

Personalities and Problems

18—Hon. Sir Richard McBride

Merely a Car-Window Impression Got from a Very Snapshot Interview

By AUGUSTUS BRIDLE

SIR RICHARD MCBRIDE has once more been in the East conferring with the Government of Canada upon a budget of topics affecting British Columbia and Ottawa. Once more he has been manoeuvred and right-flanked by the newspapers, begirt by hobnobbing politicians and conferenced more or less by Cabinet Ministers. There must be a reason for his popularity in Ottawa. The Premier—nay, the political and democratic dictator of British Columbia—does not come East or cross the Atlantic merely for health or pleasure. When he came back from England last year, a few weeks before the *culbute generale* of September 21, he was connived at by public opinion, some of which whispered through a megaphone that he should be the man to lead the Con—

Selah.

This or any other spontaneous deliverance concerning Sir Richard, who in terse communications signs himself "R. McB.," ought to be somewhat of a psalm. There is no clear way to interpret "Dick McBride" except through the lyric. He is somehow a song and a dance and an exceeding great stimulus in living. He is the luminant, phosphorescent hope-star of the Pacific—this is no mere flamboyancy of journalistic imagination either; for behold what the Premier of all Canada said about him, before he became Premier or his friend, Sir Richard:

"A brilliant young Canadian whose name in British Columbia means to the people of that Province much, if not all, that the name of Sir John A. Macdonald meant and still means to Eastern Canada."

Mr. Borden did not say all that perhaps he thought. And for the matter of that, since his eulogy Sir Richard McBride has become to the political figure he was a year or so ago what a kodak snapshot may become in a moving-picture show. When he is interviewed by the newspapers now it is not merely to say what he thinks or knows about the Pacific Coast; but tersely what the whole of the Pacific Coast thinks about the all of Canada. The Premier of British Columbia is no longer a provincial figure, going out with Irish shillelahs to knock the heads off Liberal oppositionists. He is not merely the most unparalleled Provincial Premier out-boldening and out-generalizing Sir James Whitney. He is not only the Progressive who believes that the surest way to conserve the interests of the Pacific Coast is to develop—without booming—British Columbia. He is a man who thinks continentally and who, when he says something about the Pacific Coast, refers to the problem of a united Canada in the British Empire.

IT is something of an open secret, and one of the amenities of public life nowadays, that Sir Wilfrid Laurier holds Sir Richard McBride in very high regard. The reason is not political. It is personal; and personal in a way that may yet mean a great deal for the future of Sir Richard McBride in public affairs.

And there is a curious parallel between these two leaders who have so many personal qualities in common. Personal magnetism—much-abused word—they both have it outside of politics; charm, affability, a rare smile and a tremendous gravity; aristocracy of bearing; oratory and the knack of deep silence. One French, the other as much Irish; one representing a great race and a province, the other a race less dominant in Canada, and a part of the country fast becoming as important to the whole of Canada in progress as Quebec is in history. And Richard McBride is personally just about the kind of leader now that Sir Wilfrid Laurier was when he became leader of the Liberal party in 1896. He is also a man who, in a country, supposedly mad over the almighty dollar, has no desire to get rich.

He was born in New Westminster, B.C., in the year 1870. That now flourishing metropolis on the Pacific was then about as raw a hamlet as any African village exploited by Rider Haggard. About the time Sir Richard was born, the Province of British Columbia was talking seriously of slipping away from Confederation, unless Vancouver should be tied to Montreal by a transcontinental railway. The young man was taking a course at Dalhousie University in New Brunswick shortly after the C. P. R. got through to Vancouver. In 1890 he

became an LL.B. In 1892 he was a barrister and began the practice of law in Victoria, B.C. In 1896 he made his first stab at public life by being defeated in the general election for the House of Commons, running for New Westminster. From 1898 till 1907 he was Liberal-Conservative member of the local Legislature for Dewdney, most of that time as Minister of Mines; in 1902 leader of the Opposition; 1903 and until now Premier of the Province.

