

A "Close Up" of Union Government

Our National Executive as Seen from the Press Gallery

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(Illustrated by Lou Skuce)

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There are three kinds of great men: those who have been born great, those who have achieved greatness and those who have become cabinet ministers. It will be generally admitted that the Union Government is largely composed of cabinet ministers.



When was sitting with his feet on Doherty's desk, and smoking, when the pressman called.

ockets stuffed full of patronage, the cabinet minister can roll into his native village and create an impression somewhat akin to that made by the Queen of Sheba on a certain historic occasion. But viewed "close up," and day by day, this personage dwindles to a plain person and in many cases to a very ordinary person. The disadvantage a press gallery man labors under is that he sees this Union Government every day and "close up." So, if this appraisal lacks enthusiasm, you will bear with me.

It might also be well to explain right at the start that the press gallery belongs not to the heavens above, the earth beneath nor the waters under the earth. It just sits there and watches the procession move by. It never achieves greatness, yet mingles with it daily; it mingles with wealth yet never shares in it. It sees a common everyday member of Parliament, called to the Cabinet, swell up like a toy balloon. It sees the halo sprout from the roots of his hair. It sees others bow the knee and burn the incense of flattery before him. And then, when the inevitable resignation comes, it sees the wind go out of the balloon, the halo fade and the flatterers vanish. If you want recent examples take Sir Sam Hughes and Hon. Bob Rogers. Since Sir Sam discarded the uniform and the special train habit he doesn't have to dodge reporters to keep his name out of the papers. Nor does Hon. Bob have to tip the hall boy to keep the "welcome" sign from being worn off his doormat. And yet it is only a few short months since these two statesmen found the spotlight hardly big enough to take in their entire persons.

Run down the list of discarded or resigned Ministers of the last ten years and note how they have all shrunk and then you will understand the attitude of the old press gallery denizen who remarked: "Those Ministers have nothing on us. We have to have some ability to hold our jobs. They're only accidents." And if those Ministers could hear the running fire of comment on their daily walk and conversation by those who know them best and follow their actions most closely it is a good guess that they would contract either a greater contempt for the gallery or a smaller idea of their own importance.

With these few words let me introduce Sir Robert Borden, the man who made Union Government possible. That his present cabinet is union in anything but name is an open question. To date it has stuck together. But how could

it do otherwise when it is propped up on north, south and west, by the crisis in Europe and on the east by Sir Wilfrid Laurier? If the props should break, Union Government would exit with all possible despatch. Even as it is the rumblings that come from the Council Chamber taken with echoes from various parts of the country give every promise that the next session of the House will be lively and that the Ginger

Group will not furnish all the excitement. Sir Robert Borden will be the last man to find this out. Probably no man in Canada is so thoroughly immune to public sentiment. If you wander into

Ottawa on a hot day in summer—and it can get hot in Ottawa when it tries—and ask if there is a cool spot anywhere in the city, the answer is almost sure to be: "Yes, up in Borden's office." For you could hardly call the Premier genial. He admits also that he does not read the newspapers, except such selected passages as his secretaries clip for his perusal. It is safe to assume that those selections are not such as will hurt his self-esteem. Nor are his intimates, if any, of the kind to communicate to him much of what the masses are thinking. A thrifty person himself—he is the richest Premier that Canada ever knew—he rather prefers the company of men who make, and know, the value of money. For instance, you would hardly look to Sir George Perley as an interpreter of the public mind.

Sir Robert is not a politician. That may be the reason some people have concluded that he is a statesman. He has a sort of genius for doing the right thing at the wrong time or vice versa. Neither is he an orator. He can make almost any subject uninteresting. Moreover, he mumbles his words, always appears to have a clove or something like that in his mouth and punctuates his orations with so many extracts from printed documents that "Borden readings" have become a by-word in the House. But there are occasions, far separated though they be, when he appears to shed his books, his clove and the marcelle wave in his hair and stand forth an orator and a statesman. When he announced his conscription policy his oration was so eloquent and courageous that his followers were enthusiastic. The real Borden for whom they had vainly searched for years, had at

last appeared. But the enthusiasm waned when, apparently forgetting the boys at the front for whom he had put forward such a pathetic plea, he spent almost the entire summer looking for this Union Government we now have. The next time he showed to advantage was almost a year later when he repelled the farmer invasion of the capital last May. That time he did not arouse the same admiration. His followers could not help wondering where they would be next day.

