

Back to the Parliamentary Grind

A FORECAST OF THE WORK OF THE SESSION.

By RODEN KINGSMILL

THE wisdom of the new regulation, under which Parliament begins the session in mid-November, has already been amply proved. When the Legislators separated for the Christmas holidays an appreciable inroad had been made on the sessional agenda paper. The tariff, now that the Parliamentarians are once more at work, has to undergo its most crucial trial. In Committee of Ways and Means each item will be carefully scrutinised. It will be held up to inspection and comment from all points of view, and the success or failure of the many interviews which the Finance Minister has granted interested parties will become evident. In this connection it seems fair to remark that the enthusiastic admiration which a section of the Government press has indulged in because the anti-Budget secret interview has been abolished seems hardly warranted. The interviews which have been granted since Mr. Fielding delivered his Budget speech have been numberless. Just as in the Conservative days, they have taken place in camera whenever the visitors so elected. And there is no reason why they should be public. Manifestly unfair it certainly would be for merchants or manufacturers to be compelled publicly to exhibit private matters when endeavouring to impress upon the responsible minister their arguments in favour of tariff adjustment. The final result alone can warrantably be said to concern the Canadian people. Mr. Fielding, who is a fair-minded man and who is, as one of his political opponents has said, "as straight as a string," evidently recognises the necessity for confidential treatment for this class of communications.

WHAT OF THE INSURANCE COMMISSION.

Before Parliament shall have been in session many more weeks, Judge McTavish and his colleagues will present their findings in the Insurance investigation. If Ottawa insurance circles are at all well informed, the Commissioners' recommendations will closely follow the lines of the report of the Armstrong Commission in New York State. The terms of this report are by this time well known and, if our own Commissioners report, *certis paribus*, in similar terms, the public mind will be greatly reassured. In connection with the report of the Commission those "in the know" at Ottawa tell a remarkable tale to the effect that Mr. G. W. Fowler, M.P., has served formal notice upon the Government that, if in his opinion the Commissioners go out of their way to attack him and his proceedings in connection with the Foresters and the subsidiary loan and land companies in which he is interested, he will retaliate by telling Parliament and the country some unpleasant and unsavoury things about the private conduct of certain Ministers. Mr. Fowler, like Alan Breck, is "a bonnie fechter." In the whole House of Commons there is not his superior for coolness and determination. When he made his explosive and indignant defence before the Commission at Toronto he stated what he firmly believes—no matter how greatly he may be misled in so believing—and that is that the Government, through the commission, is endeavouring to damage the reputation of Hon. G. E. Foster, Mr. Fowler, Mr. Lefurgey, Mr. Rufus Pope and their associates. Of course, Mr. Fowler may be totally in error in believing that the gentlemen who compose the Commission would for a moment submit to external influences of any kind, in fact, the probability is all in favour of this view of the situation. But G. W. Fowler is no faintheart, neither is he by any means moderate in his opinions, convictions or line of action

once he has chosen it. If he once begins to fight on the lines spoken of he will pursue his journey of denunciation to the bitter end, sparing neither friend nor enemy. His coolness and audacity will make him a dangerous opponent even to the greatest amongst those who sit on the right of Mr. Speaker.

RECIPROCITY WITHOUT RECIPROCIARIANS.

Of course there is bound to be a full-dress debate on the reciprocity question, no matter how it may arise. Already, it is said, parliamentary negotiations with Washington have been put in train although the change in British Ambassadors has resulted in a temporary dislocation of the arrangements. The President is believed to be a reciprocitarian, but he will have to accept the views of his party leaders, and they are for nothing that will not give to the United States a marked advantage. The solemn truth is that there is no weight of American opinion in favour of better relations with Canada. Sporadic outbreaks of speechmaking in favour of the will-o'-the-wisp occur, but, while now we hear a cry from Minneapolis and again Mr. Eugene W. Foss makes another after-dinner speech in New England, the fact remains that the great mass of the American people care nothing about reciprocity, while the politicians who occasionally mention it have in mind nothing but an obscure desire to score for themselves by scoring off Canada. Conditions are much the same now as they were during Mr. McKinley's first administration, when the president appointed Hon. John W. Kasson, sometime of the late lamented High Joint Commission, to negotiate a number of reciprocity treaties with foreign governments. Mr. Kasson, urbane, thoughtful and well-informed, executed his notable mission with remarkable success. No fewer than thirty-five treaties did he negotiate and, when it is said that they were uniformly acceptable to the ultra-Protectionist President it is certain that they must have favoured the United States. What was the subsequent history of these instruments? They went from Mr. McKinley down to the Senate and the "most distinguished legislative body in the world" slaughtered them *seriatim*. From the moment the reading-clerk of the Senate pronounced the first syllable of each treaty's title its doom was sealed. Treaties must be carried by a two-thirds majority of Senators. Not one of the thirty-five secured a fifty per cent. vote. Mr. Kasson was so indignant that, with a biting message he returned his \$20,000 honorarium to the treasury. Canada may propose to achieve better terms by the intermediate tariff rate, but while the negotiations are in the making, our representatives should take as their motto "*Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes*."

KEEWATIN AND ITS IMPENDING PARTITION

The Roblin Government in Manitoba will not be happy until it gets the whole of Keewatin for its own. In that case its beatitude seems far away, for, in all probability, the Federal Government will give to Saskatchewan and Ontario each a portion of the territory contiguous to the borders of these two Provinces. The whole agitation seems scarcely worth while, although it is undoubtedly good politics for the acute Mr. Roblin and his colleagues. In the House of Commons last session a member who enjoys peculiar facilities for securing information concerning this terra incognita said plumply and plainly that Keewatin had not and never will have a white population of fifty souls. "And," said he, "most of those who are there are fugitives from justice. The