

one thing I am absolutely convinced of, and that is that they have not the slightest interest in the discussion of the merits of political parties at this moment.

I was about to say, when I was carried into this digression, that I am prepared to trust the people, to trust the sane judgment of the people; to trust the judgment of the people after they have had proper opportunities for information. But to-day we are dealing with a people upon whom this proposition has come unexpectedly, and they are not prepared for it. I think that members of Parliament should be guided by the opinions of the people, but by the opinions of the people arrived at and formed after opportunity for consideration, and expressed at the proper time and in the proper manner under the provisions of the constitution. The hon. member for Montcalm took us nearly all over the province of Quebec, and told us of meetings that he had attended that were against conscription, including one in my own constituency. He further warned us that it would not be safe for us to go there and say a word for conscription, because the Lachine canal is near. Well, let me tell the hon. member in turn that, when he wants to make the statement that I lied, it would not be wise for him to go back and make it in St. Anne's hall, even at a Liberal meeting, because the Lachine canal is very near.

Now, I was saying, I trust the people. I trust implicitly to their judgment when they have had opportunity for information and consideration. But I do not conceive the functions of a representative of the people to be to go around to meetings throughout the country addressing people who have not the necessary information, stirring them up to express an opinion in a certain sense, and then walk into this House and say: There is nothing more to be said; I am here to express the opinions of the people. The question what the function of a member of Parliament is under the British system is not a new question. I am not going into that question, but I would suggest to these hon. gentlemen who are so anxious about the opinion of the people that they should take a few minutes some day to read a famous speech of that great English statesman—I should rather say, that great Irishman whom Ireland gave to England to be one of her greatest statesmen—Edmund Burke. That will tell them what is the proper position of a representative of the people. Let me read a few lines. Burke was being reproached for not having

[Mr. Doherty.]

followed the opinion of his electors—the subject is not material. He said to them:

For, gentlemen, it is not your fond desires, nor mine, that can alter the nature of things; by contending against which, what have we got, or ever shall get, but defeat and shame? I did not obey your instructions. No; I conformed to the instructions of truth and nature, and maintained your interest, against your opinions, with a constancy that became me. A representative worthy of you ought to be a person of stability. I am to look, indeed, to your opinions; but to such opinions as you and I must have five years hence. I was not to look to the flash of the day.

We owe a duty to the people and that is not to look to the flash of the day, not to be governed by the opinions of people described by the hon. gentleman as being in a frame of mind where they throw one into the canal if he express any opinion other than what they may happen to entertain at the moment. Speaking for myself, and having respect for the people who were at these meetings, I can quite understand that at the first flash this proposal, ill-understood and worse explained, does not commend itself to their judgment but when it is brought to their attention and properly explained I am satisfied they will give it their approval. I am satisfied that if, by any mistake on the part of this Government and Parliament, we should decide to let this question be settled at this moment by a vote taken without further preparation, upon the submission of this sole question to the people when they are being appealed to in the most powerful way and by the most eloquent gentlemen to resist and reject this proposal, that if we should subject the honour of Canada to being soiled by the possibly unfortunate result of a vote taken under these circumstances by the people ill-informed and without proper explanation, these very people themselves, when they saw the result, would never forgive us for what we had done. They would tell us, in the words of Edmund Burke: You should not have been governed by the flash of the moment; you should have waited for our opinion one year, two years or three years hence when we shall be in a position to appreciate the possible results; perhaps even to know the actual results of the decision you are called upon to make.

Now, I feel that I owe the House and yourself, Mr. Speaker, an apology for the length at which I have allowed myself to be led into going in connection with this most important question. I do not know that I can flatter myself that what I have said can alter the views of any man but at least I feel that the best thought that I have been able to give to the most im-