



ABOLISH GERRYMANDER

WHenever the time draws round again for Parliament to enact its decennial redistribution of the constituencies, whichever party happens to be in Opposition invariably shivers—and any “fellows of the baser sort,” who may belong to the party which happens to be in power, prepare to gloat. These experiences come to both parties in turn. The better men in them dislike one almost as much as the other. They do not want to be the victims of an electoral outrage; nor do they want to be suspected of giving way to the “baser” element in their own ranks and assisting at an outrage on their opponents. Yet both parties calmly sit still and await the approach of this double annoyance without taking any effective and permanent measures to rid themselves of its recurrence.

IT seems to me that it would be the easiest thing in the world for the best men in both parties to get together and finally delete the ugly term “gerrymander” from our political vocabulary. It could be done in a single act; and done forever. That act would merely declare that county boundaries would hereafter be the boundaries of all Parliamentary constituencies. Some counties would, of course, get one member; some would get two, and some three. In other cases, two counties could be put together to make a single constituency. But the decisive rule would be that constituency boundaries must always be county boundaries. As to the number of members which each county should have, that could be fixed, too, by an automatic standard. A unit of population could entitle a county to one member—two units to two members—and, say, a unit-and-a-half to two, while less than a clear unit-and-a-half must be content with one. Each city would be a single constituency electing its tale of members from the whole city. The urban unit could be established by definite act of Parliament at a fixed ratio to the rural unit.

OF course, every school boy can think of objections to this plan. It wouldn't work out evenly. One county with a few hundreds below the unit-and-a-half would only get one member, while its neighbour with a few over that arbitrary unit-and-a-half would get two members. A vote in county “A” would not count for as much as a vote in county “B.” Granted. But before you regard this objection as fatal to my plan, take a look at the present constituencies. Or wait and take a look at the brand new constituencies which Parliament is about to create. They present—and I venture to predict will continue to present—quite as striking contrasts as the counties do. It has been found impossible to cut the country up into uniform constituencies. And I doubt very seriously whether there would be any more cases of rank discrimination under my plan than already exist under the present plan. Moreover, if my plan did show more unevenness, it would have the compensating merit of entirely abolishing practically all partizan manipulation of constituencies. That would be a gain which would offset a vast amount of accidental discrimination.

THE great and valuable difference between any inequalities which may occur under my system of county representation, and those that exist under the present system, is that the county inequalities will be accidental and just as likely to favour one party as the other; while the artificial inequalities, carefully considered and created by a Redistribution Bill, are very likely to be anything but accidental, and to distinctly favour one party over the other. Inequalities we must have. The only question is—shall they be accidental and non-partizan, or shall they be pre-arranged and partizan? The contrast will not be between a county system full of inequalities, and a perfectly uniform system in which every constituency will contain an equal number of electors; but between two systems full of inequalities, the one representing an honest “deal” and the other a shuffle of “stacked cards.”

THE beauty of the county system is that the adjustment of the representation of a Province to its changed allotment of members after a new census, would become practically automatic. We would not have to wait for Parliament to collect the voluminous and partizan reports of its henchmen from all the odd corners of the country, out of which to draft a new political map as full of quirks as a pig's tail, to know what the effect of the census was. Any man could sit down with a map of his Province and a table showing the distribution of its population under the new census, and just about allot the new members to their proper places.

There might be a question, sometimes, as to whether two counties were to be telescoped together or treated separately; but that is just about all that would be left for a partizan Parliament to quarrel over. Generally speaking, each county would automatically get its member or its two members, as it had kept up or fallen behind in the race for population.

THE party factor would be pretty nearly eliminated. That is one very big reason why I do not expect to see my plan adopted. Fair play is precisely what the average party manipulator of the second-class does not want. He had rather suffer from the effects of foul play when he is the under dog than give over the vicious joy of measuring out

Parliamentary Peregrinations

How the House of Commons Spends the People's Time

By AN INDEPENDENT COONSKIN

PROCESS of passing supply forms an interesting demonstration of the machinery of our parliamentary system hard at work. By formal vote the House of Commons declares itself to be not a “house” at all, but a Committee of the Whole House upon question of Supply. The



Speaker then retires gracefully to his private apartments at the end of the corridor and lights his pipe—that is, he is at liberty so to do. But they say he never does. Even in the privacy of his official retreat behind “sporting” massive oak of pure Gothic design, they say that Dr. Sproule doth neither smoke, drink, chew nor swear.

The Speaker having departed, the Deputy Speaker becomes the Chairman of the Committee of the Whole, and takes his place, not on Speaker's dais

or in the Speaker's ornately carved chair, but at the end of the Table of the House upon the other end of which rests that other emblem of sovereign majesty, the Mace. The Chairman takes up department of the Government estimates of expenditure for the current year—printed volumes of which have been generously distributed among the members indiscriminately without regard to party—as prepared by the Minister of Finance, and calls off the first item.

“Salary of the Deputy Minister of Railways and Canals,” sings he, let us say.

