

The Brain Browsers' Guide

Winnipeg, Wednesday, April 8th, 1914

CAMPAIGN FUND CONTRIBUTIONS

The letter from Levi Thomson, M.P., which appears in this issue, will prove of interest to every reader of The Guide who believes in clean politics and democracy. We congratulate Mr. Thomson on his courage in taking hold of a question which, by the common consent of both political parties, is kept as much as possible in the background. Mr. Thomson has had the courage to stand up for the rights of the Western farmers on the floor of Parliament, even in opposition to his party, and we are glad to see him take hold of the campaign fund question, also. No one denies that both political parties secure large contributions to their campaign funds from corporations and individuals. Such contributions are not prohibited by law, neither does our election act provide for any publicity of these donations, so that the public does not know definitely who is paying for election campaigns. Our politicians of both parties have never in the past shown any real desire for such publicity. A few weeks ago, however, both parties united on a resolution providing for changes in the Controverted Elections Act, and the committee in charge of the investigation have been taking evidence preparatory to amending the act. It is to be hoped that when Parliament is called upon to deal with the report of the committee that one amendment to the act will provide for full publicity for campaign fund contributions. This publicity should be given, not only after the election is over, but also, and more particularly, before the election. It will help amazingly to clean up our political life.

Mr. Thomson has pointed out quite clearly why such contributions are given. Of course there is no crude bargaining, at least very little of it, but the effect is practically the same as if it were a hard and fast bargain. Protected manufacturers, railway promoters, large and small contractors, financiers, and others who are looking for pap from the Government, either in the way of fat contracts or license to plunder the public under shelter of the law, contribute to the campaign funds, and there is no person outside of an insane asylum who imagines that such contributions are made from purely patriotic motives. They are made as a business proposition, and because they expect it to come back to them with interest compounded at usurious rates if the party they support is successful at the polls. Then, of course, there are contributions from gentlemen who feel that they are excellently qualified to become senators, or postmasters or customs collectors in large cities, or members of one of the many high salaried commissions. They, of course, do not buy these positions by a contribution, but it is equally certain that a nice contribution that helps to put or keep a party in power will tend to bring their excellent qualifications to the favorable notice of the Government they have supported. Then, of course, there are other gentlemen who want to see their party win because of the luscious plum crop in general which is always at the disposal of the party in power. No doubt there are some contributions made by men who place their party before their religion and who actually and sincerely believe it is their patriotic duty to contribute, but such contributions are an inconsiderable item. The majority of campaign fund contributions, as Mr. Thomson truly states, are made in the expectation of receiving a return. Practically none of these contributions are made by the common people, who represent about ninety per cent. of the population. The contributions come

from the ten per cent., and the most of our legislation is for the benefit of the ten per cent. Mr. Thomson places the election expenses of each candidate in a Dominion election at \$5,000. The salary of a member of Parliament is \$2,500 per year. It can readily be seen that no man can faithfully perform his duties as a member of Parliament, support his family, and save \$5,000 for election expenses every three or four years, on a salary of \$2,500. The expense, therefore, must be met either from the member's private means or from outside sources, unless the electors themselves meet the expenses, which they never do. If a member pays his own expenses he must be a man of sterling integrity and inspired by real patriotism if he can resist the temptation to make good his expenses by one or more of the many opportunities that may be opened to him. If, on the other hand, his election expenses are paid either from the funds of his own party machine or by some corporation, he will naturally be under obligation for such help, and will be expected to vote as his party bosses order or as his corporation friends desire. Any one of these three courses is very dangerous to true democracy.

