

most potent of all influences, the influence of experience. He showed the impression prevailed at the time that because the Indians were wards of the Government they should not be enfranchised. The argument was followed up still more fully by the hon. member for Lambton (Mr. Lister), who showed that the great danger felt in respect to the enfranchisement of Indians was that they were wards of the Government, and it was therefore supposed the Government of the day would exercise an overwhelming controlling influence over them and they would not be in a position to give free votes and exercise the franchise freely and intelligently. Those hon. gentlemen went into the evidence on this point, and they proved to the House conclusively, in my judgment, that all the fears entertained in regard to the enfranchisement of the Indians had proved to be delusive, that they exercised the franchise as intelligently and independently as any other class of the electors, that instead of being entirely swayed by the Government, they had again and again, although somewhat dependent on the Government, shown their independence by dividing their votes, in a great many cases, about equally between the two political parties. Those hon. gentlemen showed that the Indians were perfectly qualified to vote, and they proved by many long years' experience in those counties where the Indians, in very considerable numbers live, that they were well qualified to exercise the franchise in a wise, judicious and independent manner. I put it to my hon. friend whether he can find any Liberal Government in the world, except the Government of the province of Nova Scotia, where a Liberal party ever attempted to induce Parliament to take away the franchise from men to whom it had been entrusted, who had been exercising it, without being able to show that those men had in the slightest degree failed to discharge in an independent and intelligent manner the duties imposed on them.

My right hon. friend is in a very awkward position when he finds his friends to the right of him and to the left of him complaining of this provision in the Bill. It is not these unfortunate Tories whose opinions have no weight with my right hon. friend who are now complaining, but it is his strongest supporters who tell him that they would regard it as an outrage and as a complete abandonment of these great principles of Liberalism for which they have long fought and of which they thought the right hon. gentleman was an exponent; if, as he now proposes, he disfranchises a large class of the population. Long ago the question was decided as to whether the Indians should be enfranchised or not, and year after year they have proved that they possessed all the qualifications necessary to exercise the franchise in a wise, independent, and judicious manner in the interests of the country. For the leader of the Government

to deprive them of that franchise, without being able to advance a reason for his action, is a thing for which you will search in vain for a parallel all the world over. You might find some fossilized Tory who would go back on Liberal principles and who would not regard the importance of maintaining good faith with a large body of the electorate; but except in one memorable instance where a Liberal Government of Nova Scotia tried to do something of the same kind, you cannot find in parliamentary history any attempt to take away the franchise from a section of the population to whom it had been entrusted, and who for many years had wisely exercised it.

This is a most significant illustration of the vicious character of this measure, and to-night the Premier's own friends point it out to him. It is all very well to say that the legislatures of the provinces shall have the right to exercise their judgment as to who shall have the franchise. They have shown in the different provinces that they differ very widely on that question, but so far as their own legislature is concerned, they have an indefeasible right to exercise their judgment and to say what class of the community shall elect its members. But, Sir, it is an entirely different thing when you undertake to say that you are going to turn over to the provincial legislatures the power to say what shall be the franchise on which members of this great Federal Parliament of the Dominion are elected. It is a very different thing when you come to legislate here, that you shall commit to half a dozen independent legislatures in which you have no voice, all of them differing more or less one from the other on the question of franchise; the control over the representation in this Federal Parliament. It would be bad enough if it were to rest there, and if you were to legislate that the existing franchise laws of the provinces should be the franchise of the Dominion, but under the present Bill you have no security whatever as to that. You have not even the security that in these provinces the franchise for this Dominion Parliament will be the same as they intend to use for themselves. If you were to take the provincial franchises of to-day it would be bad enough, but it would at least have the merit of being permanent. The members of this House and the men who are to be candidates for seats in this House in years to come, will be in a frightful position indeed if we in this Parliament adopt a franchise law that enables a local legislature, after a general election in that province has been held, to change the franchise and to manufacture a special franchise law, not for the purpose of the representation in their own legislature, but for the purpose of controlling the Federal Parliament of Canada. If we pass this Bill we will give the local legislature the power of adopting a franchise without the slightest intention of using it themselves, but for the