

in the interests of our own country and in the interests of the Mother-country. Only on that ground—the want of moral courage—could anybody have charged us with not having done our duty. There is, of course, room for difference of opinion as to whether others could not have done better. We are merely human, and can only claim to do the best we can in an emergency, and it may be that others, after full criticism and knowing all the circumstances, may think they could have done better in our place. All I have to say is that the members of the Administration were unanimous in the course followed, and that we adopted it after deliberation and because we believed it to be right. I want to reaffirm that no amount of criticism, fastidious or otherwise, can in any way alter that fact. There was one item of personal element that was introduced by the honourable member for Bruce, and I think also by the leader of the Opposition, relative to what they thought the Government ought to have done in the way of consultation with the leader of the Opposition at this juncture. Now, I want to say, without the slightest offence, that I recognise, and that we all recognise, the responsibility of the leader of the Opposition in this country, or in any other country, and also that of the members who support him; but I also recognise that under the Constitution of the country there is a much greater responsibility devolving upon the Ministry of the day, and that neither the leader of the Opposition nor any one round about him can remove from the Ministry the responsibility of carrying on its constitutional work as the Executive of the country. Nothing can remove that, and if the leader of the Opposition had been consulted and had taken up a course of opposition to it, what position would the Government have been in?

Mr. ALLEN.—What are you referring to—the Dreadnought?

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—I was alluding to the offer.

Mr. ALLEN.—I did not refer to that. I thought he should have been consulted about the closing of Parliament.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—Well, some one referred to it; and I want the point clear that, so far as the Government is concerned, no one could remove responsibility—neither the leader of the Opposition nor any one else—from the Administration of the country, because the fact has to be recognised that so long as the Government is in office it is the Executive of the country, and it must accept the whole responsibility of its acts. If it makes an error of judgment, as all Governments must do sometimes, then it must accept the tremendous responsibility attaching to its position in such a case as the present one. I want to say advisedly that on a question of administration the Government cannot shelter under the ægis of the leader of the Opposition or of any members of the House, or even of our own supporters. The suggestion has been made that we were not sufficiently considerate to the members of the House, our own supporters of course included, in not communicating with them by telegram. Now, I want to make clear why I did not communicate with members by telegram. We are being blamed for a course that we followed advisedly. After discussing the matter fully we were of opinion that we could not expect the individual members of Parliament, with no opportunity of conferring with other members and no opportunity of having placed before them the same information that we had in our possession, to come to a decision. We believed that if we attempted to shelter ourselves by getting members of Parliament to commit themselves to a certain course by telegraph we should be acting unfairly to them and placing them in an altogether wrong position. Whether rightly or wrongly, that was the view taken by us, and I believe it to have been the best and the right one. We came to the conclusion, in a matter unprecedented so far as this country is concerned, that we should not be justified in attempting to throw off the Executive its actual responsibilities, and, if that course was a wrong one, that we should as a Government suffer by losing our position on the Treasury benches. I also think that the members of our own party should not suffer as the result of our own action. In other words, that the members of Parliament, when they met, should be free to take whatever course they desired, or which they believed to be in the best interests of the country. Those are the reasons which influenced us, and every member of the Administration knows that to be the case. And here I want to say, with reference to the sending of a telegram to the members of the House of Representatives and receiving their *imprimatur* upon any question, I do not approve of that.

Mr. MASSEY.—Why telegram to the editors?

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—Pardon me, no editor of any newspaper in this country was consulted on this point. I am now referring to members. As to telegraphing to the editors, that was not going to help us in deciding this question, as the telegram referred to was sent after the offer of the Government had been despatched.

Mr. J. ALLEN.—It did help you.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—I think the member for Bruce really desires to see the Imperial navy helped. And surely, if anything could help the Government in such a matter, the honourable member ought to have been delighted to have seen such assistance given—an assistance that was given by a very large section of the Press of this country; and the bulk of the editors of our Press are hard-headed business men. Of course, there is an odd exception, as there is in every body of men, but the bulk of them are hard-headed and honest, and have practical knowledge, and know themselves what is best for the welfare of the Empire and of this country.

Mr. MASSEY.—I suppose you say members are not?

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—No, I do not say that. I should be very sorry to do so, or to think so, as I hold a contrary opinion. But I say that the sending of telegrams to editors was not in the nature of a consultation or a request for the ratification of the action of the Government. And the honourable gentleman must know that to be the case. The Government accepted the responsibility, as I said this afternoon, and I reaffirm it now. We did so because we were persuaded in our own mind that it was not only the right thing to do, but it was a desirable thing to do. And although I am exceedingly sorry that the member for Christchurch North should have such a poor opinion of myself as that I should be desirous of flourishing in London, I may