

A BUSINESS MAN'S VIEWS

ON THE

West Huron and Brockville Election Rascalities.

SPEECH OF MR. E. B. OSLER, M. P.

In the House of Commons on Wednesday, May 13th, 1900, Mr. E. B. Osler, M.P. for West Toronto, delivered the following speech on the election outrages in West Huron and Brockville:

Mr. Speaker, the hour is late, and but for the fact that I do not trespass very long on the time of the House when I do address it I would not speak to night. What a wonderful array we have had of technical defences of fraud. It is perfectly marvellous to find one lawyer after another on the Government side, getting up and quoting from law books and law cases, as if they were arguing to defend not merely one criminal, but many criminals; these criminals are having very strong and very able advocates in the members of the Government and their supporters.

NO MERE TECHNICALITIES.

We are not here, I take it, to discuss mere technicalities, or how one man can protect another man from the penalties of his fraud. We are here, I take it, to bring criminals to justice. All the speeches of members of the Government and their supporters have been for the purpose of whitewashing criminals; but they are not succeeding. That there has been election fraud committed, not one member of the Government nor one of their followers will deny. All they are trying to do is to shield these criminals and to shield themselves from the penalty they will have to pay at the next election, for having aided and abetted these criminals. Last year the Premier and the

Government allowed the Committee on Privileges and Elections to inquire into certain election corruption. I was not a member of that committee, but I took some interest in the inquiry; I attended it on many occasions; and the opinion I formed—and I think I formed it without political prejudice—was that the chairman and the members of the Government on that committee found that they were going to unearth a nest of corruption, and they deliberately tried to prevent a proper and honest inquiry. Now, if a great fraud has been perpetrated, as a great fraud has been perpetrated, it will not excuse the Government to say that for technical reasons this is not the way to bring these criminals to justice, and you should have proceeded otherwise.

CRIMINALS BEING SHELTERED.

The Government can only justify themselves by saying, this fraud has been perpetrated, and we will use our best endeavours to bring the criminals to justice. But one lawyer after another gets up and argues as if he were in court, quoting from cases and giving reasons why these men should not be brought to justice at the court that has been opened. I say nothing about that; I say at once that I do not know whether or not it was the right way to proceed; but the court having been opened for the trial of these criminals, their trials should be concluded. The Government know they are criminals, the country knows they are criminals, we all know they are criminals. You may try to shield them if you like. From what I saw of the operation of the

committee last year, speaking for myself individually, if I had been an outsider, observing a case in which I had no interest, I would have come away saying that the Government advocates were trying to shield the criminals and burk the inquiry; and the action of the Government now, in saying that they will not carry on that inquiry, but will refuse it, justifies, I think, to the fullest extent my impression of what I saw. No amount of special legal pleading can justify them in the eyes of the people. The hon. the Minister of Marine made what he considered a magnificent case to show why this was not the proper mode to catch a particular sort of criminal. He tried to show that the men who gave evidence against the Government's friends were of bad character. He attempted to show that the Government's friends who had committed frauds were wonderfully straight and honest, and could not by any possibility have committed these frauds. He argued that the old farmer, whose hand was all knuckles and warts, had been brought before the committee to show how he could manipulate the ballots, and had shown by his clumsiness that he could not possibly have done the sleight-of-hand work attributed to him. But if that old gentleman had sense and cunning enough to manipulate the ballots in private, as no doubt he had, he certainly had sense and cunning enough to appear very awkward when before the committee.

OBTAINED SEATS FRAUDULENTLY.

The man who puts a pea under one thimble appears a very awkward man to a country greenhorn when doing it, but is one of the cleverest manipulators in the country. And the men who manipulated these frauds were as cunning and well educated in that particular line as the thimble ringer at the fair. I was very much surprised at the claim of the last speaker (Mr. Bell), that because the hon. member for West Huron had, even rejecting the ballots discovered to be fraudulent, still a majority of seventy or eighty, consequently the fraud did not effect his election at all and was not of interest to the House. Well, I claim that if there had been fraud to the extent of only one ballot, that affected the whole election, no matter even if the gentleman elected had 400 ballots of a majority in his favour. I say that the man who sits here representing that constituency is sitting here fraudulently, and I should be very sorry to think I could bring myself to realize that an honourable man could retain his seat in this House and vote under the conditions that hon. gentleman does to-day. The Province of Ontario was described by the Prime Minister, when he came in to power, as his right hand. Ontario, he thinks, is still his right hand to-day, but that province has shown to this country such a mass, and such a system of scientific corruption as has never before been exhibited in any other part of the Dominion. There is not a man in this House, there is not a member of the Government, that is not ashamed when he thinks of the iniquity and the corruption and the lawlessness enacted in the Ontario elections.