Immediately arises a member of the Opposition from the far East. From down east, be it remarked, come more of the conversationalists in Committee, as do most of the inspired orators of debate. You would be inclined to gather as a casual visitor in the Speaker's Gallery, that Canada has a tract of land mostly surrounded by the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the Bay of Fundy. Occasionally a ray of light and common sense breaks through the Atlantic fog from Edmonton or some place in the West, but you seldom hear from the “banner” Province of Ontario, whose members maintain a fine reserve. And as for the city of Toronto, for all its five intellectual members, you would scarcely suspect it had a place on the map. To be sure, Hon. George Eulas Foster represents a Toronto riding, and this session he figures with considerable prominence, but this is in a general sense as a Cabinet Minister.

The little man from the East wants to take advantage of his historic right as a Commoner, before the King gets his Supply, to demand information from the Minister. He may ask, therefore, some such question as this:

“Will the Minister of Railways and Canals inform the Committee the reason for the increase of the rate for cordwood upon the Prince Edward Island Railway from \$3.50 per car to \$7 per car from New Harmony Station to Souris—a distance of between five and ten miles?”

The Minister disclaims personal knowledge of the schedule of P. E. I. railway rates upon cordwood; that railway, he reminds the honourable gentleman, lost \$100,000 last year. The rate was likely made

similar treatment to his enemies when the circle swings round and he comes on top. But there are a lot of decent fellows in both parties; and they can get their way if they will make a stern stand for it. Neither party can get along without its “face”—i.e., without its honest frontispieces. And if these honest leaders will go resolutely on strike until their “wicked partners” are ready to concede to them the right to eliminate the “gerrymander” from the list of legitimate weapons of party warfare, they can win out. A political Hague conference can put the “gerrymander” in the category of explosive bullets and floating mines.

IF you do not think that an automatic redistribution is worth making some sacrifices to obtain, you probably will before the present session has finished. Our Parliamentarians are never more unseemly than when squabbling over a purely partizan question. I believe that, by the time the pending bill is passed, a majority of the House of Commons itself would vote for any reasonable plan which would forever prevent another such debate. And—remember—I am prophesying this at a time when a most reasonable bill is expected; for no other sort can possibly hope to pass the Senate.

THE MONOCLE MAN.

the same as on the main line of the I. C. R. to reduce the deficit.

The Prince Edward Islander is dissatisfied. He grumbles that the size of the Island cars are only half the size of those on the main line.

“No!” ejaculates Hon. Frank Cochrane, with characteristic staccato.

“Will the Hon. Minister tell us what is the difference, then, between the capacity of freight cars upon the P. E. I. and the I. C. R.?” persists the loquacious Garden-of-the-Gulfer.

Hon. Frank shrugs one of his square shoulders. “The honourable gentleman made the statement, not I.”

The persistent Prince Edward Islander puts his question upon the order paper for next question day.

TALKING about fish whenever possible every Nova Scotia member considers part of his duty to the electors. Mr. Sinclair, of Guysboro', seized a recent opportunity at some length. He said there were 65,000 Canadians engaged in the active actual trade of catching fish off the Eastern Canadian shore, and 20,000 more on shore handling them. The total value of their catch last year was \$33,389,464. Vividly he pictured one of his constituents 20 miles out to sea afloat in an open dory in the month of January with the spray of the North Atlantic freezing to his whiskers, and his mitts sopping wet with the ice-cold sea. This man wanted a market, likewise a subsidized steamship service to carry his fish to Boston. Incidentally Mr. Sinclair expressed surprise at the high cost of fish in the retail shops of Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa.

“They have always been a puzzle to me,” asserted he. “In Canso haddock sells for 1½ cents a pound. In Ottawa it costs 10 cents.”

Hon. J. D. Hazen told him the Government's idea was to build up the trade with inland Canada rather than with the New England States. Reciprocity was defeated in 1911, he blandly reminded the Guysboro' member. In furtherance of the patriotic idea of the Conservative administration, iced express cars were provided to carry fish to Montreal for distribution every Sunday to Toronto and points west, the Government guaranteeing at least a shipment of 10,000 pounds, or making good the difference to the carrying company.

AS an example of literature based upon the life and times of maritime Canada, the Cruise of the Alert will perhaps some day form the basis for a work of fiction worthy of a place beside the Cruise of the Shannon. The latter concerned the Government ice-breakers in the Straits of Northumberland. The former concerns the activities of the Customs department tug in the wild water of the north shore of Cape Breton and the county of Victoria. She hails from North Sydney, and her lookout in the wheel house keeps his glass focussed for smugglers. Victoria is a “dry” district, and whiskey and French brandy have a wicked way of finding their road over from the French Islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon, off the coast of Newfoundland. At least, that is the presumption, and acting on that presumption, the tug Alert faithfully cruises the stormy water just inside the front door of the Gulf.

But she has taken her last trip for the year. The Minister of Customs has been told that there are no smugglers doing business on that coast in the winter. It requires too much nerve. He has ordered her out of commission, therefore, until the ice bergs melt again in Belle Isle, and the ice boats come in