

Now, Sir, we have in the discussion upon and the attempt to pass upon this Bill a violation of that first principle demanding a full discussion and a careful sifting and weighing of the features of the Bill. We have in this Bill another measure which is in antagonism to that feature which requires that the Government should not have anything to do with the election officers, or the machinery which is to decide the question. We are told that we must yield to the majority. Well, Sir, does the dictum of a majority always make a thing right? Supposing a majority of this House should solemnly resolve at this moment that it was now three o'clock in the morning, would that make it three o'clock? Supposing that a majority in this House should resolve that Darwin's theory of evolution was right, would that settle the question? Supposing a majority of this House should determine the question of eternal punishment—would that settle it? I remember reading of a convention of pilgrims fathers in Massachusetts, who decided, by resolution, First, that the Saints of God should inherit the earth, and they passed a second resolution declaring that they were the Saints of God. I do not suppose that that settled the question, although a majority decided that that was the case. Here a majority are inclined to resolve that they should stay in power, and secondly, they would resolve that as they intend to stay in power, they should take the power of manipulating the voters' lists so that they should be able to do so. That is the decision which the majority are about to arrive at. The hon. gentleman told us this afternoon that their conclusions must prevail or else there will be a tragedy. I do not know to what the hon. gentleman refers, or what the character of this tragedy will be. I am at a loss to understand. I hope he has no violent designs against the Opposition; I hope we are not to be punished for our contumacy in this matter, by the condign wrath of the First Minister and his followers. Now, Sir, this measure has not been understood by this country; it has not been understood by this House.

Mr. RYKERT. Hear, hear.

Mr. CHARLTON. This measure is not understood today by a majority of this House. The hon. member for Lincoln does not himself understand it.

Mr. RYKERT. Speak for your own side.

Mr. CHARLTON. The country is just at this moment fairly arousing itself as to the character of this measure. We hold that this measure is one of such importance that it should not be passed hastily. We hold that the opinions of the great mass of the people of Canada should be obtained upon this measure—the people who are to be affected by this measure, whose interests are at stake in this matter—a measure which will affect their interest not only this year but for all years to come, which will affect not only this generation, but all generations who may live in future in this Dominion,—we hold that this measure should be taken into consideration by the people of Canada, and that some authoritative expression of their opinion should be furnished to their representatives in this House, before a measure of this importance should pass. We believe on this side that although in a minority here, we represent the great majority of people, with regard to this measure.

Some hon. MEMBERS. Yes, yes; no, no.

Mr. CHARLTON. We believe that we are standing here the champions of the people, the advocates of the people's rights, in resisting an attempt to perpetrate on this country a great wrong. We believe that the assertion of the hon. gentleman is correct, that representative institutions are on trial. The question is whether the defendants, the party in power, who are shortly to be arraigned before the people of this country—whether these defendants in that trial shall be permitted to pack the jury. The question

Mr. CHARLTON.

is whether we shall have a free unbiased expression of the opinion, a declaration of the will of the people of this country, or whether the Government in power shall snatch a verdict, by means of an improper manipulation of the voters' lists, as it is proposed to do by this Bill. I cannot say that the hon. gentleman's speech this afternoon was anything but Parliamentary and moderate in its tone and spirit. The hon. gentleman, in that speech, indicated a desire to make concessions. Well, Sir, unfortunately this is a matter where the very principle at stake is a principle on which no concession can be made. We stand on the principle that any attempt to take the fixing of the franchises from the Provincial Governments, that have enjoyed and exercised that power for eighteen years, and through five general elections, and have exercised it in a manner that has been, in the highest degree, satisfactory to the people of the various Provinces—we hold, I say, that any attempt to take that power from the Provinces, and to exercise it by the Dominion, is an infringement of a principle that we cannot permit if we can help it; and, consequently, at the very threshold, we stand face to face with a principle that prevents us from offering or accepting any concessions in this matter. We meet that issue in the resolution in your hands, and the issue presented in that resolution is one that does not admit of compromise or concession. For that reason, Sir, we cannot accept the assertion that the discussion of this great and momentous measure has been obstructive. It is our duty as an Opposition to discuss this measure fully, and we intend to discharge that duty. Now, I may, perhaps, refer to one or two personal matters in the speech of the hon. member for Lincoln (Mr. Rykert). He asserts that I took broad ground in favor of universal suffrage. I did nothing of the kind. I took the ground that if the Dominion Government were to adopt a uniform franchise, they would be compelled to accept universal suffrage—that nothing else would be acceptable to the people of this country, because we could not consistently adopt a franchise that was less liberal in its character than the most liberal franchise in any of the Provinces. Then the hon. gentleman speaks about Yankeeism, in respect of my having made quotations from the American Constitution. Well, I pointed out that a great nation, which has grown to be a power with 56,000,000 inhabitants, originated the federal system of government; that it was the system we copied, that the Australian colonies were just adopting it, that it was likely to become very wide-spread in the world, and that, inasmuch as we had copied the institutions of that country, it was only proper that we should examine into their working, and should endeavor to learn the lesson that has been taught by the hundred years' experience of that nation. I pointed out that the United States had adopted that very system of suffrage that we have had in this country for eighteen years, that it had worked well there, and that no public man had raised his voice against it; and I think the example I quoted ought to have weight with the hon. gentleman opposite, who has not been above copying from that country. With regard to the implied charge of Yankeeism, I have this to say: I have been a resident of this country for thirty-five years; I came here a boy; and I am a British subject by birth. But leaving all personal questions to one side, if I were an annexationist, which I am not, and if I desired to see the institutions of this country changed, I would ask no better means to secure that result than to have hon. gentlemen who are now in power, stay in power for five or six years longer. The men who are involving this country in inextricable difficulties, who are driving this country into debt, who are violating the very principles of responsible Government—these are the men to drive the country into annexation, if that result is to be produced, and not the gentlemen on this side. The hon. gentleman said I