

House of Commons Debates.

FIFTH SESSION—EIGHTH PARLIAMENT.

SPEECH

OF

NICHOLAS FLOOD DAVIN, M.P.

ON

INQUIRY INTO ELECTION FRAUDS

OTTAWA, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 14, 1900

Mr. NICHOLAS FLOOD DAVIN (West Assinibola). Mr. Speaker, I am sure that the House has listened with a great deal of interest and edification to the speech which has fallen from the hon. member for North Norfolk (Mr. Charlton). Nothing could be more interesting to this House, nothing more worthy of its attention, than to discuss its demeanour and efficiency. I am glad that the right hon. gentleman (Sir Wilfrid Laurier) was not in the House a few moments ago when one of his foremost followers declared that the conduct, the demeanour and the dignity of the House have fallen so low under the leadership of the right hon. gentleman that twenty-five years ago, when this country, generally, was not as advanced as it is to-day, it was far ahead of what it is now, under the leadership of the right hon. gentleman.

Mr. CHARLTON. I must ask the permission of my hon. friend (Mr. Davin) to set him right. I attributed none of the features I condemned to the management of the right hon. leader of the House.

Mr. DAVIN. It is no point of order. My hon. friend took his cue of dignity from the right hon. gentleman, and nobody has a better right to talk about dignity than the Prime Minister, because, I say, with truth, that nobody can assume an air of dignity better than the right hon. gentleman. But, what is the good of dignity and of demeanour, if, beneath that dignity and demeanour there is no real manliness of public character? What have we seen here to-day? When my hon. and learned friend here (Mr. Borden, Halifax) pleads for an opportunity of making an inquiry into the scandals connected with the Brockville and West Huron elections, the right hon. gentleman first blocks him by stating that he is going to go

on the line of red tape, of parliamentary etiquette, and then falls back on a declaration about his own dignity. Mr. Speaker, I wonder if you have ever seen the picture Dignity and Impudence? I will say here, with all deference to the right hon. gentleman, that where a Prime Minister, in the face of such scandals as were revealed here last year, before the whole country and before parliament, puts up his thin screen of dignity to block inquiry, impudence and dignity go very close together. We have had, in the history of this country, and in the history of all countries, specimens of dignity and of politeness where there was not much solidity of character. The exquisite urbanity of Charles II. has passed into a proverb, but the epitaph on Charles II. was:

Here lies our mutton-eating king,
Whose word no man relies on;
He never said a foolish thing,
He never did a wise one.

I do not know whether the right hon. gentleman is fond of mutton, but I do know that he very seldom falls to say just the right thing. I wish I could add that he never failed to do the right thing. He never fails to say the right thing; he never succeeds in doing it; and certainly to-day he failed to do the right thing, when my hon. friend (Mr. Borden, Halifax) asked for the opportunity of doing that which is the great privilege of a member of parliament. Why, Sir, what is the meaning of this parliament where we are speaking? What is its great function? It is not only the great consult, but it is the great inquest of the nation, and we are here to inquire into and to probe everything. I say here, Mr. Speaker, that not one of the many things that during these last four years have disfigured that government, and disfigured the reputation