

PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE

Subject.....

Date.....

Publication.....

Ryerson, then, might petition, memorialize, protest, ventilate in newspapers, do what he liked, but Strachan, at Sir John Colborne's ear, could convince that "officer du premier ordre" of the necessity for endowing fifty-six Church of England rectories out of the Clergy Reserves, and Sir John could authorize the endowments in spite of Ryerson, in spite of his furious, protesting assembly. Neither Colborne nor Strachan was responsible to the assembly. Ryerson, who was never more than a protesting evangelist, with a nervous dread of "reform," might have been ignored, but the calm distribution of provisions, made in utter indifference to the feelings of the assembly had the result which might have been expected even by an oligarchy. The question became part of the struggle for responsible government; these pieces of alleged piracy brought up the whole theory of the constitution for re-examination, and it was vehemently asserted that the executive government must be responsible to the assembly, and that the Governor must be responsible to his executive council.

This was an attack from another angle; a more dangerous attack; it struck at the very seat of Strachan's power. The government must be kept exclusive or all would be lost. And while he was heaping odium on the Methodists and splitting them by his masterly tactics of division, he had to conduct a far more exacting campaign against a different sort of enemy who had risen against him in the assembly. Here he found himself confronted by William Lyon Mackenzie.

VIII.

William Lyon Mackenzie was that happiest of mortals, an energetic, impatient radical in a country governed by a dominating Tory oligarchy; truly, as Mackenzie looked over the political landscape the fields of official iniquity in Upper Canada were white for the harvest and calling loudly for the billhooks of the reformers. He projected himself into the situation with the impetuosity and intensity of an electric current; needless to say, he enlivened the whole scene and brought to it a brilliance which still throws a fitful light over the period.

The work to be done was vast; Mackenzie, "a tiny creature with the appearance of a madman, who raved about grievances here, and grievances there" (this is how Sir Francis Head saw him) charged Strachan's entrenchments with the wildest of battle cries and presently found himself involved in libel charges and expelled out of the assembly in a tornado of expetives mutually given and received—Strachan and his friends were—"as mean and mercenary an executive as was ever given as a punishment for the sins of any part of North America"; Mackenzie was a "reptile" and a "spaniel dog." Mackenzie was hurled out; the turmoil echoed over the waters of Lake Ontario, and reverberated in the half-cleared settlements of the colony.

The country groaned under a preposterous burden of grievances, not to be borne; Mackenzie drew up a Grievance List; called in frenzy for Commissions to Inquire; bombarded the colonial secretary, Lord Goderich, with correspondence and advice; went through a marvellous and comet-like series of projections into and out of the assembly; the electors voting him in and the assembly throwing him out.

The resiliency of the man was positively disconcerting. Also, in the very highest quarters he was being listened to. Lord Goderich, in a huge despatch, dry as starch, suggested to Sir John Colborne, the lieutenant-governor, that, really, it might perhaps be just as well to consider some judicious reform of things as they were. He seemed, it was incredible, but he seemed to suggest that there was room for improvement, and he had—it was appalling—the indecency to state quite frankly that the Reverend Doctor Strachan should remove himself from the legislative council.

"I have no solicitude for retaining either the bishop or the archdeacon (Strachan) on the list of councillors, but am, on the contrary, rather predisposed to the opinion that by resigning their seats they would best consult their own personal comfort, and the success of their designs for the spiritual good of the people."

Besides all this his views about what His Majesty thought should be done with the educational grants, the electoral laws, the public accounts, were really unbelievable. And worst of all, he had actually listened to Mackenzie; had sent him letters, made appointments.

Strachan and the oligarchy chewed their scowls with rage, and Beverley Robinson, now Speaker of the legislative council, penned a report to Goderich chilly enough to have frozen that unfortunate nobleman's blood. But the mischief was done; Mackenzie bounced back into the assembly—for the sixth time—and this time he stayed there and clamored for an Official Inquiry into all this mountain of pestilence which called itself government; a commission, with power to summon witnesses. It was held in the spring of 1838; Mackenzie in the chair, and at the tenth session of the Inquiry, held on April 1, surely a significant date, Strachan appeared and submitted himself to examination.

King, Rt. Hon. William Lyon Mackenzie (MG 26 J 7 volume 23) William Lyon Mackenzie - re: articles - Winnipeg Free Press 1924-1937

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