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Nec araneorum sane textus ideo melior, quia ex se fila gignunt, nec noster vilior quia ex alienis libamus ut apes.

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LEGISLATIVE NEWS.

NEW BRUNSWICK.

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY, March 15.

On motion of the Hon. Attorney General, the House went into a committee of the whole on the further consideration of the bill to establish Municipal Corporations in this Province.

The Hon. Attorney General rose and said, that he had only spoken once to the bill under consideration, although it had been already debated for two days, and they were now for the third time in committee of the whole on the subject. The principles which he (the Attorney General) enunciated with respect to municipal corporations, when he had had the honor of bringing in the measure now under discussion, were precisely the principles which he had enunciated to his constituents in the County of Northumberland when he had the honor of presenting himself for their suffrages in June last. They were the principles which he had distinctly avowed to His Excellency the Lieutenant Governor when he took office and they were the principles which he avowed at the hustings when he went back to the Consistory of the County of Northumberland for reelection after having accepted the office of Her Majesty's Attorney General. So far, therefore as the principle of the bill was concerned, there had been no change of opinion, for he had simply embodied in the bill the views which he had expressed to his constituents in June last, when he had the honor of being returned one of the representatives of Northumberland, and he had repeated the same views on the hustings in January last when he returned to the same constituency for reelection after accepting the office which he had the honor to hold.

Having said this much with respect to the principle of the bill, he would at once proceed briefly to notice some of the objections which had been raised to the manner in which he (the Attorney General) proposed to carry out the principles that he had enunciated. In the first place exceptions had been taken to the title of the bill, and it was contended that the title and the provisions did not agree, because the bill did not make it imperative on the different counties to accept municipal institutions. On this subject he differed widely from the hon. and learned leader of the opposition (Mr Ritchie), for however desirable the introduction of those institutions might be, he (the Attorney General) was satisfied of one thing, that to force them on the people, against their consent, would turn into a curse what might otherwise be a blessing, and for that reason he had left it optional with the people themselves to accept or reject the form of local self government sought to be established by the measure under consideration. The next objection to which he would direct the attention of the hon. member was, that by the bill now before the committee, the parishes in the respective counties were not separately incorporated, and that in this respect the measure was a step backward.

This was incorrect for two reasons. In the first place, although the bill vested in the municipal council to be elected under its provisions the power to appoint parish and county officers, yet hon. members would at once see that these councillors having themselves derived the authority to make such appointments directly from the people, it amounted after all to the same thing as if these officers had been appointed in the different parishes by a direct vote of the rate-payers. In the second place, supposing it was deemed desirable that instead of incorporating counties apportioning for municipal corporations, that every separate Parish should be a corporation of itself, there could surely be nothing to prevent the introduction of such a measure at a future time, and incorporating the counties in the first place. Instead of retarding it the municipal principle would be one step towards the accomplishment of that which hon. members who had made the objection seemed to desire. The Bill which was before the committee was founded principally on the bill establishing municipal corporations in Lower Canada, which had been in operation for years, and which had worked as far as he (the Attorney General) knew admirably well. Its principal features were plain and simple. It vested the entire control of county affairs in an elective council, and provided that two of these councillors should be chosen from each parish. It had been argued that the entire magistracy should be made elective, but in this he (the Attorney General) did not concur. He would leave the criminal jurisdiction where it was now vested, in the hands of the Justices of the Peace appointed by the Crown but would give the entire management of the fiscal concerns to the elective officers chosen by the people. He did not pretend to say that the present measure was a perfect one,

for it must be recollected that in every organic change, such as was proposed to be made by this bill, circumstances would arise which no one man could foresee, and if on the discussion of the different sections amendments were proposed of which he (the Attorney General) could approve, he was ready and willing to adopt them. Even in the British Parliament it had been found necessary again and again to introduce amendments to measures proposed by the ministers of the day, but when once the principle of a measure was established, no one ever dreamt of upsetting a government on the details, and no ministry ever were so absurd as to promise that all the details of a measure involving inorganic changes were perfect and capable of being amended. Those therefore who contended for the principle but condemned the details, appeared to him to be more anxious to oppose the government than aid in carrying out the principle of which they approved. The opinion of hon. members, actuated by a spirit of this kind, should be taken with some grains of allowance, for although he (the Attorney General) could appreciate a fair and manly opposition, and could respect those who opposed him on principle, yet he could not approve of captious objections to a measure which was acknowledged to be correct in principle. This was however the kind of opposition with which he expected to be met on the details of the bill now under consideration, and this was the kind of opposition which he had already received from the hon. and learned member from the County of St. John (Mr R.) and the other hon. and learned member from the city, who approved of the principle but appeared determined to oppose the details.

