

ONTARIO LEGISLATURE.

Third Parliament—Third Session.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY,
Toronto, Jan. 10, 1878.

The Speaker took the chair at half-past three.

PETITIONS.

The following petitions were presented:—

By Mr. Cameron—From Henry Pellatt and others, of Toronto, that the capital stock of Ontario insurance companies may not be assessed for municipal purposes.

By Mr. Bethune—From the Toronto Club, for an Act to amend their Act of Incorporation.

By Mr. Sinclair—From the County Council of Bruce, for certain amendments to the Municipal Act.

By Mr. Creighton—From the Town Council of Owen Sound, for an Act to authorize the construction of water-works.

THE DEBATE ON THE ADDRESS.

Mr. ROSS (who was very indistinctly heard in the gallery), on rising to move the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne, was received with loud cheers. He said that he would ask the indulgence of the House, and more especially of the older members, in making the usual motion; and he did not do so as a mere matter of form, but because he felt very keenly his peculiar unfitness for the task owing to a more than usual share of that nervousness to which inexperienced speakers were subject. He embraced the opportunity of saying thus publicly that three years ago, having the fullest confidence in the honesty, ability, and integrity of the head of the Government and his colleagues, he had been elected as a supporter of the Administration. After these three years' experience, observation of the conduct of the Administration, and of the character of the laws they had placed on the Statute Book, he had to say that he had unabated confidence in them still. (Hear, hear, and cheers.) If on some occasions he had differed with them on matters of detail, he had never failed even on such occasions to feel fully assured of the honesty of their views and the integrity of their purposes. No clause in the address would strike a truer chord in the hearts of the people than that relating to the late abundant harvest. Without attempting to discuss all the causes of depression that had prevailed in Canada in common with nearly every civilized country in the world, he thought it could not be denied that one of the causes that affected our own Province most materially was the comparative failure of the crop of 1876. It was beyond question that since the harvesting of one of the most abundant crops that it had ever pleased a beneficent Providence to bless us with business prospects had most markedly improved in nearly every direction. Manufacturers who had been curtailing their operations and in some cases suspending them altogether were resuming work. Merchants, though wisely profiting by the disasters of the past, wisely avoiding rash and speculative ventures, were now finding an enlarged volume of business and an increased purchasing power, the result of the satisfactory prices received by the farmers, who were the great capital producers of this Province. Every one must agree that in this large and fertile Province of Ontario our present wealth and our future prosperity depended to a very large extent upon the interest and prosperity of the agricultural community. (Hear, hear.) Egotistical politicians might arrogate to themselves the power of producing prosperity or removing a depression by passing certain laws; but what did all their petty nostrums amount to compared with the fields of waving grain or the barns stored with the fruits of an abundant harvest? (Hear, hear, and cheers.) He therefore most devoutly joined His Honour in according to Him who caused the rain to fall, the sun to shine, the spring grain to fructify, and the

harvest in ripen, the full meed of thanks. Second only in importance to the farming interest of this Province, in the number of persons deriving support from it and the amount of capital invested in it, was the lumber trade. Unfortunately this had been in a depressed condition for some years back, and this had disastrously affected a large portion of the community, more especially in the northern and eastern parts of the Province, where the people were perhaps more largely dependent upon this interest than on the agricultural. It was therefore a matter of congratulation that, owing not only to a large demand at home for that commodity, but to an increased foreign trade, the lumber interest had materially improved. As a result of the enlarged prices they were assured that, notwithstanding the past depression, the revenue from the woods and forests during the year had been equal to what had been expected. It was stated that the revenue from the sale of public lands had been as great as had been anticipated, though a reduction in this quarter might have been expected as a consequence of the failure of the crops in 1876. It was therefore pleasing to know that though the depression of the times might have caused the new settlers to curtail their personal expenditure in many ways, they had been able to pay their dues to the Crown, and that they were becoming—what fortunately every industrious settler in this Province had the power to become—the independent owners of their farms. (Hear, hear.) It was a matter of regret—as expressed in the Speech—that the provision for the insane and for the deaf and dumb had not hitherto been commensurate with the demand made upon the accommodation provided for these unfortunate people; and it might be well, perhaps, if the attention of some of our most competent medical men were directed to the question of whether there was any real increase in these classes of the population, or if the increased demand for accommodation did not arise from the greater confidence the people had in the treatment and care provided for such patients in the public institutions. It might perhaps be the case that the people kept fewer of these persons at home than they had done heretofore, and that this was the cause of the apparent increase in their number. He could not but congratulate the House on the absence of any proposed measure for the aid of railways. In the past, no doubt, there were many railway projects that had had their claims pressed upon the House which were really deserving of aid by the encouragement they offered to settlers in the newer parts of the Province. But to him it was gratifying to know that for one session at all events members would be relieved from the importunate button-holing of a score or so of railway promoters; or, at all events, that these gentlemen would not be able to exercise their talents in that direction with the knowledge that the Government had sanctioned a reduction of our surplus by granting more assistance to railway schemes. He was not by any means averse to granting aid to necessary and deserving lines of railway, and he concurred in the main with the wise and judicious policy which the present Government and the House had pursued in that regard. But this could not go on for ever. The surplus of the Province was not the widow's cruise of oil—inexhaustible, and he thought that perhaps the time had come when a check should be put upon the tendencies to construct lines of railway in every possible direction. Municipalities had been granting bonuses to roads which did not appear to rely so much upon a reasonable expectation of paying traffic as upon municipal aid and the anticipation of Government grants. He thought, therefore, that perhaps the present was a good time to curtail these expenditures; and this paragraph of the Speech was particularly opportune in view of the many failures of railways on the other side of the line. In truth, he was beginning seriously to doubt the propriety of having a surplus at all. Upon the railway speculator it acted something like the piece of cheese upon the fox in the fable; and it might per-