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MR. BLAKE'S RETIREMENT.

THE exit of a great man from the arena of public life calls forth a chorus of remark in which criticism blends with unusual sympathy. Opponents regret his absence the more easily because they do not feel the keen edge of his logic, or fear the frustration of their plans, while friends look upon his loss as a check to their own advancement and the triumph of their principles. With both friends and foes there is mingled a regret that so much ability and eloquence—so much that made memorable the debate of public questions—have left their wonted sphere. The subject of Mr. Blake's retirement will not be exhausted by the first few weeks of newspaper comment, nor can a fair estimate of his character and influence on Canadian politics be given by the alternating praise and blame that come from friend and foe. Besides, his political career cannot be said to be a completed one, nor can the political forces which he controlled be regarded as free from his future influence. Whether bodily sickness or mental disappointment, or both, have caused him to relax his hold on the Liberal party, it cannot be known yet that he will not return to the leadership. But it must be confessed that Mr. Blake's failures to obtain power have been such as might well produce in him a feeling of disgust, and a resolve to keep clear of interference with the political embroglio.

There is no need to impute, as some have foolishly done, such despair of mind as the words "heart-breaking disappointment" and other phrases bordering on the maudlin would imply; for such despair has no place on the record of duty nobly done. It is not likely that he has reached the last stage of gloomy isolation which compelled another great Irishman, Edmund Burke, to say that he would not give a peck of refuse wheat for all that is called fame and honour in the world. While the only known immediate cause of Mr. Blake's retirement is physical illness, it can only be surmised what part mental anxiety and discouragement had in the result. To those who know the methods by which his policy has been opposed, contempt for these methods and disdain of imitating them may well seem to have contributed to it. Still, there is no doubt that some minor personal deficiencies, doubly injurious to a party leader, have partly nullified that largeness and weight of mind which would have had their proper recognition in a political life far larger than our own. Mr. Blake stands a grand and, if the word be no reproach to his dignity, pathetic figure in

the public eye; grand, by reason of the size and cogency of his argumentative powers and unmatched strength in public discussion; pathetic, because crippled by the lack or the unwillingness to practise the lesser arts by which politicians gain friends and tools—not necessarily unmanly arts—but those which are so potent when greatness and suavity meet in their possessor. Sir John has been known to make political converts by slapping them on the back, but has Mr. Blake ever been suspected of so jovial a familiarity? It may be said that these are small obstacles in the path of a leader with a salient policy, but in Mr. Blake's case they are aggravated by irresoluteness in grasping the main chance; and this latter fault, while it is consistent with a profound and comprehensive view of political questions, lets slip by the exigent moment in which a man's enemies are given into his hand. The facts which seem to determine the success of a political leader relate either to his personal qualities or to the inherent strength of his cause. Either he must be capable of uniting various political forces and opinions under a strong personal ascendancy, or the vitality of the principle he contends for must be strong enough to live without aids other than a clear presentation of its truth. Either he must rule a heterogeneous party powerfully, or he must have a policy which alone is the adhesive bond of its supporters, and will inevitably prevail when its claims become evident. In the one case, opposing prejudices and alien sections of the community may be so played against one another that an illusive unity is gained and the temporary aims of a party leader are advanced; in the other, progress depends upon education of the public mind.

Had Mr. Blake remained at the post of honour when his admiring countrymen placed him as leader of the Canada First Party, journalism and all the interests which it voices would not now be looking for the coming man. The latter shadowy personage ought to have been earnestly at work when aspirations for a more vigorous national life began to manifest themselves. As the pioneer and exponent of those aspirations, a little more perseverance would have given Mr. Blake command of all the fine opportunities whose loss has kept him from power. But "Canada First" was left to thrive as best it could, and from that moment Mr. Blake's career has not been successful. He has shown the possession of great powers and has left an example of the purest morality, but has not realized his political ideals because, even if he did anticipate public opinion, he failed to give it voice and direction in its earlier stages.

Is it yet too late? Mr. Blake is by no means an old man in the parliamentary sense, and the possibility of effective work remains to him. Commercial Union is the question which now waits to be solved, and where could it find an abler advocate?

Toronto.

J. W. R.

MESSRS. HARPER & BROTHERS are about to enrich their increasing library of American fiction by the addition of an interesting volume from the pen of Miss Mary E. Wilkins. It is a collection of short stories of the Green Mountain region which originally appeared in various magazines. The title is *A Humble Romance and Other Stories*.