

*The Late Sir Robert Borden*

It must have been deeply gratifying to him to have lived to see the time when, despite the differences of view there were and will always be with respect to some of the acts and policies of his administrations, he had nevertheless gained a place in the esteem of his fellow countrymen which was altogether above party, and had won a position of honour not only in his own country but throughout the empire, and that his name was held in high regard in other countries as well.

I shall not say more. Sir Robert's life and work are already a part of the history of this country. There is moreover very little, if anything, which could be added to the many and deeply sincere tributes which have been paid his memory in this and other lands. I have felt, however, that hon. members of this house would wish to have recorded in the proceedings of this parliament some expression of the sense of the loss which, as representatives of the people of Canada in the House of Commons, we feel our country has sustained in the passing of a great Canadian who for twenty-five years was a member of this house, for nineteen years, the leader of the Conservative party in this country, and for nearly nine years the Prime Minister of Canada. Sir Robert's name will find an enduring place among those of our land who have sought to serve parliament, their party and their country and who have done so with outstanding devotion and high distinction. His name will find its place also among the names of world statesmen who had to do with empire councils at a time of war, and whose memories will be associated with Versailles and Geneva, and with the beginnings of the League of Nations.

It will, I am sure, be the wish of this house, that you, Mr. Speaker, convey to Lady Borden, who for almost half a century shared so fully and sympathetically the struggles and the achievements of Sir Robert's career, the expression of the sincere sympathy which is felt for her by all hon. members.

Right Hon. R. B. BENNETT (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, when the Right Hon. Prime Minister (Mr. Mackenzie King) suggested that the course he has taken should be followed this day, I felt that those of us who sit here are under a debt of obligation to him for having so publicly stated the claim of the late Sir Robert Borden on the regard and esteem of the Canadian people. Perhaps I knew Sir Robert Borden longer than any member of this house. He had one characteristic that marked him from his younger days, that is he was a man of infinite patience. I have never known a more patient

[Mr. Mackenzie King.]

man. I think there is one, perhaps more than one, hon. member of this chamber who was associated with him in government and who knows how patient he was with respect to matters that affected his country. He was a great lawyer, a great constitutional lawyer, and I venture to believe that, with the possible exception of Sir John Thompson, who ranked with him, no man who has ever discharged the duties of first minister of this country could prepare so excellent a state paper. I think that can be said with truth.

It was charged at times that Sir Robert Borden was indecisive. The truth is that he was cautious almost to the point of indecision, but once his mind was set, once he had arrived at a conclusion—sometimes taking a very long time to do it, weighing the pros and cons with great thought and care—nothing diverted him from his purpose. Once he had made up his mind that he was following the correct and proper course he was almost relentless in the pursuit of his purpose. He was jealous of this country and its honour and reputation. We have not produced a stronger Canadian. At times of stress and strain, when difficulties were multiplying, he never for a moment lessened his support—nay more, his advocacy—of the claims of this country to a measure of consideration that sometimes was denied and oftentimes questioned. Our position with respect to the peace treaty I frankly think we owe entirely to Sir Robert Borden. Those of us who know something of the attitude which he took, the manner in which he supported his views, and the vigour and strength of his advocacy, will realize what a debt the Canadian people owe to him with respect to the position of Canada at the negotiation of the treaty of Versailles.

Although I was a supporter of his government, I differed from him with respect to the railway problem of this country. But that did not in any sense interfere with our personal or political friendship. The last political speech that he made, as far as I recall, was made on behalf of the party with which I am associated, on the same platform as myself. During the long hard years in which we held office I think a week did not go by when I was in Canada that he did not either ring me up or send me a note about some matter which struck him as worthy of comment. When he was in the United States he frequently sent me clippings for consideration.

I agree with everything the Prime Minister has said; Sir Robert's last years, the years of calm, of reflection, of honoured position in the community where he was almost an oracle,