

TRUTH FOR THE PEOPLE

OLD SERIES.—17th YEAR.

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THE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION.

It is a notable fact that none of the want-of-confidence motions of Mr. Blake ever produce much of a sensation, even among his own devoted followers. During the session of 1885 it was predicted by Conservatives as well as by Reformers that when Mr. Blake moved a resolution respecting the outbreak in the North-West that his indictment would be very severe; and some of the followers of the Government said, "It is hard to see how the administration is going to escape. There are certain forms, in which it is possible for Blake to move a resolution, that will almost preclude the possibility of recording a negative vote." And so when the leader of the Opposition arose in the House, towards the close of the session, and when the tumult had been brought to an end in the North-West, Conservative members shivered at their desks when they looked upon the vast bulk of manuscript that the Hon. gentleman held in his hand. There was a breathless silence in the House when he began; Reformers strained forward to hear every word that the speaker uttered; Conservatives shrank back upon their seats and held down their heads. One and all looked for a tremendous and terrible impeachment; they expected the formulation of a series of grave charges against the Government for dereliction of duty and criminal misadministration of North West affairs; they sat ready to hear that at the doors of Government was to be laid the ruin which had been wrought on our fair plains. But no such impeachment came. Mr. Blake simply contented himself, in a rhetorical sense, with being magnificent. He made a speech of great length, of ponderous weight, and of wide grasp; but there was no direct charge against the Government; indeed there was no charge of any kind. He merely recited a hundred points; and when he sat down the whole utterance left upon one's mind the effect produced by some huge "Whereas" without any "Be it therefore Resolved" following it. It was just as if a commander, supposed to have in his following invincible legions, had gone up to the enemy and fired in their faces a broadside of blank cartridge. "Never mind," some of his followers said, he will make an arraignment of the Government next year that will scuttle the country. "Then his first step should be to call for a commission of enquiry into the administration of affairs in the North-West," some one suggested. "Mr. Blake knows his own business best," was the retort by a Grit M. P. from Nova Scotia. "Of course he does," chimed in a Reform journalist—and a pretty stupid one at that—from Montreal. "Don't you know, my good sir,"—putting his finger through the button-hole of the suggester's coat—"that there is no need for the Commission of enquiry? Riel is to be tried next summer and the cross-examination will elicit all the grievances which the Metis have suffered. There is no need for a commission of enquiry." "Then," responded the Independent adviser, you believe that Riel and

his followers will be allowed upon trial, to put in the plea of justification? That is absurd. The prisoners will be tried for high treason, the most grievous offence known to the law. Enquiry into grievance will be shut off. "Oh," they did not know about that. It might be so; and it might not. But Mr. Blake was the best judge "anyway." So they went away and depended upon their theories and upon Mr. Blake.

Riel was tried, and just as the one independent in politics had predicted, his defence were not permitted to set up the plea of justification. All the hopes of the Opposition, therefore, that the grievances would "come out at the trial" were thrown to the winds.

But the Opposition once more established solid foundations to their faith in Mr. Blake. They believed that he would move such a resolution, and make such a speech during the present session as would shatter the administration to its foundations. But while they were waiting for the wonderful resolution and the overwhelming speech, M. Landry moved his resolution affirming that the execution of Louis Riel was unjustifiable. This was a trap for Mr. Blake and his followers; there was more than one way to avoid that trap; but Mr. Blake could not see it. Once again he came up with his mod and artillery and expended his energies at a point where the enemy was not at all. What was a more legitimate result of the rebellion, and the only justifiable act of the executive in connection with it, was made to take the place of the great question itself. Mr. Blake of course made a magnificent speech; but what is the good of a magnificent speech without the verdict?

Now, as we have many times admitted before, it is an easy task to be a critic.

"A man must serve his time to every trade. Be a censor;—critics all are ready-made."

Nevertheless, when a man with diverse splendid opportunities at his hands fails to turn any one of them to account, criticism, even from indifferent pens may be excused for obtruding itself upon the scenes. In the Government's management of North-West affairs, Mr. Blake has had a great opportunity; such an opportunity as seldom comes to a man in opposition; yet the outlook is that no profit is to come to his party through that opportunity. Nay, more, it does seem as if Mr. Blake himself is to have permanent injury thereby.