Mr Needham—I certainly approve of the principle of municipal incorporations, but I oppose that bill because that principle is not in it. The Hon. Attorney General must understand that he was opposed to the bill in toto, and for the very reason that it contained no principle.

The Attorney General now understood the hon. and learned member, but a majority of the committee would not agree with that hon. and learned member in thinking that the bill contained no principle; it did contain a principle, and a principle of which that hon. gentleman declared himself in favor of, but it did not force that principle upon the people of this country unless a majority of them were willing to receive it. The Hon. Attorney General then reviewed the speech of his hon. colleague, (Mr Johnson) contending that when in June last he (the Attorney General) visited the County of Northumberland, he found that his hon. colleague had been lecturing on the subject of municipal corporations; but he found also that the minds of the people were filled with the belief that all the misfortunes which had overtaken the county were the result of bad legislation. He did not say that this belief had been instilled into their minds by those lectures, for he did not hear anything of them.

Mr Johnson—"Nor did I see any of your private letters on that occasion."

The Attorney General did not wish to be interrupted by his hon. and learned colleague, and if he would have the kindness to mention what letter he alluded to, he should have a full explanation; what he meant to say was this, that ideas such as he had mentioned prevailed in the county. While on this subject he would allude to what he then said to his constituents on the hustings—that the late Government was politically dishonest. This expression had been seized upon and made a handle of on all occasions, proper and improper, by the learned leader of the opposition, (Mr Ritchie) and his hon. and learned colleagues. He (the Attorney General) had no wish to deny or retract that expression, but every candid mind must admit that in using that expression he had reference to a particular act which he had already explained had been set at rest by the Colonial Secretary. [The Attorney General then went through the bill, section by section.] He would in conclusion, briefly allude to the nature of the opposition offered to the government of which he was a member. Hon. members would recollect what he said on the subject at the time when he first had the honor of addressing the house, and announcing his own views and that of his colleagues in the government. He took office, not bound to defend the acts of his predecessors, and having accepted office, he was obliged to return to his constituents for reelection. What was then the course pursued by the hon. and learned member from St. John? (Mr Ritchie.) Scarcely was the speech from the throne read when that hon. and learned member rose in his place and moved a resolution of want of confidence in the government of which he (the Attorney General) had accepted the leadership. There was he (the Attorney General) standing by a pillar in the lobby of the

House with his hands tied behind his back and his mouth gagged, while the hon. and learned member was on the floor of the House and at full liberty to attack the government, while he (the Attorney General) could not utter a word in defence of himself or his colleagues. If the hon. and learned member from St. John had no confidence in the late government, how did it happen that he did not last year move a vote of want of confidence in the government?

Mr Ritchie—"Because I knew I could not carry it."

The Attorney General continued, was this the manly straight forward course of one opposing the acts of a government on principle? He thought not, and if the hon. and learned leader of the opposition was of that opinion, he (the Attorney General) differed widely from that hon. member. Because he could not then carry a vote of want of confidence, he would not move it, and why? He (the Attorney General) would tell the House why. His predecessor in the office of Attorney General was then on the floor of that House to defend himself and his government; but when that gentleman was elevated to the Bench, and he (Mr Street) called upon to take his place in the office of Attorney General, and in the councils of the country, what did the hon. and learned member do? Did he wait until the leader of the Government had an opportunity of appealing to his constituents, and of taking his place on the floor of the house, where he could defend himself? Not he. He then moved a vote of want of confidence at once, because he thought he could carry it. It would certainly have been more manly in the hon. member to have waited until the result of a pending election had placed the leader of that government in a position to defend himself. He however, did not carry his resolution of want of confidence at that time, but he had little doubt he would do every thing in his power to embarrass the measure now under discussion. There was two or three ways of opposing a measure; one was to attack the principle, as had been done by the hon. and learned member for Queen's (Mr Earle) and if you fail in that, then attack the details and make such alterations as will either destroy the bill altogether in committee, or render it inoperative should it finally pass into a law. He was prepared for opposition of this kind in the present instance, but he hoped his hon. and learned opponents would not succeed in destroying the bill. The opposition of the other hon. and learned member from the city was also of an extraordinary character. He was opposed to the government out and out, let their measures be what they will, and had electrified the house and galleries with his eloquent bursts of indignation at the vileness and corruption of its members. Standing with his hands in his breeches pockets these bursts of patriotism came thundering from the hon. and learned member with an almost overpowering effect. Everything the government did or tried to do, was wrong with that hon. and learned member, and he was afraid they would continue wrong so long as that hon. member entertained the opinions of the duties of a government which he had already enunciated. There was little doubt that the hon. member thought that were he in the government everything would be right. He no doubt thought that he (Mr Needham) would make a better Attorney General than the individual who now had the honor of holding that office. ("I don't doubt it in the least" from Mr Needham, which was followed by shouts of laughter from both sides of the house.) The Attorney General said, that he had not the slightest doubt that these were the real opinions of the hon. and learned member from the city, but he (the Attorney General) would leave it for the country to judge which of the two was better qualified to discharge the duties of the office. After again referring to the different sections of the bill, the Attorney General concluded by asking for a fair field and no favor, and he would not despair of carrying the bill through the house in such a manner as would produce benefit to the country.

