



REFLECTIONS

IIII BY - STAFF - WRITERS IIII

THE PARLIAMENTARY SESSION

ALTHOUGH the present session of the Dominion Parliament commenced in November last, it still exists. The dragginess of the early days has been displaced by an impatient activity induced by the hot weather. In the cool days, the arguments were heated and long-drawn-out; in these warm days, the opposite state of affairs exists. Presumably this is the season for which the Government has been waiting, and its most important legislation is now being discussed and passed by a sweetly reasonable body of law-makers. It would seem to be another tactical triumph for the Premier.

After a tortuous and doubtful career, the much-discussed Election Bill has got into its final stage. There has been yielding on both sides, and the Bill has really been turned inside out and upside down. The discussion over it has done this: It has warned the provincial governments that their voting lists must be kept above suspicion, or a party will arise at Ottawa which will substitute federal for provincial lists.

The Civil Service Reform Bill is the greatest contribution of the Session. The report of the special commission appointed to investigate the situation and the attitude of the Leader of the Opposition were the two great causes which led to the introduction of the Bill. If left to themselves, the Government would probably have preferred to wait until after the elections before bringing in such a radical reform; yet it is quite arguable that just before a general election is more suitable for such a measure than the day after. That the Bill is not sufficiently comprehensive to suit the radical reformers is quite natural; most reform bills have this characteristic. That it will require amendment and enlargement from time to time is as certain as in the case of all legislation which introduces new principles into governmental administration.

The Annuities Bill met with little opposition, simply because there was nothing wonderful about it. The pension system would have caused great discussion, but an annuity system is so simple and so easy of calculation that no one could seriously oppose it. It provides that any citizen may pay certain periodical sums into the Dominion treasury and at the age of 55, begin to draw an annuity based on what he has paid in and compound interest at the rate of three per cent. The annuities will not be subject to seizure, will be absolutely secure and should not cost much for administration. Great Britain has a somewhat similar law, but no one takes advantage of it. It is just probable that Canadians will so treat the Canadian law. The improvident will save only when forced by necessity or contract.

A somewhat doubtful cigarette bill has been discussed by the House, intended to prevent boys under eighteen purchasing tobacco. The evasion of such a law is so simple that it cannot be effective.

The enlarging of the powers of the Railway Commission and the placing of the telegraphs and telephones in their jurisdiction is one of the notable advances of the session. The people may now send in their long-treasured complaints concerning the larger telephone and telegraph companies with the full assurance that they will be carefully filed for future reference. It will, however, do the public much mental good to have an official channel for the laying of complaints. The Railway Commission promises to be a great clearing-house for grumbles.

There are other important measures, not yet in their final stages. These will probably include an important measure regarding the Hudson Bay railway, which has been foreshadowed in the speeches on the measures relating to the management of the Crown domain in the western provinces.

WINNIPEG'S PROBLEMS

IN common with all other towns and cities in the West, Winnipeg has had great problems to solve. One of these is the question of sub-divisions. A speculator decides that the time has come to extend the city in a certain direction. He buys up a hundred acres

or so, and plats or plans a sub-division. This contains a number of streets and a great number of lots. The latter are offered for sale at prices varying from \$50 a lot to building sites at \$50 a foot frontage. This sub-division business has been steadily pursued by clever speculators in Fort William, Port Arthur and all the larger towns between those points and the Pacific coast. The successful vendor of a sub-division makes a great deal of money.

In Winnipeg, sub-divisions have been placed upon the market which at the time seemed fantastic to the wise-acres. The foolish people who paid high prices for small farm-land lots were the subject of condolence. Yet a city which has increased its population by 50,000 in five years has made some of these fantastic speculations develop into profitable investments. The Winnipeg Real Estate Exchange has endeavoured to discourage some of these speculations and has even gone so far as to try and persuade the newspapers to refuse to publish advertisements respecting certain of these sub-divisions. Since 1890, there has been a clause in the Winnipeg charter which requires that all new surveys must be approved by the city surveyor and no plan may be registered without his certificate. This has proved of considerable value as a check. Since 1904, no undivided land may be converted into town lots until all arrears of taxes are paid. This also prevents imposition of a certain kind.

It would seem that, like Topsy, the towns and cities of the West have simply grown; they have not been made. There has been no comprehensive and well-planned scheme for leading streets, for railway tracks, for sewage or for the proper grouping of the various portions of the municipality. The towns grow according to the varying tastes and dreams of the real estate boomsters. If each province had a municipal commission to lay out the various towns; or if each municipality was compelled by law to appoint such a commission to make the proper sub-divisions, the towns and cities would be more attractive and could be more economically governed.

Winnipeg's problem of this kind has been complicated still further by its rivers and railways. The Red River cuts off its extension eastward and the Assiniboine its extension southward. The main street was originally near the junction of the two rivers and there it remains. The development has not been in all directions, circling out from the business section. The city has grown only north and west. The main streets to the north have all been cut by the C. P. R. yards which are said to be the largest in the world. Main Street passes under the tracks through an expensive subway. One street farther west crosses by an expensive and difficult high-level bridge. Many streets are closed entirely. In the centre, the new line of the Northern Pacific comes in from the west and again cuts many of the north and south streets. Farther south, the same trouble is caused by the C. N. R. line which runs west from its terminals on Main Street. The G. T. P. is now about to enter and only the authority of the Railway Commission will prevent another street blockade.

The Railway Commission should help Winnipeg to grapple with this railway problem and all the competing companies should be compelled to come in over one or two lines. Saskatoon, Edmonton and other towns have similar problems, though they are as yet less acute than in Winnipeg.

THE APPROACHING HARVEST

ONTARIO'S grain and hay crop this year promises to be one of the best in its history. When it is remembered that Ontario produces nearly as much agricultural produce as all the other provinces combined, this is an important feature of the present situation. In 1901, the average value of farm produce per acre ran from \$2.71 in Manitoba, \$4.15 in British Columbia, and \$6.20 in Prince Edward Island, to \$9.05 in Ontario. Therefore the crop situation in this province has more bearing on general business conditions than most people are accustomed to think.