

NAME CARRUTHERS, JOHN
NOM

No. 2006

P49 Supplement July
In July 1 2006

The Daily British Whig Supplement, December 1886, by Carl Fechter re Langston.

A PIONEER'S SUCCESS

A REVIEW OF THE BUSINESS LIFE OF A RETIRED MERCHANT.

A Man Who has Carved Out his Own Fortune,
and Done it With a Heroism Worthy of Imitation
by the Rising Generation - His Spirit of
Generosity and Philanthropy.

John Carruthers

In my younger days I had a hobby, or mania, call it which you please. I would be a curiosity if I stood alone in this respect. I have met people who boasted of inestimable wealth in the shape of old coins which they spent a life-time in gathering. I have known some whose anxiety was to accumulate postage stamps and autographs, prosecuting their callings with an industry worthy of a better cause. My craze was the collecting of photographs. I had two groups of them. One group embraced the photos of men of eminence, but men of whose eminence I could not say: "It is the reward of merit; they wear their honours well; they are honourable in reality as well as in name." A good many belonged to this groups, and it constantly increased. The other groups was made up of the photos of men whose careers had been a succession of heroic deeds and heroic sacrifices, whose personal efforts carried them into prominence, and whose mature life was freed from reproach. To this group I added the photo of John Carruthers. And it remains there. I have loaned it to you, and your wood-cut is as good as wood-cuts usually are, and it is the reproduction from a picture taken some fifteen years ago. It may not be a faithful representation of "the old war-horse" of to-day, but the fault is not mine. A picture of him as he is was not available.

Well, of this retired merchant what shall I say? He is known to everyone in the city, and he is known to be one of the most generous-hearted, public-spirited, and philanthropic of men. For his age his activity is surprising. I find it difficult to pay him tribute, knowing how reluctant he is to communicate for publication anything which personally concerns him. I rejoice that he has not "immortalized" himself in the pages of Rose's Biographies of Representative Canadians as some have done. I rejoice still more to learn that he had the opportunity of dictating a puff and expatiating upon his own goodness and declined to improve it. I don't know that it would have done him any good to be sandwiched, as it were, between some of those characters who have told, in that biographical work, all about their

many virtues, including the many virtues which they did not possess. John Carruthers decided to keep in respectable company, and in so doing he gave proof that he was a most sensible person. I am sorry, nevertheless, that I am not supplied with the data with which to point the lesson which this man's business life teaches to the rising generation. He, of course, had the sagacity and caution so characteristic of his countrymen, and once he became fixed in his purpose his rise was rapid. He had a modest beginning. It's nothing to be ashamed of. But his plans quickly developed and his business expanded until he had the finest wholesale trade in Upper Canada. He was not an idler. He surrounded himself with a staff of able assistants; but he was the central figure; his was the controlling mind. Is to his infinite credit that he was, within a limited time, enabled to accomplish so much - that his energy and thrift were so handsomely rewarded - that he retired from trade with the highest reputation for probity and sterling worth.

Mr. Carruthers pleases me best because of his bluntness and plainness of speech. He is pre-eminently a practical man, and he talks and acts like one. He looks at the questions of the day, whether political or commercial or social, with an eye that is deeply penetrating. He doesn't like to hear one talking flummery, tiring himself in trying to say that which could be expressed in half a dozen words. There is such a thing as smothering an idea with language. The stronger the thought the less need of elaborating it, and the less danger of its being buried out of sight. That a man of Mr. Carruthers' sound judgement should have had his usefulness (outside of his own business) confined largely to the boards of trade, local and dominion, is to be regretted. Certainly he rendered the country splendid service in those councils whose recommendations have so often been embodied in the legislation of the country, but he should have had a higher place than any he has occupied. I am not surprised that he did not enter the city council, seeing that he is not an expert in the use of unfinished English. There are, it is true, just as good minds in the corporation now as there ever was, but there are, likewise now as there has been in the past, others who do not know to what they owe their election, and fail effectually to make their mark. It is some of these that carry the wards by astonishing majorities, and, after the lapse of a few years demand, on the ground of seniority, the highest honor in the gift of the people. The places held by these Mr. Carruthers and men like him should have filled, giving to the public business the benefit of their experienced thought, and to the people an assurance of economy consistent with the requirements of the city. My friend may have been scared away -- though when in his prime not easily daunted -- or he may not have been eager for the privilege of being

abused. Did they have, in former times, the little sensations so peculiar to civic government in this year of grace? Yes; and the speech of to-day is not more ornate than that which has been heard in the same council chamber often and many a time. There is a story, for the accuracy of which I will not vouch, to the effect that the earlier municipal legislators were wont to punctuate their sentences with their ink bottles, and that to prevent an undue waste of ink and unnecessary destruction of carpet the bottles aforesaid were screwed to the table. That was no place for Mr. Carruthers, and again I think he is to be congratulated upon his good sense.

