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PROVINCIAL FINANCES

Hon. Dr. Hetherington, Provincial Secretary-Treasurer, delivered his third budget speech in the Legislature yesterday, and it was beyond a doubt one of the ablest and most concise expositions of provincial finances that the House has listened to in many a day. While the Provincial Secretary-Treasurer is a modest man and lays no pretence to oratory he is at the same time a most fluent and interesting speaker and is always listened to with the closest attention. Indeed it is not going beyond the bounds of truth to state that no member of the House enjoys greater popularity with his colleagues and fellow members and none are more universally esteemed. Hon. Dr. Hetherington comes from the good old County of Queens, a county which has given many able men to the public life of the country, but it never had in the Legislative Assembly of this province a more diligent and painstaking representative than the gentleman who now honors the portfolio of Provincial Secretary-Treasurer, one of the most important offices in the cabinet.

Calamity howlers, apostles of blue ruin and whisperers of death will not derive much comfort from the financial statement which Hon. Dr. Hetherington presented in the Legislature yesterday. His speech carried a note of optimism from start to finish, and he backed up his statements by facts and figures which cannot be successfully refuted. There was a lot of sound logic in what he said, particularly in his somewhat extended allusion to the great and burning question of prohibition. Picturing New Brunswick as a land not thickly settled by people engaged in farming, lumbering and fishing, he took occasion to point out that the province stood high with the investing public, and clinched his statement by declaring that our bonds bring a higher price than those of any of the other provinces.

The present administration may have committed errors during the seven years which have elapsed since I took over the reins of government in 1917, but whatever may be its faults it cannot be charged with lack of diligence in collecting His Majesty's royal revenues. The Provincial Secretary-Treasurer quoted statistics to show what had been accomplished along this line, and it is certainly a story of wonderful service and achievement. For instance, he pointed out that the old government between the years 1912 and 1916 had collected a total of \$2,710,000 in territorial revenue. It was regarded at the time as very efficient work and there was a lot of boasting indulged in over it. If the old government was entitled to credit for what it did what can be said of the achievement of the present administration in collecting between the years 1919 and 1923 the magnificent sum of \$5,545,540 from the same source, or more than double the amount which their predecessors were able to gather in. The present government has imposed no new taxes on the people, yet it was able to collect in taxes from incorporated companies in a period of five years the sum of \$819,935, whereas the old government only succeeded in collecting from the same source \$255,910 in a like period, yet they claimed to be giving the country an honest and business-like administration. In the item of succession duties the old government in a five year period, when there was no Health Act and life was more uncertain than is the case today, was only able to collect the sum of \$396,159. The present government promptly discarded the old shopworn system and adopting one more in keeping with this progressive age was able to collect the handsome sum of \$715,622, an increase of \$319,463. These are some of the fruits of a real business like administration of provincial affairs.

In dealing with the debt of the province the Provincial Secretary-Treasurer was able to show that while it stood at \$29,363,932 on March 31st of the present year, the province possesses assets including the Valley Railway, the Musquash Power, sinking funds, Farm lands, etc., valued at \$14,756,089, which bring the net debt down to \$14,627,843. In addition to

BUDGET BROUGHT DOWN IN THE LEGISLATURE BY HON. DR. HETHERINGTON

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not increase that power. HON. MR. BYRNE said that the School Boards consulted the councils as the school estimates were always placed before them. The boards were responsible.

MR. RICHARDS—To whom are they responsible. It is too late to make any change in estimates when they are placed before a city or town council.

MR. MARTIN said he wanted this power conditional on approval of the councils, otherwise he must oppose.

HON. MR. FOSTER said that the Hon. Attorney General had given this bill careful consideration. He must admit that the powers of School Boards were very wide, but if a School Board could recede a school without reference to anyone else, why should it not be given the power of granting small annuities. Reference to a vote of the ratepayers could not be applicable to large cities.

MR. SCOVIL said that the point of the hon. member for Northumberland (Martin) was well taken. There was a feeling in many communities that the powers of School Boards were too great at present, and he did not want them increased. It would be a good provision to give no further power to School Boards. At present they could demand any sums from city and town councils. It was his opinion that School Boards should have to consult the councils.

MR. MARTIN said it would be thoroughly satisfactory to him if it were provided that these retiring allowances had to go to the councils for approval.

HON. MR. BYRNE said that the school boards although not directly representative had performed the will of the rate-payers. If retiring allowances already granted were legalized similar powers for the future could not be refused. School Boards, if not representative, as claimed by hon. members, certainly were legally constituted bodies. If they had the power of disposing of hundreds of thousands of dollars, why not of the matter of annuities to teachers.

Out of Politics.

HON. MR. VENIOT said that school boards had been given their present organization in order to keep the administration of the school law apart from civic politics, and not to place it at the mercy of every change of opinion. The same had been done in regard to the rural districts. It was considered safer to give large powers to school boards than to councils which had to go to the people every year or two. A very similar principle had been adopted by this legislature in regard to power development when the later was placed under a Commission in order to separate it from politics.

MR. YOUNG—Consult the people. HON. MR. VENIOT said it was all very well to say that, but how could that be done in the city of St. John. He would like to have some instances of school boards acting at variance with the will of the people.

Fredericton School Matters.

MR. SCOVIL—The School Board of Fredericton tried to spend \$200,000 on a new school building that the people did not want.

