

duty. They made the public thoroughly conversant with the features of this measure and with the principles upon which it was based, and it speaks well for the general intelligence of the people that they read with attention and care and thoroughly appreciated and understood the character of the measure which my hon. friend proposes to repeal. I have no doubt of this, that the First Minister does not like to place a measure on the Statute-book and afterwards admit he made a mistake. He is advancing in years, and it would be a handsome act on his part on this occasion, and it would not in any way be derogatory to his dignity or his influence in this House, if he were to admit that he made a mistake, and now assist us in repealing the measure and in righting the wrong that he committed in 1885. I am perfectly sure that the friends of the hon. gentleman who sit behind him if he made that announcement would cheer him much more heartily than they cheered the speech of his colleague the Minister of Justice.

Mr. DESJARDINS (L'Islet). In addressing the House for the first time I must beg the indulgence of my colleagues while I offer a few remarks. Although a new member of the House, the question under debate is not new to me. When it was first brought under discussion in Parliament I had the honour of occupying a seat in the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Quebec, and from that distant point I followed with interest the very important proceedings of this House. I read from day to day the reports of the speeches *pro* and *con* on the measure submitted for the consideration of hon. members. I thus ascertained the objections of the Opposition to the Bill and the reasons advanced in support of the measure. I remember very well that the first outcry raised in the House was that the Government in proposing such a measure were striking at the provincial autonomy of the provinces. I remember also that it was prophesied at the time that the working of the measure would involve a very large expenditure, and hon. gentlemen sitting on the left of Mr. Speaker, who are always so cautious on the question of public expenditure, were rather afraid of the consequences. In the Legislature of Quebec the Federal Government was attacked for seeking to establish a federal franchise at great expense, and I very well remember that there I heard the strongest denunciations of the Federal Government for trampling under foot the provincial rights. I am free to declare here to-night that at the time I was not carried away nor frightened by this discussion, and that I mustered sufficient courage to take my stand in the Local Legislature of Quebec in favour of the Dominion Franchise Act. Since that time, on several occasions, before many public meetings in the Province of Quebec, I have been called upon to express my opinion on this part of the policy of the Dominion Government, and the stand I adopted in the Local Legislature I took, as it was my duty to do, before those public meetings. To-night we have to decide whether the law is to be repealed or maintained. We have heard two of the hon. gentlemen opposite, leaders of the Opposition, again repeating, although in somewhat briefer form, their objections to the measure. We have heard no new arguments from them whatever; it is a revised edition of what has been said in the House for several years past, not augmented but

much decreased. There were two points raised by hon. gentlemen who have spoken on the other side. The hon. member for Huron (Mr. Cameron) employed all his effort to prove that the Bill is an outrageous one, because of the errors committed in the preparation of the lists, and the other hon. gentleman pointed to the question of expenditure. In the few remarks which I intend to make, with all due respect to the two hon. gentlemen opposite, I will try to look at the question from a little higher standpoint. So far in the debate I have not heard a repetition of the argument which was formerly used that the Bill was a violation of the federal principle of the constitution. I have not heard it repeated to-night that it was a violation of provincial rights. On this subject I will repeat in a few words what I said in the Legislature of Quebec. When the sovereign authority of the Crown, with the sanction of the Imperial Parliament, gave us this constitution which has been now working so well for the last 25 years, it was based on the federal principle it is true, but if we want this constitution to work well, and to produce all the good results we have reason to expect from it, we must never forget that if there is such a thing as provincial autonomy there is also such a thing as federal autonomy. I said in the Local Legislature that it was most absurd to pretend that when the Federal Parliament in the due exercise of its constitutional rights decides upon the question that hereafter there should be a Franchise Bill for the Dominion of Canada, and I repeat now,—it is most absurd to pretend that there is in this a violation of provincial rights. If a measure had been brought forward in this House to declare what would be the provincial franchise for the provincial elections, well and good, then there would have been a violation of provincial rights. If a measure had been brought into the Local Legislature of Quebec to provide for a federal franchise, then there would have been a violation of federal rights and federal autonomy, but so long as the Federal Parliament and the Provincial Legislature remain prudently and wisely within the limits of their jurisdiction, where is the violation of rights on one side or the other? I cannot see any. Perhaps I have to regret that I have not the keen intellect of hon. gentlemen opposite, for if I were so endowed I might see more clearly into the matter. I take the question from its very root, when I say that the right of the Federal Parliament to provide for the Dominion franchise is undeniable. This right was inserted in the British North America Act by the legislative power which alone in the world had the right to insert it, that is, the Imperial Parliament. I call the attention of the House to the fact that when the Imperial Parliament had to legislate to give a new constitution to the Dominion of Canada, it would have been absurd and completely nonsensical not to give to this Parliament the right to declare what would be the franchise of the electors to select the members of this House. If the Imperial Parliament had not given this House control of its franchise, it would have been creating a body without a soul. If the principle announced by the opponents of the franchise law were to be carried into application, we would require an amendment to the constitution under the British North America Act to declare that the right of legislating upon the Dominion franchise would be hereafter vested in the