

Now, I was saying, I trust the people. I trust implicitly to their judgment when they have had opportunity for information and consideration. But I do not conceive the functions of a representative of the people to be to go around to meetings throughout the country addressing people who have not the necessary information, stirring them up to express an opinion in a certain sense, and then walk into this House and say: There is nothing more to be said; I am here to express the opinions of the people. The question what the function of a member of Parliament is under the British system is not a new question. I am not going into that question, but I would suggest to these hon. gentlemen who are so anxious about the opinion of the people that they should take a few minutes some day to read a famous speech of that great English statesman—I should rather say, that great Irishman whom Ireland gave to England to be one of her greatest statesmen—Edmund Burke. That will tell them what is the proper position of a representative of the people. Let me read a few lines. Burke was being reproached for not having followed the opinion of his electors—the subject is not material. He said to them:

For, gentlemen, it is not your fond desires, nor mine, that can alter the nature of things; by contending against which, what have we got, or ever shall get, but defeat and shame? I did not obey your instructions. No; I conformed to the instructions of truth and nature, and maintained your interest, against your opinions, with a constancy that became me. A representative worthy of you ought to be a person of stability. I am to look, indeed, to your opinions; but to such opinions as you and I must have five years hence. I was not to look to the flash of the day.

We owe a duty to the people and that is not to look to the flash of the day, not to be governed by the opinions of people described by the hon. gentleman as being in a frame of mind where they throw one into the canal if he express any opinion other than what they may happen to entertain at the moment. Speaking for myself, and having respect for the people who were at these meetings, I can quite understand that at the first flash this proposal, ill-understood and worse explained, does not commend itself to their judgment but when it is brought to their attention and properly explained I am satisfied they will give it their approval. I am satisfied that if, by any mistake on the part of this Government and Parliament, we should decide to let this question be settled at this moment by a vote taken without further preparation, upon the submission of this sole ques-

tion to the people when they are being appealed to in the most powerful way and by the most eloquent gentlemen to resist and reject this proposal, that if we should subject the honour of Canada to being soiled by the possibly unfortunate result of a vote taken under these circumstances by the people ill-informed and without proper explanation, these very people themselves, when they saw the result, would never forgive us for what we had done. They would tell us, in the words of Edmund Burke: You should not have been governed by the flash of the moment; you should have waited for our opinion one year, two years or three years hence when we shall be in a position to appreciate the possible results; perhaps even to know the actual results of the decision you are called upon to make.

Now, I feel that I owe the House and yourself, Mr. Speaker, an apology for the length at which I have allowed myself to be led into going in connection with this most important question. I do not know that I can flatter myself that what I have said can alter the views of any man but at least I feel that the best thought that I have been able to give to the most important question that I have ever had to consider has inspired me to say what I have said. In conclusion, let me just say one word as to what has been called the constitutional lack of power of this Parliament to pass this Bill and the absence of a mandate on the part of its members. I wonder if hon. members remember what happened in January, 1916, and I wonder if their memory goes a little farther back to August, 1914. In August, 1914, nobody could question the mandate of this Parliament and nobody could speak of this Government as being moribund. I do not feel quite so shocked about that expression as the hon. member for Montcalm thought I ought to. The best of us, even my hon. friend from Montcalm himself, will come some day to be in a moribund condition and still he marvels that we do not rise in wrath at the very mention of it. I do not know what we are expected to do or to say when we are described as a moribund Government as we have been by the leader of the Opposition. Well, we have to stand that epithet. Could this Government be described as a moribund Government in 1914? Had this Parliament a mandate in 1914? What did this Parliament do in 1914? We had a three or four days' session. I think we all look back with pride and pleasure to those three or four days because in that three or four