

Mr. Leach was not brought to trial, if the Attorney General of Manitoba filed against him a *nolle prosequi*, if the Attorney General said he would not proceed against him, the only conclusion we can draw is that Mr. Leach was absolutely innocent of the infamous accusation brought against him.

In the face of such a condition of things, it is at least unfair, and, if it were not for my hon. friend from Marquette, I would say unmanly to try to fasten such epithets on Mr. Leach as are heaped daily upon his head, when those who accuse him had not the courage to make good their accusations. But even though this is the case, Mr. Leach is daily assailed and even in this House every day his name is held up to obloquy. And when, some time ago, he was appointed by this government to superintend the distribution of seed grain, my hon. friend from North Toronto (Mr. Foster) said that if he had known that Mr. Leach was to be appointed to such a duty, he would have hesitated before voting the money for the seed grain.

Mr. FOSTER. Does my right hon. friend approve of what Mr. Leach did?

Sir WILFRID LAURIER. When I am shown that Mr. Leach did anything wrong, I shall not approve it; but up to this time this has not been shown. Hon. gentlemen opposite cannot escape by this tangent. Assertions have been made against Mr. Leach; but when Mr. Leach asked for the proof and when the opportunity was given to make the proof, neither my hon. friend nor any of his friends brought the proof against him.

May I say something personal to myself. When I heard the statement made by my hon. friend from North Toronto (Mr. Foster)—who, I know, is a strong partisan just as I am, and perhaps a little more—I could not believe that he could make such a statement unless, in his own heart and conscience, he thought he had cause to make it. I acquitted him altogether of any intention of consciously doing that man any wrong. Nevertheless he was accusing him; and when I heard so strong a statement from my hon. friend, I thought I would make some personal inquiry to ascertain what was the character of Mr. Leach. I took some pains to ascertain what was his character, and I must say that the opinion given me by everybody—at least by those with whom I communicated—was that he was a perfectly respectable man. But Mr. Leach has since been acting in the capacity to which he was appointed a few weeks ago in connection with the distribution of grain. There have been some complaints that the grain was not, every part of it, of good quality. I may say that it was not purchased by Mr. Leach but by Mr. Castle—a man, I understand, who is absolutely above reproach. I was given communication of a newspaper in connection with my in-

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quiries, and in that newspaper I read the following:

After a few weeks, however, the farmers from various points in the province began to raise objections to the seed which was delivered to them, and for which they were compelled to sign a lien on their next year's crop before they could examine it. Mr. Leach in a prompt way, arranged for an exchange in several cases and consequently much publicity has been avoided. The fact remains, however, that Mr. Cassels has not been doing what is right by the farmers, and if they had been forced by Mr. Leach to accept the grain given them it would have been a very bad thing for the country.

What is this newspaper which thus speaks of the work done by Mr. Leach, whose nomination was assailed by my hon. friend? It is a Conservative newspaper published in the city of Regina.

Mr. SAM. HUGHES. What is the name of the paper?

Sir WILFRID LAURIER. 'The West.' Passing now to another aspect of the question, I have to observe that this condition of things is a very serious one.

Mr. FOSTER. Which condition?

Sir WILFRID LAURIER. The condition which prevails in Manitoba with regard to the adjustment of the lists in the constituencies. We thought the work could be done by the returning officers but, as my hon. friend the Minister of Justice said the other day, no one will undertake to-day the duties of returning officer. The task is such that the returning officer would have to submit to the same risks which he took in 1904. Unless we have a change in the law, the returning officer will be in the same peril in which he was in 1904. Suppose we should have an election to-morrow, the lists go to the returning officers as they are, without having been adjusted to the federal constituencies, and the returning officer would have the work thrust upon him of doing this, and he would have the same peril.

Mr. FOSTER. Would my right hon. friend make it clear what his conception of the duties of a returning officer is?

Sir WILFRID LAURIER. I shall try to make it clear to my hon. friend. The constituencies are forty-two in number and there are forty-two lists. When a returning officer receives the lists, say of Lisgar or Selkirk, he will receive the lists, not of the constituency of Lisgar or Selkirk, but of all the parts of the local constituencies which are included in Lisgar and Selkirk for the Dominion elections. The boundaries of these constituencies—

Mr. FOSTER. Dominion constituencies?

Sir WILFRID LAURIER. Yes, the boundaries of the Dominion constituencies