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THE
POLITICAL REVIEW:

A JOURNAL FOR SPREADING KNOWLEDGE OF POLITICS.

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GEORGE BEMISTER, CIVIL ENGINEER.

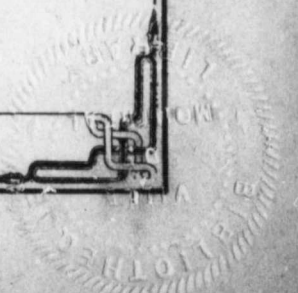
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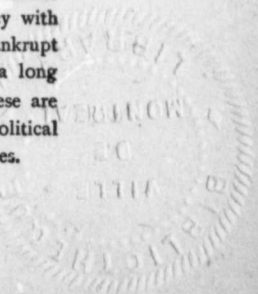
MONTREAL, May 18, 1878.

TO THE HON. H. G. JOLY,
Premier, Province of Quebec.

SIR,

The reasons which have induced me to write you will become clear in the course of this letter. I trust my previous connection with the Railway questions affecting this Province, together with the interest I take in what affects the public welfare, makes any apology for sending it unnecessary.

In ordinary times, when the political machine is moving steadily and with comparative ease, citizens generally are to be excused for taking little interest in what is going on, especially when it is considered how much they must be immersed in their own affairs; but when a great crisis or political change is over the country it becomes the duty of every citizen to enter as intelligently as he can into the prominent questions of the moment, and to act on such convictions as form themselves in his mind from their consideration. Unless the citizens do this there is a great, a very great, danger of the vast public interests at stake passing entirely under the control of unscrupulous politicians who will act only with regard to their own ends and their own pockets. This may be said to be the greatest danger that, in our day, threatens free institutions. And how very great a danger it is may be known from the United States, where the best class of the people have hitherto kept quite aloof from politics, the results being seen in the difficulties they have in finding a public man whose career is not blemished so as to render him unfit to send on a foreign mission; in bankrupt States where the enormous debts have made repudiation either necessary or desirable to the people; in national repudiation which is rising into a policy with them at present; in debt-loaded cities like New York; in bankrupt cities like Chicago; in not a year passing without showing a long list of their highest officials as defaulters for immense sums: these are the results of the best citizens' neglect to interest themselves in the political affairs at periods of change and crisis as well as during ordinary times.



All the countries under English rule, home or foreign, have now practically free governments, free meaning popular governments, and consequently the same things that make a spectacle of the United States, such as every man whose heart beats with an honest love for the cause of freedom and human nature's best interests, must look upon with sadness and pity. Although the time is gone by when he need fear that the cause of freedom can be injured by their national crimes and follies (the people's cause was injured and retarded in England and other countries by the crimes and follies of the French Revolution), the same things threaten the peoples living under English rule. Fortunately, public men at home or in the colonies are as yet little tainted, but tendencies have shown themselves, to speak especially of Canada, which, if the people do not curb them by taking active interest in political doings at such times as are now over this Province, will surely place Canada beside the States as a nation of official thieves and bankrupt corporations.

Canadians placed their foot on the neck of such tendencies when they crushed the Canadian Pacific swindle which overthrew the Dominion Conservative party, and I am much mistaken if I shall not clearly show that another neck of similar character requires the Canadian foot to be placed with a crushing sternness exceeding even that given to the Pacific swindle. The Pacific swindle was strangled almost at birth, and before Canadian or English money had been swallowed by it. The neck that now requires crushing has grown older, and has gulped down hundreds of thousands of dollars of the public money, every dollar of which has to be made good by the citizens out of their hard earnings.

Reviewing the late Government's administration from the time of their taking the railways in hand to the present, the following is what I see :

First—The railway companies, baffled in their attempts to raise money in England by Grand Trunk hostility, and the idea that became general there that things in Canadian railway management and the promotion of undertakings were not all as they should be, they and their contractors looked about to find some way of carrying on the works. The only way open was to induce the Government, who already had a large stake in their continuance from the grants of subsidies and lands that had been made, to take over the Railways and finish them as public works. This and the influence brought to bear compelled the Government to make them public works.

A short time previous to this a change of government, although not a change of party, had taken place owing to the notorious Tanneries swindle carried through by members of the Cabinet, and the general idea was that Mr. DeBoucherville and some of his colleagues were simply put "to keep

the seats warm" for the former men, who were the most active members of the Conservative party at the time, till the scandal caused by their acts had settled down. Subsequent events proved that this idea had a good foundation. At the time then when the arrangements were made for the Government to take over the railways, the ousted Cabinet ministers, who by the way succeeded so well in tanning their political skins that they will never lose their color, began to think they might venture back to the seats they had left, and were besieging Mr. DeBoucherville daily. To their great astonishment they found the Premier was not so ready to add "black sheep" to his fold as they expected. They, however, made a determined onslaught, and the result of this was, in the end, that the best and ablest man they had, Mr. Robertson, was hustled out into the cold, and after that part of the tanned lambs found shelter, and part have been ever since airing their tempers somewhere in the shades between government and opposition.

