

**THE CHAIRMAN'S HANDBOOK:
SUGGESTIONS AND RULES FOR THE
CONDUCT OF CHAIRMEN OF
PUBLIC AND OTHER MEETINGS, BASED
UPON THE PROCEDURE AND PRACTICE
OF PARLIAMENT**

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The Chairman's Handbook: Suggestions and Rules for the Conduct of Chairmen of Public and Other Meetings, Based upon the Procedure and Practice of Parliament by Reginald F. D. Palgrave

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REGINALD F. D. PALGRAVE

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SUGGESTIONS AND RULES FOR THE CONDUCT OF CHAIRMEN
OF PUBLIC AND OTHER MEETINGS, BASED UPON THE
PROCEDURE AND PRACTICE OF PARLIAMENT.

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY LETTER
ADDRESSED TO

The Right Honourable the Speaker of the House of Commons,

BY
REGINALD F. D. PALGRAVE,
THE CLERK ASSISTANT OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.

FIFTH AND ENLARGED EDITION,

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To the Right Honourable the Speaker,

§c. §c. §c.

DEAR MR. SPEAKER,

The permission to preface with a letter addressed to you, an attempt to popularize the business method of that Assembly over which you, with so much distinction preside, is an honour that claims my most grateful recognition. And this act of kindness on your part is the more welcome, as my special object has been the assistance of CHAIRMEN who, in discharging their duties, seek to act in imitation of the SPEAKER of the HOUSE of COMMONS.

Following the line thus indicated, I have endeavoured to show how, according to parliamentary usage, a CHAIRMAN is chosen, discussion guided, and motions put to the vote. And Rules of Procedure are added, based on SIR T. ERSKINE MAY'S "Treatise on Parliamentary Practice;" an acknowledgment, indeed, which applies to the whole of this publication.

As the sound usage under which the HOUSE of COMMONS regulates deliberation is the result of English common-sense acting with precision and uniformity for at least three centuries, it may be presumed that this usage is so in harmony with our national cast of thought, that any explanation of its merits is almost unnecessary.

This statement, however, cannot be made wholly without reserve. The practice of the HOUSE of COMMONS is, in one respect, somewhat misunderstood. When an amendment has been proposed, CHAIRMEN generally give priority to the amendment over the motion against which it is moved; and they do so under a belief that

this method accords with the procedure adopted by the SPEAKER.

In this they are mistaken. Nor is the distinction which exists between the parliamentary and the popular treatment of an amendment merely a technical distinction; it involves an essential principle.

When two propositions are submitted for deliberation, first a motion, and then an amendment offered as an alternative to that motion, to obtain a fair and straightforward debate the following conditions must be observed. If two propositions are submitted for discussion, it is, in the first place, essential that their consideration should be conducted, as far as possible, on equal terms; and, secondly, it is essential that discussion should be limited to the question proposed from the chair. But how far are these conditions observed, if precedence be given to an amendment over the motion on which it is moved? One of two results must ensue; if the debate be kept with strict precision to the proposition so put forward, namely, the amendment, the supporters of the motion should not be heard, until the amendment is disposed of. If, however, argument in favour of the motion be permitted, then debate strays away from the subject immediately in hand. Even under the fairest conditions of debate, the popular method withholds from the advocates of a motion their due position. They were foremost in the field of discussion, but they come last; nay, their proposition may never be submitted to any decision at all; for as the amendment is the first to be considered, it commands the chief attention and the primary vote of the debaters.

These consequences must arise under a usage which

places a motion and an amendment in direct antagonism. This conflict is averted by parliamentary practice. The formula used by the SPEAKER—"that the words proposed to be left out stand part of the question"—is framed for that express object: it offers an alternative choice between both motion and amendment, and withholds them from the vote until the HOUSE has resolved which subject it will, in the first instance, consider.

PARLIAMENT in its procedure obeys that common-sense instinct which dictates that it is essential, when two propositions are offered for discussion, to know first of all which proposition shall be discussed. Nor is it till that point is settled, that the HOUSE proceeds to bring the matter to a final conclusion.

To our ears, if I may so far identify myself with the HOUSE OF COMMONS, the purport of the phrase, "that the words proposed to be left out stand part of the question," is immediately apparent. This may hardly be expected of those to whom that formula is not habitual. And yet, perhaps when the motive of that phrase is appreciated, attention may be given to the principle it enunciates, as the systematic discussion of motions and amendments cannot be obtained, save under the method put in operation by the usage of PARLIAMENT.

With much sincerity, the readers of this little work are begged to regard it with the same kindly consideration which it has received from the SPEAKER. Gladly as I would deem that these illustrations of parliamentary procedure are capable of immediate or general enforcement, that hope cannot be expressed without some hesitation. A system may be simple in operation, though it may not be a simple matter to

describe; though its effectiveness is certain, still that certainty may not be perceivable without the aid of experience.

If, however, an explanation of the business method of the HOUSE OF COMMONS be the sole result of these pages, they will not be useless. According to that eminent authority of whom mention has been made, "the confusion which must arise from any irregularity in the mode of putting amendments, is often exemplified at public meetings, where fixed principles and rules are not observed; and it would be well for persons in the habit of presiding at meetings of any description to make themselves familiar with the rules of Parliament in regard to questions and amendments; which have been tested by long experience, and are found as simple and efficient in practice, as they are logical in principle."

It is, in conclusion, my pleasant duty to acknowledge the help I have received from those MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT who have given their kind attention to this publication. Their large experience in Parliamentary and Local Administration enabled them to make suggestions of great utility; and my hearty thanks are but a slight return for the trouble they have taken,—a favour of the highest value, conferred with the utmost good-will.

I have the honour to be,

Dear MR. SPEAKER,

Yours most faithfully,

REGINALD F. D. PALGRAVE.

SPEAKER'S COURT,
PALACE OF WESTMINSTER,
May 3rd, 1877.