

(Continued from page 341.)

Mr. Needham.—The Bill before you in its mechanical arrangement and codification of the old laws a very decided improvement, and this is nearly all I can say in its praise. Vote by ballot is wanting. Yet this is now scarcely to be considered a debateable question, so generally and universally are its advantages conceded. It is the honest man who most requires the protection of the ballot, the man who wishes to do right but would be intimidated by the consequences of an open vote. A man may be very honest of purpose, and not over resolute of will, and he may be both honest and resolute, and yet fearful of the effects to himself and family of offence to his employer. On the question of franchise I am prepared to go the whole length they have gone in Nova Scotia, and extend it to every resident rate-paying British subject. Who introduced this property qualification of votes into our statute book? why it was the very men who at the very time were parceling thousands upon thousands of acres of our most valuable public land among themselves their favorites and their friends, "without money and without price." The principle is that the people—the whole people have a right to govern themselves or to delegate the governing power to whomsoever they will; we have no right to deny this principle or restrain its application.

Hon. J. H. Gray.—It has always been acknowledged to be very easy to find fault—Many men possess a happy ingenuity in discovering defects in the works of others who exhibit little skill in making anything themselves. The remark seems appropriate to the course pursued by the opposition in its treatment of the Bill before you. It is on their showing lamentably deficient in all the elements of satisfactory legislation. The ballot is wanting here—universal suffrage is not there—registration is no where to be discovered in it, yet which of the gentlemen has submitted any measure as a substitute for this one, or even suggested any single practical provision for the introduction of any one of these coveted reforms. Among the gentlemen who oppose us terms of sweeping condemnation are very freely employed against all that is included in the Bill, while loud but equally general eulogy is indulged in, with reference to all that is wanting in it. But they wisely abstain from committing themselves to any particulars, they theorize with great eloquence and enthusiasm but it is at a safe distance from everything that involves practicable responsibility. Now, sir, our office and duty is not with the discussion of abstract theories. As legislators, we are engaged in a work much more practical than this, and have to do with the proper application of just theories to the business and purposes of life. For good or evil our measure is at any rate palpably and tangibly before you, if there be anything of good in it, it can be seen and handled, if it be evil as it is said, there is at least no concealment; but where, I ask, is the measure of the opposition, where even the instalment of a measure reducing one of their theories to practice? Sir, their whole system is vague, indefinite, and visionary; it exists only in imagination, and cannot be approached even to investigate it, much less to demonstrate its propriety or impropriety.

But the opposition is not only intangible, it is inconsistent with itself. Some of our opponents accept the Bill as it is, but desire a registration to be superadded. Now I contend the Bill contains a registration, and an efficient and inexpensive one. The leaseholders to whom the franchise is extended are now bound to register their leases, and here is found one of the advantages and the safety of our scheme. If you carry the franchise further than we have done, you will be bound to provide a new registration, but our extension is accommodated to the existing laws. The argument that if any description of personal property is admitted as a qualification, all descriptions of personal property are equally entitled to confer the privilege of voting, is more plausible than sound.—There are no fixed records by which the ownership and transfers of other species of personal property can be followed, and the assignment of these for particular purposes is obviously more easy and more difficult to be de-

tected. We concede the franchise to a class of proprietors who have recorded titles to an interest in land—an interest of a fixed and permanent nature, and which secures a fixed and permanent regard to the welfare of the country. When the ownership of other kinds of personal property is found to possess the same characteristics it will be entitled to the same immunities, and none will be more ready to acknowledge them than those who have prepared this Bill. We have not been insensible of the importance of a just franchise, and have embodied one in our Bill as liberal as we feel to be judicious in the present circumstances of the country. If the committee should however be dissatisfied, I shall only ask that before the Bill is rejected on this ground we shall at least be shown what is to be substituted for it.

It is objected to the seventh chapter of the Bill which provides for the settlement of contested elections, that it denudes this House of its constitutional powers, and this is an ingenious objection suited to the ear of the House and the country. But how is the fact? Every one admits that the present system is not to be endured, that some reform and relief must be afforded. Our system denudes the House of no power, deprives it of no right, it simply proposes to it to delegate its powers for the trial of scrutinies to a commission instead of a committee. True it is the commissioners are in the first instance to be nominated by the Governor, but they must be approved by the Speaker, and the particular commissioner to be designated for any particular scrutiny is to be drawn by the House. The House does not decide these questions now, they are referred to a committee drawn by ballot, and the report of the committee is always accepted as conclusive. Under the present system the time of the House is wasted and the public service is delayed by the absence of many members on these scrutiny committees—this time will be saved under our plan, and a court erected in the particular County, and the controversy settled in three or four weeks which now occupies as many sessions.

