

Through a Monocle

THERE is no denying that His Majesty's Loyal Opposition at Ottawa seems to have taken a tonic—and not before it was needed. They have started the session with a lively series of fusillades, though they did make the mistake of blazing away at first with the old "blue ruin" blunderbuss which the Liberals must have left in the Opposition trenches when they joyfully went over to take possession of the City of Power after the pitched battle of '96. However, we will hope that the rusty old muzzle-loader "kicked" good and hard, and that they will never fire it off again. The cannonading that followed was certainly not of the obsolete class. It was as good as the Liberals used to do at their best when they sat in Opposition; and that was a pretty fair "best." The Conservatives brought forward their amendments to the Address, debated them briskly, and ceased firing when their ammunition was gone. They did not make the capital mistake of keeping up a noise when they had nothing left in their pouches but powder.

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The Government, having to fight upon ground of the Opposition's choosing, did not show up any too well. Their defence in the case of the Quebec Bridge was feeble and unconvincing; and they were not in a popular position when they had to discourage the idea of a rural mail delivery. However, they do much better on the estimates. There is no use trying to tell this people that it should not spend money. Canada feels rich, in spite of all the "financial depressions" that Wall Street can breed. Our mounting revenue flows into the coffers of the Government without our citizens feeling any pinch. I remember riding down town in Toronto in a Church Street car one morning, many years ago, just after Sir Richard Cartwright had made one of his terrific attacks upon the then Conservative Government for "its enormous expenditures." Two old gentlemen were discussing the speech. "Ye-es, it sounds bad," one of them was saying, "it sounds bad. But this heavy taxation—I don't feel it. Do you?" "No," admitted the other old gentleman, "I don't; but it must be there." "Yes; but that's just it," insisted the first speaker. "It's there. Cartwright can prove it in figures. But nobody feels it. You cannot get the people indignant over a burden they do not feel."

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So long as we do not feel our taxation, we like the Government to spend money. I am not defending this attitude; I am simply stating the fact. If we had direct taxation, we should probably take a different view of the subject. But when the Federal revenues seem to fall from a kindly heaven, and when we can borrow money in London without being conscious that we owe a cent in the world, it is only human on our part to like to see Government money spent where we can at least enjoy the glitter of the stream as it flows by. Then judicious spending at this stage in our national career, is not extravagance—it is shrewd investment. We are in our very young manhood. We are merely preparing the basis of our business. We are hardly thinking yet of asking for a dividend—nationally. That will come in good time. Now we are planting branch stores to catch the trade, flinging our advertising abroad to catch customers, making our name known, establishing a reputation for our goods, compelling people to recognise our enterprise and our fitness for our unparalleled opportunity. It is no time to count the pennies.

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The only way to fight estimates is to show that certain specific items are wasteful or corrupting. And that is precisely the way that no Opposition, yet born into the world, dare fight estimates. It will criticise the expenditure of money after it is spent, and the locality affected is not to be alienated by being told that the Opposition will not spend money in its midst. But to attack an item in the estimates yet to be spent—on any other ground than that it is too small—is to make a present of the vote of the interested community to the generous

Government. The consequence is that criticism of the estimates usually resolves itself into two lines of attack—safe generalities as to the "demnition total" and bitter reflections on the details of similar past expenditures as set forth in the Auditor-General's report.

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The spice of the session up to the time of writing has been supplied by the efforts of the Opposition to "draw" Mr. Pugsley. But Mr. Pugsley is—again up to the time of writing—stronger on dignity than detail. He proposes to take his own time to make his charges. Mr. Pugsley is an experienced politician, and he knows as well as the next man what effect his hesitation is having on the country. People do not like too much shrewd calculation when it comes to launching charges of wrong-doing. They prefer that the accuser should feel his righteous soul so outraged by the evil he has discovered that he cannot keep from blurting out his indignation at the first opportunity. When he holds it back, contingent upon an "if" and a "but," they fear that he is either tacitly bargaining for its suppression or preparing to get the best theatrical effect from its launching. Then none of us like a man to "take a dare." There is enough of the boy in us all to want to see him hit out when his own face is menaced. Still Mr. Pugsley is an experienced politician.



"Will you excuse me, Mother, if I don't go in with you? You see Father said I was to live within my means, and I don't feel as if I could afford the collection!"—Punch.