So he has never been a member of the House of Commons; and since British Columbia has forged ahead so rapidly he has found enough to occupy his talents as Provincial Premier. Now, with an Opposition which the Lieutenant-Governor keeps in a small glass case—what do we find? No longer the need of just one railway; but more railways—and railways with bonds guaranteed at \$35,000 a mile in order to give British Columbia the chance to grow into what she wants to be as the great west gate to the Dominion of Canada. Though just as surely there are critics who say aloud that Sir Richard and his confreres are wasting the life of a Province, caring nothing for posterity.

It's some few years since R. K., of Jungle-Book fame, wrote a couple of luridly melancholy letters about B. C. That was when he probably didn't happen to run across Richard McBride, or he would have blue-pencilled his sibylline pseudo-jeremiads, and reckoned that probably the man who was born and lived there most of his life might know something worth telling hopefully about the country of the west coast.

THIS is all more or less irrelevant prelude to the narrative about Sir Richard and his visit East, last week. He was a few days in Ottawa. He went up to Toronto and expected to be there



More or less plain "Dick McBride."

a couple of days; but he was wired to go home. In Ottawa he gave a syndicated interview to several newspapers both in Ottawa and Montreal. The things he said to and heard from Premier Borden were not published. The interview was mainly about the Navy. But it said nothing about what Sir Richard knows concerning the Admiralty's views and expectations more than he knew when he was over there last year. He knows; but he doesn't tell it. Which is where a Premier differs from an editor.

In Toronto Sir Richard came and went as quietly as Santa Claus. He was at an hotel; but his name was not on the register. None of the newspapers interviewed him. When the writer of this got first glimpse of him he was at lunch in the big dining-room. He was not alone. Two other knights were with him. The page bore him a brief note asking for an equally brief interview. With true democratic *bonhomie* he scrawled in pencil—never bothers with a fountain pen when he's traveling—"Shall try to see you here at 6.30. Thanks. R. McB."

At 6.30 the telephone. Clerk just about to call off the number of the room was suddenly arrested by the 'phone. Took an order—for sundries; room so-and-so—which was the suite occupied by the Premier of British Columbia.

"Oh!" to the interviewer. "Did you want to speak to Sir Richard Cartwright? Number three booth. Yes, he's in."

Details the order to the page.

Just at the moment round the corner swung the compact form of a man who knows unwritten books about the West and the land question. Quite obviously he also must be looking for Sir Richard (but not Cartwright).

"Sorry I can't give you more than a minute by the clock," said the genial, smooth voice of Sir Richard down the 'phone. "I've been on the edge of a round-up all day; very busy now—or will be in about sixty-seven seconds. Glad to see you, though. Come up."

One car behind the other man hunting Sir Richard, the scribe got to the elevator. Third floor up he met the other man getting aboard again and saying to the elevator boy,

"Do you know what room Sir Richard McBride is in?"

"No, sir; I don't know that."

Up he shot two or three floors too high. Meanwhile the interviewer lands at the door of Sir Richard, who opens the door swingingly—a stunning, almost Beau Brummelian figure dressed in the height of comfortable fashion.

"Glad to see you!" he said, genially.

"Sir Richard—there's a man chasing you."

"Yes, I know. He's been telephoning. Where is he now?"

"Several floors too high."

"Oh, he'll be along. Now—what do you want me to say?"

"Well primarily sir, concerning the Navy—?"

There was no time for either to sit down. In fact just as Sir Richard began to say that all he had to say about the Navy he had already given to a ring of newspapers in Ottawa, the telephone tingled again and he said to the lost man,

"Yes, I'm here. Come right up."

HE slipped across the room. Most enviably groomed; brown tweed, black bow and that almost matinee mop of fine silvery hair that might have made him a premier pianist, if he hadn't found other strings even more native to his career than the Irish harp. He has all the native gallantry and chevalier get-up of Shaun Rhue or Brian Boru; something of the inherent poetry of "The harp that once," or The Minstrel Boy. He had that fine, large expressiveness to his mien; the splendid—

Selah.

This is becoming Irish. Sir Richard—oh, many a time he must have smiled when the westerners whacked him on the back and swore they never would Dick him again. He is first and above all things a true son of the West. Irish he may be as a shamrock twined in a harp or the poems of Tom Moore. Western he is in all that makes him what he is to the Pacific Coast and to Canada. Not the feather of a frill—when he could wear the robes of an Irish lord or the garb of a Killarney