

PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE

Subject.....

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duct a far more exacting campaign against a different sort of enemy who had risen against him in the assembly. Here he found himself confronted by William Lyon Mackenzie.

VIII.

William Lyon Mackenzie was that happiest of mortals, an energetic, agitating radical in a country governed by a dominating Tory oligarchy: truly, as Mackenzie looked over the political landscape the fields of official iniquity in Upper Canada were white for the harvest and calling loudly for the billhooks of the reformers. He projected himself into the situation with the impetuosity and intensity of an electric current: needless to say, he enlivened the whole scene, and brought to it a brilliance which still throws a fitful light over the period.

The work to be done was vast; Mackenzie, "a tiny creature with the appearance of a madman, who raved about grievances here, and grievances there" (this is how Sir Francis Head saw him) charged Strachan's entrenchments with the wildest of battle cries and presently found himself involved in libel charges and expelled out of the assembly in a tornado of expletives mutually given and received—Strachan and his friends were—"as mean and mercenary an executive as was ever given as a punishment for the sins of any part of North America"; Mackenzie was a "reptile" and a "spaniel dog." Mackenzie was hurled out; the turmoil echoed over the waters of Lake Ontario, and reverberated in the half-cleared settlements of the colony.

The country groaned under a preposterous burden of grievances, not to be borne; Mackenzie drew up a Grievance List; called in frenzy for Commissions to Inquire; bombarded the colonial secretary, Lord Goderich, with correspondence and advice; went through a marvellous and comet-like series of profections into and out of the assem-

bly; the electors voting him in and the assembly throwing him out.

The resiliency of the man was positively disconcerting. Also, in the very highest quarters he was being listened to. Lord Goderich, in a huge despatch, dry as starch, suggested to Sir John Colborne, the Lieutenant-governor, that, really, it might perhaps be just as well to consider some judicious reform of things as they were. He seemed, it was incredible, but he seemed to suggest that there was room for improvement, and he had—it was appalling—the indecency to state quite frankly that the Reverend Doctor Strachan should remove himself from the legislative council.

"I have no solicitude for retaining either the bishop or the archdeacon (Strachan) on the list of councillors, but am, on the contrary, rather predisposed to the opinion that by resigning their seats they would best consult their own personal comfort, and the success of their designs for the spiritual good of the people."

Besides all this his views about what His Majesty thought should be done with the educational grants, the electoral laws, the public accounts, were really unbelievable. And worst of all, he had actually listened to Mackenzie; had sent him letters, made appointments.

Strachan and the oligarchy chewed their goosequills with rage, and Beverley Robinson, now Speaker of the legislative council, penned a report to Goderich chilly enough to have frozen that unfortunate nobleman's blood. But the mischief was done; Mackenzie bounced back into the assembly—for the sixth time—and this time he stayed there and clamored for an Official Inquiry into all this mountain of pestilence which called itself government; a commission, with power to summon witnesses. It was held in the spring of 1835; Mackenzie in the chair, and at the tenth session of the Inquiry, held on April 1, surely a significant date, Strachan appeared and submitted himself to examination.

Strachan at that moment had no realization that the shadows were closing around his world, and that a stronger power than the divine right of kings and their councillors was staring at him through the gawking eyes of the "tiny creature," whom he had come to answer. In Mackenzie's stormy, fire-darting mind some consciousness of the portents of the encounter may have been stirring; but none, certainly, in Strachan's granite head. The archdeacon treated the whole proceedings with lofty indifference. He came before the four commissioners, regarding them as a watchful lion might have allowed his speculative gaze to fall on a quartette of mysterious jackals. The business in hand was ridiculous; they were, upon his soul, endeavoring to make him—him, remember—commit himself; to make him impart information—to them. Beyond any doubt they were four fools.

Mackenzie went on with his questions:

"Is the lieutenant-governor obliged in matters of state policy to ask your advice as an executive councillor?"

Strachan looks at him—"I refer you to the constitutional act."

Mackenzie—"In what way is the government of this colony responsible to the public opinion, as expressed by the representatives of the people in parliament?"

Strachan—"I could not answer that question otherwise than by saying that the government is quite as responsible as any other government."

Mackenzie—"Do you consider the clergy corporation legal?" (The clergy corporation controlled the Clergy Reserves.)

Strachan—"Certainly, I do."

Mackenzie—"Ought not the whole public revenue to be paid in the gross into the exchequer or treasury of the colony, and the proceeds applied only according to law?"

Strachan—"I do not answer that question."

He "does not answer" such questions; he leaves this absurd commission to its impertinent investigations; withdraws, having divulged nothing beyond the fact that where he has hitherto stood on all these matters he still stands. This

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