

THE GREATEST SPENDER IN CANADA

By AUGUSTUS BRIDLE



HERE is a little grey man in the Dominion Cabinet who in the ranks of the politicians and the electors commands some such consideration as "Bobs" in the army. This little man, who on a platform looks like the ghost of Debate, has been indirectly responsible this campaign for a large amount of bickering at the hands of the Conservative press. It is he who has given Canada the hundred-million budget; he who has been accused of *haut finance* in Government—of hitting a swift and seductive trail in expenditure: Hon. Mr. Fielding, the greatest spender in Canada.

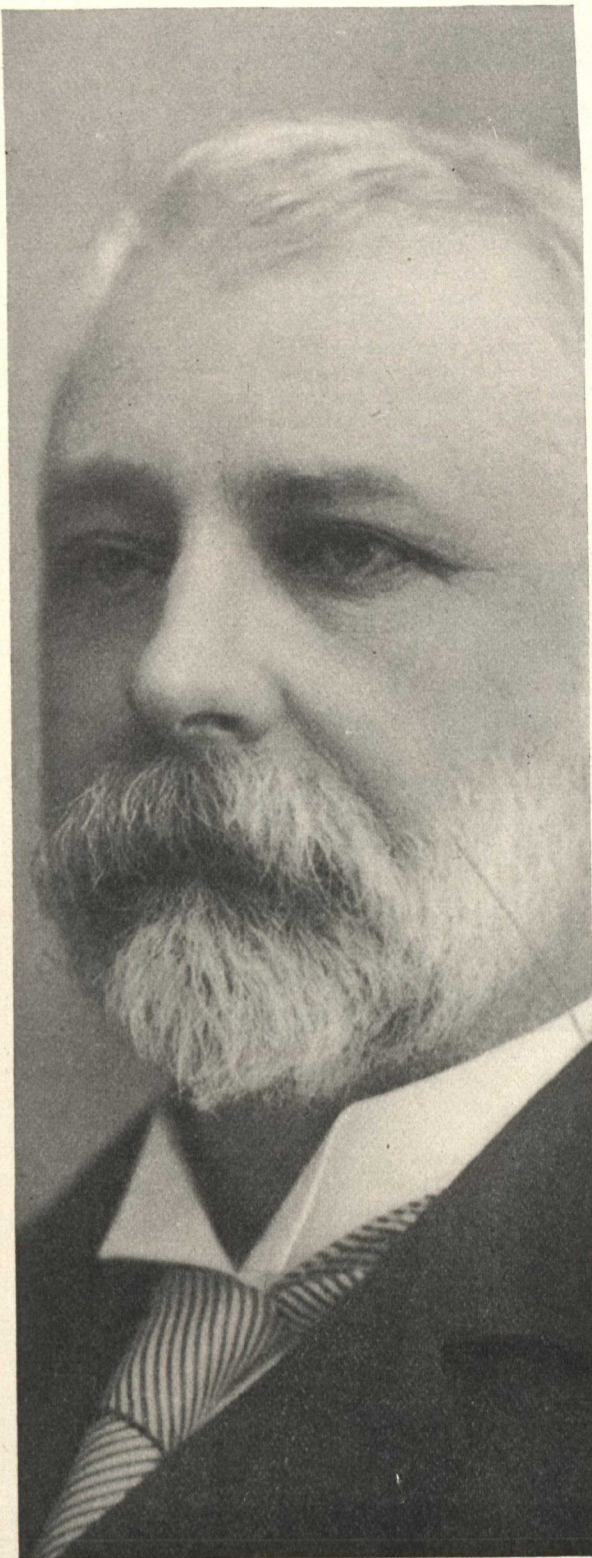
A man who raises and spends a hundred million dollars a year is liable to be talked about. Mr. Fielding handles a hundred million dollars on a seven-thousand-dollar salary, which is as low a commission as can be got anywhere. He makes no concealment about his lavish expenditures; seems rather to glory in his shame; affirms that it is his business to spend, and that he has the wherewithal to do the spending.

