

## Mr. King 'Losing Touch', Says Former Secretary

By I. N. S. of The Journal Staff.

IN the January issue of Harper's Magazine is a scholarly and friendly sketch of Prime Minister Mackenzie King. It is scholarly because it is written by Professor E. K. Brown, chairman of the Department of English at Cornell University. It is friendly because from February, 1942, to August, 1942, Professor Brown was one of Mr. King's secretaries. But Mr. King won't like all of it, for there is much faint praise and some plain punching.

Professor Brown tries patiently to answer the enigma: why is the public always ready to vote into power this man whose character does not at all satisfy their notion of a national leader? The enigma remains unanswered, but Professor Brown may bring many of us closer to the man than we have ever been.

Mr. King, he says, is one of the hardest men to meet but one of the easiest to see. You may see him in the Commons every day at 3.00 when Parliament is in session or you may see him nearly every Sunday evening in St. Andrew's Church. But few meet him at his fireside in Laurier House or walk with him over the fields at Kingsmere. His greatest friends are dead: his mother, his mother's father, the Lauriers, the youthful Henry Harper, Ernest Lapointe, Norman Rogers.

Professor Brown suggests that in his loneliness—"he is one of the loneliest beings alive"—Mr. King dwells with these earlier and lasting friends, perhaps thinks of his problems in the light of their teachings and counsel.

This continuing reference to his own past may account largely for the reiteration right up to today of views and principles he embraced in former years. Laurier taught him that the crucial Canadian problem was the preservation of national unity and to that view he has clung in these war years despite the clamor of the majority that he was trading integrity for unity and losing both.

Sir Wilfrid was his master and friend. Mr. King saw Sir Wilfrid lose his English-Canadian followers in 1917 but stuck closer than ever himself until Laurier's death in 1919. Thereafter he was chosen Liberal leader and to this day keeps faith with Laurier that national unity is the be-all and the end-all.

It is significant that Mr. King's closest friend after Laurier's death was Ernest Lapointe; and that the man next in his choice was probably Norman Rogers.

With and through Mr. Lapointe, Mr. King strove to understand French Canadians and narrow the gap between French and English. Mr. Rogers, it seemed, was his choice as successor: an earnest and able young man who left a university chair to enter public life as Minister of Labor, much as Mr. King had left his labor studies to become Deputy Minister of Labor in 1900. Mr. King was going to work with French Canada during his regime and was going to train an understudy just as Laurier had trained him so that the long-view of Laurier and King would be carried ever nearer to fruition.

But Mr. Rogers died and Mr. Lapointe died. Their places in Mr. King's Cabinet were filled, but no one replaced either of them in his inner forum. Writes Professor Brown:

"He lives much in the past. . . . As you meet him on his way to his office—an office which is almost as Sir Wilfrid left it—you think you are face to face with a chunk of the nineteenth century at its best. The heavy comfortable clothes cut in a spacious old-fashioned way, the high stiff collar, the pearl tie-pin, the thick black cord that hangs from his massive spectacles, the elaborate cane—all these, and the air of immovable dignity, suggest some contemporary of Sir Wilfrid. Looking at Mackenzie King, one is taken back to leisurely days in small Ontario cities, before there were motors, when the leading citizens passed the Summer evenings bowling on the green and

thought twice before they removed their vests in the company of ladies.

"But Mackenzie King's mind is also on the future. Everyone in Ottawa knows that he is compiling voluminous memoirs, and that all his utterances and actions are calculated partly for the position they will have in the written record. What he says and does must satisfy the ghost of Sir Wilfrid; it must also satisfy the future historians of our time to whom he is demonstrating, no doubt, that everything he has said and done is of a piece, forming a pattern of flawless consistency and symmetry."

THE Prime Minister's critics scoff that a Prime Minister cannot go ahead by looking backwards, and Professor Brown admits that Mr. King is in peril of failing to understand the fullness of the present. Memoranda, monographs and press clippings he reads without end, but his forte in his earlier days was his intuition—and intuition without frequent and widespread association and contacts with the people is not intuition but guesswork. "The almost broken contact between the Prime Minister and the people is a grave loss to them as they undergo their greatest crisis; it is a grave loss to him, too."

Professor Brown finds this loss is sadder to contemplate because Mr. King is instinctively on the side of the common man. He is not proud, he is not impressed by wealth; pomp and flunkeyism are distasteful to him. Of the people, Mr. King would continue to reflect the people if he were still able to mingle with them. But he is tired and not young, he is an idealist who is too weary to struggle in the forum against the realists. He states his case in ordinary language, and if it doesn't get an emotional response it is not in him to bring it forth. They trust him, they respect his knowledge and recognize his cunning—but they don't cheer, nor wave affectionately, nor paste his picture on billboards to sell Victory bonds. He is not the forceful, colorful and youthful leader of a forceful, colorful and youthful people. He is the wise and deliberate and conciliating leader of a country split in two by race and language. *and by M.M.K.*

Wisdom and conciliation and restraint are scarcely ideal war-making talents—but here is the view of Professor Brown, a view remote from politics:

"The needs of the Canadian imagination and the needs of the Canadian situation have been at variance ever since Confederation. With its two nations within a single state, its strong sectional feelings, its precarious economy, Canada can be effectively governed only by a conciliator. Those Canadian statesmen who have not been conciliatory have not risen to the prime ministership or their stay in the office has been brief and uneasy."

PROFESSOR BROWN recalls that 20 years ago he heard Mr. King address a student audience in Toronto University, speaking of the liberal way and illustrating from one of his heroes, Louis Pasteur.

"I can recall the restrained emotion with which he spoke, and how deathlike a silence fell upon the room. Everyone felt that for the moment he was in the presence of human greatness. The man who gave that address still lives, but he is buried under layers of fatigue and an increasing weight of awareness how appalling are the problems with which Canada must cope in war or in peace."

Yet Professor Brown feels that Mr. King's personality is far stronger and warmer than he lets the public think. His study in Laurier House is a charming informal place and the man who sits facing the fire is entirely unputted up by 15 years in the highest post in the nation. Conversation with him is a constant surprise for one who has known him only from public appearances.

The study is lined with thousands of books, but it has also large and specially-built windows, deep comfortable davenports, thick rugs and a roaring fire.

The story of Henry A. Harper, Mr. King's young friend who gave his life in 1901 to save a drowning girl, is retold by Professor Brown as final evidence of Mr. King's great heart and of his "sentimentality"—for the Prime Minister was deeply moved and penned a lovely, old-fashioned memoir called "The Secret of Heroism". Ottawa people know the Harper story, but it is Professor Brown's point that the people of Canada don't know the story nor the Mackenzie King that penned the memoir. The loss is theirs, and his. Concludes the Professor:

"He has been Prime Minister even longer than Sir Wilfrid Laurier. . . . And yet one remembers Sir Wilfrid's incomparable panache, his spectacular phrases, his operatic bearing, his warmth and gaiety and inescapable charm, and the tears that come into the eyes of hard old men when they speak of him a quarter century after his death."