Mr Ritchie said that the hon. and learned Attorney General had digressed a good deal from the subject before the committee, and had gone into something like personalities at one time, and purely parish matters at another. He (Mr R.) thought the better way was to clear up these little matters on the spot, and as he had said so much about manly opposition, there were some reminiscences which he would bring to the hon. and learned Attorney General's mind of the nature of the opposition which that hon. member himself offered to the government at the time when they acted together in the opposition. He had before him a file of the Head Quarters newspaper, containing the report of the speech of the now hon. and learned Attorney General on the subject of the initiation of money votes. (Here Mr Ritchie read a portion of

the Report.) Would it be believed that last year the hon. and learned member called upon the members of the government to bring down a measure for the surrender of the initiation of money votes to the government, if it was their belief that such a measure was for the benefit of the country, and that if they failed in carrying the measure, they should go out of office—while the same hon. and learned member comes down this year and tells the House, as leader of the government, that this was a matter with which the government could have nothing farther to do than simply to express the willingness of its members to take the initiation if it was offered to them.—(Cries of "hear, hear," from the opposition.) If it was the duty of the Government then to bring down an initiatory measure, it was the duty of the government still to bring down that measure; but it was not the duty of the government to press the measure on the house last year, what then became of the manliness of the opposition of the hon. and learned Attorney General. The house would see that the hon. and learned Attorney General did not then have so much consideration for a manly opposition as he now claimed for himself. This was not the only case in which the hon. and learned Attorney General had changed his opinions. In the speech in which he enunciated the views of his Government, he emphatically stated, and he (Mr R.) took down his words at the time, that he was opposed to the Province becoming stockholder in any work of public improvement, yet in the facility bill which had been introduced the other day by the honorable Provincial Secretary, that principle had been departed from, and he and his government were willing that the Province should have an interest in works of public utility, such as the European and North American Railway.—With respect to the hon. and learned member's explanation of his having joined a Government which he had recorded as politically dishonest, it was but another proof that the hon. and learned member had occasionally changed his opinions. When the office of Attorney General and the six hundred pounds a year were placed in the scales against the political dishonesty of the members of the late government—with some of whom he was now acting—the honor of being leader of the government, and the power and emoluments of office kicked the beam. These remarks would not apply to some of the hon. Attorney General's colleagues. The hon. member from Northumberland (hon. Mr Rankin) had always been opposed to the measure which the present Attorney General when out of office condemned as politically dishonest. But the other hon. member of the government, he meant the Departmental member, (Hon. Mr Partelow), supported the measure for the immediate reduction of the salaries of the Judges, but when power, and office, and emolument were offered by the Departmental member, and what remained of his government, the Attorney General was ready after some hesitation, and after some stipulations, to throw himself into their arms. The Departmental member felt in all probability, that he wanted the assistance of the hon. the Attorney General, and the hon. the Attorney General felt in all probability, that to be Leader of a government in that branch of the Legislature, with the honor of being her Majesty's Attorney General, and six hundred pounds per annum to boot, was not a very bad sort of a thing, and so the matter was settled to the mutual satisfaction no doubt, of all the parties concerned. The printed political dishonesty was forgotten, the manly opposition ceased, and there was his hon. and learned friend, who formerly sometimes fought shoulder to shoulder with him (Mr Ritchie) against the Government of the day, now acting with, and claiming to be leader of that very government which he had opposed and not only in his place in the house, but on the hustings in his own county, and in the published address to his own constituents. What was meant by a leader of a government or leader of an opposition he could clearly comprehend, but as the hon. Attorney General applied the term to himself on several occasions, he thought it was not unparliamentary to use the authority which the hon. and learned member had himself furnished. He thought that he (Mr R.) had already said enough to show the house that the opposition of the Attorney General had not always been so manly as he would wish the house to suppose it had been. That that hon. member's opinions like the opinions of other hon. members did sometimes undergo a modification, and even a change; for on the subject of the Railway he avowed one set of opinions, and by the act of one of his colleagues in the government, repudiated them within a month. The consistency of the hon. member was not more conspicuous than that of others, and he had shifted his position to suit the temper of the house. In a few words the hon. leader of the government had launched his ship with those whom he