

shortly after, the hon. gentleman himself, at an entertainment which was given to the gentleman recently deposed, I regret to observe—I refer to Mr. Mousseau, late Prime Minister of the Province of Quebec—quite sufficiently indicated that his existing relations with the party to which he is an ornament, were about to be severed. Well, that was the state of things, so far as the public were informed, at the close of the Session, and immediately after the close of the Session an announcement was made that that state of things had been changed; and that while the hon. gentleman was about to assume the office of High Commissioner, he was also to retain the office of Minister of Railways. Now, I think, that when an arrangement of this kind was made, it was not an unreasonable thing to expect that the earliest opportunity would be taken of making an explanation to the House of the reasons for the change—if it was a change—and the arrangement which was substituted for the original one, for no doubt it was an important substitution. We may differ as to the constitutional propriety, as to the convenience of that arrangement; but, whether we differ or no, there can be no doubt whatever that it is an innovation on our practice, and one of sufficient consequence to entitle us, I think, to explanations upon it. I do not intend, at the present moment, to do more than to ask for those explanations, and to indicate, in the briefest possible way, the points upon which I think, mainly, they ought to be given. It seems to me that is the more proper course. In the first place, there is the question of the relation of the High Commissioner of Canada to the particular members of the Administration. He is the agent of the Administration at large, but he is also the agent of the various Ministers to whom, individually, he has been in the habit in the past of referring. We have before us instructions given to Sir Alexander Galt, as High Commissioner. It will be remembered that with respect to the negotiations with France, and I rather think with Spain also, he received instructions from the Minister of Finance. The Minister wrote the Commissioner a letter, which is published, instructing him what to do. The Commissioner went and did not do it, but I suppose the failure was not his fault—he tried to do it. The Commissioner reported to the Minister of Finance what he had done under his instructions. He reported to the Minister of Agriculture what he had done upon the subject of immigration, and I dare say to other hon. Ministers also, with respect to matters on which, under their direction, he had acted for their different Departments. It seems to me it is unfortunate that hon. Ministers should pay so little regard to those reports that, as we have learned to-day, they really do not know whether they have been made or not; that an hon. Minister was not in a position, although two days' notice was given of the motion for the production of the Lord High Commissioner's reports, to tell whether there are any reports or not. We do not know whether some subordinate, some deputy-chief, has put reports from the Commissioner away in some dusty pigeon-hole. Whether the memory of the hon. Minister of Agriculture has become oblivious, we do not know; but the fact remains that he does not know whether reports have been made by the High Commissioner either to various hon. Ministers or to one hon. Minister. As to the Commissioner acting under the directions, and carrying out the views of various hon. Ministers, I suggest that the position of an hon. gentleman who is also himself one of the hon. Ministers, is exceedingly peculiar. It is an inconsistent position, as it seems to me; it is a position of servant and of colleague as well. As a Minister, he is equally responsible, according to the theory of our Constitution—however imperfectly that theory may work in England and with us to-day—with other members of the Government for all that is done; but as Commissioner, he acts under orders; he is told to go, and he goes; do this, and

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he does it—or at all events he tried to do it. Then, as I have said, our system is one theoretically of undivided responsibility, unless that responsibility is purged, of course, by the Government at large declining to accept it, and we know in that case the result to individual members; and I have said that this system is imperfectly worked both in England and here. Practically our system of responsibility is largely a departmental one. Both the House and the country at large are very much disposed to hold individual Ministers very largely responsible for the conduct of their Departments. Large questions there are, as the First Minister said the other day, in regard to which therefore, it is not inconvenient he should often direct; but a First Minister has a very special responsibility, and which, this statement of the hon. gentleman is incidentally a proof of my present proposition, that there is a great number of questions in respect of which a Minister acts independently, and in respect to these, neither the House nor the country is disposed to look very harshly upon undivided responsibility but is disposed to judge of the individual Minister. The punishment to-day for breach or neglect of duty, for error or misjudgment and for whatever may be called political crime or political action, which is objected to, is a loss of confidence by the House and the country; and it is, therefore, of great consequence that a Minister should be, as far as circumstances will at all permit, in a position in which he can discharge the duties of his office, that he may do them, and be held to that responsibility to which I refer. I may be told that when he does not perform them, somebody else does. It is quite true there are acting Ministers. The Minister of Agriculture knows how that is done—that it is done in a perfunctory sort of way. We know how it was done with respect to the location of the Canadian Pacific Railway last summer, during the absence of the Minister of Railways temporarily. We know all about it: I should not say we know all about it, but we know enough about it to be able to judge with regard to it. It is a mode of doing business which is unsatisfactory. It is fitting that the Minister of Agriculture should take charge of immigration and statistics; that the Minister of Railways should take care of his own Department; and arrangements by which acting Ministers take charge are arrangements only to be tolerated as arrangements of a temporary character, due either to illness or temporary absence on public business, necessitating the non-performance of the duties of the office by the hon. Minister who is responsible. It is quite different to make an arrangement of this description under which an hon. Minister leaves the House and the country before the Session is over and returns just about in time for this Session, being absent during an interval in which important questions with respect to the great railway which forms the main subject of this Department, were to be settled; questions of the route through the Rocky Mountains, for instance; the settlement of the passes, of the financial standing of the company, of the guarantee—the papers in regard to which we hope will be brought down in a few moments—and other questions of very great importance, all of which we have not fully before us at this time. I say it is of great consequence for the practical good working of the Constitution, for the realization of that measure of responsibility upon which the efficacy of responsible Government depends, that hon. Ministers charged with Departments should, as a rule, subject to as few exceptions as possible, perform the duties assigned them; and the absence of the Minister of Railways during the whole recess practically is, in the circumstances under which he has been absent, not consistent with the Constitution as we understand it, and its practical good working. Then the Session comes and this dual officer cannot be in two places at once, not being an Irishman or a bird, and he leaves London and comes here. What is to become of the High Commissionership? We are told it is a very important