

the proper thing for me to ask for correspondence that has never taken place.

Mr. PATTERSON (Essex). I have heard nothing in this debate to change the view I expressed when the subject was under discussion some days ago. I regard the whole affair as a trivial matter and believe that no particular grievance has been made out by any hon. gentleman opposite. It does not appear that a single case of wrongdoing has been proved or that any member has been deprived of his rights or has a serious grievance to complain of. In regard to the case of the hon. gentleman who has just sat down and whose return was delayed for twenty days, I believe that if it had been entered earlier, a petition would have been filed against him.

Mr. MILLS. They could not raise the money.

Mr. PATTERSON (Essex). Not that I would suggest that the hon. member was aware of anything wrong. I have reason to believe that the facts are as I have stated in regard to this case. I do not see why the language of political vituperation should be exhausted about a matter which is really one of secondary importance. The effect is to destroy the moral sense of the public outside, when exaggerated language is bestowed on a question of this kind, for the public do not know, when a question of real importance arises, whether to attach weight to it or not. Some remarks I made the other evening were taken up by the hon. member for West Durham (Mr. Blake), and he implied that I had probably had something to conceal, because it was stated that I went to the returning officer and asked him to send in my return. I had intended to say, though I am not so reported, that it was the place of members to see that their returns were sent in as soon as possible. In my case I was not in my riding when the day of declaration came. The matter was adjourned owing to some irregularities, and it was uncertain for a moment whether those irregularities might not be used to prevent my return. I did not see the returning officer from the beginning to the end of the election and I have not seen him since. But the hon. member for West Durham, in that generous and genial spirit which so enhances his personal magnetism in this House, and endears him to its members, took advantage of a verbal slip to assail me as if I must have some dishonorable motive because I had wished to have my return made early. It is perfectly legitimate that members should, if possible, get their returns early, but I have explained the facts in my own case. Under all the circumstances, I think that hon. gentlemen opposite have ample remedy under the Election Act.

Mr. MILLS. No.

Mr. PATTERSON (Essex). I will give the hon. gentleman the section which I think will fully cover the case:

"Every officer and clerk who is guilty of any wilful misfeasance, or any wilful act or omission in violation of this Act, shall forfeit to any person aggrieved by such misfeasance, act or omission, a sum not exceeding five hundred dollars in addition to the amount of all actual damages thereby occasioned to such person:

"Every returning officer, deputy returning officer, election clerk or poll clerk who refuses or neglects to perform any of the obligations or formalities required of him by this Act, shall, for each such refusal or neglect, forfeit the sum of two hundred dollars to any person who sues for the same."

I think if any returning officer has done wrong or neglected to perform his duties, any sitting member who has suffered injury has ample recourse under this Act, and I do not see it is a matter of sufficient importance to justify the very strong terms which the hon. member for Bothwell (Mr. Mills) used to the official who is blamed for not being so prompt as he might have been in transmitting to the *Canada Gazette* the names of members. In order to complete our information we should be furnished with the names of members who have been petitioned against, so that the public may be able impartially to judge of the whole matter. I intend to oppose the motion to send this subject to a committee, because there is ample remedy against the officer, and I do

Mr. MILLS.

not see why the time of the House should be taken up with a matter that is after all a trivial one. It really looks as if hon. gentlemen opposite, having been disappointed in obtaining a majority, are now venting their spleen on the Clerk of the Crown in Chancery.

Mr. LAURIER. We are just out of an election, and the Government have been sustained by a majority; but we may well question at this moment whether we still have responsible government in this country or whether we have an autocracy pure and simple. Judging from what has taken place since the opening of the Session we can come to no other conclusion than that responsible government is a thing of the past in this country. Of course we have kept all the paraphernalia, the gorgeousness, the ceremony and all the rest; but so far as practical matters are concerned, it is no longer the Government which is responsible to Parliament, but Parliament which is responsible to the Government. On a recent occasion a motion was made in this House to have papers laid on the Table as to the dismissal of an officer by the Government. This motion was refused. In the good old times it was held that the Government of the country was responsible for every act of its own, even for the dismissal of an officer. In the good old times, whenever it was asked as to the cause of the dismissal of an officer by the Government, an explanation of the reasons would be placed at once on the Table in order that the House might judge as to whether the conduct of the Government was warranted or not, because the Government was responsible for the acts of their subordinates. But at the present day a Government can dismiss an officer, and when an enquiry into the cause of dismissal is made, no answer need be given. At this day what have we? We have here an officer of the House, the Clerk of the Crown in Chancery (to speak of him alone and not to speak of him with the returning officers) who is accused of having failed in his duty. Why, in the Province to which I belong, we have, according to the report made by this Clerk of the Crown in Chancery, no less than twenty-three different cases of members, all belonging to this side of the House, whose returns of election were kept in the archives of that officer one, two or three weeks before they were published. Is not that a grievance? The hon. gentleman who has just taken his seat, who is generally so fair-minded in his opinions, sees no grievance whatever. I have not seen, he says, a single case of grievance. Let me refer him again, not to the twenty-three cases to which I have just alluded, but to the language which he must have heard this afternoon of the hon. member for Prince Edward (Mr. Platt). He stated in his place in the House, and he not only made the statement but he corroborated it by actual proof, that the return of his election had been stated by the Clerk of the Crown in Chancery as being on a certain day, and a different day had been placed in the return. Is not that a grievance? If an officer of this House is allowed to make a false statement, is it not a grievance of which the House should take cognisance? It appears that an officer of the House, wilfully or not wilfully, makes a false statement, and yet this is not a grievance. If that is not a grievance I am at a loss to know what is the meaning of the word "honor," and also of the words "British fair play," as understood at one time. Of course the majority is here, and the members can sustain the Government; and, indeed, as I have said, we have come to this that the majority is here simply to do the bidding of the Government, and give solemnity to their decrees. It is no longer the majority which controls the Government, but it is altogether the Government which controls the majority. We cannot do much in the matter; we are a minority; but, at least, we can protest, and protest we will, in the name of British fair play and of British independence of character.