DESTROYING THE EVIDENCE.

The ballots in connection with one of the elections, which were very important for the trial and bringing to justice of the men who had stolen that election, were required when the investigation came before the courts. But unfortunately the ballots had shared the fate of the city of Hull; they had been burnt. There was no record insurance upon them. If it had been possible for honest men to take out a policy to insure protection of those ballots, the insurance company would have required a premium of many hundred per cent. if they knew the ballots had been in the custody of the men implicated in these frauds. This is one of the things that I feel very keenly about. I feel that the election frauds affect my own individual honour and the honour of every man in Canada, and I say that there has been a wave of corruption passing over this country since the present Government have come into power.

CRIME MUST NOT BE CONDONED.

I hope that this country will not be so demoralized as to condone what has been done to-day, because of what may have been done in the past, but I would say to the party in power that if the Conservative party were guilty in the past of the corruption which these hon. gentlemen denounce, they have improved upon that corruption and are now keeping themselves in power by means of it. I am prepared to say, without any hesitation, that I had a great deal of sympathy with the Liberal party before the last election. I felt that the other party had been perhaps too long in power, and I had a sort of half belief that the promises and professions of honesty and honour which the Liberal party made before they came into office would more or less be carried out. But have we seen one single solitary instance of this? Certainly not since I have been in this House. I have seen a Government that has made me ashamed of my country. I have seen an attempt to put through the Yukon Bill which was simply a gigantic steal. I have seen the Drummond deal put through, which was a most iniquitous transaction. The hon. member for Kingston (Mr. Britton), in talking about this corruption, said that it was a small matter not worth bothering about. Well, if the hon. member for Kingston and the other followers of the Government, and the members of the Government itself, think that this is a small matter, I do not, and I do not think that the country does. I think that it is the most important matter that has come before the House since I have been a member. If we are going to have the country that we ought to have, and deserve to have, we should have the members of the Government honest.

TRYING TO SHIELD CORRUPTION.

I am not cavilling about a little bit of extravagance. We may differ about the expenditure on one public work and another,

the country can stand it. But there is one thing we cannot stand. There is a greater dishonesty than stealing money from the treasury of the country—the dishonesty of stealing the franchise from the people. This country can stand the stealing of millions of money, humiliating and degrading as that may be; but this country cannot stand the slightest attempt on the part of the Government or of any man to shield election corruption. The Government have tried for the last two sessions to shield corruption such as has never been unearthed before—it may have existed, but it never before came to the surface where the Government could grapple with it and check it. England is fighting to-day, and we are fighting to-day, for what? We are sending our sons to Africa to defend the right of suffrage, the right of proper representation of the men who own property. The Government to-day are trying to suppress the honest opinion of the people; they are trying to do that as effectually as Kruger and the Boers tried to suppress the voting of the men who by their money and their work have made South Africa. The Government, in trying to suppress this inquiry into fraud so great that the whole country feels degraded by it, is defending corruptionists. As a question of moral wrong, it is greater than the Yukon deal or the Drummond county deal.

LIBERAL DEFENDERS OF CORRUPTION.

May I suggest to the Minister of Marine and Fisheries (Sir Louis Davies) that all those accused of corruption I have had most magnificent defenders in the Minister himself and others behind him. If these men had been here to hear the defence made for them, they would have gone out of this House as the murderer who had been acquitted went out of court, saying: I never knew I was as good a man. I may be quite wrong in my premises as to technical matters, as to whether this is a proper tribunal before which to bring this question or not. But I say that all these difficulties were swept away by the one act of the Government last session in agreeing to the reference to the committee. I saw these men come down last session, forty or fifty of them, and those of them that were accused of wrong-doing I heard defended by the hon. Minister of Marine and Fisheries and others as though they were paid defenders, using all their skill in cross-examination and the raising of technical points to prevent evidence being given.

PUNISHMENT SHOULD FOLLOW WRONG-DOING.

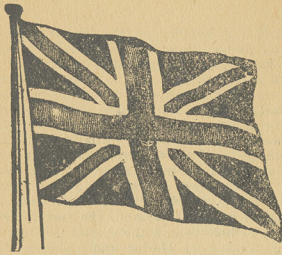
I am not concerned with the question whether it was right or wrong technically; but I am concerned with the broad fact that the impression left on my mind was that there was a desire on

the part of the members of the Government to shield and protect those who were doing wrong. Now, I have spoken a great deal longer than I intended to speak, but this is a matter upon which I feel very keenly. It should not be made a technical matter at all. If these men have done wrong, or if wrong has been done the Government should at once take the initiative and have them punished. If the Government do not take the initiative and use every effort to bring these men to justice, they are shielding these men. Like the ostrich which thinks to hide itself by thrusting its head in the sand, the Government are trying to hide behind the special pleading of the hon. Minister of Marine and Fisheries, the hon. member for Halifax (Mr. Russell), and the hon. member (Mr. Bell, P.E.I.) who has just sat down, and who gave us an awful specimen of this kind of oratory. But, though the Government try to hide themselves in this way, they are not deceiving Parliament, they are not even deceiving the men behind them. The men behind the Government are feeling humiliated with the knowledge that they have to back up the action of their leaders. Nor are the Government deceiving the country. Sweeping aside all technicalities, the country, knowing that wrong-doing has been perpetrated, believe that the Government should prosecute and punish the wrong-doers. We cannot shame you; we cannot make you other than you are.

