

proper official uncontrolled by the government within a week of the vacancy occurring. It is hard to realize why so much red-tapeism surrounds a proceeding so simple. One would think that such duties properly belong to the clerk of the House.

In the nominative branch a vacancy should not be permitted to exceed one month.

Returning Officers.

To advance the cause of purity of elections, the electorate of each constituency should choose its own Returning Officer. The appointment is a most perilous thing to trust any government with. The electorate in their choice should be as free and untrammelled of government influence as it is possible to make them. When the present bad system of appointing all returning officers by the Dominion government was passing through the crucible amid hot shot from the fearless opposition, there was some slight force in Sir John Macdonald's justification of withdrawing the privilege from sheriffs and other appointees and partisans of a local administration who, as he said, may be hostile to the Dominion government. But he went to the other extreme. It was like flying from Scylla to Charybdis. There was a middle, moderate, non-partisan course that he could have taken—to leave the constituency itself to choose its returning officer; and it would have the happy merit that none could predict in advance on whom the lot may fall, whether Grit or Tory. Let the mayors of cities and towns, and the wardens of counties be ex officio returning officers. For example, the mayor for Ottawa, the mayor for Brockville, the warden for Frontenac. In cities like Toronto, sub-divided into two or more electoral divisions, let the mayor be ex officio returning officer for division No. 1, the chairman of the Finance committee for No. 2, the chairman of the Board of Works for No. 3, the chairman of the Water committee for No. 4, and so on. In counties, like Renfrew, divided into two ridings, the warden of the county for the south, and the mayor of Pembroke for the north riding. In "United Counties," like Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry,

the warden for Dundas, the mayor of Cornwall for Stormont, and he of Alexandria for Glengarry. In counties, like Carleton, partly in several electoral districts, the warden for the electoral district of Carleton, the reeve of the senior township (Gloucester) for the electoral district of Russell, and the warden of Lanark for the electoral district of North Lanark, and the mayor of Perth for the south riding. The pervading and permeating influence of the returning officer on the result of an election is scarcely credible. What I have said here has, since it was written, been emphasized by the recent unpleasant revelations in West Elgin.

My Experience.

I have once, by the grace of the late Hon. J. Sandfield Macdonald, been returning officer for this town. Never was election in this or any other country more honestly conducted. If ever a candidate was believed to be invincible in a constituency, that was the status of the opposition candidate. At dissolution a person suggesting opposition to the ex-member would be looked upon as a fit subject for an insane asylum. Yet, in a small constituency he was so badly licked that he scarcely knew whether he stood on head or heels. I wanted an honest election and let the best horse win. I knew that hitherto such a thing was a rare avil.

My duty consisted in thwarting and checkmating frauds of long standing, and did it so effectually that they hardly knew what happened them. Had the former returning officer been selected, the election would assuredly have gone by acclamation. That was the effect of appointing one special returning officer. Multiply it by 213, and you may realize the extent and peril of the power which the government wields in the appointment of returning officers.

Bribery at Elections.

Is it not high time that the government set about checking, if not wholly preventing, the demoralizing effect of bribery at elections. Tell me not that it cannot be stopped. The "horse marines" may believe that yarn. The government can, if it desire to, and gc