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ST. JOHN, N. B., WEDNESDAY, MARCH 6, 1912.

FROM BEHIND THE SPEAKER'S CHAIR.

Mr. Pugsley as the injured innocent.

To do him justice there is no member in the House of Commons who can play the role of The Injured Innocent in the same street with Mr. Pugsley. In the handling of this, at times, exacting character, the ex-Minister of Public Works is pre-eminent. His performance is well worth watching. With delicate finesse he glides over pitfalls laid craftily for his reception by abandoned Conservatives; with pained surprise, often verging on open indignation, he discovers that his past philanthropic efforts for the country's weal are being called in question; with a voice trembling with emotion he declares that all acts and deeds of the late Administration, of which he had the honor to be a member, are as white as the driven snow, and then, with a parting regret that his calumniators should be so lost to all sense of justice, he resumes his seat—the picture of The Injured Innocent. One expects to see the wings materialize but they don't. It's acting, but it's mighty good acting at that.

There is no shrewder lawyer in this fair Dominion than this same Mr. Pugsley. As Robert, the draughtsman, remarks in a play with which many St. John people are familiar, he can "smell out a stink anywhere," and what is more to the point, where the late Government is concerned, he can endow it, to his own entire satisfaction, with a fragrance like otto of roses. Talk about sawdust wharves and Gaspereaux dredging scandals! Nothing to them when Mr. Pugsley has explained the real true facts in the case. It's an art, that's what it is, and Mr. Pugsley is its most gifted exponent.

Now that the member for St. John is in Opposition he keeps a watchful eye to see that his sayings and doings in the hallowed days of power and patronage are not misinterpreted. Irresponsible journals published in New Brunswick are scrutinized, the speeches of opponents are carefully scanned lest the poison of calumny should sink into the ears of the susceptible elector. It was on one of these foraging expeditions that Mr. Pugsley discovered a statement in The Standard made by Mr. George W. Fowler at a banquet at Albert which called for his early attention. It related to a little matter of rails for the Salisbury and Albert Railway.

By way of preface it should, perhaps, be explained that for many months last year some 20 miles of this road ceased operations. The people of Albert were without a railway. Parliament was in session, the late member for Kings-Albert, Dr. McAllister, was a supporter of the Government, Mr. Pugsley represented a nearby constituency, but months passed and nothing was done to relieve the difficulty. Residents in Albert county got pretty mad when they looked at that railway, or rather at the place where the rails ought to be. In consequence of that, for it was a burning question in Albert, and possibly for other reasons, Dr. McAllister's political neck was already in the noose when, to make matters worse, the general election was suddenly announced. Mr. Pugsley made a gallant effort to save his doomed friend and colleague. The wires got busy for the first time on August 2. The I. C. R. authorities at Moncton were entreated by earnest and perspiring Liberals, many a time and oft, to hurry up and do something to save the situation. The case was desperate.

We now come to Mr. Fowler's speech at the Albert banquet, after the election, which had attracted Mr. Pugsley's attention. Mr. Fowler said in part:

"The people of Albert county were fooled about the railway. Promises were made by our opponents that we were not intended to be fulfilled. Some car loads of rails were sent to Salisbury a day or so before the election and these were to be taken back again in case the Government were defeated. There had been no authority for these rails to be loaded or removed from Moncton, and as soon as the elections were over and the Government was defeated, arrangements were made to withdraw these rails. I found it necessary to go to Ottawa. I found out that there had been no contract signed or executed in regard to rails for the Salisbury and Albert Railway. I made arrangements for those rails and got them forwarded."

This looked like a pretty clear case until Mr. Pugsley got busy with it in Committee of Supply on the railway estimates. No self-respecting champion of a dead and gone Administration could allow his memory to be defiled in that way. So Mr. Pugsley rose in his place in his celebrated impersonation of the Injured Innocent and started in. He showed that an agreement had been prepared by the Department of Justice for the sale of the rails by the Government to the company and that the document had been sent to New York for the signature of the president of the road. He received a telegram to say that the agreement was signed. "It was understood," said Mr. Pugsley, much aggrieved, "that when it was signed the company's solicitor would send it forward to the Deputy Minister of Railways at Ottawa. I took it for granted that that would be done, and I immediately wired either to the Minister of Railways or to the Deputy Minister of Railways, stating that the contract had been signed and forwarded to Ottawa, and asking him to give directions for the delivery of the rails."

All this happened two days before the election. The propriety of the Government parting with several carloads of rails valued at \$27 a ton before the contract was received at Ottawa, was not dwelt upon by Mr. Pugsley until Mr. Fowler called attention to it in the course of debate. It can be well understood that with his friend and colleague in Albert county already on the scaffold, such a trifling matter of routine as making sure that the Department got the contract first was not worth consideration.

The rails were rushed forward, but somehow they failed to carry the election. Dr. McAllister went to his political doom. It was not until October 5, a fortnight after the fatal day, that the discovery seems to have been made by the Department that there was no contract for the rails. They were ordered to be returned to Moncton. The contract was not signed in Ottawa until October 26.

Mr. Pugsley was very indignant that the people of Albert had been fooled over the transaction. "Mr. Fowler," he said, "was not acting in a manner which would command the approval of those who were acquainted with the circumstances, when he went to his constituents and told the people that the late Government had been deliberately fooling them. Instead of delivering these rails, in fact, telling them that they never intended to deliver them and that what they did was simply to send forward the rails with the intention of taking them back after the elections. I submit that upon consideration even the lion member himself will feel that his far greater than the demand—chillblains."

