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Dr. O. D. Skelton

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It would not be fitting that I should conclude this review of Canada's external affairs and of our present international relations without reference to the loss Canada has sustained since the house last met, in the passing of one of the noblest of her sons and one of the greatest of her public servants, whose life was so completely identified with world affairs.

Seventeen years ago, Doctor O. D. Skelton entered the service of Canada at my request. For sixteen years he was Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs. Before he came to Ottawa his teaching had inspired thousands of young Canadians. Throughout his whole life he enriched our national heritage by his scholarship, our national service by his labours, and innumerable lives by the gift of his friendship.

The outbreak of war and the anxieties of the years which immediately preceded it threw new and heavy burdens on the Department of External Affairs. In spite of failing health, the advice of his doctor and the entreaties of his friends, Doctor Skelton insisted on shouldering far more than his full share of them. I have never seen anything which surpassed his devotion to duty as exemplified in his daily work. His death was marked by expressions of sorrow, admiration and affection almost unprecedented. Many notable messages bore witness to his great work, not only for Canada and the British commonwealth but for the cause of international good will and human understanding the world over.

Only those who have had the closest association with Doctor Skelton during those seventeen years could begin to know what his life meant to the public service of this country. Selfless and self-effacing labour, the highest integrity, and the enlightened use of whatever leisure was granted to him were the measure of his devotion to his native land. Throughout the many tributes that were paid to his work and his memory there ran the theme of his modesty, his kindness and the example he set and created for the young men who grew up with him in the diplomatic service of the department of which he was the permanent head. It is impossible for me to express in words what I owe to his wisdom, his experience, his counsel and his faithful friendship.

It is a matter of common knowledge that Mr. Bennett, who knew and appreciated the eminent virtues of this great public servant, offered him a knighthood, which Doctor Skelton felt obliged to decline. I wish to submit his name to the representative of the king for a privy councillorship, not as an honour or reward but as a sworn relationship which I deemed appropriate to the performance of his highly confidential duties. This position he was unwilling to accept. He believed that men in the public service could best carry on their work by remaining in the background of anonymity and retiring from the light of public favour. He refused to accept any honour or position which would appear to remove him from the level of his fellow workers or create any barrier or embarrassment between him and them. He hated notoriety, controversy, publicity and everything that was blatant or garish. He knew that the great things in life are wrought in the stillness and solitude of the mind of man, and that reflection and silence become a trusted servant of the people far more than speech and the glitter of the limelight.

By his own modest acceptance of these high traditions of the public service, which he did so much to create, he fashioned the pattern of the Department of External Affairs. Like Doctor Skelton I have always believed, and I believe this house will agree, that the quiet persistent dedication of Canada to the cause of international understanding best fulfils our mission, and perhaps destiny, in a stricken world.

The result of Doctor Skelton's example and influence is that to-day in the Department of External Affairs, in London, in Washington, and elsewhere throughout the world this nation is served by men who, thinking nothing of public acclaim, of personal distinction, or of public reward, have laboured without ostentation, steadily and silently, for the great cause which has been entrusted to their hands.

The name of Doctor Skelton deserves honour on the lips and in the hearts of all Canadians. While he asked for no reward while he lived, he would be humbly proud to know that in the remembrance of his life and labour Canadians found a new dedication and a continuing devotion to national unity, international good will, and the thoughtful and unselfish labour without which they cannot be maintained.