

people were brought before it; and I will venture to hope that it is in consequence of the experience which hon. gentlemen have had, in consequence of the obvious truth of the propositions we then advanced, as to the results of the so-called amendments of the law, which they then passed, that they have placed so prominently before us at the first Session after the application of the practical test of that law the proposition that the laws relating to the representation of the people in Parliament require amendment. I recollect that our position at that time—speaking for the moment with respect to the Province in which we stand and which was the Province mainly, I may say exclusively, affected by that particular amendment, was this: parties were represented here by a strength of, I think, 26 on the side of the Opposition and 62 on the side of the Administration, giving the Government a majority in that Province of about 36. It was alleged, indeed, by those who supported the Administration, that they were stronger in that Province in popular opinion than they had been at any previous time; but prudent men do not rely on their own conviction of their strength; they make things sure, and notwithstanding those vauntings of increased strength, precautions were taken to make that increased strength greater still. And so I contend that the results have shown the effect of that measure to be diametrically opposed to the true theory of popular representation. It was to produce the suppression of, instead of the extension of popular opinion. The change in public opinion was certainly very great. Amongst the constituencies which were changed in their bounds, with the view of making the Government very much stronger, so strong that it would be impossible to overwhelm them, were a great number in which, notwithstanding those changes in the bounds, public opinion pronounced itself, as evidenced by the returns to Parliament, adversely to the Administration. Those results are to be found in North York, North Ontario, North Wellington, South Wentworth, East Huron, East Bruce, South Brant, South Perth, East Elgin, East York, East Lambton, South Norfolk and other places. I say, in those constituencies which were altered in order to make that which was thought sure, surer still, the Act of Parliament to which I have referred, and which, I presume, it is intended to invite us to amend, so as to redress those wrongs, failed of its object, and members of the Liberal party were returned in spite of the amendment. The general return was 37 Opposition instead of 26, and the adverse majority was reduced from 36 to 18. But I admit that the hon. gentleman was not wholly unsuccessful in effecting the object of that Act—which was for the purpose of suppressing instead of expressing public opinion—for eight seats there were in the Province in which, judging by the returns, it was necessary to make alterations, and the alterations made were successful. Eight seats there were which, if any fair alterations had been made either to existing bounds or to considerations which ought to have had weight in the minds of the Legislature, would have returned Opposition members. Why, there is one of those cases in which the constituency has, within my Parliamentary experience, been changed twice in order to secure—as a gradual weakening took place in the strength of the hon. gentleman's principles in that constituency—the triumph of those principles at the polls, and for three Parliaments it has been represented by a supporter of hon. gentlemen opposite by virtue not of popular election in the proper sense, but of an Act of Parliament which from time to time changed the bounds. Now, if the object be to obtain, even approximately, an accurate representation of popular opinion, I say those are traitors to the principle and object of representation who legislate so as to thwart this view; and I maintain here as I have maintained elsewhere—I take the first opportunity of stating it here—that the general results of the poll in the Province to which this legislation was applied are such as prove that the popular opinion was

Mr. BLAKE.

suppressed instead of being expressed. There were in that Province, I think, two acclamation elections—one of which you, Mr. Speaker, were the happy recipient, and the other, my hon. friend from the South Riding of Lanark, who made his constituency so safe that he was unopposed. I say that there were two acclamation elections, and there were also a few others in which the contests were of such a character that some allowances have to be made. These, however, do not materially affect the results; but making the most reasonable allowances that can be made I take the total poll as 29,500, of which, I believe, there belong to the Ministerial party 136,300, and to the Opposition 133,200, giving to the former a majority of the people at the polls of 3,100 only, or about 1 per cent. I believe that the true result, if the constituencies had expressed it here, would have been to give to the hon. gentlemen opposite from the Province to which I refer, one of a majority in this House; while, as a matter of fact, they have eighteen, or eighteen times more than that amount. I see the hon. member for Monck (Mr. McCallum) smiling at me; of course he knows that if this true result had been obtained he would not have been here to smile. If you turn to the district in which we are sitting here, in which this House is held, to the eastern district with its thirty seats, a true poll would have given about sixteen to hon. gentlemen opposite and fourteen to friends of mine; but the returns in Parliament give twenty-seven to hon. gentlemen opposite and three to friends of mine. These results to a certain extent were to be anticipated from the unfair character in the distribution as it stood, and which was accelerated, enlarged, enhanced by the changes which were made in this very district, and which as is proved by the return, resulted in the abstraction from us of the North Riding of Lanark, the old bounds of which returned a Reformer, and the Riding of Brockville, the old bounds of which returned a Reformer. Strength being taken away from us by the distribution of the district, in which we were to have too few seats on any fair competition as matters stood, and in which we were deprived even of two of those too few seats, therefore, that consideration to which I have referred was not bestowed on the task of amending the Act. But that is not all, Sir. There is another particular in which those Acts require amendment, in which the law as it was ought to be restored and the alterations which under the guise of amendments taking place ought to be replaced by another amendment. The Government proposed, and the late House adopted the view, that the power of nominating returning officers should be left in the hands of and at the discretion of the Administration. That had been the law; and the law had been changed, and certain public officers, having a stake in the county, and residing there, owing to themselves and to their situation feeling a certain degree of restraint in political matters, and most likely on the whole to be persons who would rise to the level of their situation, were those among whom alone the choice could be made. It was made unlimited, and being unlimited it was used in such a way; and in many instances the most partisan and improper conduct was pursued by officials who were appointed at the nomination of the Administration, not merely in their own conduct but also as to the class of persons whom they appointed as deputies in the election. Now, Sir, I maintain that with a complicated system of election such as ours is, in which so many questions arise and in which so much is dependent upon the intelligence, the integrity, the honor, the impartiality of the officials, though it is in the last degree deplorable, that there should be as there was in the last election a distinct and sensible deterioration of conduct on the part of the public officials, though there should be an almost unconcealed and unveiled spirit of partizanship, leading in many cases to most lamentable results. I do not impute this to all these officers, either