

# THE WEEK.

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### MR. EDWARD BLAKE.

IN THE WEEK for 9th June appeared an article on "The Liberal Opposition" which is simply an unqualified denunciation of Mr. Edward Blake. Had the article been issued by an organ of the Government it might very properly have been allowed to pass without notice; but it occupies a prominent place in the paper which professes to be the exponent of the impartial intelligence of Canada on public questions, and the writer claims to represent "the vast majority of honourable men," to express "the mature judgments of the vast majority of calm and dispassionate thinkers throughout the Dominion." Yet amid all that has been written about the retired leader of the Opposition this article stands conspicuous for its absolutely unrelieved vituperation. While the organs of the Government, in referring to the calamity of his broken health, have in general been moved by the natural generosity of the human heart to mitigate the usual language of partisanship, the writer in THE WEEK, who criticises Mr. Blake "from no special regard for the party in power," but "merely from a national or patriotic point of view," has no generous word to utter about a man the strength of whose prime has been shattered in the unrewarded service of others—can find not a single redeeming feature in the character he paints, to give even a faint streak of light to the dark colouring with which his picture is drawn. And the colours, which he lays on with no sparing brush, are surely of intensest darkness. Twice within the column and a half to which the writer restricts his attack, Mr. Blake is declared to have "eaten dirt" in large quantities; he is described as "angling in dirty waters for the French vote," as "trading upon the rivalries of race and religion," as "pandering to the worst vices of national and religious sectarianism:" and thus the agony is piled up till it reaches its culmination in what was evidently intended to be a climax, but may after the above expressions of horror perhaps produce rather the effect of an anticlimax, a final charge "more serious" than all,—"the charge of disloyal and unpatriotic sentiment and conduct." If such are the phrases of "calm and dispassionate thinkers," and not rather the literary garbage in which passionate partisanship finds the gratification of its peculiar tastes, I have failed to estimate the true force of language. It does not appear upon what evidence the writer bases his claim to speak "the mature judgments of the vast majority of calm and dispassionate thinkers," nor is there any evidence to show that he expresses even the immature judgments of men who are neither calm nor dispassionate in their thoughts. There exists no means for canvassing the opinions of any large body of men in regard to such assertions, and therefore I refrain from arrogating the right to represent a vast majority of any kind. But till evidence to the contrary has been adduced, I shall refuse to believe that this writer expresses the mature judgments of any large number of calm and dispassionate thinkers even among Mr. Blake's political foes.

The writer professes to view Mr. Blake's character from the standpoint of those who lament the excessive party spirit by which the political life of all countries under popular government is apt to be corrupted. It is matter for congratulation that there are still among us a remnant who have not bowed the knee to the Baal of political sectarianism; but it is also to be feared that not a few who pose in the attitudes of calm impar-

ality have no higher claim to the position than that of never having troubled themselves to grapple with the perplexing social problems which drive men into political parties. Any man may ape the language of political impartiality by simply declaring the whole strife of parties to be a mere question of Ins and Outs, though he may never have spent an hour's earnest thought in trying to comprehend the strife. Thus the utmost poverty of intelligence and sentiment may obtain the credit of having reached a serene altitude of mind, from which the struggles of contending parties are seen to arise from the narrowness of their lower points of view. But there are instances in which this spurious impartiality is the most hopeless form of party spirit: it is the spirit of that truly "stupid party" which has unfortunately been too numerous at all times. For there is a stupidity that implies a torpor of the brain which cannot be awakened to any intelligent interest in the struggles of men for a righteous condition of society, and a torpor of the heart which cannot be thrilled by these struggles into one faint vibration of feeling. "Against such stupidity the gods fight in vain."

These remarks are intended, not to reflect on the writer of the article before us, but to explain the action of Mr. Blake against the charge of undue devotion to his party. He is certainly not one of those whose hearts cannot be touched by the earnest face of our struggling society. His actions and his utterances, even outside the arena of politics, show that his mind has long been taken up with the great social problems of our day. It was natural, therefore, that he should enter political life as the sphere in which he might hope to contribute something towards the practical solution of the problems in which he was interested. By the very nature of the case a man entering political life must endeavour as far as possible to act with others, and induce others to act with him, in the promotion of measures on which they can agree. And therefore, after all is said that can be said against the evils of our party system, it remains a fact that a man is practically debarred from usefulness in political life unless he makes up his mind to attach himself, for the time at least, to one of the great parties by whose aid alone he can expect to realise his own political ideas. It cannot therefore be made a ground of complaint against Mr. Blake, that he could not act with the party at present in power, or that he has clung, during a struggle of many discouraging years, to the party in Opposition. Nor will any fair mind indulge in unmitigated condemnation, even if it can be shown that Mr. Blake spoke and acted at times as he would not have done if his judgment had not at the moment been biassed by the party-warfare in which he was engaged. Every honest man knows that his own judgment is often warped, and his better nature sometimes wholly thwarted, by the perplexing complications amid which his life is spent; and he is ready therefore to pass a lenient, which is the only just, criticism on those who bear the heat and dust of our social conflicts, unless their conduct betrays that they have habitually burst the restraints of intelligent moral conviction. I certainly know of no prominent man in either of our political parties, who has kept himself more clearly aloof than Mr. Blake from the temptations of his position; and perhaps if the writer of the article under consideration approaches the question in the truly historical spirit, he may find it more difficult than he imagines to select among the most honoured statesmen of Canada one whose freedom from partisanship may be used as a foil to set off the enormities of Mr. Blake.

It cannot be that Mr. Blake's political speeches have shocked the writer by the violence of their sectarian tone. While most of the leading men in both parties have been betrayed at times into language such as gentlemen never use except when gentlemanly sentiment has been obliterated by the passions of party-squabbling, the Leader of the Opposition has in general maintained a dignity which has been supposed to render his eloquence less effective than it might have been if it had been more frequently interlarded with the spicy thrusts and colloquial vulgarities that titillate the popular ear. I fear I must in frankness confess that the language of Mr. Blake's detractor, when compared with that of Mr. Blake himself, appears to me to disclose the very fanaticism of partiality.

But it is probably the conduct of Mr. Blake, and the matter rather than the style of his speeches, that excite the wrath of his critic; and his charges, so far as they have anything specific, seem to be these four:—that he had no policy; that he bade for the French vote; that he bade for the Irish vote; and that he was guilty of disloyal and unpatriotic sentiment and conduct.