

THE BORDEN CABINET—V. THE POSTMASTER-GENERAL

by H. F. Gadsby.



Hon. L. P. Pelletier

In England the Postmaster-General is known as One Flag Looey; in Quebec as Padlock Pelletier. He comes by these names naturally enough. They commemorate two outstanding facts in his career.

When Premier Borden took him over to London as a tamed Nationalist, Exhibit A., of French-Canadian loyalty, the Postmaster-General made a great hit with his after-dinner speeches in which the last dollar of Canadian money and the last drop of Canadian blood was all too little for the British Navy. It was here he won his sobriquet of One Flag Looey.

The new oil-burning, smoke-consuming Dreadnaughts are the direct result of Pelletier's visit. Pelletier is a great tobacco-burner. He smokes perhaps fifty cigarettes a day. With characteristic thrift he rolls them himself. With still more characteristic thrift he inhales the smoke because he is not the man to waste anything. When he gets through with a cigarette there's nothing left for anybody else, not even a butt. Inhaling so much smoke may not be good for Pelletier's heart—indeed many people say he has a bad heart—but at all events it put

the British Navy up to a new trick. All the Dreadnaughts said: "If he can swallow his own smoke so can we". And they did.

The title of Padlock Pelletier was conferred on him later by the people of Quebec who had followed his rise to power and patronage with great interest. The story speaks for itself. A young mail-clerk in the Quebec district invented a new padlock for mail-bags and tried to sell it to the Post Office Department. He did not succeed, but the fact did not escape Pelletier that it was a mighty good padlock for other purposes as well as mail-bags. The inventor had the usual luck of geniuses who travel without a guardian. He sold his patent for a song to three of Pelletier's friends who formed a company and landed an order for three hundred and fifty thousand padlocks,—enough padlocks to cover the Interprovincial Bridge between Ottawa and Hull. There are forty thousand mail bags in the whole of Canada; some of the padlocks on these bags have been in use since Confederation and are good for another fifty years yet. In the course of nature Pelletier's padlocks would still be working at the end of the Twenty First Century, and the Government of that day would not be worried about laying in a new supply of padlocks before the year 2300 A. D. These curious details, extracted one by one as King John did the Jew's teeth, came out when Rodolphe Lemieux cross-examined Pelletier in the House last session but when Hughes of Prince Edward Island quizzed him on the same subject this session the Postmaster General denied that there was any order for three hundred and fifty thousand padlocks. Ten thousand padlocks, he said, was the correct figure. Strangely enough the Postmaster General was telling the truth in both cases. What had happened in the interval was that Premier Borden had told his colleague that he was long on padlocks and three hundred and forty thousand of them were cancelled?

However the padlocks were not an unmixed evil. They were in a manner of speaking father to the parcel post, for it was not until the

night before the padlock revelations were threatened that Pelletier put a notice on the order paper announcing his good intentions.

Pelletier has worked wonders in the Post Office Department. In three years he has fired all the Grit Postmasters in Canada. In some cases where the Postmaster was dead Pelletier dug up the graveyard to get at him. These solemn graveyard activities may explain his gray-green complexion. When there wasn't a postmaster's head to chop off he did the next best thing—he changed the name of the Post Office.

Pelletier is the Bob Rogers of Quebec where all things work together for Pelletier. He is a great magician. He makes ten dollars grow where only one grew before. When the Quebec quarantine station was to be sold Pelletier smiled and there were two profits amounting to about twenty thousand dollars inside six months. In another case of a quarry near Quebec the fortunate manipulators made a gain of \$2,500 in three days. These are only two instances which go to show that it pays to be a friend of this unselfish man. Lest virtue leave him stranded in his old age, he has saved up about half a million, does his driving in a Post Office automobile, turns his clothes and uses both ends of his cuffs. He is an advocate of the simple life, confines his greatness to one room at Ottawa, and, when he receives, the sandwiches are served from the bathroom.

Pelletier has a conscience that enables him to turn handsprings or look at the back of his own neck as easily as you or I eat breakfast. When he broke into public life in 1883, a poetic figure with long black hair, he was a Tory. Space lacks to follow his career of whirling Dervish but suffice it to say that he always knew what way to spin, which was to the side that the sun shone on. In the course of thirty years he has been in turn: Tory, Nationalist, Liberal, Tory, again, Liberal, Tory, Nationalist, Tory.

Yes, a strange man is Black Zandrags. In the course of thirty years he has been all around the circle a couple of times and is now meeting himself as he comes back.