

came from the Liberal party are not so numerous as they were before. My hon. friend quotes some six or seven; he claims, I think, that there were eight who were there. Well there are five to-day, and there is one who has been deceased for only a very few days, so that it seems to me it is straining a little too much to say that a reduction from eight to six is such a breach of the whole constitution of this country that we are landed now in chaos.

When my hon. friend was being carried away with the magnificence of his own declamation, particularly in those last fifty awful sentences, surely the thought came to his mind—and if it did not, it must have come to the minds of many of those who sit around him—that he was overdrawing the picture; that even if everything he had argued for was right, even if the little points he made had driven him to the conclusion that he sought, he had wholly overstated the consequence and so grossly exaggerated it that it was becoming pretty close to the absurd. Is the whole moral structure of this country going to go to pieces, because a Government retains office when Parliament has by no means run its full term but when in the main the great issue upon which it was elected has been decided? Even if he is right in his contention, does it necessarily follow that there has been some terrible, vicious, vile and permanently destructive act perpetrated against the people of the country?

But in the first place, when did the doctrine first arise that after the great, say even the only, issue upon which an election is fought is decided, the government ceases to function? When was that subscribed to by any writer on constitutional law or history? When was it subscribed to even by hon. gentlemen opposite? In the history of this country there have been many elections in which there was virtually one issue, and one issue alone, upon which the verdict of the people was obtained. That was the case in 1891. That was the case in 1878. That was the case in 1904, when the late leader of the Liberal party in this country, assisted without a doubt by my hon. friend, went to the electors of Canada on the issue of building the ill-fated Transcontinental railway. When he was returned, with the help of my hon. friend upon that issue, and when, in pursuance of the mandate which they said they had obtained, they went on with the construction of that railway, did the fact that they did so mean that their functions were ended? Were

[Mr. Meighen.]

they then believers in the theory that they had no mandate from the people of this country to do anything else except to build the Transcontinental railway? And in 1911, when honorable gentlemen opposite were defeated on the issue of reciprocity, when there was indeed a new and big departure in public policy proposed in this House by hon. gentlemen opposite, and when the country was appealed to on that issue, and as a consequence reciprocity was defeated, did it follow that the Government should not continue—that they had no power for example, to deal with other grave issues that confronted the country? And even if the Prime Minister through stress of circumstances should be compelled to resign and a new Prime Minister should come, does it mean that the new Prime Minister is a usurper, and guilty of all the crimes ascribed to me by the hon. member for Prince (Mr. Mackenzie King)?

Then he told us we were the only Government in the civilized world that had denied the people the right to elect a new parliament after the Armistice. Well, I do not know that we need be very much disturbed as to the precedent that may be set in China, or even in Germany, or Austria, or Russia, but if there is anything in my hon. friend's contention that can be argued from precedent set in any of the Dominions or the Motherland, then possibly he would have said something that would have given colour to his contention. But is that the case? One would have thought by his reference to Australia that their position was quite analogous to ours, and by his reference to New Zealand that the case was the same there. Is he aware that in New Zealand the Government there was elected in 1914, and that although by the constitution of that Dominion they had only a three-year term for their Assembly, actually, by extending the life of Parliament, they went until December 1919, over six years, and then appealed to the country? And because, after more than six years—when their term was three—they went to the country, my hon. friend argues that in this country, after three years,—yea, a year ago, he said, after two years—when our term is five and when our election was held in December 1917, we must by virtue of the example of New Zealand, go to the country too. In the case of Australia, the facts are very similar, although there was no extension there. In the case of Great Britain, the Lloyd George government, which was the successor of the Asquith administration, but which did not feel that because Mr. Asquith retired it must appeal to the country at once, carried on for some years.