

tion. He said: I overheard a remark made on this side of the House that this is the old story. It comes from an eminent authority. There is a very old story, and one older than this, concerning doing righteousness and refraining from evil, and the object of this Bill is in line with that old story. The Bill of which I now move the second reading is supplementary to a Bill that the Minister of Marine and Fisheries has alluded to, which was under the consideration of the House for two or three sessions before its provisions were accepted, and which after its passage by this House was regularly passed for three or four years before it finally succeeded in securing the sanction of the Senate. That Bill provided that an age of consent should be established by law, and that the seduction of a female of previously chaste character under the age of 16 and above the age of 14 should be a misdemeanour. The law provided that under 14 years the crime should be a felony. That law has been on the Statute-book for many years. The character of the law and its operation are no longer mere theory; but it may be reasonably claimed that the law has proved to be eminently satisfactory, that its working has been satisfactory, and that it is a law which a very small proportion of the people would ask the repeal of at the present time, although it was very bitterly opposed when first introduced and discussed. This Bill proposes in its first section to extend the age of consent from 16 to 18. I imagine there can be no doubt of the truth of the assertion that if it is proper to protect a young girl of the age of 16, it is not improper to protect a young girl up to the age of 18. It will be found on examining the statutes of the various states and countries which have dealt with this question, that in many cases the law throws its shield of protection around the girl up to 18 years. The Bill asks that the protection in this respect should be extended to that age. We had last session a deluge of petitions asking for this amendment to the Criminal Code. These petitions have not been placed before the House to the same extent during the present session, but there were hundreds last year, and the character of the petitions and the sources from which they came clearly proved that the feeling in favour of the age of consent being raised to 18 years is very widespread, if not universal.

The language of the first section of the Bill is as follows:—

1. Section 181 of the Criminal Code, 1892, is hereby amended by substituting the word "eighteen" for the word "sixteen" in the fifth line thereof.

Section 181 of the Criminal Code is as follows:—

Every one is guilty of an indictable offence, and liable to two years' imprisonment who seduces or has illicit connection with any girl of previously chaste character of or above the age of

Mr. CHARLTON.

fourteen years and under the age of sixteen years.

The amendment proposed is to substitute 18 instead of 16. The same provisions in respect to corroborative evidence will apply under the Bill as now apply under the existing law. The principle of the change was accepted last year by the right hon. Premier and it was accepted by the former Premier, Sir John Thompson, if I am not mistaken, and with the sanction of both of these authorities, and with the evidence that so strong a sentiment exists in the country in favour of the change, we may reasonably conclude that the change asked for in this Bill is one that will meet with public approval; and certainly I consider that it will be a change in the public interest, that it will secure in a greater degree the chastity of young females, a matter of very great importance in establishing society upon a safe basis in this or any other country.

The second section of the Bill proposes to amend section 182 of the Criminal Code. That section is as follows:—

Every one above the age of twenty-one years is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to two years' imprisonment who under promise of marriage seduces and has illicit connection with any unmarried female of previously chaste character and under twenty-one years of age.

The law as it now stands assumes that a male is not responsible for this crime until he is 21 years of age. I propose by this Bill to raise the age of consent to 18 years, from which time a female must care for herself, and it is proposed at the same time to make the male liable for the crime of seduction under promise of marriage from the age of 18 years. I can see no reason why a male should be exempt from accountability and punishment between 18 and 21 years. Certainly he is responsible at 18 years. The Bill, if passed, will change the age of consent by the female from 16 to 18 years, when she must care for herself; and the Bill also asks that the male shall be responsible for the Act declared criminal not from and after 21 years, but from and after the age of 18 years.

The third section of the Bill provides for an amendment to section 283 of the code, and it reads as follows:—

3. Section 283 of the said code is hereby amended by substituting the words "twenty-one" for the word "sixteen" in the fourth and last lines thereof.

Section 283, which we propose to amend, is as follows:—

Every one is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to five years' imprisonment who unlawfully takes or causes to be taken any unmarried girl, being under the age of sixteen years, out of the possession and against the will of her father or mother, or of any other person having the lawful care or charge of her.

2. It is immaterial whether the girl is taken with her own consent or at her own suggestion or not.