

morning I left for my home in Halifax for that reason and that reason alone, expecting to return to Ottawa by noon of the following Tuesday. As I have already mentioned in this House, I did not reach Halifax on Friday evening owing to the snow blockade, but I reached there on Monday evening, more than seventy-two hours late. I left Halifax on Wednesday morning and arrived at Ottawa on Thursday evening. I think it is due to myself to make this explanation, because I do not think that in my public life I have usually been found wanting in my attendance on parliament; nor do I think that anything has been displayed in my public career which would lead any journalist of even the most suspicious type to suppose that I would have gone to Halifax on this particular occasion if it had not been absolutely necessary, in my judgment, that I should do so. I apologize to you, Mr. Speaker, and to the House for having been compelled in self defence to inflict this statement of private and personal affairs upon the House, and I know that under the circumstances the House will pardon me for doing so.

There is one other matter which I forgot to mention. On the introduction of this Bill I brought to the attention of the government the fact that a number of returns which had been moved for had not yet been brought down. I also pointed out that there was certain information which I thought would be necessary for the intelligent discussion of the questions that are to be considered in the House, and that it should be brought down in a shape to be readily available to every member of the House.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER. Mr. Speaker, I think I voice the feeling of the House when I say to my hon. friend that no apology was needed from him as to his absence from the House. Unfortunately, we are all victims of the press, and if we were to take very seriously everything that is said of us, our repose would be considerably affected. But I think we can make allowance for the newspaper men in their desire to give the latest news. Everybody knows the painful circumstances under which my hon. friend had to leave this House, and no one, I can assure him, speaking for this side, had any suspicion that his absence was due to any other cause than domestic affliction. With regard to the main question which my hon. friend has put to me, I do not agree with him as to the constitutional practice. I admit that in Canada the discussion generally takes place on the second reading of a Bill. This is so in England also; but my hon. friend is aware that in England every important measure, I do not say invariably, but as a rule, is explained by the minister in charge of the Bill upon its presentation for the first reading. Thereupon the matter is left for some time for the deliberation of the House and the

country. This practice I have followed on this occasion, and I believe yet that it is the best method. The government have explained their policy, and have left it to the judgment of the House and the country. If the Bill were to be presented without any explanation, the country would be without the real reasons which prompted the government in introducing it. If the first reading were to be followed immediately by a discussion, I think the House, especially the opposition, would be taken at a disadvantage, and the government might be charged with sharp practice; but if the Bill is left for a reasonable time after being introduced, the opposition have an opportunity to prepare and explain their views upon it. I still think this is the best policy that can be followed.

My hon. friend has asked me if it was the intention of the government to introduce changes into this Bill. I have only to reply that it is open to the party who introduces a Bill to change it at all times. I have seen few Bills introduced into this House or any deliberative assembly which have gone through the third reading without being considerably amended, and the more important the Bill the more likely is it to be amended. Even Bills of a very minor importance are very often amended so as to be hardly recognizable when they leave the committee. Whether or not any changes shall be made will be known as the Bill goes through its various stages; and if any should be made, they shall be made in the ordinary course. With regard to the information asked for by my hon. friend, I shall endeavour to comply with his request.

Mr. FOSTER. It seems to me that in addition to the information already asked, it would be advisable that a definite summary be furnished of the different changes, dating from confederation, in the financial terms which have taken place to the benefit of the provinces. There has been legislation in various years, adding to the provincial subsidies. If a concise memo. could be made of all these changes with reference to each of the provinces, showing the additions that each one has received to its subsidy and matters of that kind, that would help us very much when we come to discuss the financial clauses of this measure.

Mr. FIELDING. I agree with my hon. friend that a memo. of that character would be useful, and shall endeavour to have it produced before the second reading of the Bill is proceeded with.

Hon. PETER WHITE. It would be desirable that in the case of a long speech such as that which was delivered by the right hon. the leader of the government when introducing this Bill, a copy of the Bill should be also at the time, before the House. It would be well hereafter that members of the