

THE BORDEN CABINET—III. THE MINISTER OF TRADE AND COMMERCE

by H. F. Gadsby.



Hon. George E. Foster.

INTRODUCING the Minister of Trade and Commerce, better known as Far Flung Foster.

The British Empire is far flung, but it is not far enough flung for George Eulas Foster to fling himself in. The orb of the earth is his field. One of his first acts when he became Minister was to dismiss Mr. P. C. Larkin and appoint himself Canada's representative on the Imperial Trade Commission which was to be a non-political body. One reason for dismissing Mr. Larkin was that he is a Liberal; another was that Foster needed a roving charter that would take him away from Ottawa; still another was that it would give him an opportunity for globe-trotting and sight seeing at the public expense while calling the Junkets by the name of duty.

Any one of these three reasons would have been enough for Foster, but three reasons of a kind beat two pairs so the result is that he has been away from Ottawa in distant parts of the world for three-quarters of his time, and his Department of Trade and Commerce, which might have been made a fine instrument of Canadian expansion, is a standing joke. The office gives him a place to hang his hat, a chair to sit in, an excuse for foreign travel, emoluments of ten thousand a year and a prince's expense account. That's about all Foster wants out of it. As for

Cabinet meetings they can go hang, Foster's away in far Cathay avoiding the Canadian winter.

At the back of this wanderlust is pique. You will remember that Foster had his fling once before in the "Nest of Traitors." He had it again in the affairs of the Union Trust Company which were the subject of a legal investigation. So when his party came to power, instead of making him premier, they side tracked his spotted past in the Department of Trade and Commerce and Far Flung Foster instead of trying to live it down by good deeds flung out in a rage and has been circling round and round the world like a maddened equator ever since. The only time he cares to be on the spot is when his leader Borden is seeking health in Virginia and then he loves to be Acting Premier on the off chance that the dear fellow will not get better. Speaking generally, however, Foster's motto is that you can always go home when there's no place else to go to.

As far as the cartoonist can do it in a one column cut, he has pictured Far Flung Foster with the graces of travel still clinging to him. You notice the cap with the button, the badge of a mandarin of the first class—he picked that up in China. The kimona is the result of his sojourn in Japan. The boomerang is a souvenir of his Australian visit. He is playing on a samisen. The pine apple typifies his West Indian triumphs. The cross-legged attitude is a prevailing Eastern custom. These and a few literary impressions of Corea and other countries with which he entertains Canadian Clubs here and in the United States are about all Foster brought home with him. Trade and things like that he leaves to professional drummers—he scorns to soil his hands with it. They say travel is a great educator and yet with all his travel Far Flung Foster has not learned to have a meek and lowly spirit. He hates his colleagues like cold boiled veal.

Since he foreswore reciprocity in 1911, he has been telling audiences that he saw the Underwood tariff coming and that's why he behaved as he did. Without confronting

him with his speeches of 1911 or calling him a liar, we will say that he has a useful gift of talking his memory to sleep, and let it go at that. Recent utterances indicate that even now he has only a step-mother's love for lower food taxes, his idea of helping the cost of living being almost anything so long as it does not interfere with the tariff.

He has not had the nerve to deny what he said about the Canadian navy in 1909, when he spoke and voted, as did Premier Borden and the Conservative party in the House of Commons, as in fact Parliament did unanimously, in favour of what afterwards became the Laurier policy. Faced with his words the best this brazen old cynic can do is shrug his shoulders and say he has had a change of heart.

This brings us back to his picture again. Did you ever see sadder whiskers? For a time while hope beamed and there was a chance that Premier Borden would not fit there was a hectic flush on Far Flung Foster's cheeks and a bring light in his eye and he took to trimming his whiskers to a point, but as hope faded he grew careless, his whiskers reverted to type, so to speak, and presently he began to gad about like the Wandering Jew. Poor Foster! He started as a free trader and he swallowed that. He rose to notice as prohibitionist and he had to swallow that to get into Sir John Macdonald's Cabinet. He had some business scruples and he had to swallow them in the course of a short, but disastrous business career. All the way through the wretched man has had to swallow his own opinions. Eating crow is no fun. If the man looks sick put it down to that.

The trouble with Foster is that he has about as much red blood as a preserved fish. His party stands for him because he is a fluent speaker. Being a voice and nothing else he has the same influence in the party as a good phonograph. If the party were so unfortunate at this moment as to lose Premier Borden and had to choose between Bob Rogers and Far Flung Foster as his successor I think Bob would land it.