A great deal has been said in the course of this discussion about liberal views and liberal measures. Now, sir, I have no hesitation in asserting that there is as much real liberality among the members of the Government as is to be found in the learned and hon. member from Northumberland (Mr. Johnson) or, indeed among the opposition. But, sir, the Government are burdened with a responsibility of which their opponents are independent, and their measure is here in black and white before the committee and the country, while that of the opposition where is it and what is it?—I believe, sir, the committee will act in this matter with entire indifference to the consideration whether the Bill comes from the Government or those who are opposed to it. The character of the measure and the practicability and value of the system proposed, instead of it, if any should be proposed, will, I am sure, govern your decision.

I would not be misunderstood, Mr. Chairman with reference to the more important features of the scheme which is so loosely suggested by the gentlemen who are opposed to us. If I cannot assist them in bringing in universal suffrage and vote by ballot, it is not that I have any horror or dread of these. As theories of the day, favored by men whose opinions are entitled at least to respectful consideration, I am willing to consider them, but even should I be convinced of their soundness in theory something further is necessary before as a legislator I can adopt them: I must be taught how they are to be reduced to safe and successful practice. While then I am free to admit that I cannot unite in the apprehensions of those who see nothing but destruction in these changes, I am equally unable to indulge the anticipations of advantage which our opponents associate with their introduction, and I find it quite impossible by any consideration of my own, or from any suggestions of their advocates, to understand how these theories can be made to conform to the condition of our affairs and the character of our institutions.

It has been argued against this Bill that its franchise is too contracted, that the right to vote at our elections should be held by every rate-

payer, and that in such case the rate rolls of the parishes would present a simple and efficient registration. Now, sir, without any cowardly fear of experiment, without any blind regard for precedent, I yet dare not be unmindful of the experience of Nova Scotia in this particular. In the case of our sister Province we have the example of a country lying beside us and possessing similar institutions, and a people identical in almost every characteristic with our own. And what is the lesson that this example teaches? Why that the assessment system is not only infinitely worse than a franchise restricted to freeholders or enlarged to universal suffrage, but is absolutely and utterly insupportable. Nova Scotia has tried the system and condemns it after a trial, not by the voice of one man or party, but by the concurrent voices of all men of all parties. In that Province they have now gone on to a franchise all but universal, limited only by the qualification of residency, and this is the proposition of the Hon. Mr. Johnson, the leader of the Conservative opposition, supported by the Provincial Secretary and the foremost men of the ministerial party. But, sir, it must be remembered for it is to us a most important fact that this concert in favor of so wide a franchise proceeds from no abstract love of universal suffrage, but because in their condition it is impossible to return to the old qualification of the freehold, equally impossible to endure the evils and corruptions of the assessment system, and so the only possible escape is to press forward to the franchise they have now adopted. It is not pretended in the debate in the Nova Scotia Legislature that the latitude of this franchise is to be preferred, on the contrary, it is openly admitted or implied on all hands that necessity, not choice, has led to its adoption. (Mr. Gray here quoted largely from the report of the debate in the Nova Scotia Assembly from the British North American, in support of this opinion.)

Now, sir, while we are free to choose, while we are yet fortunately exempt from any such necessity, let us take counsel by the experience of a sister Province and save ourselves from the difficulties with which she is embarrassed by the very policy which is now so warmly recommended here. Let the gentlemen of the opposition fairly study this example and learn from it, that if they adopt the assessment system they will be bound to go further and that directly. The choice is not between the qualification of landed property and the payment of rates, but between the property qualification and universal suffrage. This is the real question, the question to be discussed and determined, and yet who among the members of this committee is prepared to go the length of universal suffrage—only the learned and honorable member from the City of St. John—(Mr. Needham.)

