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Woodstock, September 1851

[From the great length of the debates on the resolutions brought up by Mr. Ritchie, when in committee on the state of the Province, which appeared in the *Sentinel* of the 22d inst., we have thought it sufficient to give below a synopsis of the speeches as taken by the Fredericton Correspondent of the *St. John Courier*.]

REVIEW ON THE GOVERNMENT DEBATE.

The discussion on Mr. Ritchie's Resolutions began on Monday. Mr. Ritchie was the first speaker, and occupied upwards of two hours. This speech was an elaborate review of the question involved, and although Mr. Ritchie is neither eloquent, nor in his voice or manner pleasing, besides being somewhat inclined to verbosity, yet there was a good display of ability, and his appeal was very effective. There is too much of the *Nisi Prius* Lawyer about Mr. Ritchie to make him an interesting or statesmanlike speaker; and standing now in the front ranks of the Opposition, in the place of the old leaders of his party, he is exposed to disadvantageous comparisons; moreover, he wants the *suaviter in modo*, which are essential to a successful Parliamentary leader. Whether Mr. Ritchie will prove a permanent failure, in the last respect, or whether, after a few years' more drilling, he may equal his own wishes, is a matter of doubt, although the former seems now the probability. These observations I make without any disparagement to Mr. Ritchie as a zealous legislator, who is anxious to distinguish himself, and who, in connection with a political party, and under the direction of some vigorous or more practical and experienced minds will, I believe, continue to do good service to his constituents; but justice requires, in reviewing movements which intimately concern the Government of the Province, and in fact our Colonial Constitution, that it shall really appear why certain results have been obtained, why certain principles have been overridden, and why the expectations of a considerable political party have been cut off.

If the present Executive are undeserving the confidence of the country—if they hold office at this moment on principles of irresponsibility—if a gross violation of the Country has taken place in the late judicial appointments, and no voice of censure is on record in the Journals of the Assembly—the opposition are to blame for the evil. Never had a body of men a better case against a Government, and yet they have failed—miserably failed—one false step after another has reduced their strength to the weakness of infancy. *The present Government exists only because the opposition has shown its utter inability to direct its own movements.* But I proceed with the debate.

After Mr. Ritchie concluded, a question of order arose, in which the Attorney General, Secretary, and many others took part, and when this was settled, the former replied at length on behalf of the Government. He complained of this new attack—the second in one Session—called it unprecedented—and then went specifically into the Resolutions, and submitted his amendments. One or two other members afterwards spoke, and the House adjourned.

On Tuesday morning Mr. Gray took the floor first, and delivered a long, able and eloquent address—decidedly the most eloquent delivered in the Assembly this Session. He first commented fully on the subject of Bounties, and then went into the Resolution respecting the late appointments. The political doctrines which he pronounced on this subject, were exactly those which had been advocated by Wilmot and Fisher, and to both of these gentlemen he did what he called "an act of justice," by reading the letter addressed by the former to his colleagues, retracting his opinion respecting the three judges, and complimented the late resignation of the other as having been made on constitutional principles. He then went into the subject of Salaries, and here his views (which he expressed fully and decidedly,) are contrary to the views of Messrs. Ritchie, Needham, and other leading members of the opposition. Mr. Gray was followed by Messrs. Barbarie, Crane and Gilbert, who defended the Government on various grounds. The next speaker was Mr. Beardsley, one of the new members for Carleton. This gentleman, who spoke under evident physical debility, and who is known to be a liberal—an extreme advocate of retrenchment—made the best argument against the present movement of the opposition which has yet been made. The gentlemanly manner and evident sincerity and good feeling with which Mr. B. delivered his opinions, made a most favourable impression on the House, although he rested his defence of the Government on the most assailable point, (the appointment of the Judges,) *entirely* on collateral grounds. "Why," said he, "did not Mr. Ritchie bring up this question at the opening of the Session, when he moved his vote of no confidence?—the papers were filled with the subject of Mr. Fisher's resignation, on this ground, and the correspondence between that gentleman and the Governor was published—why did not Mr. Ritchie use this ground of attack then? If he thought, for any reasons

at that time, that it was not worth stating, it ill becomes him now—eight weeks afterwards—to revive it. The House then, on the information furnished, declared its confidence in the Government, and now it was not to be supposed that for anything which had occurred before that vote was taken, it could pass a different judgement," &c.—Mr. B then, after alluding to the confusion which would have followed a dissolution of the Government, animadverted on Mr. Gray's opinions respecting salaries, and said, as it was a question between the Government and the opposition, the former had proposed more extensive reductions, and therefore he would support them for the present.

