

one of the highest authorities on constitutional government, has declared himself favourably on the principle of referendum in British affairs. Lecky, who is also one of the foremost authorities on the British Government and constitution, in "Democracy and Liberty" volume I, p. 287 and following presents a most elaborate argument in favour of the referendum. I have prepared a short synopsis of it. The referendum would prevent the placing of the essential elements of the constitution at the mercy of a simple majority in a single Parliament—a majority perhaps composed of heterogeneous and discordant factions combined for a party purpose without the direct and deliberate assent of the people. It seems as those words of his were uttered on this very question and under the circumstances of to-day. The referendum would have the immense advantage of disentangling issues, separating the one great question from the many minor questions with which it may be mixed. Confused or blended issues are among the gravest political dangers of our time. Revolutionary and predatory measures are less likely to be carried on their merits because their purposes have obtained a majority by joining with them a sufficient number of other measures appealing to different sections of the electorate. It would be a great gain to English politics if a capital question could be decided by the electorate on its own merits, on a direct and simple issue. If the nation is moving towards revolution it should at least do so with its eyes open and with a clear and deliberate intention. Such a vote would prove to be the most powerful bulwark against violent and dishonest change. It would bring into action the opinion of the great silent masses of the community and reduce to their true proportion many movements to which party combinations or noisy agitations had given a wholly fictitious prominence. It would lift above the dominion of party a capital measure, and thus greatly increase the probability of its representing the genuine wishes of the electorate. It would enable the nation to re-

ject a measure which it dislikes without destroying a ministry of which it approves. Democracy has been crowned king. The voice of the multitude is the ultimate court of appeal. It would be an appeal from a party majority, probably made up of discordant groups, to the genuine opinion of the country.

Besides Professor Dicey, Mr. Lecky and Mr. Balfour, we have another opinion, that of the right hon. leader of the Government on this question. The late Mr. Monk once moved for a referendum on the naval question, to which a sub-amendment was moved by the present Prime Minister; this being lost, the right hon. the Prime Minister was given the privilege of voting for Mr. Monk's amendment for a referendum. Yes, he and all his followers, with the exception of the Minister of Trade and Commerce, voted for the referendum.

If it was necessary to submit the naval policy of the Laurier Government to a referendum—a policy which did not involve conscription, a policy which had been dealt with by the Imperial Conferences of 1902 and 1909—surely, Sir, it is much more logical and much more urgent to submit to a referendum such a momentous question as that of the conscription of the blood of the young men of this country, enacted by a moribund and unrepresentative Parliament.

I have trespassed too long on the time of the House, but I will say this in conclusion, and I say it with all the firmness and all the good faith that I can attach to solemn statement: knowing the people of my province to be above all things a law-abiding people, if a referendum is taken, whether it goes for or against conscription, the French-Canadians, who are the descendants of those who defended Canada in 1775, in 1812, will abide by the verdict of the majority. If conscription comes they will not have to be bullied or dragooned into the ranks, but will obey the law and fight the battles of Canada as valiantly as their fellow-men of a different race and a different creed.