

whether that did not invalidate the nomination, but he was persuaded to the contrary, and I sit here because he was persuaded to the contrary. I advise the hon. gentleman another time when he is about to give a character under a little gentle phrase, to a registrar whom he knows, not to throw away dirty water before he gets clean, and to be satisfied that the change will be an improvement before he makes such an experiment as he has done on this occasion. I will not go into the other consequences. They might have been tolerably serious, and had my majority been a little less than it was, they might, with the change which the hon. gentleman was pleased to make, have relieved him from the pain of hearing me at this moment. I do think this is a serious question. As I say, we were told, when the Bill passed through the House, that except in case of necessity arising from their being incompetent and improper persons, the registrars would be retained. We are told, to-day there is no cause of complaint against the Registrar of West Durham; it is admitted that he belongs to the same political stripe as the hon. gentleman, and that he possessed experience, capacity, and impartiality. He was, however, changed, and another person appointed. It is, therefore, evident that the pledge which the Administration gave to the House last Session, was, on this occasion, violated, and I do not, and cannot, understand why the change was made.

Sir JOHN A. MACDONALD. As to the pledge of which the hon. gentleman speaks, the pledge or statement was simply this: that, as a general rule, the officers usually employed as returning officers would be retained. That general rule was carried out, with particular exceptions, and the West Riding of Durham, which the hon. gentleman has mentioned, is one of them. At all events, it cannot be said that the change was made for the purpose of putting in a political friend. The hon. gentleman states that the registrar was a political friend of this Government, and his successor, I presume, was of the same politics; but I do not remember—I do not really remember, who he really was. It is quite clear that the returning officer decided that the hon. gentleman was eligible; in the next place, he decided that it was proper for him to return the hon. gentleman; and I can assure the hon. gentleman that, though he wishes to show the House that great was the desire of the Government to appoint new men, we would have been greatly disappointed if the hon. gentleman had not been returned—I will not say for West Durham, but as a Member of Parliament—to represent a constituency in this House. He has complained of the returning officer who took time to consider, although the result of his consideration was that he decided that the hon. gentleman, not only in name but in fact, had the right to claim the suffrages of the people, and he obtained the suffrages of the people. There could be no complaint, therefore, that any wrong had been done either to the electors or to the hon. member.

Mr. CASEY. The hon. gentleman seems to draw a wide distinction between a statement and a pledge. He made a certain statement to us, last year, as to what would be the course of the Government with respect to this matter, and he wishes us now to understand that his statement as to the intentions of the Government is by no means always intended to be a pledge, which is a point worth bearing in mind.

Sir JOHN A. MACDONALD. I did not say so.

Mr. CASEY. In regard to this particular case of West Durham, the hon. gentleman says the officer was not to blame for having followed the example of the Government by taking time to consider. It was no harm to take such questions as the use of "honorable" and "esquire" into serious consideration, but he might have kept them under consideration too long, after the time required either for

declaring the nominations closed, or for returning a member by acclamation. But the hon. leader of the House goes further, and says it was not in order to put in a political friend, that some other person than the registrar was changed on this occasion, because Mr. Armour was also a political friend. It may not have been in order to put in a friend as returning officer, but it may possibly have been done—I do not insinuate that it was, but still it is open to that suspicion—to put in a political friend as member for that constituency. The explanation given by the hon. gentleman leaves us almost no room to doubt that the changes made generally in the returning officers, whatever may be the case in this particular instance, must have been done for the purpose of giving some advantage to Government candidates. He has stated that in the case of West Durham, at least, it was not due to any lack of competency on the part of the old returning officer that the change was made. The hon. gentleman had nothing against him. The same will be said in regard to other sheriffs and registrars, that they were not appointed returning officers, for the Government will not directly insult them by saying that they were not competent. The man chosen, instead of the sheriff or registrar in each case, must have been more desirable, for some reason or another, than the man whose experience in this sort of work had extended over many previous elections. He cannot have been more desirable on the ground of experience, because he had had no experience as a general thing. He cannot have been more desirable on the ground of impartiality in most cases, because very often those instead of whom he was chosen were Conservatives, and he was not, therefore, likely to be more impartial. Can it be possible that he was chosen, in many of these cases, instead of the sheriff or registrar, because he was more likely to be partial to the Government candidates? I think that this is quite possible; and I do not hesitate to say so. I think that this possibility, moreover, is borne out by the facts. These returning officers, chosen for this particular Election, have been most forward in assuming to themselves judicial functions which are not generally assumed by returning officers, or not generally supposed to belong to them; and not only did they assume judicial functions, in some instances, but what might almost be called legislative functions. They were a law to themselves in many cases with regard to the rejection of ballots and the total vote polled in certain places, when this happened to tell against some particular candidate by whom they were appointed. And this brings me to the worst point in the whole business: although appointed by the Government, as a matter of form, there is no doubt that in most cases—if not in all—they were really appointed on the nomination of the Government candidate, at whose election they were to act in the character of quasi-judges. They officiated altogether in the character of judges in some cases, because they assumed to act with judicial powers. I say it is a very serious, dangerous and improper thing, that a candidate soliciting the votes of the electors, should be allowed to select the man who is to act as a judge on the fairness of the election, on the qualifications of those who voted for or against him, and the regularity of the poll in every sub-division. It is an extremely serious thing that this should be done; it is an extremely serious precedent to be established; and it is a still more serious thing, Sir, that the Government have not seen fit yet to give any general reason for introducing this change, and for breaking on the established usage of many years, other than the general statement once made, and now being retracted piecemeal, that the sheriffs and registrars in these particular cases were not fit for the position.

Mr. O'BRIEN. The hon. gentleman who has last spoken has talked about returning officers exercising legislative functions. Of course, I presume that he alludes to gentle-