



Delegates to Manitoba Grain Growers' Convention, Brandon, January 24, 25 and 26

Sidelights on Parliament

An interesting article on some of the Happenings Behind
the Scenes at the Capitol

It must be a great thing to be a member of parliament," is a remark often made by visitors to Ottawa. And so it is. To be one of the 821 gentlemen, who rule, and supposedly at least, represent, the eight million people of the Canadian nation, is at once an honor, a privilege, and an opportunity. A member of parliament has many privileges and he usually exercises all of them; he has many opportunities to do good and to do harm, and he exercises some of them. Among the privileges there is the receipt of an indemnity of \$2,500 per session, and the right, which is given by law to every senator and member of the house of commons, of travelling free on any Canadian railway. At Ottawa, the member of parliament is a member also of the finest club in Canada, the houses of parliament, which contain the largest and most complete library in the Dominion and the most sumptuous of restaurants and at home, if he be on the government side, he is the man who can make and unmake government officials, and exercise a wide and far reaching influence in many directions.

Some Members Busy

But being a member of parliament "is not all beer and skittles," as they say in England. A member who attempts to do his duty to his constituents, is much harder worked during the six or seven months the house is in session each year, than the ordinarily industrious business man. Making speeches in the house, or even listening to the oratorical efforts of his colleagues, is a very small part of the work of a member. To begin with he will probably receive from a dozen to fifty letters every day, all requiring an answer, and many of them necessitating an interview with a minister or a visit to one of the departmental offices, which are scattered all over the city. Most of these letters come from constituents who desire favors from the government or information of a political nature. There are people who want to get timber limits or grazing leases, homesteaders who are having trouble with the homestead inspector, political supporters who have run up against some new and surprising allegation of the opposing party and who want to know how to answer it, people who want jobs for themselves, their sons or their friends. All these write to their member, and of course they expect that whatever they ask he will be able to accomplish. To write their letters, the members employ a large number of stenographers. Hitherto the work has been done by a charming bevy of young ladies who carried their typewriters and notebooks around and camped in committee rooms, smoking rooms, corridors or any old place where they could get the use of a table or a chair for a while. One day there was a mild sensation caused by one of these young ladies tripping quite unconcernedly into the chamber when the house of commons was in session to take dictation from one of the members. When she realized her mistake she hastily retreated, and the house roared with laughter. The members, it is said, were

very fond of dictating letters to these fair and fluffy damsels, but a few days before the Christmas recess an unfeeling committee having jurisdiction over the internal economy of the house, gave orders for their banishment and in future their places will be taken by men.

Committee Meetings

Then there are meetings of the various committees of the house, some of which each member belongs to and is supposed to take an interest in. There is the railway committee, for instance, to which all private bills dealing with railway legislation are referred for the consideration of their details. A "private" bill, it should be noted, means a bill that is introduced in parliament at the request and for the benefit of some individual, group of individuals or corporation, such as a measure authorizing a railway company to construct new lines or extending the time during which such lines may be constructed. Bills only go to the committees after passing first and second readings in the house and having their principles approved, and it is the business of the committee to consider matters of detail and either make such amendments as may be thought desirable and then send the bill back to the house for third reading or to throw the bill out altogether. Party lines are not quite so closely drawn in committee as in the house itself, and here members often have opportunities of securing changes which, for party reasons, they would not advocate from their seats in the house. What frequently happens, however, is that a bill which is opposed by some special interest but is known to meet with popular approval, and which the members would not dare to offend their constituents by opposing publicly in the house, is quietly killed in committee when the speeches made and the names of those voting are not recorded either in Hansard or the party press. An instance of this was the bill providing for the establishment of co-operative

societies, which was killed by the banking and commerce committee last session, as the result of the opposition of the Retail Merchants' association. The standing committees, of which there are thirteen, meet during the forenoon, and attendance at these takes up a good deal of the time of members.

