

Bill (No. 77) further to amend the Post Office Act, 1875, I suppose it will have to go back to Committee of the Whole. This portion of the section is as follows:—

And if such acknowledgment has not been received by the depositor through the post within such ten or such eighteen days respectively, and before or upon the expiry thereof he demands such acknowledgment from the Postmaster-General, by registered letter addressed to him at Ottawa.

Instead of "registered letter" it should be "letter." The reason is that, if the man complains of the postmaster, and has to register the letter, the attention of the postmaster is called to the fact that he is writing to the Postmaster General, so I wish to strike out the word "registered."

Order for third reading discharged, and Bill referred back to Committee of the Whole.

(In the Committee.)

Mr. BLAKE. I cannot understand the reason which the hon. gentleman has given, namely, that in all cases in which the acknowledgment has not come back by reason of some default on the part of the local postmaster, this is giving that local postmaster a notice that complaint is being made. But, on the other hand, the neglect to send a certificate may have arisen from several other causes, and very great difficulties will, I am afraid, be created if a conclusive title is to inure to the depositor, capable of being continued, simply by the statement that he has sent a letter and not a registered letter. There will be disputes as to whether he did send a letter or not. How is that fact to be proved? It is clear that the object in the original Act, saying "by registered letter," was in order that there might be a means of proof satisfactory for the party. But now you say if he sends a letter it shall be conclusive evidence during a term of eighteen days. Now, supposing the letter does not reach its destination. At a small country office the postmaster knows a good many letters that are sent besides those which are registered; he may know the handwriting of the depositor, for instance. There is no security, then, that it will go, and there is no proof, either, to the Department, that such a letter was actually sent. While we are incurring very considerable liability in the convenience that we are affording to the public by these deposits, we are incurring a liability for the honesty and good management of a large number of officers all over the country, and the prudent precaution which, up to this moment, has existed, that the title shall inure only on condition of a registered letter being sent, is now proposed to be dropped. I think there are reasons on both sides.

Sir HECTOR LANGEVIN. Perhaps so. But the party who has to send the letter, if he wishes to have a guarantee, may register it if he pleases. He might do so if he thinks that will be an additional guarantee to him. But if you make it an obligation by the Act that he must write a letter and have it registered, and if he has reason to believe that the acknowledgment has not been received, and that it is the fault of the postmaster, then he will not register the letter. At all events, it will be for him to decide whether he should register it or not. The section now reads:

And if such acknowledgment has not been received by the depositor through the post within such ten or such eighteen days respectively, and before or upon the expiry thereof he demands such acknowledgment from the Postmaster-General, by letter addressed to him at Ottawa."

But you put here "by registered letter," and compel him to have the letter registered, and if he sends a non-registered letter he will not have complied with the law. Then the entry in his book will not be conclusive evidence of title during another term of ten or eighteen days. So that I really believe, if you do not make it a necessity for him to register his letter it will be better,

because you leave it to him to select the one course or the other.

Mr. BLAKE. This provision has not been inserted for the security of the depositor at all; this provision as to registration is a condition imposed by Parliament upon the depositor for the security, not of the depositor, but of the Department and the Government. I quite admit that the depositor is entitled to register if he chooses, although he be not obliged to register; but it was in order to make a security to the Department that he shall perform this duty, which is the condition of a continuing of the liability on the part of the Government for money that it may never have received. The condition of registering it is a means of being quite certain that there shall not be a trumped-up sending of letters. If no registration takes place, then, after an interval of two or three months, the depositor comes forward and says: I want my money. The Department replies: But you never received an acknowledgment from us within the ten or eighteen days. He answers: True, but I have sent you a letter. How is it going to be proved; what sort of proof are you going to admit of that fact having taken place, which, under the law as it has been ever since the system was introduced, was provided for, and it was provided for by the registration that it is now proposed to alter.

Sir HECTOR LANGEVIN. Of course the hon. gentleman knows this is not my Department, but I am informed by the Postmaster-General that the registration of the letters was not in the previous law.

Mr. BLAKE. Oh, yes.

Sir HECTOR LANGEVIN. So I am informed, and it is at his special request that I am moving to strike out this word, because the Post Office authorities believe that the word "registered" should not be there, and they think they will have a better guarantee by leaving it to the party to do so if he chooses. Of course I admit what the hon. gentleman says about the guarantee being in favor of the Department; but, on the other hand, if the postmaster is dishonest enough not to send the money forward, he would also take care that the registered letter did not reach its destination.

Mr. BLAKE. I assumed that the law was the same in this particular, upon the statement the hon. gentleman made when he took the first stage in the Bill, because he then informed us that the only change he was making was to apply to the North-West Territory and Manitoba. There is a further change, I see. Upon looking at the Bill I find that the depositor may demand the acknowledgment of the Postmaster-General, and if the acknowledgment shall not have been received by the depositor within ten days, he shall then demand a further acknowledgment from the Postmaster-General. The law up to this time made a still greater precaution to the Department than even the Bill as it now stands; because it was necessary that he should make a demand through the Postmaster-General, but it was not necessary it should reach the Postmaster-General. The demand might be good provided it reached, but if it did not reach it would not be a good demand. Then there is a proposed acknowledgment which he is to demand by registered letter addressed to Ottawa, which is a still further extension of time. There is a very considerable extension of time even as to the older Provinces, because, whereas by the existing law you would have to make your demand on the Postmaster-General within ten days, now you have only to commence the demand within ten days, so there is an extension of the time and there is also a relaxation of the method. As the hon. gentleman now proposes, the party will make a demand by letter without registration, and the result may be the Department may know nothing about it, and yet it becomes liable. This is a matter, however, to be largely disposed of according to the practice and experience of the Department. I do not