

Years Around Parliament

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The first this writer heard of him was when the agitation in Parliament was warm over the statutes setting up the new provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta and perpetuating, in that connection, certain educational provisions as they were in the Northwest Territories Act. Conservatives made a determined assault on these measures in Parliament and the agitation, there and outside, introduced much of the sectarian prejudice which had been displayed in the Manitoba school question.

Whirlwind Orator

Two vital by-elections occurred, providing, as they may, tests of public opinion. One was in London, Ontario, and the other in nearby North Oxford, and both were on the same day. Parliamentarians by the score were drafted, for the House was in session. Mr. Bennett, with the reputation of a whirlwind orator, came down from Calgary and spoke on many platforms, taking a dark view of the whole question as hamstringing, for all time, the two provinces in respect of their educational system. The election results were very influential. The government won the two seats easily and the agitation vanished, then and there. The dire things which were foretold have never really happened in the long intervening years.

One remembers Mr. Bennett in Parliament where he arrived in 1911. Ahead of him, here was the reputation of a torrential Niagara on the platform. The Conservatives were in office. To be returned to support a government which is well entrenched has its drawbacks. It does not provide anything like the opportunity a new member gets in opposition. The cabinet is supposed to be self-reliant and largely sufficient. Consequently, "R.B." for a good while was not conspicuous, nor did he ever push himself forward. For one possessed of singular powers of debate, his participation in it was rare. He was not the most faithful attendant, either, having a very big business and with no great disposition to unduly neglect it.

When he rose, however, the House sat up and listened. Particularly did it do so, at the time of the famous encounter in 1913 between him and Mr. Meighen. The Borden government had guaranteed \$35,000,000 worth of bonds of MacKenzie and Mann's Canadian Northern. Mr. Bennett, whose dislike of this combination was undisguised, descended heavily on the legislation, denouncing it in the strongest terms, although he was a supporter of the Borden government. Mr. Meighen, who had drafted the bill, defended it vigorously. He interrupted Mr. Bennett, protestingly. The latter called him the "gramophone of MacKenzie and Mann." It illustrated the Bennett capacity to battle, if need be, with his friends as well as his foes.

He was in Parliament from 1911 till 1921 when he was defeated and out for a term. Then he came back in 1925 to stay till he quit for good.

Didn't Show Hand

After the 1926 election, when Mr. Meighen lost his seat, the Conservative party drifted on for a session under the House leadership of Hugh Guthrie, looking to the time when, in 1927, a leader was to be chosen at the Winnipeg convention. If Mr. Bennett, all along had the intention of going after the leadership, he didn't show his hand, except, as related earlier, to say that should there be a chance of Bob Rogers being chosen, he certainly would be in the field. Much more was heard of Howard Ferguson, who could have had it, apparently.

Some day we hope to do a piece on national conventions including the one in Winnipeg which chose Mr. Bennett and sent him much further on the way to great distinction if not of political immortality. It was colorful and altogether successful.

One thing, abundantly evident right after that, was the intention of the new leader not only to fight in parliament but to win the next election and become Prime Minister. To that resolve, he devoted himself by drawing on all his resources, physical and material, if not spiritual, and enlisting all the support he could find. It was understood that personally he did most of the financing of the campaign. He was returned to office, with a sufficient majority and was beholden to no one.

The first thing was to form a cabinet, which he did, taking plenty of time and evidently having the difficulty of all Prime Ministers when many who are qualified and have claims, think they are called, and not enough posts exist for them

all to be chosen. It is an unhappy business at times and has been known to give rise to lasting resentments and jealousies. In Mr. Bennett's case, some were included in his cabinet with no large comprehension of why they were taken in and why some others of experience were left out. It would not be right to say that it was a one-man ministry, for some of its members were men of strong opinions, and with the disposition to voice them. But there could be no doubt as to who, throughout, was the dynamic and dominating figure.

Crowded Years.

