

THE BORDEN CABINET—II. THE MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS

by H. F. Gadsby.



Hon. Robert Rogers.

THE irony of fate has ticketed Premier Borden as Dreadnaught Bob. The name belongs by rights to the other Robert, by rights to the other Robert, to wit Bob Rogers, Minister of Public Works and the real Master of the Administration.

Dreadnaught Bob has never done anything to deserve his swash-bucking title. He dreads building a Canadian Navy; he dreads letting a Canada have too much Home Rule; he dreads the Nationalists and plays up to them; he dreads the people and will not give them a plebiscite, a general election or a redistribution bill; he dreads laying hands on the tariff to reduce the cost of living. In fact wherever there is anything to dread he dreads it. On the other hand Bob Rogers has the courage of his lack of convictions.

The genial Bob for a while kept a general store in a little Manitoba village but the store keeping wasn't a success. The profits were small and the returns were not quick so he shifted to a business where he could spread his soap with better results. He moved to Winnipeg and set up as a statesman.

In a very short time, Bob graduated from Winnipeg ward politics into the Cabinet of Sir Rodmond Roblin whose right hand he became. Within the recollection of men not more than forty years

old today, Manitoba has had three governments. The pioneer government of Norquay, the farmers' government of Thomas Greenway and the real estate government of Rodmond P. Roblin. Bob was very lucky in being a member of the real estate government right up to his ears. He shared the era of expansion. Shared is a poor word to express what he did with it. He was there and helped to keep it blown up by his personal and official influence. He soared with the town lots. In fact when a great many other people were sore from having landed on their backs, Bob was soaring as gayly as ever.

Playing both ends for the middle on a sure thing bet, is the one best way of making money and Bob came out of the game with a silver lining ample enough to double-quilt the firmament.

It would be beneath his merits to say that Bob's good fortune was wholly due to luck. As a cabinet minister he was in a position to know what was going to happen next and as he was a foresighted, forehanded man he was generally there on the spot when a shower of blessing in Winnipeg or on the outskirts showed signs of bursting. In this way he provided bountifully for his old age. What's more he earned his blessings by his valiant services in elections. As Sir Rodmond's opinion of himself swelled he became a sort of practical idealist. He would call Bob in and say: "Do this but don't let me know the details". Some premiers are like that, pure, aloofish, not wishing to know how their success is manured.

At all events, whatever it was, Bob went out and did it to Sir Rodmond's taste, and all went merry as marriage bells. His enemies called him the boss with the little black bag, and his friends spoke of him as a master of inside politics. It was probably six of one and a half dozen of the other. When the reciprocity election came on in 1911, Bob had just the kind of reputation the Borden movement was looking for: He was made responsible from Winnipeg to the Rockies and he delivered the goods. This entitled him to rewards which he was not slow to accept because Sir Rodmond P.

Roblin was growing irritable. It did a lot to straighten matters out when Bob became Premier Borden's Minister of the Interior and Mr. Roblin was made a knight in place of getting the big job at Ottawa.

Bob has made a great hit at Ottawa with the rank and file. The back-benchers idolize him.

It is only fair to Bob to say that he did not win all this appreciation by his oratory in the House. Indeed he talks very much like a scrambled egg, and his elocution recalls nothing so much as the wind moaning through the telegraph wires. But behind closed doors he is said to be a most direct conversationalist and no suitor leaves without a promise or something better. He is a good spender and wears his hair in a rapidly whitening plume which is the outward and visible sign that he wants to be Premier of Canada. His resemblance to Laurier and to the career that great man has had goes no further, however, than his back hair.

Premier Borden has sanctioned and approved the Bob Rogers methods by promoting him from Minister of the Interior to Minister of Public Works, the idea being that a Minister of Public Works can work a constituency better. Bob has given several proofs of his mettle as a buy-electioneer since he was called to Ottawa. On results he has about broken even. In Macdonald where enough Grit voters were imprisoned on false charges over polling day, he won. In the Alberta general election, where he endeavoured to give the province absent treatment, he increased the majority of the Sifton Government.

In Chateauguay, where he was the man on the spot and employed two hundred men in rubber boots to build a dam and wash the river, he elected his candidate by a rubber-boot majority of one hundred and forty-five. Incidentally, he elected a tombstone maker no doubt anticipating a brisk mortality in the Grit Senate. In East Middlesex where the Conservative majority was cut in two and in South Bruce where a Conservative constituency turned Liberal, Bob was not present, and his amateur imitators who were present are just now passing the blame around.