HON. MR. VENIOT said that the Fredericton School Board had been proved to be right, for a bill to authorize the expenditure of \$150,000 for that new school already was before the House and the Fredericton City Council had approved of it. Last

year the expenditure had been prevented through an agitation which had been worked up. MR. FAWCETT said he was strongly opposed to giving such powers to school boards. The town of Sackville had such a board and it was not satisfactory. Representative government should apply here. He agreed with the Hon. Attorney General that the amendment under discussion did not extend the powers of the School Board, but he did not consider the principle to be right.

MR. MARTIN said that the amendment was giving additional powers. MR. MELANSON said that he was a little afraid that where school Boards were opponents of the present administration they would take objectionable steps and place the blame on the government. He knew that in certain districts where they were paying minimum salaries to teachers, they were placing the burden upon his colleagues and himself to the injury of the government. He approved of the reference to the meetings of ratepayers.

MR. PECK said there was no reason for this provision in the rural sections. Pensions for teachers were provided already. There was little use in referring such a matter to school meetings, for they were not representative and he knew of some at which it was hard to get a quorum. The sanction should be cut out. HON. MR. BYRNE said he did not believe there was reason to apprehend action on the part of school boards, such as had just been mentioned.

Mr. Richard's Views.

MR. RICHARDS said that school boards had been referred to as both representative and constitutional. In rural districts the school boards were representative where they were elected from year to year, but in cities and towns such was not the case. The approval of the ratepayers in rural districts was required by this amendment, but in cities or towns no such approval was required. He would admit that a general plebiscite would not be applicable, but he wished to point out the inconsistency of the amendment. In general it would be admitted that the administration of the school law should not be brought in contact with civic politics, but in the towns and cities the overwhelming majority of the members of school boards were appointed by the government. The councils had no voice in school expenditure, but must merely supply the money required. There was certainly a general feeling that there should be no extension of the powers of school boards in the matter of assessment. The Hon. Premier had referred to the relation of the legislature to the Power Commission, but the cases were not analogous, for the legislature at the very first authorized the raising of the money which was expended. He questioned if the section was needed at all, and believed that in the rural sections it would be a nullity. In the country teachers did not stay in one place, but moved around and whatever instances arose could be dealt with as needed.

Amendment Amended.

MR. YOUNG moved that the portion of the amendment referring to rural school districts be struck out. MR. PECK seconded the amendment. He said that the hon. Attorney General would want no discord caused in the rural sections.

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that the province owns crown lands worth at least fifty millions of dollars, so it will strike the shrewd observer that we are not so badly off after all. The Provincial Secretary-Treasurer also took occasion to point out that the government had provided sinking funds for all indebtedness accruing since it took office in 1917 a little matter which previous governments had overlooked, but one which nevertheless is of great importance to financial houses who are in the market for sound investments. This is one of several reasons why New Brunswick bonds are in such great demand and command a higher price than those of any other province in the Dominion.

As Hon. Dr. Hetherington pointed out in the course of his speech former governments could make surpluses at the close of the fiscal year by juggling the accounts. Under the present administration that has become a lost art. The accounts are now audited by an independent firm of chartered accountants, and all liabilities outstanding at the close of the year must be gathered in and charged up to that year. The government cannot interfere in the matter even were it so disposed. It is sound business and is so recognized by the right thinking people of the province. The financial press makes no bones about saying that New Brunswick has the best system of accounting in vogue in any province of the Dominion, and it stands to the credit of the present government. Recalling the wretched state of affairs that existed under the old administration all good citizens have reason to be proud of the change which has been brought out in the short period of seven years.

The Provincial Secretary-Treasurer made good use of the abundant material at his disposal in painting a

rosy picture of New Brunswick. While there has been depression as a result of the great war there is every reason to believe that we have crossed the divide and that better times are just around the corner. Policies have been announced by the government during the present session which when carried out will be certain to bring about great industrial development. New Brunswick has the natural resources and is bound to go ahead; it cannot stand still. It has a virile population who given half a chance can hold their own with any people on this continent. The government in undertaking the development of the water powers has launched a real forward movement, and the great majority of the people stand ready to fall into line under its leadership. In the work of the future all should keep in mind the memorable words of the late Sir Wilfrid Laurier, "that the nineteenth century was the century of the United States; the twentieth century belongs to Canada."

The culprits who burglarized and ransacked the unoccupied home of a citizen now sojourning in Sunny California, and regaled themselves on his private stock, may be possessed of a sense of humor, but this will not save them from paying the penalty of their crime providing they fall into the hands of the authorities. There is no reason why members of the police force should not be instructed to pay an occasional visit to dwelling houses which are closed for a part of the year especially those which have well stocked basements. Had there been some supervision over the dwelling in question the loss and annoyance which will face the owner on his return home, might have been avoided.

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The report of an animated discussion on School Board matters in committee of the House yesterday will be found in another part of this issue and will be especially interesting to the tax-payers of this city. There is no doubt that School Boards have altogether too much power, which they sometimes use in an arbitrary manner and the average taxpayer will welcome an effort to curb rather than to extend that power.

Harvard is limiting the number of its entrants. This may be good for scholarship, but will it help the eleven to whip Yale?

The French lecturer who declares American husbands are angels is doubtless correct in the Broadway sense of the word.

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