What is to be the remedy for this condition of affairs? It is easy to detect the evil, but the remedy is more difficult. The salary of a member of Parliament in Canada is altogether too small. It should be increased so that the member can live upon it comfortably, and be in a position where he will not be compelled to look for outside support and humiliate himself by accepting favors for which a return is expected. It can readily be seen that it is poor economy to keep salaries so low as to force temptation upon men who should be free and independent. We should like to see every member of Parliament an honest man, earnestly representing his constituents to the best of his ability and receiving a salary from the public treasury worthy of the high position he occupies and the great responsibility he carries. If he is not such a man he should not be in Parliament. There should be some limitation placed upon the expenditure in election campaigns in each constituency, and a portion of the necessary expenses should be provided for out of the public treasury. If the candidate is a man really interested in the welfare of the people, he is making sufficient sacrifice when he gives his whole time and ability to the campaign, and should not be expected to contribute very much else. If he is not such a man, he should not be a candidate. Other expenses should be contributed by the electors themselves in each constituency either in cash or in free service in support of the candidate they choose.

It should also be specially provided that the candidate should not be held up for contributions to baseball clubs, church bazaars, hockey clubs and other local institutions, because they are nothing more or less than a species of holdup, and the candidate cannot be blamed if he regards them as such.

If the people really want honest legislation they must elect honest representatives and encourage them to remain honest. In the last analysis the people are to blame for existing conditions, and it is time to start reform in each local constituency, beginning in each local community. The man who will sell his vote or will buy another man's vote is not fit to vote, and should be disfranchised. Such a man has no right to point the finger of scorn at any man in public life. The man who votes for his party when he knows it to be in the wrong has no right to blame any member of Parliament for similar action.

Clergymen, and other prominent citizens, who solicit subscriptions from members of Parliament or political candidates for local institutions throughout his constituency are contributing directly to the cause of political corruption, and should begin their reforms at home. We are not at all excusing nor condoning the crookedness on the part of the political parties, because they are composed of men who know the difference between right and wrong. But at the same time it is well for us to consider our own weaknesses and endeavor to correct them. The politicians themselves are not liable to criticize the people in this respect for fear of losing votes, so it is better for the people themselves to see that all is right with themselves before going further. We shall be glad to receive letters on this subject from any other members of Parliament or from our own readers.

CITY LIFE PROBLEMS

It is well that country children should not grow up with the idea that country life has all the drawbacks and city life all the blessings. The tendency of the age is a migration from the farm to the city. It is in the interest of the nation that this tide should be turned in the other direction if our civilization is not to be turned backwards. An exchange of population between city and country is highly desirable, but it should be on a more even basis. Part of the rush to the city is due to the idea that prosperity forces itself upon city dwellers. This notion is quite erroneous, as most city dwellers realize to their cost. Conditions in Winnipeg are not what one would be liable to gather from the press. There is more suffering and want in Winnipeg than the country dweller dreams of. Winnipeg has its slums where men, women and children are herded together like cattle, forced into such conditions by ever increasing cost of food and clothing, high rents, low wages and frequent lack of employment. Our civilization so far is powerless to cope with such a situation. Most of the "leading citizens" are studying how to get something for nothing, and what they thus get is withdrawn from those who really earn it but do not get it. There is enough vacant land in Winnipeg to accommodate one million people in comfort, yet it is all held by speculators, who are permitted by law to gouge its unearned value out of the public. Ten per cent., or less, of the people of Winnipeg live in luxury, probably half the rest of them are comfortable, and the balance are having a mighty hard struggle to make a living, with nearly 10,000 men out of work altogether. Some of these problems will be dealt with in a series of articles by J. S. Woodsworth, secretary of the Canadian Welfare League, the first of which is published in this issue. Mr. Woodsworth has had years of experience among the foreign and what is known as the "working" population of the city, and is in a position to speak with authority upon the subject. It is well for the rural population to have some idea of the struggles faced by their city cousins, and thus a closer bond of sympathy may be established between people who have a common enemy and are plundered by the same unjust laws.

SENATOR JONES AND LIBERAL PARTY

The Liberal party is to be sincerely congratulated on the fact that Senator Sir Lyman Melvin Jones has withdrawn from its ranks. Sir Lyman is President and General Manager of the Massey-Harris Co., President of the Bain Wagon Co., President