Mr. Carruthers has been a candidate for parliamentary honors three times. I don't believe he was ambitious to fill a seat in the commons, but he was the choice of the liberal party, he had the leisure and the means compatible with public life, and he could not decline the nomination. Once he sought to redeem the county from toryism, and twice he opposed Sir John Macdonald in the city. He was unsuccessful in every case, and yet he was successful, having reduced the vote of his opponent each time, and at length left the field for capture by Mr. Gunn, his business partner and most intimate friend. It was Mr. Carruthers who gave liberalism its greatest boom in Kingston. He backed George Brown here at a time when Macdonald's grip upon the constituency seemed to be too strong to break, and he cherished liberal principles and fought for them against an odds that to ordinary men would have been disheartening. I believe that Hon. A. Mackenzie, on his accession to power, offered Mr. Carruthers a senatorship, and that our citizen most respectfully declined it. Again I take off my hat to him, and declare that his common sense is of a most uncommon quality. Other men would have been tempted to accept the "honor," but it did not turn his head. The senate he had long regarded as an institution that had outlived its usefulness; he did not purpose to stultify himself by becoming a member of it. he has no reason to regret his choice.

He has for some years spent his summers in the old land, principally in Scotland, visiting the scenes of his youth, mingling with old friends and enjoying a climate that is most helpful to his health. He was in Paris, I hear, in 1878, when parliament was dissolved and a general election ordered. A few days afterwards he appeared upon the streets, ready to cheer on his party and show his devotion to its principles. The city has no firmer friend. Every movement set afoot, and calculated to advance the welfare of the people or their institutions, finds him in the fore-front as its advocate. He is not fond of speech-making, but when he does speak in public his language is terse and pointed. As a business man he gave

back-bone to the Queen's college endowment scheme, after the call to the principalship of Dr. Grant. His address had the right ring to it, and it was followed by one of those magnificent subscriptions for which the people are so much indebted to him. As a member of the college endowment committee since then he has been most serviceable.

Mr. Carruthers is one of Kingston's wealthiest citizens. He is also one of its most liberal citizens. His generosity is unostentatious; it is unstinted; it is impartial. Were his traits not exceptional -- were his sympathies and philanthropy not unusual -- there would be less ground for the spread of socialism and its discordant demand for division of the spoils. He who labours not is not entitled to the fruits of those who do labour, and law and justice rule it so even now. There are those who are unfortunate, however, in spite of all their efforts to be otherwise, and their lingering lives are more or less dependant upon the bounty of their fellows. It is of these that Mr. Carruthers thinks, thanks to his love for the brotherhood of man, and whose kindness towards them will be remembered in the sweet by-and-bye.

I met my friend the other day (not as Carl Fechter to be sure) and as I chatted with him I noticed how hale and hearty he was. He is 72, but his walk is smart and his head as clear as it was forty years ago. And he is withal quite youthful in his feelings. Weather permitting he would not miss the athletic sports on any account, and in football he takes an especial delight. He lives on the corner of Earl and Sydenham streets, has one of the finest residences in the city, and the most charming of grounds. His family has been a happy one. Of his five children two are married. The eldest daughter is the wife of Major Short, one of the bravest soldiers in Canada, as his conduct at Cut Knife Creek so amply proved. His eldest son formed an alliance with the daughter of the late Hon. Isaac Burpee, minister of customs in the government of Mr. Mackenzie. His second son is a member of the banking house of Carruthers Bros., and the companion of his father in his travels abroad. His youngest son is a lieutenant in the 21st Hussars, stationed at Ballingeollig, Ireland, and fulfilling all my expectations of him as a young Canadian officer. His youngest daughter is a very talented young lady, with an affection for home and parents. That Mr. Carruthers may long have the felicity and the friendship which he now enjoys is the prayer of.

POSTSCRIPT. -- Mr. Carruthers' being the first name upon my little list I have dealt with him first. Others will be attended to in due time, and I shall carry out my commission and speak of them as I find them. -- C.F.