

THE BORDEN CABINET.—VII. THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE.

by H. F. Gadsby.



Hon. Martin Burrell

MARTIN Burrell, with the accent on the burr, finds the portfolio of agriculture a better job to stick at than fruit farming in British Columbia. He is a song-and-dance farmer, two ten minute turns a day, but nothing in the nature of sustained performance. He goes in for the fancy touches. He knows as much about practical farming of the shirt sleeves and sweat variety and has as little sympathy with it as his colleague the Minister of Labor has with carrying the hod or the doctrines of Henry George.

The field the Minister of Agriculture tills best is the social one. Life for him is one long round of boiled shirts, swallow-tail coats and white kid gloves. His best work is done between eight o'clock in the evening and four o'clock the next morning. Night shifts and union hours are nothing to him when he is following his favorite occupation. His eyes shine brightest after midnight. He dances all the extras and asks for more. He stays up as long as the band plays and the leader of the orchestra will do almost anything for him as a real lover of terpsichorean music. He has learned all the new steps, and no Conservative cabinet minister in the Ottawa Valley excels him in treading the grape vine, the dip, and other dainty measures. As an amateur farmer he is particularly interested in the Cochon China Glide and the

Turkey Trot and many a stormy winter night he spends cosily in the Chateau Laurier ball room raising poultry just that way. This robs labor of half its terrors by depriving it of all its grossness.

Martin Burrell has the butterfly beaten forty ways from the jack. The butterfly is seldom out after six p.m., but the Minister of Agriculture just begins to wake up at that witching hour. The butterfly confines his gaiety to summer but all the seasons fall in with Martin Burrell's whirl of pleasure.

Not only does curfew refuse to ring at night for Martin Burrell but school doesn't keep during the day. Garden parties, pink teas, golf, billiards, tennis, racquets, Omar Khayam under neath the bough and other manly sports take up his time. He has considerable skill at billiards which is a very handy accomplishment when a Government is as near the cushion as the one of which Mr. Burrell is a member. He is strong on golf and can do the club veranda in as few high balls as most of them.

Mr. Burrell is the most expert pink-tear in the nine provinces. It is a sheer delight to watch him balance a cup and saucer in one hand and pass out a line of small talk with the other, showing as it does an amount of poise, a balance of forces, a stable equilibrium which is rare in the Borden cabinet. He also takes a great interest in art and nothing pleases him so much as to stand before a reproduction of Millet's Angelus and see the people pausing for one sacred moment for their hard work on the farm. That's about as near farm-work as the Minister of Agriculture likes to get. His aesthetic nature prevents him from viewing it at any other, closer angle. Like the old maid who was once kissed, he loves to talk about it but it goes no further than that.

On the whole Mr. Burrell is as happy and carefree as a comic opera villager. He never allows business to interfere with pleasure. When he is asked a question in the House he takes weeks to answer it, his course in this respect being a close copy of his favorite dance, the Hesitation Waltz. When he came into the Department of Agriculture he frankly confessed that he found it so

well organized by Sydney Fisher that there was nothing left for him to do but let well enough alone. Then he borrowed from the Liberal party the brains of C. C. James and washed his hands of the hard work.

One or two little flaws in his character we are bound to acknowledge. He loves to advertise himself. He advertises in the Agricultural Gazette which seems to be run for that special purpose. He also advertises on the Agronomy building at the Ontario Agricultural College, a building erected by the Ontario Government but opened, according to the stone tablet over the door "by the Hon. Martin Burrell, Minister of Agriculture for Canada." So that of \$196,000 given by the Federal Government to aid agriculture in Ontario, \$51,500 of it goes for a monument to Martin Burrell. Another little fault is his habit of siding with the manufacturers and transportation companies against the farming class which he is supposed to represent, as he did when he helped to vote down Dr. Neely's motion for a wider market in wheat, and Mr. Knowles' motion for a reduced duty on agricultural implements. On the principle, perhaps, that a high church curate makes a good chief of police, Mr. Burrell has appointed an expert chemist as Assistant Director of his Experimental Farm System, thus proving himself a good friend to Mr. Frank T. Shutt, but an indifferent agriculturist.

His experiments with experimental farms spell more profit to Mr. Burrell's party friends than they do to Mr. Burrell's reputation as Minister of Agriculture. In New Brunswick he turned down a Grit farm which had been under consideration and purchased a Tory one instead, paying \$13,000 for what would have been dear at a thousand. One of the first trips the Minister of Agriculture made was to Grosse Isle to see how he could spend money on new quarantine buildings there. He did not even look at the splendid experimental farm established by Mr. Fisher near Quebec but spent his time on the Grosse Isle job. A Minister of Agriculture whose first love is quarantine stations is not much of a farmer.