Business in The House

At three o'clock "The House" opens, with prayers. Non-members are rigidly excluded from the chamber during devotions, which are led by the speaker, and it is reported that sometimes a good deal more than prayers are said, the time being a favorite one for the airing of personal grievances. At any rate prayer time sometimes lasts much longer than usual, and occasionally the muffled sounds of voices raised in angry dispute reach the corridors. The business of the house then goes on until six o'clock, when a recess for dinner is taken. At eight business is resumed, and may be continued until any hour of the night or morning, though usually the adjournment takes place about midnight.

But it must not be supposed that while the debates are in progress the members must sit in their places listening to the speeches for and against, carefully weighing the arguments adduced and earnestly endeavoring to decide on which side they shall cast their vote. Oh, no! A member must put in an appearance at some time during the day or \$15 will be deducted from his indemnity, and he must be around when a vote is likely to be taken, or he will be in trouble with the party whips, but when matters of minor importance are being discussed and especially when the house sits until late at night, the majority of the members may be found in any place except their seats. There are rooms on every floor to which members can retreat when bored by parliamentary oratory. The chief resting place for tired liberals is "Number sixteen," conveniently situated just across the corridor

from the entrance to the chamber, while the conservatives have their "Number eighty-nine," across the road from the Press room. The Press room itself is frequently invaded by members from both sides seeking intellectual refreshment. Refreshment of another kind, with or without the company of the gentlemen of the press, is sought upstairs in the restaurant, with former governor-generals, premiers and old time patriots looking on in silent envy from oil paintings on the walls. There are also rooms in different parts of the building reserved for the use of members from the different portions of the Dominion, and on the ground floor, near the library and reading rooms, is the smoking room where the tedious hours preceding an early morning division are often whiled away in a quiet game of cards, or a stern but silent contest over the chess board. There are comfortable lounges in every room, but members who have the unfortunate habit of snoring are not allowed to sleep long in peace.

"Poor But Honest" Members

A "poor but honest" member of parliament who comes to Ottawa has a hard row to hoe. There are such, no doubt, and there will be more when the people use more discretion in selecting their representatives, but a man who has not a considerable income apart from his sessional indemnity, is, to say the least, subject to great temptations. Take the case of a Western member for instance. Unless he is a farmer, he must practically retire from active business, and if he has no investment of capital from which he can draw a revenue he must live on his sessional indemnity of \$2,500 less \$15 per day for non-attendance at the house. With a home to maintain in Ottawa during the winter months and another in his constituency for the summer and a family to provide for, he will probably find it hard to make both ends meet, but still it can be done. But getting elected is an expensive matter and, in a large constituency, such as those in the West, a candidate cannot expect to get through on less than \$4,000 or \$5,000. Some of the candidates in the last election spent \$20,000 and one or two much more than that. And the question is, how is a member to get his \$5,000 or \$10,000 back? In some cases the funds are provided from the campaign chest of the party, but the party chest is filled chiefly by the big corporations, and what is a member, who has been elected with this assistance, to do when those corporations come to parliament to ask for favors? Wherein is his position different from that of a member who accepts a direct bribe? There are many members, no doubt, who come to Ottawa determined to raise their voice and use their votes against the injustices and the wrongs that prevail. They will not be parties to the granting of special privileges to the railways or anyone else. But when they get here they find unexpected difficulties in the way. It is pointed out to them by some smooth-tongued and more experienced

Direct Legislation: or The Initiative and Referendum

What It Is and Why We Need It

All over Western Canada the people are asking for information on Direct Legislation. This little booklet of 36 pages by R. L. Scott tells the whole story. Every man interested in Direct Legislation should buy from 25 to 100 copies of this booklet and distribute them among his friends. They will be sent to any address for 5c each, post paid, or 25 copies for a dollar. If you want only one, send for it. If you want a large number of copies to be distributed, send in the names and addresses with your money, and the booklets will be mailed direct to any names desired. Direct Legislation is one of the greatest needs of the time, and no man can afford to be without a copy of this booklet. They are kept in stock in The Guide office and will be sent promptly by return mail.

BOOK DEPARTMENT • • GRAIN GROWERS' GUIDE, WINNIPEG

Continued on Page 81