

which will prejudice individual grantees cannot properly be entertained.

This principle of holding the pledges of Parliament to the individual sacred admits of no exception, and can be qualified by no circumstances which would be likely to occur within reasonable probability. But if it were permissible for Parliament to tear up the instrument of grant, and thereby extinguish the grant itself, the most superficial thinker would admit that reasons for such an act must be momentous and compelling, and could only have it warrant in considerations of the highest state policy, or that the omission to act must involve the greatest consequences to the country. Can, or will, any one affirm that once such an act as this Annuities Act has become the law of the land, it is possible to put forward as reasons

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a law only those of the most pitiful and paltry character—unworthy of a country as great as Canada has become.

In what the undersigned has said thus far, he has not intended to cast doubt upon the constitutional power of Parliament to rescind the grants in question; that point may be taken to be beyond controversy, but what is affirmed is that, in a moral sense, Parliament is not competent to do so. There is hardly any limit to the powers, constitutionally speaking, of the Imperial Parliament, when legislating within its proper sphere; but legislatures are continually distinguishing between the power to do things and the wisdom, propriety or morality of doing them.

If the pensions laws of Great Britain and discussions in the Imperial Parliament on the subject be examined, it may be at once seen by what principles and within what rules the mother of Parliaments has uniformly acted in dealing with this subject: As early, at least, as the reign of the First Charles, and for a considerable period thereafter, annuities and pensions were granted by the Crown itself, without Parliamentary sanction. Later, of course, Parliament assumed entire control of these grants. It will be in the personal recollection of many that during the late Queen's reign a strong public agitation arose against the continuance, particularly of perpetual pensions, of which a number had been granted, and some of which had been running for upwards of two hundred years. The agitation led to the passing of a bill,—not for the immediate extinction of these grants, but for vesting in the Lords of the Treasury the power, in such cases as they should deem expedient, of commuting the annuity on the basis of a twenty-seven years' purchase. Official returns of the Lords of the Treasury recently laid before Parliament show that, notwithstanding the act of 1889, authorizing commutation on the basis mentioned, some of these annuities still remain uncommuted, although the present recipients acquired their rights by purchase, or inherited through purchasers, and and after passing by transfer through persons wholly unconnected