

trust, that the Government made any other selection ;" and, once again, it has been stated that it was only when the Government "knew, from the character of the men and their positions, that they could not be free from sinister, clandestine and improper influences," that they took other and better men. These statements have been made with reference to the cases in which the Government departed from the rule which had been formerly established by law, as to the choice of returning officers in the late Election. I need hardly say that this is a serious aspersion upon the character of every one of those persons, because it is said of every one of them that no change was made except in cases where the Government had been convinced that they were unworthy of confidence, and would act in a manner inconsistent with their duty. I desired to say, with reference to one returning officer whom I have known for a number of years, and whom I think the hon. gentleman has known much better for a great many more years—I mean the Registrar for the West Riding of Durham, for which county I sit here—that that statement, so far as it is based upon any facts known to the public, and upon any facts known to the electors of both sides of politics in that constituency in which he had officiated as returning officer for all the elections with which I am conversant, is not correct as applied to him. His political proclivities are very well known, they are those of the hon. gentleman himself. He never was a friend of the Liberal party, but it was the good fortune of the constituency of both sides of politics, I believe—certainly of the Liberal party—to be always able to say at those elections, that he had acted with perfect fairness and impartiality; and I desire to say, that I have heard nothing which would justify those imputations on the character of Mr. Armour, or on those other persons to whom the hon. gentleman has referred in that condemnation, without exception or qualification, to which he subjected them all, upon the occasion I have mentioned. It is important that we should have a list of those unworthy sheriffs and registrars, because I think, if they are unfit to be returning officers, they are unfit to be either registrars or sheriffs, or to fill any other position of trust or confidence in any shape or sense, directly or indirectly, in the government of the people.

Sir JOHN A. MACDONALD. There can be no objection to granting this motion. With reference to the language which the hon. gentleman has quoted, I would wish it to be understood that I pass no general condemnation, or specific condemnation, upon every registrar or sheriff who was not appointed. I certainly did not desire to say so. I believe there is a good reason for every case in which that rule was varied from. With reference to Mr. Armour, the Registrar for the West Riding of Durham, certainly I had no intention of passing any condemnation upon him. Mr. Armour is a gentleman I have known for a great many years, and always esteemed; and I believe he is, so far as he has any political predilection, a Conservative—or used to be at all events before he held office, and I have no reason to suppose he is not so yet.

Mr. CASGRAIN. While we are upon this subject of returning officers, I would remark that I think the hon. leader of the Government, in making his choice of those officers, forgot the report made by a former House in 1867 as to the returns made by the then Registrar for the County of Kamouraska. He was declared, by the report of a Committee of this House, unfit to be a returning officer, and, so far as I recollect, nothing has occurred since that time which would lead us to believe that he is better fitted to fill that duty now than he was at the time he was censured by a former House.

Mr. SCRIVER.. It seems somewhat difficult to reconcile the words which have fallen to-day from the lips of the hon. leader of the Government, with those which he uttered

Mr. BLAKE.

on two previous occasions, and which have been quoted to-day by the hon. leader of the Opposition. I desire to say that a change has been made in the county I have the honor to represent, which I found it difficult to account for in anything that took place before the close of the last Parliament. The gentleman who occupies the position of Registrar in my county, and who has acted as returning officer for many years past, both in the Local and in the General Elections, was not appointed returning officer at this time, and no reason that I can imagine ought to have influenced the Government in making the change that was made. That gentleman has always acted with the most perfect impartiality. He has not been in any sense a partizan. Politically he has been in sympathy with the Administration of the present day; and I feel bound to say that the gentleman who was appointed in his place acted in quite another spirit to that which would have animated his predecessor in the discharge of his duties.

Mr. BLAKE. I was very glad to hear the hon. gentleman's disclaimer, since the case was brought to his attention, of any intention to make a complaint against the Registrar of the West Riding of Durham; but I find it, as the hon. member for Huntingdon has said, a little difficult to reconcile that statement with the observations which induced me, I frankly say, to make this motion to-day, because there was neither exception nor qualification in the use of the very strong and cogent language which the hon. gentleman used in criticizing the conduct, the trustworthiness, the fitness, of those whom he stigmatized, because he did stigmatize them by not appointing them on the ground he stated the other day. As we understand now from the hon. gentleman in this particular case, and as we will understand after a while from some other hon. gentleman, there was no impropriety of conduct, and no reason to cast any blame at all upon the officers. We had a pledge from the Administration, during the progress of that Bill through the House last Session, that unless there was a reason to cast blame on the officers, the Government would not depart from the rule, and would still—though not with that security of tenure, and security therefore of independence which the Statute gave—would still, of their own good will and pleasure, appoint the persons who formerly held an official title to this duty. As we find the hon. gentleman has no imputation to make, and says the registrar has acted as returning officer on many previous elections, and acquired a full knowledge of the duties which devolved upon him, and of the capacity of the sub-officers, and, therefore, was able to make a fit choice, and conduct the election regularly, I want to know why the change was made. As it was not that there was anything wrong with the registrar, as he was competent, impartial, and experienced, was it in order to get somebody who would be incompetent, partial, and inexperienced? If it was, I admit the hon. gentleman accomplished his purpose; I admit that was the result on this occasion of the change. Why, the person whom he appointed to be returning officer for the West Riding of Durham, knew so little—anxious, though I dare say he was, to discharge his duties—of what his duties were, that he was for half an hour in a state of painful suspense on nomination day as to whether his duty would not require him, and would not call upon him imperatively, to reject my nomination paper. Why? Because there was the word "honorable" at the beginning of my nomination paper, and "esquire" at the end of it; and it was not until a sort of legal pressure by the agent of my committee who presented the nomination paper, it was not until argument after argument had been advanced, that this exceedingly impartial, intelligent and capable gentleman, who was substituted for the Registrar of the West Riding, was prevailed upon to accept the nomination. He looked at the Statute. The Statute said nothing about "honorable." He looked at the Statute again. It said nothing about "esquire." He doubted