Second—The Government had decided to take the railways. The state of things was that the works had been altogether discontinued for many months, and the contractors were practically insolvent. That this is a true statement is proved by the subsequent facts that the railway commissioners were subjected to insults in the endeavors which they had to make to arrange with the contractors' creditors along the lines, by paying a percentage on the debts, before the people would allow any works to be proceeded with, and also by their guarantee for large sums given to the banks, and by other acts of theirs.

Undoubtedly the public interests required that the works for completion of the lines should have been thrown open to public tender. There can be no question whatever but that this was the course that should have been followed. Tender considerations for feelings of contractors and sentimental desires to keep contractors out of the insolvency court have no right whatever to make a part of the Government policy. In fact all peoples would do well to make it a stern rule, having no exceptions to it, that too close an intimacy of Government and contractors should be sufficient reason for the overthrow of a Government. It is not possible for any such intimacy to exist and yet for the public money not to be squandered or the public interests not to suffer. As a fact, of course, although there was such an intimacy between the late Government and their contractors as to pass beyond a political crime and become idiotic folly, no such tender feelings or sentimental desires existed. Interest and influence alone guided them. The pathetic way in which the commissioners describe their watching of the contractor's struggles and embarrassments exceeds anything that could be made out of "a dying duck in a thunder storm". After watching his struggles (the contractor's, not the duck's) for months they relieved him by giving him some (public) money. (They remembered, no doubt, that there was

plenty more where what they had got came from, and what a very big and very reliable majority they commanded in the Assembly. Therefore, there was not the least necessity for being parsimonious in relieving poor struggling creatures that came in their way, especially when such might be politically grateful for the relief.) Anyone would relieve a duck's struggles by twisting his neck. If the Government had put their contractor out of his miseries in that way it would have saved half a million dollars that the hard earnings of the electors have now to make good. If the electors do not wish that the Government had so finished their contractor, and as they have it practically in their power, if they do not effectually wring the political necks of those who have laid such additional burdens upon them they deserve what would be the duck's fate. The commissioners' description of their watch of their contractor's struggles is enough to make one laugh for a week. But the laugh becomes changed to a very opposite feeling when one sees that their great tenderness has burdened the poor people of this Province, passing as they are at the present time through a fearful commercial depression, with an additional burden which it is within the mark to say will be a total of a million dollars; thus bringing direct taxation and heavy taxation of business interests down upon the people.

But, this tenderness of the Government for their contractors, what does it mean? It means this, that at a certain moment one of them was able to bring such political or other pressure that the Government was obliged to give four hundred thousand dollars of the public money in addition to the contract.

At the time, I was curious to see how the Government would act in dealing with this, the most knotty point of the question. If, as the public interests required, they put the finishing of the railways to public tender, and did not award the contracts to the then contractors, those contractors had sufficient influence, by themselves and their companies, to destroy the Government, and they would most certainly have done it. On the other side, if, without putting the works to public tender, they took the contractors with the works, they would place themselves, as they did in fact, in the hands of men more clever, more unscrupulous, and, above all, men with a great experience in managing and controlling political parties and turning them to their own interests, while having also a long business experience such as was altogether wanting in the Government. These contractors alone, then, were greatly superior to the whole Government, and, pretending to look after nothing but their own interests, they were hampered in no way by ideas of what the public good required. But they also represented, and to a great extent absolutely controlled, the active influence of the Conservative party. Their companies and banks were directed by men to whom the Government at once gave good things: Beaubien, the speakership; Murphy,

a commissionership; Ouimet, education superintendence, and so on. The fact is that on the question of taking or not taking the railways, the Government had no freedom of choice whatever. No other way lay open to the contractors of going on with the works and, to save themselves the only course open, they took, they made the Government take the lines and—themselves. The Government had “Hobson’s choice” and—they took it.

