

ally believed to have acted from selfish motives; and the community, while it justly visits with the severest penalties any want of chivalrous fidelity on the part of a public man towards his associates in the Government, is bound, as it tenders its own highest interests, to protect a conscientious act against sinister imputations till something occurs to show that the imputations are well founded.

The rest of the Ministers kept their places, as the Premier, in debate, had in effect announced that they would. In so doing they appear to have been justified by the general rules of public life. The Opposition had endeavoured in debate to give the amendment to the address the character of a general vote of no-confidence. But its effect, whatever that might be, was in reality confined to a particular measure; and this limitation seemed to be essential to its success in the judgment of those by whom it was brought forward. Whether a particular measure is vital to the policy of the Government, and the defeat of it fatal, is a question, the decision of which must, it is apprehended, rest entirely with the Ministry themselves. They will exercise their discretion subject to the penalty, in case of improper retention of office, of immediate loss of reputation with the moral certainty of a speedy and more ruinous overthrow. But it is a false sense of honour which leads a Government to throw up the reins when defeated on any question not really of a vital kind. In so doing the Ministers not only betray the particular principles which they represent and the party whose cause is confided to their hands and by whose exertions they have been placed in power, but they injure the whole community, which has an interest, superior to all party objects, in the stability of government. The Parliamentary history of England furnishes a case in point in the hasty and somewhat petulant resignation of the Russell Ministry on a secondary question in 1852, which led to the ephemeral government of a minority with

fruitless faction fights and much degradation of the character of public men. To challenge a direct vote of no-confidence seems to be the general duty of a Minister who believes that he is still at the head of the majority or even that the adverse division which has taken place is far from a fair measure of the strength of his party.

The Opposition now proceeded to move as a further amendment of the address that "The House has no confidence in the Ministry which is attempting to carry out in reference to the control of the said fund of half a million, an usurpation fraught with danger to public liberty and constitutional government." This was obviously nothing but a repetition in effect of the first amendment, framed with the same object of catching stray votes upon the railway question, and open to the same criticism, since it did not allege that the Government had done anything contrary to law or with corrupt intent. "Usurped" a power could not be which, however undesirable, had been duly conferred by the Legislature, and the other epithets, even if applicable to the conduct of the Parliament which passed the Act, could not be applicable to the conduct of the Ministers so long as they were merely obeying the law. This second amendment was, however, tendered and accepted as a general motion of no-confidence. The Government met it by a resolution pledging them, in deference to the expressed opinion of the House, to take no action under the Railway Act without the concurrence of Parliament, but deprecating a decision of the question of confidence till the eight members should have arrived. It has been already said that this was ground in itself perfectly tenable, but which had been abandoned by the Government, and which could be recovered only by resorting to the avowal and appeal before indicated, and at the same time expressing the utmost respect for the authority of the House and the principles of constitutional government.