

hand, has always championed provincial freedom and autonomy, and the Bill now under discussion is a fresh evidence of their sincerity in that respect. Each province, as we all know, has the right exclusively to enact laws concerning its civil and religious government, public instruction and the administration of her territory; now, I ask, on what ground would such a province be denied the right of sending here, representatives chosen by the very same voters who are entrusted with the care of her own destinies, in order to protect her interests in the framing of the general laws of the country?

Now, as is often the case in a deliberative body such as this House is, hon. gentlemen opposite have wandered from the real ground of debate and have indulged in considerations which are more or less germane to the matter under discussion. They have spoken of the abuses of power perpetrated by the provincial governments in connection with the preparation of the voters' lists or, rather, in the framing of their Franchise Acts, as the voters' lists are under the control of the municipal authorities, the most competent to deal fairly with the matter. The hon. gentlemen may think that this criticism is a sufficient justification of their attitude, in setting up as reformers of abuses, but I must confess that I am very little affected by such a plea. Now so long as they have not devised a system of franchise that is absolutely above criticism, in theory and in practice, I shall hold firm to the belief that the provincial and municipal system is the most economical, the most equitable system, and the one that meets best the wants and tendencies of our parliamentary institutions. Moreover, the few blemishes that have been pointed out in that system arise from the fact that our provincial laws, as all our other laws, are applied by men liable to err. The disadvantages complained of do not arise from the system itself but from the enforcing of it. These drawbacks, however, sink into insignificance when compared with the abuses of every description that have been creeping in under the Franchise Act of 1885.

I agree that the hon. gentlemen must not have a very vivid recollection of the enforcement of that law, having never been called upon to watch its operation, as they had in the revising barrister a devoted friend who spared them the trouble of attending to the preparation of the voters' lists. But in our case, it was quite a different matter, because we had to go through our several constituencies and to do the work for which that Government official was paid for, so that we know fully the value of that Act of 1885.

By repealing that iniquitous Act we are purely and simply doing away with a law that was inimical to the freedom and autonomy of our provinces; we are imple-

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menting a formal and sacred pledge given to the electorate, while, at the same time, blotting out from the Statute-book an Act that constituted one of the most unpardonable attempts ever made against the constitution by the Conservative party.

Mr. CLANCY. Mr. Speaker, it seems to me, Sir, that this is such an important measure that both sides of the House should approach it in a calm spirit, for it is of too much importance to import any heat into this discussion. No party advantage should be sought in dealing with a Bill of this kind. So far, I am glad to say, that judicial spirit in dealing with the measure has been fairly well maintained, and I trust that such will characterize the debate on this Bill through its various stages. For my own part, I propose to take that course throughout, because I must repeat what I said at the outset that no party advantage should be gained by dealing with this Bill. Now, Sir, the present Franchise Bill that has been in operation for some years, is one that has been on trial to a very large extent, and time and experience alone could point out the weak points of that Bill. Those are the only means which we have of determining whether any Act passed by this House has met the expectations of hon. gentlemen who were parties to its enactment. I say that the Franchise Bill has been on trial, and if it has not met the expectations of all those who engaged in framing it, of all those who were strong supporters of it at that time, and if it has accomplished anything more than was expected by those who on that occasion gave it a very honest opposition, it is not at all to be expected that even they should not adhere to the ground that was taken by them when this Bill was introduced. Now, Sir, we have had several years experience of the operation of that Act. No one can pretend that it is without some defects. I do not think it has been urged from any side that some changes should not be made to the Bill. As I said before, time has pointed out some weak points in it, there is no doubt about that; but time has pointed out with equal clearness that there were many strong points in the Bill that the House should not be disposed to give up. I think I can fairly challenge hon. gentlemen opposite to say that there has not been a single move, there has not been any demand whatever in the country for the repeal of this Franchise Bill. True, hon. gentlemen have passed resolutions, and they have introduced Bills, in doing which they were clearly within their right, and they have made very strong speeches in the country. They have endeavoured by every means. I will say constitutional means, to excite public opinion strongly against this Bill. But, Sir, after a trial of something like twelve years of the Franchise Bill, not a single petition has been presented to this House asking for its repeal. Hon. gentlemen must