Into the hands of these men, then, the Government placed themselves, exactly as the Dominion Conservative Government put themselves under control of the Pacific Swindle promoters. All that has passed since may be summed up in the words: Toddling babies in the arms of stern nurses. Instead of the pathetic spectacle put before the public by the Government through their commissioners, of mighty men like themselves looking down upon the dangling insolvent struggles of their contractors, the real picture of the facts that should be put forth is this:—Some strong, energetic men who had a Government by the scruf of their necks, doing what they liked with them. This is the fact. That these words are not too strong by any means I will show by giving one proof out of the many that might be given. One contractor wanted something or other that he was not getting, and this is what he says to his masters—the Government, over the shoulders of one of their chief officials;—“this clause is intended, like the steel rail clause, to throw me into the hands of a ring of speculators, who are already prepared for the result and understand how things are going.” The contractor refers to clauses in the contract specifications. Here was one of their contractors, one of the most prominent members of their party making the vilest charge that could be made against any man or body of men, and how they reward him for it, the printed reports show: By Order-in-Council for an extra to his contract of forty-five thousand dollars, and by an estimated increase of his contract sum of over two hundred thousand dollars—making altogether over a quarter of a million dollars given seemingly as reward for the vile charge made against them. Let no one think that this enormous sum was given before the charge was made; on the contrary the report from which these facts are taken is one put forth officially a twelvemonth after the contractor made his charge public. What is the practical view to be taken of this? Why, that at a certain moment the contractor was able to bring such pressure to bear that he obtained a quarter of a million of public money over and above what his contract gave him a right to. In these two cases to which I thus call attention over six hundred and fifty thousand dollars of the public money is gone beyond recovery. With such a charge made by a man of weight against any man or against an executive of which he formed part, what should have been his course? Why, to make the man who brought the charge prove it to the uttermost or to drive him forth from the party, and brand him liar and scound-

drel for the rest of his life. But are these men so mild, so ready to submit to any insult that may be hurled at them without a cause? Are they so christian-like that, when smitten on the one cheek, they habitually offer the other and their purses and the public purse? No. There must be some other cause.

The Government did not put the works to public tender, and they made the contracts. If, at the time the works had been offered to public tender, the contracts could certainly have been made with good sound men for at least two thousand dollars a mile less. This would have saved the Province six to seven hundred thousand dollars. In saying this I am speaking with professional knowledge of the facts. It must be remembered that any contractor taking these lines could have carried out the works with perfect ease without using a dollar of his own capital, and of course there were no risks to provide for, as the payment for the works was absolutely certain. The present contractors have not only been enabled to carry on the works, but have also been able to pay up their debts of hundreds of thousands of dollars. Under the circumstances, and considering the overwhelming majority with which the Government was backed in the Assembly, and also the great and very active Conservative interests which the contractors represented by themselves and their companies and banks, I did not consider the contract amount excessive beyond what was to be expected from contracts made without competition and only under a slight fear of public opinion. This opinion I publicly stated at the time. The contracts were ratified by Parliament, and it certainly never for a moment entered my mind that any Government, no matter how strongly backed by supporters, would venture to burden the people with another million dollars without the least legislative sanction. And the people are burdened with this just as certainly as if the Assembly had voted it. Taking the amount of the Quebec revenue into consideration, together with the year or so in which this amount of public money has been squandered, these acts of the late Government surpass anything that is to be found in the history of corrupt and irresponsible government. Unless the power of impeachment is to become a dead letter of our constitution these men should be brought to answer for their acts and find a whole province their accusers. But they have counted on their great following in the Assembly; they have counted on the people of a Conservative Province, they have counted on this people never sending other than a Conservative majority to the Assembly; they have counted on the church as always being on their side, and what need they care? No day of reckoning can come for them. English-speaking Canadians hold their French fellow-citizens somewhat in contempt because of their readiness to submit to anything done or not done by those in authority. But will the French Canadians submit themselves to the tax-

gatherers coming to their doors, because those in authority plunder the public funds or allow others to do so? Will the Church stand tamely by and support the men who take the hard earnings of their people to squander them? I think the French Canadians are not such a down-trodden race. I think the men of their Church are animated by holier and purer principles.

Third.—The Railway Commissioners were appointed and the composition of the commission was so managed as to throw the whole management into the hands of one member. The commissioners may be likened to two little dogs; one little dog had a tail, so he went about and felt proud; but the other had no tail, and, feeling his deficiency, he wisely kept at home as much as possible.

Soon after the Commissioners began to deal with matters I saw the state of things that would follow, and I kept aloof from any participation in them, for, if ever I am found wilfully helping the squandering of the public money, even though I may not put any of it into my own pocket, I shall consider that whoever likes has full right to call me a scoundrel.

