

office, I would invoke the grace and charity of the members in respect to my very imperfect address.

Before proceeding further, Sir, permit me to congratulate you upon your elevation to the high office which you at present hold. You are successor to a long line of distinguished men, who have presided over this House with dignity and conducted the affairs with decorum. I was very much pleased the other day to hear the distinguished leader of the Opposition, and the no less distinguished Minister of Trade and Commerce, pay their tribute to those who had held the office which you now fill. They are two of our oldest statesmen, and their testimony as to the manner in which the debates in this House have been presided over by the various Speakers is a tribute indeed to our system of government. I congratulate you, Sir, as the first comonomer of Canada.

The proceedings connected with the opening of this House have always interested me. In the routine which we go through, there are many forms which have long since outlived their substance. For instance, that highly ornate and picturesque insignia which is indispensable to the opening of our proceedings, the mace, has evidently, indeed obviously, its prototype in the chieftain's club; and our genial and amiable Sergeant-at-arms is, I have no doubt, the lineal descendant of the armour-bearer. Moving the address itself has always struck me as having something of the dramatic about it. I think it smacks of the stage. In fact, the function I am about to perform is very much a prelude to our national drama; it smacks of a curtain-raiser, if you will. The stage is set, the actors are all in their places, and our great national drama is about to begin once again. And what actors, Mr. Speaker, have appeared on this our national stage since our national life began! What voices have these walls re-echoed, as the destiny of our country has been written by the various men who have sat on the treasury benches from time to time! I fancy that every inflection of the human voice has been heard within these walls during our national history. All honour to the men who have occupied these prominent positions, and all honour to-day to the two leaders of our national parties who are devoting their lives to the work of benefiting their country. These gentlemen do not always see eye to eye, but I believe, and I think the House believes, that each one follows what he

[Mr. A. Thompson.]

believes to be right, and acts according to the light as he sees it. The historian of the future will give each of these distinguished men his proper place in our temple of fame.

I think it is particularly fortunate at this time we have the Duke of Connaught, the warrior statesman, as Governor General at Rideau Hall. He brings to his office the experience gained during a lifetime in the courts of Europe, in the military camps of the Empire, and at the council tables in Britain, in India, in Ireland, and for several years in Canada. His term of office here has been characterized by that prudence, foresight, and judgment which we all admire in our Governor General.

The legislative programme for this session, judging from the speech from the Throne, is rather brief; but although brief it is none the less important. The chief matter which we have to consider is the extension of our parliamentary term. For the first time since Confederation we have decided to pass an address asking the Imperial Parliament to extend the term of our Parliament. I hardly think, Sir, that the proposal needs any defence from any member of the Government, or from any one in this House. The logic of events during the past year and a half is in itself sufficient to warrant our asking the Imperial Parliament to extend our term. The winning of the war, this great world-shaking war, is the overshadowing issue to-day in Canada, as well as in every other part of the British Empire; and, that being so, this Ministry must have an eye single to this great contest; they must be able to devote their energies to this great issue; and it is for the purpose of removing the possibility of an election in the interim between this and the next session of Parliament that an extension of our parliamentary term is desired. I say that this war is such an overshadowing and overwhelming issue that nothing else must be permitted to stand in the way. The Ministry must feel that they have the confidence of the people, and while I believe they have, and they believe they have, I think the time is opportune to give them an extension of their term. If there is any doubt in the mind of any member of the House, or any doubt in the minds of the Ministers, I think that doubt should be removed. In a word, I think they should have absolute freedom of action in order to consecrate their energies to this great question of the war. The load which the Prime Minister and his colleagues have been carrying for the last year and a half has been a huge-