Mr. Bennett's five years were crowded years. No one, at least in peace time, was ever quite so busy at his post. When he wasn't travelling and, barring the Sabbath, he practically lived in his office. He was there early and he stayed late. In parliament, his attendance was faithful.

With what high ambitions did he start out! He had promised, for one thing, to cure unemployment, of which there was much. His idea as to that was to protect Canadian industry and manufacture at home, the things that had to be imported. He jacked up, high, the tariff against the United States and then bargained to offer them the intermediate tariff, in itself adequately high. He used the preference as well. Never did anyone bargain so boldly with so little to bargain with.

In turn came much trouble over the wheat situation, with enormous quantities on hand and prices hitting 50 cents and lower, and Western farmers hard up, their holdings mortgaged. Months and months were spent over remedial measures and legislation in which the lending companies were none too co-operative. At least they appeared barren of ideas to solve the trouble. The relief provided may have been deeply appreciated. If so, the gratitude had no reflection on the ensuing election out West, or anywhere else.

The high light of the Bennett regime was the Imperial Conference of 1932 and the agreements which resulted. Mr. Stanley Baldwin dissented from the approach but what could be done about it? The conference couldn't fail, lest it suggest to the world a weakening of Empire solidarity, at a time when the strength of the bond was being questioned, in some countries.

What Mr. Bennett thought he was giving the British, God probably knew but doubts were expressed if anyone else did. What the Prime Minister of the day did know was his industrial Canada. His purpose was strong, not to impair it by needless importations. That, it seems, was his theory. How it might have worked, in the long run, was never known because the run was very short. It was a great conference, nevertheless, and in a social sense, it was glamorous. The agreements were modified later. What will become of them, in the project for multilateral trade, we don't know but we may before very long.

This writer never labored under the illusion of being regarded by Mr. Bennett as a particular worshipper at his shrine, apart from having the greatest respect for him and his abilities and for the high post he held. And yet, the approach to him was always found easy and his manner was genial. He could be, and was, most helpful in explaining situations, or providing "background" and in shedding illumination of events to come. The fact is recorded here with a sense of appropriate appreciation.

Never Forgot Act.

Space doesn't permit to tell of all the main happenings when Mr. Bennett was in office. One of interest was the resignation of H. H. Stevens from the cabinet and later his creation of a new party which hurt the Conservatives in the election. "R.B." never forgot that and never forgave it and, as is believed, never will.

Towards the time of the election, Mr. Bennett became the mouthpiece of a "new deal," the name imported. It was suggestive of social security. Many thought his heart was never in the measures

which were then forecast and enacted, only to be largely upset as unconstitutional. To overcome that, the BNA Act was later amended. "R.B." hated doles and old age pensions, save for those on the moral declivity of indigence. He hated "public pap." His speeches on the new deal were rather like academic dissertations into which no warmth was infused. The policy was largely foreign to the whole philosophy of his life. He had no time for economic theories but he could be intrigued to monetary theories, even if he did not go for them.

He was a strange man in some ways. With all his wealth, he kept up the little economies of his severe youth. He would hate to see an unused stamp thrown aside, and his desk would be covered with bits of writing paper which one ordinarily would have dropped into the waste basket.

Could Seem Arrogant.

At times he could be temperamental with the varied moods temperamental people can develop. He was commonly considerate but, he could seem arrogant as well. He could be genial or ill-humored. He was at once very generous and very uncharitable. The seeming paradox may be explained by saying that he could give away much money while being unforgiving to people he didn't like. To Dalhousie University, his Alma Mater, his munificence was massive. Not to be overlooked was his splendid and costly gift of a set of chimes to the Roman Catholic Cathedral in Hamilton when his old friend, Monsignor McNally was there as bishop.

Whether or not, as some of his friends claimed, his "diamond-studded Wesleyanism" was a pose, his prodigious work a day, week, ended Saturday night. With the Sabbath, he tolerated no interference and did no work. He would spend the day presumably in some spacious solitude of the spirit.