Officials, especially Conservative officials, have no real love for the Press, whenever, therefore, one sees such officials complaisant and supplying little paragraphs to the papers, one may be sure there is something on foot that bodes no good to the public interests. When, therefore, shortly after the Government was dealing with matters, I saw little paragraphs cropping out now and then to the effect that alterations and extensive repairs to the works already done were required I knew well enough what such items of news meant—they meant a paving of the way for fresh inroads on the public purse. And those inroads have followed, and will foot up to at least a million dollars.

The Assembly never authorized a dollar of this before the Province was pledged to pay it. The people should not mind that! They should be used to officials fattening on their labors by this time. The English say: Those French Canadians will stand anything. The people need only work half an hour a day later and let their children go without shoes and stockings through the winter as well as the summer, then they can pay the tax-gatherer and make it all square. The Assembly has but to support their late Government, who took the million from them without their sanction, to give them a majority again, and let them take another million in the same way. They'll do it.

On this question of extras I can again speak with professional knowledge. I was over portions of the lines two or three times during the progress of the works under the former contractors, and I can say that the work was being done as fairly as work generally in Canada. These works, as I have said before, lay in their unfinished state for a twelve-month or

more. Now any man who should expect to go and find railway banks and culverts, etc., in the same state after a twelve-month as they were in the day the work was going on would be simply a fool. Therefore what they required to bring them up to proper condition should have been foreseen and provided for in the contract. For any omission to do so there can be no excuse whatever. Before the contracts were made the Government sent engineers over the works, and unless the late government intend to plead that their engineers were incapable fools, there can be no possible excuse for such omission or for any consequent claim for extras. I am stating an outside sum when I say that fifty thousand dollars should have covered every extra for altered works, etc., which could not have been foreseen at the time of making the contracts.

But there are some other points that make the addition of these immense sums to the contract amounts outrageous beyond anything that officials have hitherto attempted. Since the contracts were made the prices of every thing, including labor, have decreased. At the time of making them men could not be safely calculated on for less than a dollar and a quarter the day. If report speaks the truth men have been paid by the contractors as little as sixty cents. Now, every man who has been paid less than a dollar and a quarter a day has been doubly wronged by the late Government, for the contract amounts were sufficient to allow workmen that sum for their labor, and yet that Government added a million dollars to the contract amounts, their share of which these poor workmen will have to pay in taxation, making a further deduction from the pay they have had.

Why was such a sweeping change of officials on these lines made by the Government? Was it that a very corrupt set existed? Practically I see the reason for it thus:—If the same men had been retained in the same positions, the same work could not have been entered in the accounts and paid for twice over without the facts leaking out. Cutting the connection between former and present made matters smooth. It could not have been because they wished to get rid of corrupt officials, for I know that some of the former officials that were corrupt—men who had allowed thousands of dollars of the public money to pass through their hands while they kept their eyes shut—were retained, while others were turned adrift.

I see this Government, that watched their contractors' struggles with such tenderness, and who gave relief with such big amounts of public money, and who were altogether so kind, dealing with another man in a different fashion. I see these kind men harshly and inhumanly driving Legge back to a lunatic asylum. Why such a startling difference between their treatment of one man and their treatment of another? Here is the reason: Legge was worthless, powerless, politically. These contractors could let the public into a conservative secret or two which the men of the late Government

would give their lives to keep from leaking out. It must not be forgotten that the contractors at the time of contracting with the Government were not ignorant. For years they had been working over the ground covered by the works, for years the location surveys had been in their hands, and altogether they were contracting with as much knowledge as if they were looking back over completed works. And yet we are expected to believe that these men, who have grown gray-headed in contracting, these men who had no competition against them, these men who had possession of the works and all the legal strength which such possession gave them, these men with all their knowledge of the works and ground, were such fools as to enter into contracts for sums less than the work could possibly be done for. If the people are such fools as to be gulled by anything so preposterous they deserve to lose several millions more than the one that is gone.

These things to which I have referred should be enough to condemn a dozen governments, but there are other things to come. Almost from the day of signing the contracts the contractors have been running the lines for traffic, and thus they have netted immense sums, in cash taken day after day, none of which has passed into the public funds, or been accounted for in any way. The Government have paid for engines, rolling stock, rails, station buildings, every thing indeed, without retaining even a drawback, for the contractors to wear the materials out for their own profit. The contractors have so excellent a thing that they intend to hold on to it just as long as possible. Immense claims for extras will be put forward, these will be fought through the courts and take years to settle, and meantime the contractors will hold possession and work the lines for their own profit. Fancy it! A road into which about eight millions of dollars of public money has already been put, the contractors have only to pay a few salaries and run it for years. When the line gets into the public hands it will require new rails, rolling stock, and all. This excellent Conservative Government, this wise Government, into whose hands the electors have, in two years, placed eight millions of the public money for railway works alone, were so innocent that they made contracts without giving it a thought that the lines might require to be run for traffic before they were completed. Thus hundreds of thousands of dollars of the public money will be lost in addition to the million of which I have spoken.

