

become the signal for a fight. Legislation which breaks contracts, confiscates vested rights, or otherwise violates the great principles of jurisprudence, ought to be distinctly prohibited by the Constitution, and the decision of disputed cases, instead of being left to politicians acting under party influences, ought to be consigned to a Supreme Court.

There is also, we think it may be said, a strong body of opinion in favour of fixing the duration of Parliaments by law, and abolishing the power of dissolving them before the expiration of the term. That power is a survival from the state of things which existed before Party, and in which the real government was the Crown, while Parliaments were summoned merely to grant supplies and give advice. Under the party system it is giving rise to grave and dangerous abuse. We are rapidly coming to this, that whenever the head of a party in power, scanning the weather-cock, thinks the wind favourable, he shall be at liberty to dissolve the legislature, throw the country into the turmoil of a general election, and snatch a fresh lease of power. There is no saying how far an unscrupulous man might prolong his ascendancy by this device, if he could manage from time to time to hold out some bait to the constituencies, or to catch his opponents at a disadvantage. In the Old Country the exercise of the Prerogative is restrained by settled custom, and by the comparative moderation of British statesmen; yet even in the Old Country there is danger of misuse. Mr. Gladstone's dissolution in 1874 was scarcely more justified by constitutional principle than it was dictated by good tactics; he appealed from Parliament to the country on no great question, and the bait, held out in his address, of a reduction of the income tax, betrayed the real nature of the step. That his government had lost strength was not a sufficient ground for cutting short the life of a Parliament. Sir John Macdonald's dissolution on the last occasion, was equally unwarranted by principle, though far better as a stroke of tactics. A Parliament does not cease to be representative by reason of a mere change in the census, arising from the natural growth of the population, as it does after a great extension of the suffrage. That it was necessary to take the opinion of the country on the results of the new