

Mr. BLAKE. I am very glad that the hon. gentleman has thought fit to disassociate himself from the very heavy office, adequately filled, of Minister of the Interior. I think that all of us who have been for some years in Parliament must have felt convinced that the office of First Minister is quite sufficiently exacting in itself without the addition to it of extremely onerous departmental duties, and that the necessary result of such addition is that one or other of the functions of the person filling that position must be more or less neglected. I hope that in the comparatively smaller sphere of departmental duties to which the hon. gentleman is now devoting himself, he will find it possible to administer with more successful result; in point of economy, at any rate, the Indian Department. We all know the mode in which our expenses have swelled for some years in that Department, and I look with some degree of hope to the exercise of greater economy in that branch now that the hon. gentleman is no longer embarrassed with the nominal, if not actual, control of the Ministry of Interior. But, while I say so much in approval of the course the hon. gentleman has wisely taken, I must renew the suggestion I have made once or twice with reference to Ministerial changes that have taken place under this Administration. The work of the Department of the Interior has very much to do with the revenue of the country, and is very largely of an executive and administrative character, in respect of which there ought to be the most immediate and active responsibility as between the Minister and the Commons. It is a description of work in which, particularly as the hon. gentleman has moulded and executed the Statutes, we have mainly but the privilege of obtaining information and of criticising the administration; but it is also important that should be done with the Minister in this House. It seems, therefore, unfortunate, that this important Department should have been transferred from this House to the other Chamber. The hon. gentleman has said that this is the only Ministerial change, and therefore, I presume, he thinks—and I do not intend to object to his mode of viewing the subject in that regard—that it is not fitting, under an enquiry as to Ministerial changes, to make any explanation with reference to the anomalous conjunction of offices witnessed since last Session in respect of his colleague sitting beside him; and I suppose it is in some other form we must ask explanations that are due this House and the country in that respect.

Sir JOHN A. MACDONALD. With respect to the Indian Department I can only say I will give it the same attention I have given it hitherto. The House knows perfectly well, or they did not listen to the remarks and lucid explanations I have made on many occasions in other circumstances, that the expenses of the Indian Department were necessarily very great. The Indians were thrown on the Treasury in a destitute condition, and we could not allow them to starve; but I am glad to say, in the language of the Speech, that the reports this year are most satisfactory. The Indians have confined themselves to the reserve, and if they have not been as energetic as white men, they have made and are making rapid progress towards self-maintenance, which means a very considerable reduction in the annual expenditure. With respect to the Department of the Interior I quite agree with the hon. gentleman that the office of First Minister, extending over all the Departments, involves so many miscellaneous duties, it is important that he should be free from heavy departmental work. In 1878, when I took the two offices of First Minister and Minister of the Interior, the reason I did so was that the country was going to be the scene of large operations, and that some system had to be laid down for immigration, settlement of the new population, and opening up of the North-West generally; and this involved large principles and a vast policy for which the First

Minister must be held primarily responsible. For that reason I accepted the double duty. Subsequently, when the work became more distinctly departmental, I obtained the able assistance of the Speaker of the Upper House, who relieved me in a most disinterested way of the excessive pressure of work, and he, with his usual thoroughness, has become thoroughly acquainted with the business of the North-West and the Department. It is true it would be well if arrangements could be made for the Minister to be here, but the next best thing has been done; all my present colleagues being actively employed in their Departments. Having initiated in a considerable degree the policy of the North-West, being acquainted with it, I shall be here as First Minister, taking the responsibility of meeting the House on all matters connected with the Department of the Interior, and I hope I shall receive—I do not ask the confidence—but the support on all proper occasions of my hon. friend opposite. With respect to the fact that the hon. Minister of Railways is acting just now as High Commissioner, I have no occasion to allude to that. That is not a Ministerial change. If any discussion is to arise on that point, both he and I had better wait until the subject is brought properly before the House.

Mr. CASGRAIN. I was going to congratulate my hon. friend on the promptness he has shown in calling us together early in the Session so that we might be able to adjourn by Easter; but if we begin at this rate of despatch I will have to withdraw my compliment. There are numerous subjects to which the attention of the Government might be directed at once, for instance the Bothwell or the Megantic elections, or the Government might show the same interest towards the other Provinces that they displayed last Session towards Ontario, when they devoted six weeks to the Ontario elections, by giving their attention to the state of affairs existing in Quebec. There are many other subjects, in fact, which we might discuss. Take, for instance, the Shields matter, and many other subjects which I could suggest. I will furnish any number to my hon. friend opposite, in order that he may set us to work. For my own part I am ready to work. I speak on my own account only, and, rather than adjourn now, I propose that we should do something on any kind of subject that the hon. gentleman might bring forward, and I would take in preference the Shields matter.

Sir JOHN A. MACDONALD. I think the hon. gentleman should move that we do something.

Mr. CASGRAIN. I was taken by surprise; I never anticipated this.

Sir JOHN A. MACDONALD. That would be a new step in the hon. gentleman's career, that we should do something. He has not yet succeeded in doing anything, and, if he wants to do something now, let him move. I shall move that the House do now adjourn.

Motion agreed to; and (at 3:45 o'clock, p.m.) the House adjourned.

HOUSE OF COMMONS.

WEDNESDAY, 23rd January, 1884.

The SPEAKER took the Chair at Three o'clock.

PRAYERS.

SELECT STANDING COMMITTEES.

Sir JOHN A. MACDONALD, from the Special Committee appointed to prepare and report lists of members to compose the Select Standing Committees, ordered by the House on the 17th instant, reported lists as follows:—