"conduct under these circumstances was of the most unjustifiable character."

This was pretty strong for Mr. Pugsley, but the role of the Injured Innocent demanded it. The member for Kings-Albert did not seem to feel the situation quite in the way Mr. Pugsley desired. In reviewing the circumstances which led up to the Liberals getting the rails after months of delay Mr. Fowler asked rather pointedly why there was any particular hurry at that time. "Because," he continued, "an election was impending, because this railway ran through an important section of the county of Albert, a part of the constituency of Kings and Albert, because they felt that this man Fowler would likely be a candidate, and under those circumstances, they were determined to keep him out of the House at any cost. They had succeeded once at a tremendous cost and they were determined to do it again if they could. So these gentlemen got busy, not because they wished to redress the grievance that the people of that portion of Albert county were suffering from—no, but simply because they wished to carry that constituency and they felt that it was necessary to take that step."

With regard to the contract not being signed by the Department, Mr. Pugsley had contended that as the terms were approved and the rails delivered it was binding on the company anyway. He had no doubt whatever on that point. Mr. Fowler had grave doubts. "No Minister of Railways," he said, "no responsible head or deputy head of the Department of Railways would be justified in allowing rails to such an amount as would cover 20 miles of road to go out from the possession of the Intercolonial railway under any such loose arrangement as that, I care not what statement my hon. friend may make, in regard to it on his responsibility or reputation as a lawyer. I grant that my hon. friend is a good lawyer, none better in Canada, but my hon. friend is not serious when he makes the statement that that would be a sufficient contract for him, and if he were advising a client he would not advise him along those lines."

But it was at the close of the discussion that Mr. Pugsley appeared the Injured Innocent at his best. Mr. Fowler had been remarking that the business of the Public Works Department had been done in a very loose manner. "The hon. gentleman has again indulged in street-corner gossip, I suppose," was Mr. Pugsley's scornful rejoinder. A minute later came the climax: "So far as the Public Works Department, while I had the honor to preside over it, is concerned, I have no fear of the fullest possible investigation into every act of mine, and as to everything that was done while I was Minister."

"Wait a while," suggested Mr. Bennet of Simco, with gentle significance.

"We will wait a while," returned Mr. Pugsley in a blaze of righteous indignation, "just as long as my hon. friend waits, but let us wait, do not let us anticipate what may be discovered, do not throw out insinuation as to what may be discovered, do not seek to poison the public mind with respect to the administration of a department until matters are brought out, if there are any that can be brought out, reflecting on the administration of the department. It seems to me that it is only fair, only what any public man administering a department has a right to expect from political opponents whether they are members of this House or outsiders."

It was a masterly performance! There was not a dry eye on the Opposition side of the House when Mr. Pugsley, still permeated with the glow of injured innocence, resumed his seat.

It is to be noted that the point in this debate was unguardedly supplied by Mr. Pugsley himself when in referring to the contract being sent to Ottawa he said: "I took it for granted that this would be done," it was not done. The moral lies in the reflection that, while we all know elections are not won by prayers alone, in the public interest one signed contract in Ottawa is worth two unsigned contracts in New York.

Current Comment

(Christian Guardian.)

If one is really determined to be miserable and unhappy he can easily find enough to make and to keep him that way all his days, but if he has not so determined there is enough available sunshine in nearly any day to make it measurably bright and cheery. The atmosphere of our life is very much as we make it. We see blue skies overhead if we look out at them with clear vision; and hopeful eyes, but a murky spirit will darken the brightest day. There are plenty of things to fret about to keep the scowl on our face forever, but there are infinitely more things to rejoice in if we only train ourselves to see them.

(Calgary Herald.)

A Paris daily prints an extract from an interview with Mme. Sarah Bernhardt on May 20, 1880. Thirty-one years ago Mme. Sarah Bernhardt had made her mind to leave the Comedie Francaise, and gave her reasons to a reporter on the Gaulois staff. "I only earn £1,200 a year," she said. "That is sufficient for an artist who intends to go on acting all his or her life. But I do not intend to go on acting all my life. In twenty years I shall be an old woman and I hope to have retired by then. That is why I am leaving the Comedie Francaise." The divine Sarah is still acting and is forever young.

(Ottawa Citizen.)

The announcement has been made by Premier Whitney that \$5,000,000 will be spent in the colonization and development of Northern Ontario, extending from the Temiskaming country to Fort William. In other words, the settled part of old Ontario will be called upon to develop the Northern hinterland in the same way that Eastern Canada has been called upon in the past to provide the money for the development of Northwestern Canada. This is in the nature of shouldering the white man's burden, a principle that has made the Empire great.

(Ottawa Free Press.)

The duke says that he had had trouble with his fruit trees in the old country as well as considerable annoyance. Evidently the San Jose scale and other pesky things are not respecters of royalty. Most of them did originate in the United States anyway.

(Hamilton Times.)

Thomas Edison says there will be no poverty for years now. Perhaps the poverty-stricken will derive comfort from this prophecy. All they need to have is confidence and patience.

(London, Ont., Advertiser.)

The British coal miners ask a minimum wage. The coal owners ask in return for it a minimum output. A maximum of goodwill on both sides ought to settle the dispute.

(Toronto Mail and Empire.)

Someone says that Hon. George Graham is the Bill Nye of the House; but admirers of the humorist should remember that Dickens, too, was slandered after his death.

(Mail and Empire.)

Manitoba gets the square deal, and Ontario has her way out on Hudson Bay.

(Stratford Herald.)

There is one article at present of which the supply is far greater than the demand—chillblains.

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