

which give the true meaning of precedent, and let me ask him to apply them to this great and progressive Canada, with its future to a great extent what he now chooses to make it :

A land of settled government,
A land of just and old renown,
Where freedom broadens slowly down
From precedent to precedent.

Canada cannot achieve the great destiny before her unless all her provinces are on an equality, unless all her people have equal rights and equal privileges. Do we appeal in vain to the former champions of provincial rights?

Mr. WALTER SCOTT moved the adjournment of the debate.

Motion agreed to.

On motion of Mr. Fielding, House adjourned at 12.25 a.m., Friday.

HOUSE OF COMMONS.

FRIDAY, March 31, 1905.

The SPEAKER took the Chair at Three o'clock.

ORDERS OF THE DAY.

ABSENCE OF MINISTERS AND CABINET VACANCY.

Mr. R. L. BORDEN (Carleton, Ont.). Before the Orders of the Day are called, I wish once more to call to the attention of the House the quite unprecedented condition of affairs which exists at the present time. During many months we have not had in this House the presence of the Minister of Public Works (Mr. Sutherland). That gentleman is one of my personal friends, although we are opposed in politics, and no one regrets more than I do the unfortunate circumstance that illness prevents him from taking his place among us, and any remarks which I have to make with regard to violation of constitutional usage by the government are, of course, not connected in any way with that gentleman, because I would be very glad indeed to have him restored to us, to once more have his assistance in the House and to have him back at work in his department again.

But my right hon. friend seems to take for granted that he is at liberty, so long as he may see fit, to deprive parliament and the country of the services of a Minister of Public Works possessing the authority and invested with the responsibility which that position gives to him. I have looked a little into this question, which has arisen more than once in Great Britain, and I find that the rule there acted upon is not at all in accordance with that

Mr. LAKE.

suggested by the right hon. gentleman. To cite just one instance, in 1871, action was taken in both Houses of parliament in regard to the absence of Mr. Childers, the First Lord of the Admiralty, during the early part of the session, on account of the state of his health, and within a month after his resignation took place. It has been asserted in this House, I do not know with what truth, that the Minister of Public Works some time ago placed his resignation in the hands of the right hon. gentleman, or at all events told him that his portfolio was at his service whenever the interests of the country required it. However that may be, I wish courteously to place on record a remonstrance against the continuance of this condition of affairs. I do not think there is any warrant for it under the constitution. Indeed, I do not think there is any warrant for it under the terms of the Order in Council which was discussed somewhat last session, and under which one minister of the Crown may under certain circumstances act for another minister of the Crown.

On another occasion, which is referred to by Mr. Todd in his work on constitutional government, Lord John Russell had accepted the seals of the Colonial Office, at a time when he was absent on a diplomatic mission in Vienna. Within two weeks after he had accepted the seals of office, the matter was brought to the attention of parliament, and again on two or three occasions subsequently, and was made the occasion of a grave criticism of the administration, which only ceased when he took his place in parliament on the 28th of April. Now, so far as my hon. friend the Minister of Public Works is concerned, he has been absent from his duties in parliament and from his duties in the department for a very long time; and if there be any foundation for the rumour that he is ready to surrender the seals of office at a moment's notice, I do not know for what reason the right hon. gentleman proposes to carry on the business of the country in the way in which it is carried on at the present time.

We have not only the case of the Minister of Public Works, but we have what seems to me a much more serious violation of constitutional usage in the conduct of the government with respect to the vacant portfolio of the Interior. I do not want to repeat to-day what has already been said in this House. I have asked the Prime Minister more than once for an explanation of his extraordinary conduct in passing over that gentleman in introducing a very important measure, a most momentous measure, into this parliament without even having submitted the terms of perhaps its most important clause to that gentleman, although his return was daily expected. My right hon. friend has treated that very