

OTTAWA PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS.

On September 1st, His Royal Highness, the Governor-General, in the performance of his last important official duty in Canada, declared the corner stone of the new Canadian Parliament Buildings to be "well and truly laid." The ceremony was an impressive one, and the scene historic for the corner stone in question is to form the commencement of the structure which is to house the legislators of the Dominion for generations to come. Will the generations of the future be able to say in the words of Canada's Royal Governor that the work of reconstructing the Parliament Buildings which was started in the Year of Grace, 1916, was "well and truly" done?

Already serious differences of opinion have occurred in connection with the policy so far pursued. The terms of the contracts made with the Lyall Company without competition and before the cost and extent of the new work could be known led to the resignation of Hon. Charles Murphy from the joint parliamentary committee which is to supervise the work, shortly after its creation. And six hours after the ceremony of laying the corner stone was completed, Hon. Rodolphe Lemieux, another of the Liberal members of the supervising body also resigned, his resignation being based on the belief that the policy pursued toward rebuilding the historic pile was both unsound economically, and also illegal. There now remains five Conservative members, including the Chairman, Hon. Robert Rogers, and two Liberal members only on the committee. Two days after Mr. Lemieux resigned these members issued a lengthy statement (the third of its kind) explaining to the public the policy pursued since the burning of the building on Feb. 3rd, 1916, and defending that policy.

It will thus be seen that there are two distinct opinions on the matter of the rebuilding.

When the question of reconstructing the Parliament Buildings came up first for consideration, and for long after, there were few men in Canada, including the legislators who did not believe that the work was to be one of restoration, and not of complete reconstruction. From outward view, after the fire had subsided, the beautiful Norman Gothic structure stood, so far as the front was concerned, almost undamaged, with the exception of the crowning masonry of the Tower. On Feb. 17th, shortly after the fire Messrs. Pearson and Marchand, the architects, after a careful examination of the ruins declared it as their opinion that the outer walls were little damaged, and that there were two million dollars' worth which could be utilized "in position." This, they explained later, included the Library. In the month of May, acting on this report, Parliament voted a sum of \$1,500,000 "for the restoration of the Parliament Buildings," the word "restoration" appearing in the estimates.

A joint committee composed of five Conservatives, and four Liberals, with Hon. Robert Rogers as chairman, was nominated by the leaders of the Government and the Opposition respectively to supervise this work of "restoration." Proceeding, apparently on the assumption that the work was

to be one of "restoration" the committee made arrangements to meet the Lyall contracting firm of Montreal, on a basis of cost plus percentage. The sum for the services of the company amounts to eight per cent on the first four millions, and seven per cent on the next million, no further payment it is alleged will be made if the cost exceeds five million dollars. But this latter statement does not take into account the Stock Room for the Library or the New Power House which are also to be constructed in addition to the Parliament Building proper. Then the Government leases the plant of the company and pays it a rental of 20 per cent. per annum besides agreeing that "breakages, repairs, transportation of plant" will form part of the cost of the building. It will thus be seen that the greater the cost, the greater the remuneration to the contractors.

There can be little doubt that the understanding at first was that the two million dollars' of standing walls were to be utilized. But when the committee reassembled at Ottawa in July, they discovered that not one stone of the majestic pile which still stood at the time Parliament rose remained upon another. The work of demolition was complete, even the walls of the New West Wing which had defied the flames, having been dynamited and destroyed. It was no longer a work of "restoration" but of complete reconstruction which faced the "supervising" committee.

Liberal members of the committee expressed surprise. Hon. Robert Rogers, Hon. Dr. Reid, and other government members of the body renounced knowledge that any such instructions had been given to the contractors. The Minister of Public Works placed the blame, or responsibility on the shoulders of the architects. **The fact remained, however, that walls previously valued by the Architects at \$2,000,000 had been destroyed—on the cost plus percentage basis.**

It is for the public to judge whether or not Mr. Rogers was ignorant of the work of destruction. In the first place, it may be pointed out that neither he nor Dr. Reid could enter, or leave their respective offices in the West block without seeing with their own eyes the daily process of the work of destruction. In the second place Mr. Rogers himself is on record in one of the daily papers of Ottawa dated July 7th, as having remarked to a party of newspaper owners whom he conducted over the ruins: **Now gentlemen, you can see for yourselves why the parliamentary committee which is co-operating with me in this work decided that all these old walls would have to come down.**" And in the third place it would seem to be inconceivable that two architects who had formerly reported on the existence of \$2,000,000 worth of walls which could be utilized "in position," would take upon themselves, without consulting anyone, to reduce these walls to rubbish.

Hon. Rodolphe Lemieux was not satisfied with the explanation. He took the ground that the vote of Parliament, and the powers granted the committee only contemplated the restoration of the buildings, and that with a moderate amount of