

for members of this House belonged as a civil right to the local legislatures, though towards the close of his speech, after laying that down, and laying it down weightily, he said something like what the Solicitor General said. Now, I would like to ask the right hon. gentleman: if it is the function of the local legislatures to declare as a matter of civil right who shall exercise the franchise for the Dominion, by what right do you sit in judgment on them and declare that they have done wrong, and propose to remedy the wrong? After listening to the right hon. gentleman's speech, I am reminded of the criticism that Matthew Arnold made on the first publication of a man who has since attained some celebrity: he said, "Here is a man who has some of the finest gifts that any literary man ever possessed, in speaking and writing the English language; but he cannot reason." And we might almost say the same of the right hon. gentleman. Towards the close he made an argument as to expediency. He said, would it not be a nice thing if all the provinces voted on the same franchise as the Dominion, and the Dominion voted on the same franchise as all the provinces? I do not know whether he meant that they should be uniform, or whether he means that no matter how bizarre or how different the franchises in the various provinces might be, still there was something beautiful and symmetrical in electing members to this House on the same franchise. But when the British North America Act expressly declares that it is for this House to decide what shall be the franchise for sending men to this Parliament, it is far from symmetrical, far from logical and far from expedient that we should give to other assemblies the right of making that decision. Is it not absurd to argue in that way, with the words of an hon. and learned gentleman who stands high in his party, the hon. member for West Lambton (Mr. Lister), ringing in his ears? The very words of that hon. member were these: "We have no guarantee that the provincial legislatures will legislate in the right direction." These are the words of a man who aspired to be Minister of Justice, and who, if party justice had been done, would have been Minister of Justice. The right hon. gentleman said that the provincial franchises had been in operation nineteen years without one word of complaint. Why, Sir, how can he say that? It has been demonstrated again and again here that there were complaints. It has been shown by the leader of the Opposition and by other hon. gentlemen that you actually had to legislate in this House to undo the evils of a provincial legislature; and what more solemn complaint can you have than a complaint that is crystallized into an Act of Parliament? It would have been regrettable if the right hon. gentleman had not attempted to reply to the reasoned presentation of the objections to this Act made by my hon. friend from Kent (Mr. McInerney),

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as at first he seemed inclined to do. But I must confess that I feel disappointed that we do not hear more from the Solicitor General. He is chary of giving us anything like a reasoned opinion on this subject.

The SOLICITOR GENERAL. I have no opportunity, there are so many others.

Mr. DAVIN. The hon. gentleman shakes his head; but I have so much respect for what is in that head that I think it is a pity he does not give us a reasoned opinion. Up to the present I have not heard anything which can alter the opinion I have formed of this Bill, that it is ill-conceived, founded on a wrong principle, and contradictory in its provisions, and that, if passed in its present state, it would introduce confusion into the electoral franchise of this Dominion. If this were to pass, even with such amendment as may be possible—if such a misfortune were to happen, I believe it will throw back Canada in the march of progress and be a blot upon the administration of the right hon. gentleman.

The PRIME MINISTER. My hon. friend from York (Mr. Foster) appealed to me a moment ago to correct a statement which I made that by the Act of 1885 he had disfranchised a number of voters in the province of British Columbia. The only correction I have to make is to add to that statement, and to say that by the Act of 1885 he not only disfranchised men who had the right to vote in British Columbia, but also in Prince Edward Island. Let me call his attention to a clause which was read a moment ago by the hon. member for West Assiniboia (Mr. Davin). Section 9 of the Electoral Franchise Act of 1885 enacts as follows:—

In the provinces of British Columbia and Prince Edward Island, besides the persons entitled to be registered as voters and to vote under the foregoing provisions of this Act, every person who at the time of the passing of the same—

(1) Is of the age of twenty-one years and is not by this Act or by any law of the Dominion of Canada disqualified or prevented from voting; and

(2) Is a British subject by birth or naturalization and resident in the province, and is entitled to vote in the said provinces respectively by the laws now severally existing in the same,—

Shall have a right to be registered as a voter and to vote so long as he shall continue to be qualified to vote under the provisions of the last mentioned laws and no longer.

This means that under this Act any person in New Brunswick or Prince Edward Island who was twenty-one years of age on the 20th July, 1885 when the Act was passed, was entitled to be a voter and was a voter. The first lists made in 1886 in British Columbia and Prince Edward Island were lists based on manhood suffrage, but that was only to apply to those who were of age on the 20th July, 1885 or at the