It has been suggested that if there are evils in the assessment system, these would be cured by incorporating the ballot with it. A moment's consideration will suffice to show that this expectation will prove illusory, the ballot merely regulates the manner of giving and taking votes, and can in no way affect the power of the assessors over the lists of voters, the power, indeed, to franchise or disfranchise, which is so painfully presented in the experience of Nova Scotia. I am satisfied with the franchise as it is to be found in this Bill, because in fact it places the privilege of voting within the reach of every man who desires it. No man need be excluded from the franchise unless it be by indisposition or indolence. Where land is so abundant and so cheap, every man may become a freeholder, and I may fairly say that looking at this circumstance, the introduction of universal suffrage into this country at this time, would be to offer a reward to idleness and dissipation. It is in this respect that the instances which have been cited, fail in their application to this colony. England, where land is scarce, and the landowners few—Prince Edward's Island, owned only a few years since by some thirteen proprietors—Lower Canada with its seigniors and consistaires, are no example to us where land is free to every one.

I have no objection to the ballot if an efficient registration can be provided, but travellers of great intelligence and of unquestionable im-

partiality, show us clearly by facts as well as opinion, that corruption and gross corruption is sometimes found in the elections of the United States, notwithstanding that the ballot prevails there almost universally. Our system is at any rate possessed of this advantage, here the voters must be corrupted, while there the corruption of a single assessor or judge accomplishes the whole purpose.

Practically sir, our elections are as pure as those of other countries, and as free as is desirable or necessary in our present circumstances. We are safe with our institutions as they are, and I would rather trust them as they are than fly to changes, the effects of which may be disastrous.

[From the St. John Morning Times]

LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY.

WEDNESDAY, April 20

The House was occupied nearly all day in Supply. Most of the Grants passed were those recommended by the Select Committee on School Petitions.

The Road Committee recommended the following grants:—

GREAT ROADS.

St. John to the Nova Scotia line	£1,600
Fredericton to St. John via Nerepis	600
St. John to St. Andrews	600
Nerepis to Gagetown	50
Dorchester to Shediac	70
Shediac to Petitcodiac	100
Richibucto to Chatham	750
Newcastle to Bathurst	500
Bathurst to Belledune	100
Belledune to Metis Road	550
Fredericton to Woodstock	900
Woodstock to Arestook	500
Arestook to Grand Falls	50
Fredericton to Finger Board	250
Belleisle to Scribner's	50
Fredericton to Newcastle	900
Fredericton to St. Andrews	400
Salisbury to Harvey	500
Shediac to Richibucto	750
Waweg to St. Stephen	200
Woodstock to Houlton	60
Oromocto to Gagetown	50
Oak Bay to Eel River	400
Baker's Landing to Richibucto	900
Newcastle to Pittfield's	75
Grand Falls to Canada Line	350
Bathurst to Miramichi, via Pokemouche	400
St. John to Quaco	200
Hampden to Belleisle	25
Cob's Island to Cape Tormentine	150
Town Landing, Grand Falls, to American Boundary	25
Albert to St. John via Hammond River	500
Isaac Drury's to Point Wolfe	200
Dead Water Brook to St. Stephen	75
Rous's to Oak Bay	125
Tisdale's Farm to Loch Lomond	100
Tilley's, Sheffield, via Pendleton's Mills to Petitcodiac	200
Baptist Meeting House, Upham, to Sussex Vale	100
Lower Trout Brook Bridge to Magaguadavic	100
Balance due on Bathurst Bridge	226
For erecting a Bridge over Aartibog River, Northumberland.	708
To complete bridge over the Maduxnakkik, Woodstock.	600
Pickard's Store to American Boundary	40
Edmonston to St. Francis	250
Buttermilk Creek to American Boundary	100
Balance due on Bridge over the Blind Thoroughfare, Suabury	280
	£15,659

BYE ROADS.

County of York	£1,350
County of Queens	1,258
County of Gloucester	958
County of Charlotte	1,486
County of Kings	1,442
County of Saint John	1,076
County of Sunbury	760
County of Northumberland	1,419
County of Restigouche	760
County of Westmorland	1,237
County of Kent	922
County of Albert	761
County of Carleton	988
County of Victoria	712
	£15,129

£30,788

The above does not include the Special Grants to the different Counties.

The sum of £100 has been subscribed principally by the ladies of the congregation of St. John's Church, in this City for the purpose of providing a suitable service of plate for the Communion table of that Church.—Church Wines.