

Oh, Yes, Everybody Loves Mother!



Reminiscences of Hon. Alexander Mackenzie One of the Purest of Public Servants

Veteran Pressman Writes Admiringly of the Former Premier—A Great Parliamentarian and an Honest Man—His Fine Character.

In his highly interesting and instructive series of articles in the Westminster, under the title, "Thirty Years in the Parliamentary Press Gallery," Mr. William Mackenzie writes: "Mr. Gladstone said that 'honor and character are the essence of this standard of Commons.' Mackenzie was the greatest Commons of his day. In his speech, proposing amnesty to those who took part in the Northwest Rebellion he said that the affairs of the country should be consistently carried on with those 'principles of honor and national character which bind every administration no matter what they may be composed.' In a private letter to a member of his own party, who expressed dissatisfaction over patronage distribution and certain political acts of the administration, Mr. Mackenzie replied that he might be lacking 'in political wisdom, but never in moral rectitude.' These principles were closely adhered to, no matter whether it was in the heat of debate in the Commons, on the public platform, or engaged in the conduct of public business in his office in the Eastern Block. 'I am not lacking in courage, but I never yet had the courage to misrepresent any man,' was one of the thrusts he drove home to a certain member who was giving a garbled quotation from one of his speeches.

It is a matter of history that Mackenzie refused to see contractors who were tendering—or applicants for public contracts, although he was minister of public works. He regarded this to be a pure matter of administration coming entirely within the scope of the officers and engineers of the department. And he pursued this policy, notwithstanding that he worked laboriously over plans, specifications and reports, and was consequently conversant with the minutest details of all public works. When the contract

was let he was ready and willing to hear and adjudicate any disagreement or difficulty that might arise between his officers and the contractors. At one time he was acting minister of marine, in the absence of the minister. A contractor, who was not interested in politics, was asked by the officers to carry out the work in a certain way that would greatly inconvenience him and would not be of the slightest public advantage. This contractor laid his case personally before Mackenzie, and asked if he would have to make the suggested changes. 'You are to do nothing of the kind; do it according to established precedent, as it is the best way to carry out a work of the kind,' said the Premier, in his usual emphatic way, which to those not acquainted with him might have seemed abruptness. Asked for this in writing, he handed it at once to the contractor, and that was the end of it. 'Such was the way Mackenzie did business,' said the contractor to the writer many years afterwards.

It was difficult to find work in those days, and a delegation waited upon him, asking for employment. After explaining the correct relations that existed between the Government and the people in this regard, he gave his private check for fifty dollars to meet their immediate necessities. Mr. Mackenzie never forgot that he came from the ranks of labor, although it was not his habit to appeal for support on that account. He was scrupulous about giving full and accurate returns for his labor in building stone walls as he was in after years on guard over the treasury. As a stonemason he was engaged on the construction of a section of the St. Lawrence canals. He refused to carry out a piece of work in accordance with the instructions of the Government engineer, because he regarded it as the wrong way to do

it, and got his dismissal. Yet he had a high opinion of the engineer and the incident never interfered with their good relations when he became prime minister and head of the department. To newspapermen he was always courteous, if not very informative. A certain political rumor was published in an Opposition paper and one of the editors called on Mackenzie to ask for a reply. 'You just manufacture the explanation as you did the original item,' was the prompt, but somewhat curt answer. To the newspapers on his own side he was kind and courteous. The Globe and the Browns were ever at his back giving him a most unselfish support. There was always a section of the party that leaned more to Blake than to Mackenzie. 'The Liberal' newspaper, which had a somewhat short-lived career in Toronto, represented these. The late T. J. Richardson, one of the best shorthand writers and reporters that Canada ever had, said that Mackenzie was the only man in Parliament who could stand verbatim reports and do it. In fact, he had generally a good word for the newspapermen.

Three times he refused knighthood, believing that such titles were not in accord with the existing democracy in Canada. Lord Lorne made an earnest appeal to him to reconsider his decision, but it was fruitless. He had no narrow views upon the subject, and was shown attending a small party he and Mrs. Mackenzie gave in honor of the 25th anniversary of their marriage. Some of the guests brought small gifts and he was extremely enjoyed. Indeed his feelings reached such a point that he returned them the next day, stating that they made him miserable as long as they were in the house. The fine character of the man and the stern adherence to principle, even at the expense of his own health, were well exemplified during the session of 1893. He was forbidden by his medical adviser to attend evening sittings of the House, but a question was then under discussion upon which he was exceedingly desirous to vote. The act of the Quebec Legislature for the settlement of the Jesuit estates provoked animated discussion in and outside Parliament and caused a great deal of religious and race discord, particularly in Ontario. There was a movement to supply advice, the Dominion Government to disallow

the act. Mr. Mackenzie felt keenly the suggested interference with a province in a matter which was wholly within its own jurisdiction, a course, which, if pursued, would be destructive to the autonomous rights of the provinces. Consequently he wanted to show his resentment by vote since the his physically deprived of speech. The division was expected to be reached before midnight, and he quietly informed his staunch friend, Jim Trow, the chief Liberal whip, to call for him should the House divide before midnight. It was two o'clock when the division bell rang, and at that early hour in a cold, misty morning of March the old political-warrior, fragile in frame, and feeble in health, but with a distinct gleam of satisfaction on his countenance, entered the chamber on the arm of Mr. Trow, and received such a whole-hearted and non-partisan cheer that those who heard and witnessed can never forget. On being congratulated afterwards he merely added that he voted then as he did in the Letellier case, in favor of provincial rights.