Mr. Fielding is something of a reminder if not a relique. He is the only prominent member left of the old Cabinet of notables; the Executive of Premiers that gathered about Sir Wilfrid Laurier in 1896, when the lure of Canada was strong and when the eyes of the statesmen were single to her glory. That was perhaps as poetic a season as Canada ever had since Confederation; the emancipation era; and in all the halo and the poetry of the occasion the Nova Scotia Premier was the one single dominant note of prose, just as Sir Wilfrid was the epic of poetry. Well, Sir Wilfrid is still the poetry and Mr. Fielding the prose; the Premier stands for the unity of races and the general sentiment of government; the Finance Minister represents the union of manufacturer and farmer—the man that gets the benefit of the tariff and the man that mainly pays it.

Twelve budget speeches Mr. Fielding has delivered in Canada. He has been herding Laurier's fat kine all those years. He has given Canada several tariffs. The last general revision of the tariff took rank with the Congressional messages of Grover Cleveland and the budget speeches of Mr. Gladstone; when even the farmer's hired boy turned up the general list to find out what were the chances for cheaper overalls that year. That tariff did more to impress the real personality of Mr. Fielding upon the Canadian mind than all the rest of his Cabinet career. That triangular tariff was the result of the most tireless itinerary ever conducted by a Canadian Cabinet minister—the tariff commission that held sittings all over Canada except in Ungava, Labrador, the Yukon and the Cariboo; in the endeavour to discover from this side and from that side what would best suit the general good of the Canadian people.

Now there are plenty of public men of the I-want-to-know kind, of whom perhaps President Roosevelt has been chief; but Mr. Fielding is second to none in the way he wants to know and the things he manages to find out. He has the question mark of Kipling added to the judicial mind. That tariff would have driven an ordinary finance minister into a mad-house. It was the bread of life to Mr. Fielding; that shrewd, shadowy little man with the grey cropped whisker and the grey hair, and the twinkling eye that ought to have been Scotch but happens to have been English by descent. And in that tariff Mr. Fielding lives and moves and has his being. It is his public religion; his alpha and omega. He never tires of tariffs. There is to him in the labyrinthine discursions of the general and the preferential and the surtax and the favoured-nation clause, such fascination as spell-bound Gladstone who was the first finance minister to make a budget speech listen like a romance, whereas Mr. Fielding is easily the second.

There is such amazing thrift and industry in the man's mind. He has always had it. For one thing Mr. Fielding was never a lawyer; so refreshing to find now and then a really big Canadian public man who never studied law. Mr. Fielding entered his career in life by means of the fourth estate. He was a newspaper man. He left his school arithmetic at the age of sixteen to enter the business office of the *Halifax Recorder*. Before he was twenty he wrote editorials. Those days the itch for writing was strong. It was the pre-Confederation era and



Hon. W. S. Fielding,
Minister of Finance.

Joseph Howe was still alive; and from Howe Mr. Fielding caught the enthusiasm against Confederation that he has long since learned to put by as one of the passions of youth. On the *Recorder* Editor Fielding remained for twenty years; and in that while he was body, brains and heart of the thing. Fourteen years he was Halifax correspondent of the *Toronto Globe*. And all this while he was broadening his base of knowledge and sharpening his wits for the encounters that lay in wait for him as a parliamentarian. It was in 1884 that he first got into Nova Scotia politics; at that time he had earned a reputation for sitting up with the midnight lamp, and as a man whose mind was as clear as the keel of one of the Halifax ships cutting clean through all waves and winds of doctrine. Twelve years Mr. Fielding was Premier of Nova Scotia, and by 1896 he had well and truly earned the call that put him in the Laurier Cabinet as Minister of Finance.