No words can do proper justice to the state of things that the late Government have brought about. Their scandalous criminal folly passes belief. They dare to come before the people and say this by their last report:— The utmost value we can put on work done is, in round figures, seven millions two hundred thousand dollars, (\$7,183,492), but we have paid away fifty thousand dollars more than this. (Pages 14 and 12 Commissioners' Report for December, 1877). In other words the Government have

not only not retained any drawback, but have actually paid out fifty thousand dollars over and above the value of the work done, this value being put at a large increase on the contract rates. And this at the same time that the contractors are coining money by using the property for which over seven millions of public money has been paid. But there is more yet, the Government borrowed from the banks at seven per centum, and taking commissions and money lying in the banks' hands into account, the actual percentage is sure to be nearer ten per cent. The case stands then:—The kind feelings that the Government entertained for their contractors made them pay over hundreds of thousands of dollars beyond what the contractors were entitled to, and because of the Government's kindness, the Province has to pay about ten per cent. for those hundreds of thousands. Beyond the million then already pledged there is another five hundred thousand of loss to fall upon the Province, in interest for borrowed money, in money passing into the contractors' pockets for traffic that should be returning something to the public funds, and in interest for the whole eight millions or more that will be lost before the contractors can be made to hand over the works. Owing to the way in which the late Government has managed matters, by keeping no drawbacks and allowing the contractors to run the lines for profit, the contractors will fight the public for extras and for continued possession of the lines with public money. And when the public get possession, the cost of gaining it will fall on the public funds because the contractors will take good care that they keep no property about them that can be touched. Thus it is quite possible the loss will swell to two millions before the public get possession of their property. The railway promises to be a mine of gold to contractors and lawyers for some years to come, but the public funds form the gold. The people have little idea what a fearful maw they have created owing to the rascally follies of the late Government. Let the Assembly, however, again give a majority for the late Government's support, and in a few years they will feel what such a maw can do in gorging public money. Place them back again, and let them lose a million a year besides what they spend, as they have been doing. Then, how many years will it be before bankruptcy is over the Province? Some may think a Province cannot become bankrupt, but why should not this Province become so just as well as a city like Chicago? Every dollar's worth of property is in pledge. The Province is already in the grasp of the pawn-broker. The people are paying about ten per cent. for borrowed money. There can be no repudiation under English rule. If the people choose to let their Governments pledge their property to the last dollar of its value, they must pay. If they do not look into these facts and punish the men who brought such a state of things to pass, they will surely feel the punishment that tax-gatherers can inflict.

But I hear some one say: Surely these men had some authority for spending such vast sums beyond what was sanctioned by the Assembly in the contracts! Well, it is clear they felt that they ought to show some authority. What is it they say for themselves? After their tricks played upon the Lieut. Governor in the way of introducing unconstitutional measures to supersede the law courts on the strength of a blank form signed by him for matters of routine, it is not surprising to find the sort of trick they have played on the public with regard to their unsanctioned waste of money. It is a very common thing for contractors to carry out works, pocket the money and then leave their poor laborers in the lurch to starve, or to do as best they can without pay. Because of this then, a clause was inserted in the Acts connected with the contracts that gave power to the Government, if they should see any disposition on the part of their contractors to defraud their workmen, to pay the sums due under the contracts directly to the men instead of to the contractors. This was a wise provision. In effect they say they found the contractors intended to swindle those working for them, for they made use of the clause, but for what purpose? Why, to cloak an inroad on the public funds to the extent of four hundred thousand dollars. Here are their words (page 7 Commissioners' Reports for December): "It results that there is no longer any hope of being able to retain, on the contract price, the amount which the Government paid to the Jacques Cartier Bank," this little sum being \$400,000. Spending the money, and then telling the public "there is no longer any hope of being able to retain" it, is very good, and of course they expect the people to laugh heartily at the joke. Gentlemen, pay up your taxes and—laugh. This is how the case stands then: The Assembly provided against the possible chance of a few people being swindled; the Government make use of the provision to swindle the whole Province. This is poetical justice with a vengeance. In the history of practical joking there is nothing richer, and the Government almost deserves to be let off on this item the joke is so good—that is, of course, if the people are prepared to pay four hundred thousand dollars for every good joke that can be played on them. No doubt after playing such as this on the people, and succeeding in playing similar things off on the Lieutenant Governor, if they had succeeded, they would have carried on things without any new Acts at all, their ingenuity being quite equal to making old Acts cover and sanction anything they liked to do. Some time ago, in the States, one of the Assemblies passed an Act giving each member a round sum by way of bonus; they, however, made one foolish lapse, they forgot to direct where the money should be taken from. So the public funds did not suffer, and everybody laughed at the legislators. In that case the public had the laugh on their side. That Assembly ought to have had the late Government down there to have man-