He loved to entertain and spend in the grand manner. His stock of personal gifts, when returning from a trip abroad, would be manifold as, also, is the case with Mr. Mackenzie King. Apparently, such mementos are a way the British have with them. When he was in power, or in opposition, there would go from Mr. Bennett's office four or five thousand dollars a year in gifts, and it was related that personally he had little idea of where it was going.

Unlike his reputation, the humors of rich men who have made their way, were not absent from "R.B." though sometimes his jokes were misconstrued as affronts. His humor could be boisterous but wholesome and he liked lively company, particularly when travelling.

In his opinions, he was strong and in his hatreds he was consistent. He had an abiding faith in the justice of his personal animosities. One of his perpetual themes was about living up to the letter as well as the spirit of public contractual or legislative undertakings. He was quite beyond the pale of compromise on principle. Had he been leading it in 1940, the Conservative party would never have taken towards conscription the anaemic position it did in the election that year. Mr. Bennett would have seen to that. If in office, he would have gone ahead with compulsory service. If it involved two wars for Canada—overseas, and, as well, a minor sort of war at home—why, then, there would have been two wars. That is all. His purpose would not have been frustrated.

Rare Combination.

Those who knew him well and followed his career from the start, found a rare combination of calculation and audacity. He was an outspoken man of no reserves and no particular affectations. He never relaxed from the dignity of high position. His wardrobe was large, and his dress immaculate. There can be no doubt that he will have acquired, even to the most minor trappings, the complete regalia of his lordly position. He is a great adherent to tradition.

Mr. Bennett relished the political battle and the smoke of it never got in his eyes. He was good in the forum of Parliament and

Fire Renders 100 Homeless; \$500,000 Loss

JONQUIERE, Que., Jan. 25—(CP)

—A fire which swept through the commercial section of this Lake St. John district town tonight destroyed 10 stores and caused damages estimated at more than \$500,000. No loss of life was reported but 15 families comprising more than 100 persons were rendered homeless by the conflagration.

The fire is believed to have originated in the furnace room of the Legare store at the corner of St. Dominique and Ste. Alme streets. Aided by a strong west wind, flames soon devoured the whole Legare store and spread down through the commercial district of the town.

Theater Crowded.

All buildings threatened by the flames were quickly evacuated, including the Empire theater which was crowded to capacity at the time.

Fire fighters from the town, helped by those of Kenogami, Arvida and Shipshaw—neighboring localities—poured gallons of water on the burning buildings and about an hour before midnight the fire was under control.

on the stump. He would be as ready to face a hostile as an approving audience.

With an almost fatal fluency, he could talk about anything, at any time and, almost at any length. This writer liked best his discourses from the dimension which is higher than the combats of party strifes—on war and peace, on the League of Nations, that well intentioned but frustrated institution, and on moral and legal questions including the retributive reform of evil doers. On no occasion, however, is he recalled making an utterance that could "live."

On the bedroom door of Charles the Second, it was once written that he was one "who never said a foolish thing and never did a wise one." Some would be inclined to transverse that in the case of Mr. Bennett to read "he never did a foolish thing and never said a wise one."

His continuing service has been long and distinguished and, by his public acts and his character and probity, as a public man, he deserves the niche which will be his in public remembrance. But he has left us for good, and when he has come back he seemed detached.

He will face the crossing of Jordan, no doubt, with calm confidence and without misgiving. By then, the mellowing attributes of age may have become of noble amplitude in him. But some of his friends seem to harbor a bit of doubt as to that. Knowing the grim tenacity of his personal dislikes, they conceive the possibility of his being unhappy, should some of the objects of them arrive on the other side in the same place as he. They fear that for him such a circumstance could mar the majesty and spoil the blessed harmony of the whole scene.

Next Saturday—Some Great Debaters.