



# CAMPAIGN FUNDS

By "Old Politician"

A FRANK CONSIDERATION OF AN IMPORTANT PUBLIC QUESTION—BY A MAN WHO HAS BEEN THROUGH MANY PUBLIC CONTESTS, AND HAS BEEN A LEADER IN HIS PARTY.

**R**ECENTLY the public mind has been acutely turned to the question of corrupt practices at Parliamentary elections. This is proper and wholesome. No justification can be made for corruption in popular elections. Under our system of government the people are Sovereign—the last Court of Appeal. To unduly influence the judgment of an elector is to pollute the springs of public virtue and endanger the institutions of the nation. No deadlier blow could be dealt to popular government than the growth of a system of tampering with the purity and independence of the electorate. Therefore, any strong manifestations of public abhorrence are sound and wholesome.

But the odium, so far, has fallen upon public men—members and candidates. I have some doubt if the whole responsibility should be thus imposed. It is fitting we should understand the exact conditions which exist. As one who was long actively associated with public life and called upon to face many severe election contests, I can speak with some degree of confidence—the more so since I am no longer in the field, nor likely again to be. I am, therefore, strong in my conviction that candidates for Parliament are the most disgusted with electoral corruptness and would be the most eager to have it ruthlessly ended. It is recognised as not only an evil but a burden, and the best of them know not how to escape its hideous thralldom.

Take the case of an ordinary candidate for a seat in Parliament—surely an object of honourable ambition to any able and competent man. He would like, if he could, to devote his attention to the public issues: appeal from the platform to the intelligence and patriotism of the people. This part of an election campaign is elevating and inspiring. It is pleasant, likewise, to visit the homes of the people and make the personal acquaintance of the men and women—especially so in the back districts where the conditions of life are perhaps novel and the incidents interesting. If these were the only necessities of a candidate his task would be agreeable and public life robbed of most of its burdens and revolting features.

## WHY MONEY IS SPENT.

But what happens? To-day he enters a district on his canvass and begins to talk to the electors. Are they reflecting upon the public issues? Are they interested in the matters prominently before the country? Some are, but he is bound to meet a percentage, larger or smaller, who are absolutely indifferent to public questions. He begins to hear enquiries. "Is anything going this time?" The meaning is hideously clear. He replies promptly that under the law it is impossible to expend any money corruptly. "Well, the other side has plenty of it," is the response, generally accompanied with a leer. A sense of disgust at once arises, and the candidate feels a disposition—especially after a few such dialogues have occurred—to go home and abandon the contest. But this is not quite easy. He has been appointed the standard-bearer of the cause by a convention of his friends, and the influence of this extends beyond the

limits of the constituency. The party system embraces the whole country from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and the fate of a government is at stake. Party leaders have him in their eye. It may be that he is a Cabinet Minister, and his fate as a public man is at stake. He may be assumed to have dreams and ambitions of a career. Therefore, while it would be noble and heroic to fling the game, it is opposed to the frailties of human nature and the ordinary instincts of mankind.

He goes to the leaders in the polling district—discusses the situation with his chosen adviser. This is the message: "Our fellows generally are in good trim, but the Peat Mountain boys say they won't come to the polls unless they get something." The candidate says, "But, I have no means for any such purpose, and it would be a clear violation of the law." "Well," he replies, "unless we get them the majority here will only be 20 and it ought to be 40. Besides, Jackson, the leader of the other party in the district is playing with them, and he may get them if we do nothing. Is there no fund?" When this condition has been faced in a dozen different sections the candidate sees clearly that something must be done to get the indifferent ones to the polls or defeat is inevitable.

## HOW RAISED.

"Is there no fund?" This is a pregnant question. As politics are now run in Canada there is a fund. Both parties have it. How is it obtained? This is easy. Big men having important relations with the government, men who desire to be considered leaders among politicians, men who desire senatorships and other favours and keen partisans who can afford it are ready to contribute handsomely. They do not pay it to the Ministers. There is too much sense abroad for anybody to conceive anything so foolish. But there are "Managers" who, in the quietude of unofficial positions, arrange all this, and the distribution is made with exactitude and wisdom. The safe constituencies are allowed to take chances. Where the party candidate is rich he is left generally to bear his own burdens. But in all the doubtful and well-contested constituencies a suitable sum is assigned. The candidate knows this. His chosen friends know it. Is it human nature that with this knowledge he should allow the "boys from Peat Mountain" to stay at home? He does not have to handle a penny. The local manager, well concealed, can deal with his "leaders" in each polling section, and on election day the "boys from Peat Mountain" are alive and active at the polls.

Does anyone suppose that the average candidate enjoys this? Or that he does not abhor it, and would rejoice to have it abolished?