aged things. Then the laugh would undoubtedly have been against the people, for they would have divided the money first and passed the Act to take it afterwards. They have sharp men in the States, but those of the late Government are beyond what the States can show. They expect that the people will know how to prize them accordingly. The people shall form their treasures, and they will let the people keep them as their treasures. Happy Government! Happy people! Let the late Government have a majority in the Assembly again, then the people must keep an extra money-bag always ready for the tax-gatherer. Let every household at once start a tax-gatherer's big money-box alongside the children's little boxes, and put into it every cent that can possibly be spared. But I can tell the householders a very much wiser thing to do and that is: Support economy and reform, and put your spare cash into your children's money-boxes.

There are many other things connected with this short period of official plundering, which I have reviewed, to which I might call the people's attention, but what use is it to go into the petty rascality when the greater acts are enough to damn and consign to political oblivion a dozen such Governments. I might refer to the fact, that, while the line of railway was to be carried, according to the contracts, through cultivated lands and homesteads, it has for miles been deviated into land utterly worthless, as it lies at present, land which the railway will drain and bring into value; to the fact that the deviation should save a hundred and fifty thousand dollars in the item of bridging alone; and to many others, so that, instead of the contract amounts being added to, a deduction should have been made in favour of the public of at least two hundred thousand dollars.

In every act of their administration in regard to these works there is criminal negligence, or what in most cases deserves a much harsher name. What wonder then that between one and two millions will be required to make good for the things for which they have pledged the Province beyond what was sanctioned by the Legislature.

I shall take no review of their administrative acts in the other departments, although I could point to many scandalous transactions where the public money has passed away, leaving not a thing behind to show, or only worthless shams that can never be of any value. I will only ask: Does any man suppose that these men who have done so shamefully in one department, have in the others done differently? If, in a department where they had more opportunities but at the same time more chance of being tracked, they have acted so shamelessly, is it likely that, in departments where their acts are more difficult to follow, they have been pure and good men? But what signifies a few hundreds of thousands of dollars more, beside the enormous sums that their railway administration has squandered!

In that they have done enough to blacken them for the rest of their lives ; in that they have done enough to make it necessary that the whole Province should, as one man, impeach them, if only that a warning may be set up that future official plunderers may heed. For the public to complain of one or two hundreds of thousands of dollars more would be to act like a man whose house had been cleared by burglars and who should stand complaining that his flower-beds had been trodden.

Leaving the Railway administration, and taking a brief review of the political situation for a little longer period than that covered, this is what I see :—

A Conservative Government, although having almost the whole Assembly for a following, had to retire because they were caught after—after, remember ; they are excellent hands at securing the booty before they get found out—after a great slice of public property had gone to enrich themselves or their closest friends. These men were the most active and leading men of the party. But the Province was Conservative, so, instead of the usual practice of calling upon the Opposition to form a Ministry a Conservative Lieutenant Governor chose other Conservatives. It is very important to keep this period in mind, because of what follows. For grossest corruption the Conservative Ministry had been driven forth. And what a foul state of things it must have been when, not an Opposition but political followers, who are usually not too squeamish in what they allow to go on in their party, were compelled to drive their most active, and those they considered their best, men out. Others took their place and “ kept their seats warm,” till after a short time the tainted men ventured back, and were taken in (a farce of a legal trial having been gone through). The railway contracts were made. Immediately afterwards these men were all back again, either in the Ministry or close around it. In the day of small things these men put all their energies into “ doing ” the public out of a piece of land worth a few thousands of dollars, and risked almost certain exposure for the sake of the plunder. Within two years the day of great things came, and millions of dollars are in the public treasury at a time. These men, remember, are back in their seats and old haunts again. They had a great chance. Did they make use of it ? I won't say, but this I know, the people will have to make good over a million dollars that the Province is pledged to pay, although unsanctioned by the Legislature. If the people believe that the plunderers of one period can, within two years, become so changed as to be trusted safely as guardians of millions in the dark, why, let the people give them support again, and go on till another million or two are gone and a bankrupt Province has dispelled the illusion.