THE COUNTRY WILL NOT CONDONE THE OUTRAGE.

But I should despair of my country if the people condoned the action of this Government going hand in hand with the Ontario Government to shield corruptionists—if it had been necessary, they would have burned the ballots, as the Ontario Government burned ballots to shield their friends. If the country, at the next election, does not express its opinion of these gentlemen, then I shall be sorry to think that the poison of corruption has affected more than the members of the Government, that it has even affected a section of the people, and has degraded and disgraced the whole country.

At the general elections the voters are practically asked, What do you think of these crimes? Would you like your children to practice them? Would you like your country to be known amongst the Empire's Colonies as a country where the public conscience is seared, hardened, or would you prefer to have the magazines of the world holding up Canada as an example of the nations of the globe? By your votes will your answer be given. Let your votes be a warning to all Governments, whether Liberal or Conservative. Thus, and thus only, will come the exalting of the nation.



TO THE INDEPENDENT VOTER.

"In times of war as in times of peace the Conservative party stands by the flag."

There are thousands of voters in Canada who have never allied themselves with any political party; that is, they have never tied themselves down to any party irrevocably; and there are thousands more in both parties who prefer the interests of Canada to the interests of their party.

The question for them is, how can they best make their influence felt for the public good?

At present their influence is to a great extent neutralised by the fact that they vote against each other.

All efforts at uniting this large and intelligent class of electors by a Third Party organization have hitherto failed, as witness the Patrons of Industry and the numerous parties now represented in the British Columbia Legislature.

The best, and indeed the only, way for the independent elector to make his influence felt is by steadily and persistently voting against any Government (no matter to which party it belongs) which conspicuously fails in its duty to the country.

The first effect of the independent electorate voting upon this principle would be to bring about in Canada the same rotation of parties in office that prevails in England.

The elector who conscientiously believes that his own party is keeping faith with the country, respecting its principles and fulfilling its pledges, is right to support his party. The elector who regards both parties as about equally good or equally bad, can do much to improve both parties by generally voting against the government of the day, if recreant to its professed principles, and so teaching the politicians of both sides that they are the servants, not the masters, of the country.

In England, the electorate no sooner places a party in office than they begin to defeat it at the by-elections, on the principle that men in power easily lose their heads unless kept in awe of the electors, and at the general elections the government is almost invariably defeated. Obviously this rotation of parties is entirely the work of the independent electors, who hold the balance of power between Liberals and Conservatives, and use it. It is only when the Government of the day is conspicuous for its courage, straightforwardness, patriotism, progressiveness that it is perpetuated in power.

In any country where the electors are in the habit of bringing up Governments with a sharp turn there is a wide awake susceptibility and sensitiveness to public opinion which secures a robustness in politics that makes entirely for the public good.

On the other hand, if a party does wrong and is returned to power through blind partisanship, the men who rule the party become emboldened to dare more and the country is plunged into extravagance, because the schemers, having just come through an election, realize how easy it is to hoodwink the electors.

In private business a thrifty, wise man makes up for years of poor trade by saving something in times of prosperity. If he contracts debt during times of depression, some of his savings in good years are devoted to reduction of deficits.

Isn't this so with prudent men?

It isn't so with the Canadian Government.

When the world-wide depression lifted, of course Canada got some of the benefits, although less, relatively, than almost any other country.

When the boom was on and money in circulation there was an era of generous buying, not only of staples but of luxuries. The public revenue, swelling from month to month, gave the present Canadian Government the best opportunity any Government in Canada ever had to take a slice off the public debt.

Did they do it?

As all the world knows, they deliberately set themselves to increase the expenditure and the debt.

What will they do when the inevitable evil day comes?

It is said by that time some of them will be living over the sea.

At last the independent electors have their opportunity to show to the world that they wield the sceptre of power. If the independent electors give a rebuke to the unfaithful Laurier Government the applause will come from every self-respecting people, and there will echo wherever the use of the ballot is prized these ringing words, Bravo Canada!!

The verdict will be a warning to both parties, and will do Canada immeasurable and everlasting good.