

Our Duty

"It would not follow, however, and certainly it was never intended by me nor by any of those who sit around me that, when we were summoned to Parliament and called upon to pass judgment, to sanction or not to sanction the measures brought down by the Government in consequence of the War, we were to abdicate our judgment and to sit here as recording machines, simply to register the decisions of the Government. We are still of the opinion that the War is the supreme issue; but if we believe that in the method of carrying on the War, in the policy proposed by the Government, there be errors of judgment or otherwise, then it is our imperative duty to cry, 'Halt;' to show the mistakes, to point out the true course, and to use every endeavour to prevent the mistakes from being carried into effect. When we come to matters of this kind, it is always well to refer to England, where parliamentary government is certainly better understood than in any other part of the world." (Applause.)

The Situation in Great Britain and Canada

"The situation in Great Britain is exactly the same as in Canada. There the duty of the Government and the rights of the Opposition have been again and again discussed, and the judgment of the country has sanctioned the course pursued by both parties. It may be well here that I should quote in this respect an article of great authority, published in the Saturday Review, giving opinion upon the very question which exists in England as it exists here to-day. I commend to the House the following language:

"The brilliant speeches of Lord Curzon and Lord Selborne last week will help to remind the Government that the right of criticism and inquiry is claimed in war time as well as in peace. It would be quite fatal to the Parliamentary system if this right were for a moment in question. It would reduce our political system to absurdity if the duty and function of an Opposition automatically ceased whenever the Government of the day was called on to grapple with a big and critical problem. In time of war, as in time of peace, it is the duty of the Opposition to watch constantly and jealously the men to whom the task is given of employing to the best of their ability the resources and wisdom of the country. In time of war this task mainly resolves itself into finding the right men for the work in hand, and in securing that they shall have all the support they require in material and in authority

"The Opposition must consider itself as deputed to guard against any wasting of the nation's manhood or treasure. Should the Opposition become aware of, or should it reasonably suspect, incompetence or bad faith in any responsible minister or in any political group, it is its duty to speak out and call the accused to a strict account. Such action has nothing to do with party politics

"The Opposition cannot surrender its right of criticism and thorough inquiry into such matters as these without grossly failing in its duty to the country