I see the great undertaking the Province and its Government had pledged themselves to carry through. One that required not only economy

but the straining of every nerve. What, under such circumstances, should have been the course followed? Why, every unnecessary work, everything else that could be left undone, should have been left. But, looking over the Province, I see a Railway being built—a work altogether worthless from any public point of view—and thousands of dollars of public money going into the worthless undertaking. At the same moment I see a leading director of this company a member of the Government, and a relative, the chief man pushing on the work. I am told by the staunchest government supporters, members of the Legislature, that the railway will be purchased by the Government. I see the contractor of this company making a sworn statement that he had paid a director of the company many thousands of dollars or the equivalent. Thus, beside the great Government railway swallowing its millions, I see the public funds going in many other directions. I see another subsidized railway swindling English capitalists out of thousands of dollars, and the Government so much mixed up in the transaction that it is impossible to say whether they should be charged only with gross negligence or with helping a fraud.

Assisting in the perpetration of a gigantic fraud overthrew the Dominion Conservative Government, the Tanneries fraud overthrew a former Quebec Conservative Ministry, to be followed by the overthrow of the late Government, and their misuse of the public funds must overthrow the Conservative party, unless the people wish to put themselves before the world as upholders of public crimes and public criminals.

It is not from encroachments on the people's rights and privileges made by a Lieutenant Governor on behalf of the Crown that the people need protection. A Lieutenant Governor is just about as incapable of making encroachments with any effect as a baby would be. It was from its Government that the people needed protection. The moment came when a Lieutenant Governor was wanted to show himself something more than a mere figure-head. Amid all the nonsense that is being talked about constitution and encroachment on the Assembly's privileges, it should be remembered that the very strength, the very glory of the English constitution, the very thing that is making it the constitution which all the earth's nations are adopting in principle, is the guarantee which it affords for good government by being made up of, the branches comprising the people, the parliaments and the Crown. Each part being kept in order and prevented from undue usurpations of authority by the working of the others. It is not the first time in the history of English Governments that the Crown has stood between the people and a bad Government, just as at others the Parliaments have stood between the people and Crown encroachments on privileges. The late crisis only shows how splendidly the English constitution works in periods of pressure. Political corruption flooded the Province, the pub-

lic funds were floating away in waste at the rate of a million a year, the Assembly were passing unconstitutional Acts to supersede the courts of law. The Legislative Council did not protect the people, for it was under the same control that held the Assembly; but the people, the people's interests, the people's funds were protected by the Crown. At the right moment the Lieutenant Governor showed himself the right man at the helm. Another year would have plunged the Province into bankruptcy. Is this not the case? See:—The members of a Government that began with a few thousands at the Tanneries went to hundreds of thousands and then to a million in railway administration; with such great things done, would they not have attempted greater, when greater opportunities were open to them. What would they have done? This is what the plans were; this is what was actually being pushed forward when the games were stopped. The Government railway property was to be leased to themselves or friends for twelve years, men of straw would have been nominally at the head of the thing, and probably scarcely a dollar would have returned to the public treasury for the period. Just as the Tanneries property passed away from the public, so would this have passed. Think of it! what a splendid opportunity they were about to make use of. Three hundred and seventy-six miles of railway completely equipped, costing the public ten and a half millions of dollars, for the lease was to include the line not yet under contract—the profits secured to them for twelve years. Why, instead of a few thousands of dollars apiece they might have retired at the end of the time with a million each. Will the people be such fools as to believe they would have magnanimously foregone their splendid opportunity? Why, the plot was nearly ripe, another month or two would have seen it carried out. From this loss of their great property and from bankruptcy the Province has been saved, saved only just as the scale was tipping, by the Lieutenant Governor. The people ought to thank God daily that such a man was the representative of the Crown. When the time is spoken of as a thing of the past his name ought to be found among England's titles, because he is a man who has saved a Province from bankruptcy and disgrace.

Although intending this letter to reach the public, I address it to you, sir, for several reasons. Through a long course of public life you have gained the respect and esteem of all the Province. Your political course has been consistent through times which have found consistency extremely rare. Place, profit, public plunder, might have been yours as they have been others, but you have kept to your principles. You are the man then to whom my enthusiasm—wrought to utterance by sincere love for justice and goodness, by sincere desire for the people's welfare, while looking upon the late governing political immorality—can go forth, without any underlying reserve. You have for years been fighting what is truly the people's battle, and now you are called to administer their affairs. Many will hold