During the afternoon, a squabble occurred between Mr. Hatheway and the Attorney General. The former impeached the ability of the latter as a legislator—asked him what he had ever done to exalt him to his present position—said that all the good measures of the Government had proceeded from Wilmot and Fisher, which the Attorney General was taking the credit of, &c. The Attorney General replied severely, and after commenting on Mr. Hatheway's speech, said that that gentleman was mistaken if he supposed that bold assertion, audacity, and impertinence, constituted eloquence—that his attack would, if made by any other member in the House, have annoyed him, but, coming from Mr. H. it could only have his contempt. Mr. Hatheway explained, amidst cries of "order," and then Dr. Thompson and Captain Robinson spoke in favor of the Government. Captain R. is a Tory—good natured and gentlemanly, but his comments on the opposition were very severe. He defended the Government, defended the Judicial appointments, and the principle on which they were made, and, in fact, advocated all the amendments. He spoke particularly of the vantage ground which the opposition had given the Government, in passing a Revenue Bill for four years. "Suppose" said he, "that to-morrow morning the Government is broken up, and the Governor should send for Mr. Ritchie, Mr. Needham and Mr. Johnson, to form a new one, and they should not succeed, His Excellency could go on with the old ones—for you have given him a Revenue Bill for four Years, and you cannot withdraw it; the Civil List provides for the Salaries, and you would not dare to withhold your money for Roads, &c." This rebuke, coming from a gentleman believed to be in the confidence of the Executive, is pretty significant of the security which is felt from this extraordinary want of foresight on the part of Mr. Ritchie.

On Wednesday, Mr. Cutler delivered a sensible speech in favor of the resolutions. He was followed by Mr. Johnson, who made a lengthy and well connected speech on the same side. It was, throughout, an argument in favor of Responsible Government, and was well delivered. Mr. Botsford next spoke in defence of the Government. Mr. Gray requested to be heard in explanation of his statement of the previous day, respecting salaries, and spoke earnestly, and with evident warmth; this led to some personal altercation, but it soon subsided, and Mr. Hanington took the floor. This gentleman advocated generally the Resolutions, and spoke of his former connection with the Government, and said that he believed that it had been most unjustly assailed. He went into the Despatches, and commented on the appointment of the judges, expressing his regret that the two gentlemen had not got their appointments in a different way, as he believed it lessened respect for them through the country. On this Resolution, however, he did not say how he would vote, as Mr. Ritchie having introduced a No-confidence motion early in the session, after Mr. Fisher's resignation and all the circumstances had been in the newspapers, he doubted whether it would be right to pass upon it again. He said, however, that had he been in the Government when Mr. Fisher resigned, he would also have resigned. On the subject of Salaries, he spoke decidedly, and expressed his opinion that the present Attorney General would never recommend their reduction. Mr. Needham then rose, and, as usual, his rising was greeted with more than usual attention, as this gentleman always manages to amuse and interest the House. He defended the conduct of the opposition in bringing forward a second vote of No-confidence, and used a little special pleading in trying to defend Mr. Ritchie for not raising the question on the Judges appointments, at the opening of the Session, and said that he was not then fully informed of the circumstances of Mr. Fisher's resignation, and of the important principle on which it was based. Mr. N. commented severely on the conduct of Sir Edmund Head, in writing Despatches contravening a decision of his Executive, saying that the conduct of His Excellency was an irresistible argument in favor of an elective Governor. He said that when the Judges were appointed, it was the greatest breach of the Constitution which could take place—one of the Executive—Mr. Fisher—immediately resigned, and the others should have gone out with him, it was the only course which Mr. F., as an honest man could take, and his colleagues ought to have taken it also.