Those Bluenoses—they are always right side up with care. Mr. Fielding was not a financier; but he had a head for business and he was as thorough as a threshing-machine. That shrewd, twinkling eye; a passion for detail that might have been the envy of a German scientist; the untiring love of work, and the illimitable patience that hears all sides of a controversy and makes up its mind to none without due cogitation—Mr. Fielding had them all

within as compact and trim a figure as ever occupied one of the Treasury benches. He was as prose as a clock. The Premier might perorate in grand vein about the destiny of races; but the Finance Minister from Halifax was keen on the impost of a duty. He knew that he had gone in against perhaps the biggest scientific game ever known to a Cabinet; he had the N. P. as a legacy; and he had to trick the old nag out in the bedizenry of something that looked like a compromise between Free Trade and a Tariff-For-Revenue-Only.

But the science of tariffs had no terrors for Mr. Fielding. In all those twelve years he has learned that tariffs have mysteries that only a finance minister knows. But with the tariff he has stayed; and it is of the tariff now that he delights to talk to any sort of audience where tariffs have any business. General amenities of Government—bah! what does he know or care about them? When he rises to speak he fumbles about for a few paragraphs before he manages to get the real logical angle to his feet; and having got his bearing so he squares away to the cold slabside of a huge subject as cheerfully as a Nova Scotia jack tar hauls up alongside a rope. He knows that in a very little while he will have got the kinks out and the knots coming along the rope. Demure and almost hesitant beside the table he spars a good bit with the glass of water and shifts his right foot; throws his handkerchief on the table and lets both hands out together, just for a change—and begins to trot out his arguments. Back in the compartments of his brain he has the whole logical series and he elucidates one at a time in perfect order. He begins with the total of trade—the four hundred and eleven millions increase in twelve years; and he hammers nails all over that triumphant fabric amid loud applause; whereat he passes his handkerchief over his head and flings it down again. Out comes the general tariff; then the preferential; next the surtax; here now the French treaty; again the favoured-nation clause; after a bit the general incidence of taxation; now he drags out Foster—and out of Foster he extracts much merriment. And from the first knot in the rope till the last he has managed to keep an indiscriminate audience highly and at times hugely interested in a subject that to most people is dry as punk and hard as nails.

But it is the Tariff and the Tax; in these Mr. Fielding glories. Alas! what would he ever have done in a Free Trade Cabinet? What will he do in the hereafter where there is no tariff and no tax and no price on anything?

Yes, it may have been good gossip to talk of Mr. Fielding as Premier of Canada; but Finance Minister Fielding is the real character, and in that role the little, grey, shrewd man needs no make-up.

Canadians as Canal-Builders

CANADIANS are now rated as great canal-builders—according to Mr. Edward Hungerford, writing in *Harper's Weekly* on the subject of canals. Mr. Hungerford evidently imagines we are to dig the Georgian Bay canal right away; says that we will have it done before the new hundred-million Erie canal is finished in State of New York. Aside from this miscalculation of our intentions, Mr. Hungerford's opinions are worth quoting; for he has discovered that not in vain have we taken the beaver for a national emblem. He says:

"Canada does not go blindfolded into canal-digging. It has, for once and for all time, rejected the twelve-foot canal as grossly incompetent and its canal from Georgian Bay to the St. Lawrence by way of the Ottawa and Mattawa Rivers will be twenty-one feet deep, making Chicago and Milwaukee and Duluth ocean ports, subject only to sail of several hundred miles through exclusively British soil. There is no question in the minds of the men who have examined this Georgian Bay canal proposition as to the effect its completion will have on the decreasing commercial supremacy of New York City. The Georgian Bay canal will do more than paralyse freight traffic through Lake Ontario and the Upper St. Lawrence. It will cripple the toll-catching elevators at Buffalo and proclaim the Erie barge canal the most atrocious and expensive farce yet placed upon the backs of the greatest of all the states. It will make it quite an indifferent question whether the twelve-foot Erie is completed in one century or two, for it will, of itself, provide the direct and simple water route for the grain of America's golden west to the densely populated nations of Europe."