

SPEECH DELIVERED

—BY THE—

HON. GEO. E. FOSTER

MINISTER OF MARINE AND FISHERIES,

At Hampton, King's County, N. B., January 10th, 1887.

HON. G. E. FOSTER,

who was received with prolonged and enthusiastic cheering, said :

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:—I am very glad indeed to have been able this afternoon to have given you the pleasure of listening to my hon. colleague, older and more experienced than myself, who, though coming from a Province far removed from this, is yet one with us in the common citizenship that belongs to all Canadians. (Applause.) I know you have listened to him with a great deal of pleasure and, I have no doubt, with a great deal of profit as well, and long afterward, when he shall have gone to his home and you shall be in yours, you will have a kinder feeling for Ontario and a broader idea of Canada from the acquaintance you made today with my hon. colleague, the Minister of Customs. (Hear, hear.) Now, as I appear before you this afternoon, after about a year's absence, as a member of the Government which you were kind enough to endorse in my person about a year ago, it becomes my duty to say some things to you with reference to that Government, its policy, and the methods by which it has conducted its business.

In the first place, let me say that whatever may take place here this afternoon and in succeeding days, I do not intend to waste your time nor my own time in replying to any personal criticisms, such as proceed upon suspicion and insinuation and abuse and depreciation, and which are directed not against the Government, not against its policy, but against some individual in the Government or some individual who may support the Government. I may say to you that I always feel as a man demeaned when I have to come down to such things, and I could hope that in this country of ours, where we are an intelligent people, where we are a law-abiding people, there are many questions broad and high which we may employ ourselves in discussing; and I have always regretted, and I regret today, there are people who, rather than confine themselves to argument, seem impelled by some defect of mind or guile of heart, to continually resort to insinuations, suspicion, or to personal abuse.

THE GROUNDS OF CRITICISM.

Now, I conceive that what you may have to urge against a Government, or what you may have to say in favor of it, may be grouped under two chief heads, viz.:—administration and policy. You, who are opposed to a Government, criticise it for faults in its administration; you criticise it for faults in its policy; and you who are in favor of the Government sustain it because of the excellencies of its administration and the wisdom of its policy. That does not mean, however, that while as human beings we every one have faults, we must demand that when 12 or 14 human beings are selected from all parts of the country and put in the Cabinet to conduct the business of the country, what they do and what they carry out must be infallible and perfect—defects you find in every man; defects are to be found in every association of men, defects are to be found in every Government, and the man who would turn out a Government because of some defects in it is just as unwise as a man who would refuse to live among his neighbors because some of them had defects in their character or imperfections in their conduct. (Applause.) So when deciding upon the merits or when arguing upon the actions of the Government, you are not to expect, from the very nature of things, infallibility from error, but you are to find out whether, in comparison with those who preceded us, this Government or this party is worthy of the confidence of the country or merits its disapproval. (Hear, hear.)

In the first place then, with reference to the administration of the Government. There are two lines upon which you may criticize the administration of a Government. You may say you do not like it because it is corrupt, or because it is weak and incapable.