second reading; and he had conceived that, as that opportunity had not been embraced, members generally were disposed for the adoption of the bill. It was no new subject, the principle of it had been discussed for years. The question involved no complicated or abstruse reasonings; the plain and simple thing to be ascertained was, whether members should hold their seats for seven years or for four. For his own part, he was speaking his deliberate convictions, convictions formed long before he had had a seat in that House. He thought the liberty to sit for seven years gave rise to much mischief.

Mr W. Sargent wished to know whether the gentlemen who had respectively advocated and opposed the measure, would not consent to refer it to the next session. He conceived that on a question of such importance, they should have an opportunity of consulting their constituents.

Mr John Young said, that if this were a new question, and not one which had been long agitated in the Country, he should think it prudent to defer its discussion, till members had power to ascertain the feelings of their constituency, but there was no subject on which the public opinion was more generally made up. At a public meeting which had been lately held at Yarmouth, the first resolution that had been passed was one embodying the principle of the bill before the House. At many of the elections, gentlemen had been obliged to pledge themselves to support it, and he believed there were none at which expressions in favour of this principle, had not been used by the candidates. The more frequently elections were resorted to, the less effort would be made to obtain a seat, the less of turmoil and riot, and angry feelings, would attend the exercise of the elective franchise. The Government of the Mother Country had sanctioned the principle, and though the Imperial Parliament was nominally septennial, it was in effect of a much shorter duration. Upon every change of ministry an appeal was made to the people, and a new Parliament called. Upon the death of the

King the same course was pursued. These circumstances prevent in England the duration of any one session beyond the period which had been fixed in the bill before House. He was desirous to avoid unnecessary delay; and, as the bill involved no intricate questions, requiring close and continued investigation; he did not perceive the necessity for putting it off. He was glad that the subject had been brought to the notice of the House at so early a day, as members, who then expressed their sentiments, would have an opportunity of hearing the echo of public opinion before they retired to their homes.

Mr Wilkins was not present yesterday, but when he was informed that a bill of so important a nature, had already passed the second reading, he was perfectly astonished. It was said that the sense of the Constituency generally was in favour of the measure, but though gentlemen might give what they thought the sense of those who supported them; he was by no means convinced, that the general sentiment of the public was in favor of the measure which was now before the House. While any uncertainty existed on that head—could it be proper to urge on the measure? If the public voice called for the adoption of the measure, the proper way to shew the general wish, would be by petitions, and time should be allowed to admit of their preparation. It had been remarked, that a greater change had taken place in the House by the last Election, than in any three previous Houses and that the change was altogether attributable to an alteration in the political sentiments of the country. He was not of that opinion, and felt persuaded that in his part of the country, any changes which had been effected were owing to the operation of causes entirely accidental. He was desirous therefore that the real sentiments of the people should be ascertained, and was in favor of deferring the bill till after the recess.

Mr Howe had entertained the hope, when the second reading of the bill had passed without debate, that the general feeling of the House was in favor of its adoption.

He was at all times reluctant to trouble the House with unnecessary speeches, and had not therefore felt it his duty to express the grounds of his support to the bill before any opposition to it had been offered. It was said that the House were bound to wait till they had received petitions on the subject. He did not altogether concur in that opinion. It was sometimes the duty of the House to instruct the constituency of the country, as well as it was the duty of the latter to instruct the house. If the House felt any measure to be of vital importance to the Province, he did not conceive it to be their duty to pause until the matter was forced upon them by instructions of their constituents. If, as some gentlemen said, it were improper to give pledges, it was certainly no less so to receive instructions. * * *

* * * He thought the duration of Parliament at present too long, and conceived that the homely maxim of "Short reckonings make long friends," might have a useful political application. If the House continued to manifest the same spirit, and calm determination which had characterized the last few days, he did not doubt but the people would be disposed to let them sit for the next twenty years. But it was the continuing to sit that did the mischief. He would be afraid to trust himself for seven years; he would be afraid that ease and comfort, and limited responsibility, would exercise an influence over him almost unconsciously. The more intelligent part of the constituency had made up their minds that the best check they could have on a member, was an opportunity to review his conduct once every four years. He believed that if it should be considered neces-

sary to delay the bill, petitions in support of it could be obtained from every township in the Province. This, however, he considered the best time for the consideration of the subject. The House were not now thronged with business, and he saw nothing to prevent the subject from being as well debated on that day as in a year from that time. If questions of general importance, like the one then before the House, were allowed to lie over from time to time, members would find that five or six years would pass away, and measures of the greatest consequence be neglected.

He conceived that one necessary consequence of shortening the duration of the House would be the introduction of the vote by ballot. He was most anxious to have that system adopted, and would have advocated it in connexion with the present bill, but was afraid to jeopardize one good principle by tacking it to another. Before the session was over, he trusted that the House would take that subject up. It was said that the home government had objections to the balloting system, and if so, they might prevent its introduction in the mother country if they thought proper; but, if the folks beyond the water thought they were best qualified to decide what was advantageous to themselves, he hoped they would allow us to judge what was most advantageous to this country.

Mr Uniacke thought that there could be no very great objections to the general principle of the present bill, but as the hon. gentleman from the County of Halifax had intimated that the ulterior intention of its supporters was the introduction of the balloting system, with all its decent, and shuffling, and demoralising effects, he apprehended that this was a very fatal objection to the adoption of the period of duration proposed in the bill before the House. If the vote by ballot were to be introduced, the elections should be annual—if no such measure were contemplated, he thought himself, and it was the opinion of his constituents, that the elections should be quadrennial.

Mr W. Young thought it of great consequence not to confound the real question before the House with extraneous matter. The question was not the propriety of introducing the balloting system or annual parliaments, the sole subject for discussion was the expediency of limiting the duration of Parliament to four years. Had the present measure been an innovation upon the ancient principles of our constitution, he would have felt more difficulty in making up his mind to support it.

[Here the hon. member for Justin Corps took a view of the laws and usage in England, in regard to the duration of Parliaments from the days of Edward 3d, down to the present time.]

After this short sketch of the history of the duration of the Imperial Parliament, *Mr Young* would call the attention of the House to the question then before them. Had he found the Septennial Parliament the original rule in England, he should have hesitated in lending his sanction to an innovation upon established principles. He had great difficulties as to the question of voting by ballot, and probably might feel himself bound to oppose that measure. He was an advocate for rational reform, and though he had no desire to pull down the constitution by carrying into effect vague and theoretical notions, yet when he saw that the clear interest of the people demanded a change, he felt himself bound to give it his advocacy. As to the expediency of more frequent Parliaments, his convictions upon the subject had been strengthened by a reference to ancient History, which had informed him that the limitation of its length was no innovation on the principles of the Constitution; and was therefore no reason for more frequently appeal-