We repeat; Mr. Blake should have amended the motion of the member for Montmagny, so as to retain the whole question of the Government's administration in the North-West as the subject for primary discussion, and at the same time, by his wording, if he wished it, kept himself in rapport with Quebec sentiment. Then, instead of moving a resolution violent and sweeping in its denunciation of Government, he should have made a motion putting the case in its mildest form; putting it in such a way that even the most party-blind Tories in the house could not vote against it without shame in his face. Let us for a moment imagine a resolution like this,

Whereas certain inhabitants in the region of Prince Albert, notably, as well as elsewhere in the North-West Territories, had grievances in obtaining patents and titles to their lands;

And whereas these grievances, whether as great as alleged or otherwise, occasioned much heartburning among the persons affected;

And whereas these people represented to the proper department of the Government that such hardships existed;

And whereas it was known to Government that several meetings were held at which violent speeches were made in denunciation of Government, and in threatening physical protest;

And whereas it came to the knowledge of Government that Louis Riel, a well known disturber, was amongst these people affecting certain organizations;

And whereas the Government did not take prompt and urgent steps (a) to remedy the grievances under which the complaining parties suffered; and (b) to prevent the uprising of which it had been apprized;

Be it therefore resolved that this House express its regrets that the Government through the proper department did not take such steps as might have prevented the late deplorable revolt.

Now supposing Mr. Blake had moved a resolution of this sort at once after the opening of the House, he must have taken almost the entire Province of Quebec with him as well as many of the Conservatives. The allegations in such a resolution would be heaven's own truth, plain to every man. As to the "papers," there were plenty of these in the hands of the country to substantiate the affirmations in such a resolution as we have outlined. A man of strong common sense would have seen the case in this light; but it takes an amazingly clever lawyer to perceive that a position is not strong unless technicality has been conformed to, and unless all the evidence, the whole of the vast bulk of irrelevant titillation, has been showered upon the House. No honest man could, really, have voted against such a resolution; and any man who did vote against it would be plainly showing that he was a partizan; that he was there to support the ministry and for nothing else; and that he would vote for them when they were plainly wrong as well as when they were in the right.

What Mr. Blake may do now we do not know. The only thing certain is that matched against Sir John he is like a child defying to encompass a man full-grown. A splendid intellect Mr. Blake has; but his brains are the brains of an equity pleader. The human heart he can be hardly said to understand; for the man who has not tact, who is not master of the hundred little indefinable sleights by which men's susceptibilities are touched; by which new faces are put upon surrounding circumstances; can hardly be said to have knowledge of the human heart. Sir John Macdonald has this knowledge; and a follower is to him as in-

strument upon whom he may put his fingers "to sound what note he please." It may seem an unkindly thing to say, but nevertheless we cannot refrain from saying it: the Opposition needs a leader. Mr. Blake has been tried at various times and under differing circumstances; and while he has been always magnificent he has always, in his own right, been unsuccessful. No one can be expected to do wonders; the eloquence of a man ought not be expected to carry an overwhelming majority of hard-and-fast partisans. For failing to get the Tories to rise and vote with him we do not censure Edward Blake. But even the blind followers of a party chief may be put into such a position that they must go as the stream of public opinion flows. If the Conservatives were prepared to follow their consciences Mr. Blake has so far failed to take a course which any one of them might not refuse to follow. He has failed and failed miserably. His failure indeed as a leader is almost unbelievable. And this we pen with regret.

MR. OXLEY IN THE "CURRENT."

One of our Canadian writers has lately contributed a couple of papers to the *Current*, an indescribable weekly paper published at Chicago, the series being entitled "To-day in Canada." The writer, who by the way is Mr. J. M. Oxley, of the Marine and Fisheries Department at Ottawa, looks at the country from political, social, and literary points of view. Tied as his hands are with official cords, what he has to say upon the political aspects of our situation is not of much value; but his summing up of our social status is an accurate enough picture of our people.

The following paragraph we reproduce:—with endorsement: "Although still inferior to her great rival Montreal, as regards the number of its inhabitants, a deficiency by the way which she is rapidly rectifying, the city of Toronto, by virtue of being the capital of the fairest, finest Province, and of her swift progress towards a proud supremacy over all other competitors in regard to everything that makes a city great, commands priority of notice. The capital of Ontario with pardonable pride arrogates to herself the ambitious title of the "Queen City." Commercially she has yet to make good her title, but from a literary, scientific or social point of view it is already established beyond dispute. There is of course no actual aristocracy in Canada, but the nearest approach to such a thing may be found in Toronto, where the descendants of the United Empire Loyalists flourish and multiply rejoicing in an ancestry whose honor they would preserve unsullied, and whose memory they delight to keep ever green and inspiring. To this congenial centre gather the choicest spirits in art, literature, and science, and it is but natural therefore that more delightful or improving society need hardly be desired than its drawing-rooms and clubs afford. The mere making and spending of money is not regarded as the be-all and end-all of existence. The claims