

Years Around Parliament: Thoughts, Men, Memories

By Senator Charles Bishop

Chapter 20: R. B. (Lord) Bennett

The inner secret of Mr. R. B. (Lord) Bennett's success in life—and it is great indeed and has led to high places—appears to have derived from a towering ambition to get on in the world. To some who are born in lofty and affluent environment, such an accomplishment can be simple. It is much harder for one, who, from humble beginnings, and unaided, travels upward under the sole impulsion of a will to succeed in the enterprise of life.

Well Defined Idea

Mr. Bennett apparently had a well defined idea of what he wanted to do and where he wanted to go. He wanted not only to become a lawyer but to obtain eminence at the bar. This he did. He wanted to acquire wealth. In that respect, his success was perhaps beyond his dreams. As if he didn't get enough of his own, fate directed to him a handsome heritage. He wanted to go into politics and, at successive stages,

did so. Liking its atmosphere, envisioning its power, revelling in the lustre of high official and social prestige, he sought to take them on, and did. He wanted to be ranked as a statesman. Here, again, he succeeded, but the position where best he could engage in its activities—the post of prime minister—he occupied only for five years. That is a brief time. No occupant of it properly gets into its stride so quickly.

Mr. Bennett was well on in years when, after much parliamentary experience, he took the notion that he would like to lead the Conservative party. He attained the leadership, and without great difficulty. If he didn't stay so long at the top, at least he got there.

That wasn't his ultimate ambition, either. People who used to contact him when he was Prime Minister claim that he said then that he was

going to wind up in the House of Lords, and, at that, not as an ordinary member but as a viscount. That rank is higher, with a coat of arms, and all the paraphernalia. It is said that, on Lord Bennett's armorial bearings, are two virile Canadian animals—a buffalo and a moose. That could typify Alberta and New Brunswick.

The "String-Puller"

One likes to think that Mr. Bennett's entry to the peerage was wholly in recognition of his own worth and his service and devotion to the Empire and not because either of the power and prestige of great wealth or his close friendship with Lord Beaverbrook, described by some British writers as the man "who pulls the string and calls the tune." He isn't doing any pulling or calling just now, in the Labor government at Westminster.

"R.B." was brought up by the sea

with a smell of salt in the air. Only those who are, know how infinite can be its inspiration and how endless its memory. His father at Hopewell Cape, NB, had a little shipyard where wooden vessels were built. There used to be many of them in the Maritimes. The family was of pioneer Loyalist stock and those who are, particularly New Brunswickers, appear very proud of it, often boastful of the fact. In these pioneers was a generous infusion of Puritanism, imported from New England. Mr. Bennett had that, too, but it became diluted somewhat with Wesleyanism.

Adventure was in his blood. His first trip to the West was with a harvesters' excursion. It enabled him to have a look at the country where, professionally, he was to locate and attain such success. It is claimed that he was the first man to appear on the streets of Calgary—one time a cow town—with a frock coat and top hat. That in itself is an historic distinction.

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