

The Brain Growers' Guide

Winnipeg, Wednesday, June 12th, 1912

CEMENT TARIFF REDUCED

Hon. W. T. White, Finance Minister, has hit the cement tariff and the wall around the cement combine has fallen half down. The duty on cement from June 12 till October 31 has been reduced by the government to 26 cents per 350-pound barrel. Well done, Mr. White. Thanks. The cement merger will not go out of business but will keep right on selling cement at a reduced price and reduced profit. Public opinion has brought the cement tariff down for a while. The taste should be good and result in permanent reductions. There is absolutely no need of any duty whatever on cement, except to put money into the coffers of the cement magnates in Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal. The water-logged merger may be expected to howl, but it has been plundering the public long enough. Mr. White deserves credit for his courage. Let us hope that he will keep on and take further action at the next session of Parliament. The cement magnates will of course begin to put the pressure on him at once to preserve their graft, but the general public deserves some consideration also.

THE CURSE OF PATRONAGE

After patiently enduring for the past eight months a constant siege by hungry hordes of office-seekers, Hon. George E. Foster has at last exploded. This present patronage system, he exclaims, "is damnable." As usual, Mr. Foster is very happy in his choice of words, which is only what one would naturally expect from an ex-professor in Classics. No one throughout the length and breadth of Canada has arisen to challenge this harsh term; on the contrary, a chorus of "Amens" has greeted the Minister's outburst. The Prime Minister has tried to avoid the petty and sordid business of handing out jobs in his own constituency of Halifax by turning the whole thing over to a patronage committee. But the Halifax Tories, it seems, are quite dissatisfied with the work of this committee, for they have petitioned Hon. Mr. Borden, notwithstanding the pressure of national concerns which is supposed to take the Premier's full time, to exercise his right as a M.P. and keep the patronage in his own hands. Doubtless the leader will be too busy to comply with the request of "the faithful," and his evident desire to escape all connection with the local patronage shows more eloquently than words how an honorable man regards it—as more soiling to the touch than pitch or mire. The essence of the patronage system is robbery. It is only another device of the politicians by which the people are cheated without knowing it. Every time patronage prevents the best man in sight from being appointed to a public office and puts in some nonentity whose only title is party service, the whole people are robbed to just the extent that a capable official differs from an incapable. Who ever heard of patronage committees straining their eyes trying to find the most capable man for a given position? No; merit, fitness or character does not count for a straw; it is always some party stalwart who must be rewarded or there will be trouble in the ranks. Why should the people be called on to pay handsome salaries to men who never did anything in their lives except to "vote right" every election? Has a man's politics anything more to do with his fitness for official duties than the size of shoes his grandmother wore? Yet it is only in virtue of appointing men who otherwise would stand no chance that this wretched system persists. The very word "patronage" smacks of pitchforking a dependent into a job. Grateful returns are expected

from the one who is handed such a plum. Often a goodly share of his salary must go back to the patronage committee, to help keep the party machine oiled. Not only are the people robbed in being deprived of the best services to be had for a given position, but the workings of the patronage system result in disorganizing many branches of the public business every time a fresh election comes around. And so long as the stupid doctrine prevails that "to the victors belong the spoils," so long will our elections be disgraced by the partisan activity of officials paid to serve the whole community. But this "offensive partisanship" is logical enough. The official owes his job to the party, so he serves that party. When the people insist on having all their servants appointed by an independent state authority, then they may reasonably expect their office-holders to give their whole time to their duties and cease worshipping (and electioneering for) the party in power.

Is the present Government to do nothing to abolish the looting and roguery of patronage? Is the curse to go on forever? Wringing the hands or calling the system names will scarcely abolish an evil so deep-rooted. The late Government deserves credit for making a start in civil service reform by placing the "inside" service at Ottawa under an independent board which fixes salaries and makes appointments on its own authority, free from any interference by the party in power. Vacancies are filled by competitive examination. The way an applicant votes, instead of being all-important, does not even interest the board. But this was only a beginning. It applies only to the Ottawa employees in the various departments. In the "outside" service, extending from coast to coast, the favorite way of filling an office is first to create a vacancy by chopping off the head of the present holder for partisan activity and then hand this reward to some worker who is expected to be just as active on the other side. Before the last Dominion elections Mr. Borden made sweeping promises of extending civil service reform to the outside branch. The patronage evil would be wholly uprooted. Is it too much to ask the Prime Minister to fulfil his pledge?

