

The Commercial

WINNIPEG, JULY 6, 1896.

THE ABSENTEE VOTER.

The late elections have brought the question of "one man one vote" prominently to the front again. This is one of the reforms in our election laws which The Commercial believes is urgently needed. If for no other reason than the inducement which it offers to corrupt practices, it would be well to have duplicate voting abolished. The absentee vote is one of the most uncertain features about elections, particularly in cities, and it is one of the principal incentives to corruption. Electors who are present in a constituency when a vote is being taken, should not need any inducement to lead them to record their votes. Their duty as citizens should be sufficient to cause them to vote promptly. With the absentee voter, however, it is different. Under many circumstances he can be fairly excused from exercising his franchise. The absentee voter could not be expected to neglect his business or go to much expense to visit a distant district in order to record his vote, and unless some inducement is offered he will not go. Here comes in the opportunity for bribery. If he can get his railway fair or expenses paid, he will go and vote, and thus corrupt practices are resorted to. If the principle of one man one vote were established, the absentee vote would be largely reduced, and in like proportion would the incentive to bribery be reduced, and the conduct of elections would be much more satisfactory.

Aside from this aspect of the matter, there are other reasons why the principle of one vote should be established by law. Our franchise does not rest on a property basis, and therefore why give one man two or more votes because he holds property in two or more constituencies? But even if property were the basis of the franchise, it would not uphold the principle of duplicate voting, as can be shown by the following reasoning: A man possessing property of great value in one constituency is entitled to but one vote, while another party with property of much less value, scattered over several constituencies, would have a vote in each. This shows the absurdity of the present law which permits duplicate voting. If property is the qualification, should not the man having all his property in one district be entitled to duplicate his vote in proportion to his wealth? Our law wisely recognizes no such principle; but on the other hand it improperly recognizes this principle where the property is scattered in different constituencies.

THE VOTE IN MANITOBA.

If the citizens of Winnipeg in particular, and Manitoba in general, could read all that a portion of the eastern press is saying about them just now, they would feel either very small indeed, or perhaps indignant. These papers represent that while the Liberals and many Conservatives also in the east were contending for Manitoba's rights, the people

here have sold themselves to the coercionists. On this basis they proceed to give Manitobans such a dressing down as we have never received from any source before. Well, perhaps we deserve it to some extent. At any rate, The Commercial can readily see how those who are not familiar with the situation here, would find good cause to criticize us harshly. Manitobans were supposed to be fervently attached to the cause of national schools, and prepared to vigorously oppose any attempt to enforce separate schools upon us. Through our public men we frequently declared that there would be no surrender. The Dominion government went to the country on the declared policy of coercion of Manitoba, and under our form of government the only way to oppose this policy would be to vote against the government. To support the government meant support for its policy of coercion. This is the way the eastern papers reason the matter out, and they therefore claim that Manitobans have stultified themselves before all Canada. They attribute base motives to the supposed change of front on the part of Manitoba, and scornfully state that we have been purchased by promises of public works or by direct bribes.

All this is not very pleasant reading for Manitobans. The Commercial must admit that so far as the outward appearance goes, the result of the elections here would indicate a change of front on the school question. The question which naturally arises to the outside is: What has led to the change? And in answering the question thus raised they generally decide that it was bribery, either by promises of public works, which were freely made, or by the direct purchase of votes.

This is very humiliating to spirited Manitobans, and we certainly feel like resenting it. No doubt the promises of public works had considerable influence, particularly on a section of the labor vote in Winnipeg, but not such as to decide the elections generally. There were many extenuating circumstances which, if understood by those who criticize us so harshly, would lead them to take a different view of the case. In the first place, if the total vote of the province were analyzed, it would be shown that it was largely opposed to the coercion government. In three out of the seven constituencies, there was a three cornered contest by the advent of a Patron candidate, and in two out of these three constituencies the Patron vote defeated the Liberal candidates, by splitting the vote in favor of tariff reform and opposed to coercion. Manitoba was therefore really entitled to five members out of seven in opposition to coercion. In a sixth constituency the Catholic electors have a majority and that naturally went to the government. The only real ground for criticism which eastern people have is therefore reduced to Winnipeg, and Winnipeg, we are told, was carried in favor of coercion by the outside vote. The government majority was about 125, while it has been reported that there were 600 outside votes for the government candidate. This, to a considerable extent relieves Winnipeggers of the charge of having stultified themselves, or of having been bribed into supporting the coercion government.

There were, of course, other influences at work to contribute to the result. Many Conservatives honestly believed that coercion would never be attempted by their party, and they stuck to their party. Some of the Conservative candidates here were pledged to oppose coercion. Others, just as honestly believed that the Liberals, if returned to power, would be as likely to take up a coercion policy as the Conservatives.

Another point is the fact that Manitoba is a naturally Conservative, and like party men elsewhere, many of them will hold to their party, almost regardless of circumstances. At the very height of the anti-monopoly agitation Manitobans could not be induced to forsake the Conservative party. The people of the West have had it drilled into them for years that the Liberals as a party were always opposed to the development of the West. This has been so frequently asserted that it has been almost a general belief here. Viewing the matter, therefore, in the light of local conditions, the election of three members in opposition to coercion, and the defeat of two more through the splitting of the vote in a three-cornered fight, does not give so much reason after all to the Eastern press to refer so scornfully to Manitoba.

WHAT ABOUT THE TARIFF.

More or less uncertainty will certainly be felt in commercial and manufacturing circles owing to the recent change in the political situation. The defeat of the protectionist party and the return to power of a revenue tariff party is certainly a feature which will cause uneasiness to tariff-protected interests. Every word, therefore, which is dropped by the Liberal leaders, regarding the tariff is eagerly taken up and analyzed at the present time.

In the one brief reference which The Commercial made to the political situation previous to the elections, we submitted the opinion that a change of government would not lead to tariff revolution in this country, but rather that the Liberal party, if returned to power, would see the wisdom of making haste slowly and cautiously in the work of tariff reform. The suppression of Sir Richard Cartwright may be taken as indicating a moderate course by the Liberal party in regard to the tariff. It will have been noted that Sir Richard was scarcely heard from all through the recent conflict. Whether Sir Richard's suppression was voluntary or invited, it is an indication that the radical free trade element of the party is for a time in the background.

As for the utterances of the Liberal leaders we have Sir Oliver Mowat's declaration that "Laurier would deal carefully with the vested interests of manufacturers in any tariff changes, and that free trade as they had it in England was out of the question for many years to come." Or to quote the Liberal leader himself, as reported from Montreal since the elections:

"We have been elected on a platform of tariff reform and on those lines we intend to work. It is but fair that manufacturers and the people generally should understand that we are reformers, not revolutionists. During the campaign it has been frequently reiterated