

the British constitution that there should be a limitation to the time during which a parliament might sit before being sent back to the people to consult the electorate, but that likewise it was a good provision that the government of the day should choose the opportune moment to appeal to the people. Well, Mr. Speaker, that statement needs qualification. The Prime Minister knows, as the leader of the opposition and everyone familiar with the history of the British constitution know, that the limitation upon the prerogative of the king to maintain parliament as long as the king thought fit was imposed upon the crown after centuries of struggle, after the great revolutions of 1646 and 1688, in order to prevent a repetition of such abuses which took their most acute and concrete form in the maintenance of the Long Parliament; and that was a victory of British common sense over the instinct of autocracy which is dormant in the rulers of all lands, English as well as others.

However, there is another aspect to the question with regard to the power of dissolution, and here, at the risk of meeting my fate as the leader of the opposition did yesterday, I will quote my authority. A good many years ago I was struck with the opinion expressed by so conservative a thinker and writer as Mr. Lecky, who wrote in such a happy manner, so quietly and unpretentiously but so clearly and so much to the point, which made him and my late friend Goldwin Smith, opposed as they were in everything, the most delightful writers of constitutional history of whom I knew or read. Lecky made the observation that the evolution of constitutional government as practised in England from the time of John Lackland to the present day has been, first, a victory of aristocracy over the king, then a gradual gain of communal liberties over aristocracy and the king; then, as in France, a kind of unwritten understanding between the king and the commons against the aristocracy or, at times, between the king and the aristocracy against the people. In other words, the king relied on the commons to curtail the powers of the lords and upon the lords to curb the pretensions of the commons. But through all those struggles there proceeded a development which very few observed at the time, namely, the growth of autocratic and oligarchic power of the cabinet over king, lords and commons. As a true Britisher, sir, and a true Canadian, also—though I am not too proud of it—as a democrat who is forced to live in a democracy, I deprecate the exercise of that autocratic will of the cabinet to decide at

[Mr. Bourassa.]

the pleasure of ten or twelve gentlemen, possibly men of genius; generally, I hope, honest men, but for the most part, in this as in all other countries, politicians who are more concerned about the fate of their party than about important matters of state. It is but natural that a government composed only of angels and archangels would have a sorry life in a terrestrial community. There would be too great a discrepancy between the ordinary level of public morality and the mentality of a ministry of that type. A prime minister, therefore, is careful not to choose too many of that kind in selecting the members of the cabinet or replenishing its numbers when vacancies occur. Since the cabinet, then, must be composed of average men presumed to represent the people, they should not decide behind closed doors what the date of an election shall be, simply because it may be convenient for ministers representing Ontario to have the election this year, or for representatives of Quebec another year, or for western representatives this month or that, without concerning themselves for five minutes—well, yes, they may concern themselves for say fifteen minutes—with the wishes of their partisans. But generally, they decide such matters beforehand and then call a caucus. Thirty years ago I assisted in three or four caucuses—and never went back. Having thus decided, they implore the acquiescence of their friends—I mean such of them as are strong enough to resist—whereupon they pounce it upon the heads of the rest. That is generally the result of caucuses; that is well known on both sides.

But there is something of much more importance than consulting the opinion of 110 or 120 gentlemen sitting on this or on any side of the house, and that is consulting the interests of the country, consulting the interests of trade. Everybody knows that a general election is an inconvenience to the trade of the country, and this is especially true with respect to a general election in the period in which we now find ourselves—an election which may come this year, may come within six months or be delayed for eighteen. Our present system is worse than the system in the United States. I have long ceased to do what is so frequently done in this house—to copy the Americans, or to taunt my opponents because they may say something which savours of Americanism. The United States is a great nation; the United States government, like all others, has its faults and its good qualities. The United States constitution is in many respects inferior to the British, but in some respects it is superior. Having regard to the conditions in a country