A LESSON FROM EDMONTON

The Hudson's Bay Company recently sold 586 lots from their property holdings situated within the city of Edmonton. Great excitement, we read, marked the sale. The holder of ticket number 1, entitling him to be first served by the agents of the company, was offered \$10,000 for his ticket, and refused the offer. The Hudson's Bay Company received from the sale \$2,034,150. Thirty years ago the whole estate was hardly worth a song. Where did that two million dollars' worth of value come from? Not from the company. It has not done, it has not pretended to do, a hand's turn. The value has plainly come from the people who have gone in and built up Edmonton. Yet their reward has been to be kept all those years from using these choice sites, and finally when the Company chooses to sell, the very ones who have given the property all the value it possesses have been simply taxed to that extent before they could build on it or make any use of it. "The law's a 'hass,'" exclaimed an irate Britisher long ago, and the saying has survived. One is tempted to use similar language in describing our present system of enriching idle landholders at the expense of the real upbuilders of a community. Fortunately Edmonton has awakened to the folly of this procedure, and it is this very awakening which caused the Hudson's Bay Company to

sell its vacant land to those who would improve it and not hold it for speculation. The same thing is being done every day by men and women of every walk in life. They are taking advantage of the "system" to get something for nothing.

WINNIPEG'S LAND VALUES

The report of the Assessment Commissioner for the City of Winnipeg shows that the rateable value of the land and improvements within the city limits has increased during the past year by \$41,703,190. The increased valuation of land is \$33,388,090, and of improvements \$8,315,100, and the present valuations are \$151,795,740 and \$62,584,700 respectively, making a total of \$214,380,440. While land is assessed at its full value, however, improvements are assessed at two-thirds, and consequently the assessment of improvements must be increased by fifty per cent. to ascertain the full value placed upon them by the assessor. According to the same report the increase in population for the year is 14,565, the present population of Winnipeg being given as 166,553. The increase of land value is 28.2 per cent., of improvements 15.3 per cent., and of population 9.6 per cent. The increased value of improvements is of course caused by the new buildings erected during the year. It represents brick, stone, cement, steel, and labor, and belongs to those whose money has paid for all these things. The increased value of the land is caused simply by the fact that the population has increased. It represents no expenditures of time, labor or money on the part of the owners, but has been created by the community. It does not, however, belong to the community. It belongs to the owners of the land who have done nothing to earn it, but who are collecting it in increased rentals and in increased prices when they sell their holdings. The increase in the value of the land in Winnipeg may be a good thing for the land owners and speculators, many of whom, by the way, live in other parts of Canada, Great Britain, the United States and other foreign countries, but it is unquestionably a bad thing for the people of Winnipeg generally, who pay higher rents and higher prices for all that they buy, as a direct result without getting any corresponding benefit. Why should not this \$33,000,000 of value which the people of Winnipeg have created belong to the people? They have created it by their presence in the city and the very fact of their being in the city makes it necessary that money should be available for the purpose of making public improvements, for the construction of roads, sidewalks and sewers, the laying of water mains, the supplying of light, the protection of life and property; more schools, more hospitals and more fire halls are needed, and that \$33,000,000 would provide them all. A portion of this sum will, it is true, go into the public treasury, for the owners of land will be required to pay taxes on that much more. The tax rate for the City of Winnipeg has not yet been struck for this year, but last year it was 13.25 mills, or about one and one-third cents on the dollar. If the tax rate was six or seven cents on the dollar, the whole of the land value would go to the public and this would provide not only for the needs of the Winnipeg City Council, School Board and Parks Board, but would also be sufficient to pay the share of the people of Winnipeg towards the maintenance of Provincial and Dominion Government, and all other taxes, including customs duties, would be unnecessary. The land values would pay all our taxes if we would only let them. Land values are the natural source of revenue.