different opinions to yours on questions, but they have no choice open to them. Every honest man, whatever his opinions, must support you. You almost stand alone in the Province as the one leading politician that an honest man can look upon with pleasure whatever his political leanings. The choice of the people is between yourself and corruption. Can any honest man hesitate a moment in his choice however rabid a party man he may be? The people must decide to support you with your principles of economy backed by years of consistent political life or corruption and the certain bankruptcy of the Province. Your whole public life has shown you to be one who will have respect for the opinions and feelings of others holding different ones to yours. So none need hesitate to trust affairs in your hands although differing from you on some questions. But I hear some one say: Mr. Joly's followers are no better than the men on the other side, so what is the use of supporting men from whom we differ in opinions? To any one so speaking I say: I can give excellent reasons for your supporting Mr. Joly. Remember, the great question of the moment is not that of whether the Government shall be put into the hands of this or that party. The question of the moment is essentially this: shall those be sent back to power who have attempted to pass unconstitutional acts to supersede the law-courts, who have plunged the Province into direct taxation and on to the very verge of bankruptcy, who have by their criminal misdeeds wasted a million or more of public money within a year or so, or shall the one man, the only man that there is to take, be supported at the head of affairs? That is the question, who should hesitate then in choice?

To those who say: There is nothing to choose between the men of either side I say this: granted for the moment that the new men will be no better than the old—they cannot be worse; still there is every reason in favor of choosing the new ones, the main reasons being that, the new men will start from the first pledged to economy, they will start with the whole public press watching them from their first movements, they will start from the first watched by the fallen leaders who have grown old in knowledge of every trick and turn. Hence there is every guarantee for their good conduct. Even looked at in this light then, there is no need to hesitate a moment in choice between the two sets of men. Send back the old set and corruption will stalk on unchecked and emboldened. I have already heard threats of what shall be done when they get back. Support the new men, and it is impossible they can be corrupt to any extent that can in any way deeply injure public interests.

I sum up some main points that stand forth clearly in the late Government's railway administration, and which show, sir, that there is a very grave case for your Government's consideration, and for the consideration of Parliament.

Sometime after the contractors had commenced to work the lines for traffic, for their own profit, the late Government attempted to obtain possession of the portion of the lines that could be used for traffic. They not only did not get possession but the public accounts show that the contractors just at the same period received large amounts of money beyond those to which the contracts entitled them. Some few months later the Government again attempted to get possession. Again they did not obtain it, but again the contractors were paid much larger sums than ever. Another attempt ended in exactly the same way. It resulted from this, that the contractors have not only held the lines, working them for their own profit and thus obtaining large sums that should be going into the public treasury, but that they have also been paid far in excess of the works actually carried out. So that not only have no drawbacks been retained but more money has been paid the contractors than the full value of the works actually executed. In addition to all this, in October last a new contract or contracts were made, superseding the contracts sanctioned by the Legislature. These new contracts have been framed in such a way that it is clear to me that practically the railway has passed out of the control of the Government or the Legislature for some years to come. Questions of claims for extras can be fought through the courts, which will take years to settle probably, and in the meantime it is very doubtful if any power can legally take the railway from the contractors, who will, of course, continue to work it for their own profit.

Something then of enormous value has passed into the hands of the contractors which they could not have obtained if the contracts sanctioned by the Legislature had been strictly adhered to, something of such value that it would have been worth the contractors' while to have paid hundreds of thousands of dollars to obtain it. These new contracts seem in no way to have been laid before the Legislature by the late Government. There is no reference to them in the Commissioners' reports and nothing to indicate their existence except the indirect sort of hints given that the railway will cost much larger sums than the contracts sanctioned by the Legislature provided for.

Under all these very startling circumstances the question requiring the fullest investigation by the Legislature becomes this: Has what has taken place been the result of ignorance and incapacity such as exceeds belief on the part of the administration, or, it having been clearly worth the contractors while to pay large sums, have the contractors paid by bribes for the new and great privileges that have become theirs? It is a very grave question, and I feel that I should be wanting in all that should animate an honest man if, knowing the state of things, I failed to place them before your Government and the people, while demanding in the name of a plundered Province a strict investigation.

If previous to this I had made these facts public they could not but have had a great influence in favor of your party during the elections. My object, however, is to serve the public and to act only as public justice demands.

In the name of the whole Province, sir, I ask you to do strict justice. Those who have so criminally wasted the public money must be brought to answer for their misdeeds. It is not enough that they have been driven from place and power. They must be made to stand at the Bar. The public interests demand this, so that their punishment shall be warning for all time to those in authority—a warning that justice, though delayed, comes to the guilty law-givers just as certainly as to the meanest criminals.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Very faithfully yours,

GEORGE BEMISTER.

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