But the Premier's pursuit of Union Government marked him as persevering and determined, you say. Well, perhaps. It is well, however, to remember that one or two others wanted Union Government just as much as did Sir Robert. One of these was Sir Clifford Sifton. Another was Sir Joseph Flavelle. Both are in the habit of getting what they go after. Each has a certain amount of determination. With one of them prodding on each side Sir Robert Borden would have been a much stronger man than he is had he turned either to the right or to the left.

But you probably ask, if Sir Robert is not a strong man and is neither a politician nor orator, how did he arrive? And it may be that if a Cabinet Minister is an accident, a Premier is a victim of circumstances. Sir Robert



When Union Government goes on the rocks Jim Calder will be found on the best provisioned life raft.

was born in Nova Scotia and is consequently a statesman as naturally as a Kentuckian is a colonel. Boys down that way are said to be divided in their ambitions. Some want to be premiers, others to be brakemen on the Intercolonial. Sir Robert's family have already filled several pages of the country's pay roll and he followed the family inclination, paving the way by studying law. He is still a high-class constitutional lawyer. Of course, he came to Parliament in the natural course of events. When disaster overtook the Conservative party, his fine appearance, his nice wavy hair, his natural dignity and his knowledge of constitutional law made him leader. He tried to escape once or twice and failed. Then his opponents adopted reciprocity and made him Premier. Ever since it has been

reported more than once that he meant to retire. But he didn't. In the words of an old Conservative wheel-horse now in the Senate, "He likes the position; and he likes the honor." Conscription, ably assisted by Sir Clifford Sifton and Sir Joseph Flavelle, finished the job.

If you leave it to Sir Robert to name the most distinguished members of his Cabinet he will probably say Hon. Newton Wesley Rowell and Hon. Arthur Meighen. He has been known to say as much. But the majority of his followers don't believe him. Neither do the Opposition nor the disinterested spectators in the galleries. If you want to go still further, neither does Hon. Newton think it of Hon. Arthur nor Hon. Arthur of Hon. Newton. Mr. Meighen was teacher's pet before the days of Union. Then along came Mr. Rowell and put his nose out of joint. The latter may not be popular in the House, as a matter of fact is very much otherwise, but he knows how to be nice to the Premier—and to get his own way too. For instance, after the prohibition order-in-council was promulgated, Sir Robert found his desk piled high with telegrams of appreciation from clergymen all over Canada. Naturally he experienced feelings of virtuous elation and felt grateful to the lieutenant who had suggested legislation that brought such a spontaneous outburst of approval. What he did not know was that Hon. Mr. Rowell had stage-managed the whole proceeding—that the wires were sent at his suggestion. By little things like this, attached to a deferential manner, Mr. Rowell has gained and largely held the ear of his chief. So largely that there must be moments when Hon. Arthur wonders if he was not wasting his energies when he worked so hard to bring about the union Sir Robert and the others longed for. For Hon. Arthur sacrificed not a little of his popularity with the old Tories when, at the behest of his chief, he helped fill the front benches with his old-time enemies. When he first came in from the Prairies under the wing of Hon. Bob Rogers, young Arthur was the infant prodigy of the House. His argument was strongly partisan and the old hidebound Tories would gather in the House when he spoke and cheer his every sentence. He began to loom up as the Tory leader of the future and whether he wanted to break from the Rogers' leading strings or the older man recognized a dangerous rival for the Western leadership in young Arthur can only be surmised. What can be told with certainty is that whenever a nasty deal had to be defended on the floor of the House, the young Solicitor-General got the job. From champion of the extreme Tories he became the champion hair-splitter and when he turned in as assistant Union-Maker to Sir Robert Borden, while Hon. Robert Rogers stood out as the leader of those utterly opposed to Union, he moved yet further away from those who were loudest in his praises.

So, as Hon. Newton is busy watching Hon. Arthur, and Hon. Arthur is busy watching Hon. Newton and neither has any following worth mentioning in the



Hon. Mr. Reid took a chair in the Borden Kitchen and sat down.

House, they can safely be dismissed when figuring futures. Both are clever lawyers but Parliament is full of clever

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