

firmity growing upon him, is more than excusable if at the earliest opportunity he seeks the best medical treatment he can find in order, if possible, to avoid the very serious consequences to his future in case that infirmity became incurable. This is the reason why the Minister of the Interior is absent. I can assure my hon. friend that if he regrets the absence of Mr. Sifton from the floor of this House there is some one who regrets it still more, and that is Mr. Sifton himself; and I can assure him that if there is any one who regrets it more than Mr. Sifton, it is myself. I think it is in many respects, unfortunate that he cannot attend to his duties, but the reasons that have been given for his absence seem to me so conclusive, that they should not justify the severe criticism that we have heard this evening.

Now, I come to the matter that we have in hand, the increase of salary to Mr. Rothwell. Mr. Rothwell is an officer of seventeen years service, who occupies an important position in the department. My hon. friend who has taken charge of the department in the absence of Mr. Sifton, says that Mr. Rothwell's duties are increasing. The hon. gentleman must know that the duties of all the officers of that department are increasing very rapidly, even if there were no other extra cause than the administration of the Yukon which belongs to that department. Now, how are we to treat a meritorious officer? The hon. gentleman knows that there are some officers who are good, some who are better than others, and some who have specially important duties to perform; and if the minister thinks that an officer who has to render important services in the department is entitled to an increase of salary, then the question is submitted to the judgment of the committee whether the increase ought to be voted. In this case, I think the increase is justified. In addition to these general reasons for the increase of work, the acting minister states that the position of Mr. Rothwell is one of the greatest responsibility, as when the deputy minister is absent, Mr. Rothwell has practically to take charge of the department, being next in rank. Those are the reasons which have been given for the increase of the salary of Mr. Rothwell, and I think they are sound and sufficient.

Mr. FOSTER. There is one part of my observations that the First Minister did not touch, he has not given a sufficient reason why there is such a continuous absence of ministers who are here in the city and at the seat of government, while matters pertaining to the department are under discussion.

The PRIME MINISTER. I can assure my hon. friend that the members of the government would find it more to their convenience, more agreeable to attend to their duties here on the floor of the House than to be constantly receiving delegations and

Sir WILFRID LAURIER.

deputations and having to answer questions. That is the only reason I have to give my hon. friend, and that is a reason which I prefer not to exist. But my hon. friend knows that there is a growing tendency with increasing publication, telegraphs, telephones, and postal and railway services to bring to Ottawa all the time a greater number of people to speak with ministers, and to have interviews with them. We are constantly besieged by people who wish to see the ministers on public business. I have sometimes, myself, engaged my colleagues to be as much as possible in their seats in the House, and this is the invariable reason I have received. If they are not in their seats it is not that they are out through indolence or neglect, but it is because they are attending to their duties.

Mr. FOSTER. Deputations come and deputations have to see the right hon. gentleman (Sir Wilfrid Laurier) as well. There is not a minister probably in the departments that is so frequently and generally here as the right hon. gentleman. The hon. minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding) is here very generally, and I suppose there are not two more important ministers as regards deputations than the right hon. gentleman and the hon. Minister of Finance, and there are a great many hours when they are in their seats. It is the duty of a minister, I think, to the representatives of the people and a duty to the business they are called upon here to discharge, leaving their own homes, to come and spend the time here to carry it out. I am not speaking of this in any way of harsh criticism, but it has been notorious this session that the government benches have been vacant, and they have been vacant to a remarkable degree. The effect upon the House has been that the House has got into a completely careless and listless state. I never knew in my experience a session in which there has been less go, less business, less hand upon anything in the House than during the present session. Why? Because the ministers are not here, and if the ministers are not here the back bench members are not here, and there is not a minister who seems to care fiddle-de-dee whether business is done or not. There is another matter, and it is a matter of courtesy as well. My hon. friend behind me (Sir Charles Hibbert Tupper) was discussing an important question in reference to the Yukon, when the hon. Minister of the Interior is away. The hon. acting Minister of the Interior did not think that it was necessary to remain and listen to what was going on.

Mr. SUTHERLAND. I was only out a short time.

Mr. FOSTER. The right hon. First Minister listened a while but he thought it was not his duty to remain when a charge of that kind was being pressed home. He went out also, and most of the time I do not think