I have seen Mackenzie full of fight and victory at the very best of Parliament; I have seen him putting forth his strongest efforts in the political field for a friend whom he knew well was to go down to defeat on election day. I have seen him when his whole party was almost annihilated by the votes of the people, and on the morning, undisturbed, though disappointed, he was nailing his colors to the masthead as if nothing had happened. I heard him coolly and quietly present to Parliament, instead of the party caucus, one early hour in the morning in 1890 his resignation, and the policy he has espoused, despite its non-acceptance by the people, with a determination and firmness of character and purpose born of conviction. I have seen him vainly trying to find speech to reply to his old-time antagonists when, with only a word or so forthcoming, the House would, with one accord, applaud; I saw him in 1891, too ill to enter his constituency, where voters' lists were loaded up against him, and his chances of election almost hopeless; and I listened to his last words in Parliament, during the session of 1891, when he was asked in respect to what he regarded as a purely provincial affair.

Mackenzie was greatly troubled because of his proposition to use the 'water stretches' of the Great Lakes in connection with the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway. When Sir Charles Tupper was making his announcement in Parliament that the company was going to put up a line of steamers on the lakes between Collingwood and Port Arthur, Mackenzie, from his seat, interjected with the words,



Maddox—My wife didn't hear me coming in last night.
Paddox—I'll have to get some of those rubber soles, too.

'Water stretches.' It was as if an electric spark had struck the House, so speedily and spontaneously came the applause from both sides. Sir Charles diverted and paid a high eulogy to the one man in the Liberal party who had, he said, a policy, although Sir Charles did not agree with it, for the construction of the C. P. R., and who adhered to it, and the utilization of the 'water stretches,' now approved by the Government and the C. P. R., was part of that policy. Tupper never did anything by halves. He was as magnanimous as he was sometimes severe in his criticism.

In 1891 the Government representative at Paris was under fire in the Commons on a charge of drawing a big salary and doing nothing for it. This statement, no such appointment ever being intended, ever asked, or suggested, was the final and conclusive reply, which one would have imagined could have been given in the first instance. But such was his way. Two complaints, and two only, was he known to make. The one was against himself, the other against those whom he had either been a friend to or treated generously. He blamed himself for not having the general elections in June instead of September, 1893, although it is well known that he was pressed by a large number of his followers to take the course he did. Those who regard Mackenzie as being unending and determined to have his own way ought to be able first to make a distinction between what he considered 'principle or honor' and national character' and the procedure to be followed in any particular case. He yielded to the Maritime Provinces against any increase in the tariff to meet the financial stringency, and again to please some of the Quebec leaders, he postponed the date of the general elections from June to September. He thought at the time he was making a mistake in not determining upon June, and in after years he regarded it as a little short of a blunder. In fact he was of the opinion that if June had been selected the result

THE JUSTICE'S JOKE.

While Chief Justice Sir William Meredith was lately hearing a case he was disturbed by a young man who kept moving about in the rear of the room.

'Young man,' called out the Chief Justice, 'you are making a great deal of unnecessary noise. What are you about?'



SIR WILLIAM MEREDITH.

'Your Honor,' replied the young man, 'I have lost my overcoat and I am trying to find it.'

'Well,' said the venerable Justice, 'people often lose whole suits in here without making all that disturbance.'

'I could never consent,' he said, 'to the Zollverein policy, for obvious reasons; light cannot conceive why anyone should object to reciprocal free trade secured by treaty, and not inimical to the interests of Great Britain as the heart of the empire. The utter failure of the National Policy and the enormous increase in the national debt are reasons why the present administration should not be supported any longer. Thousands of Reform votes were lost in the general election in 1893 because they thought I was wrong in my free trade policy. No doubt they acted conscientiously. Surely it is not asking too much that those should fall into line again, and carry with them a large number of hitherto Conservative votes.'

In Parliament he generally replied to Sir Charles Tupper, and loved to cross swords with Sir John. In reply to Tupper he frequently assumed a scolding tone, such as 'the honorable gentleman ought to be ashamed,' or the honorable gentleman was guilty of 'gross misrepresentation.' Answering Sir John he struck a sort of bantering attitude to begin with, but ended with all the hard hitting at his command. These differences were entirely political, for they were good personal friends.

One day Sir John asked if it were correct that a certain member of Parliament was to be appointed postmaster at Port Hope. 'I never heard of it,' replied Mackenzie. 'That's a Jesuitical answer,' retorted Sir John. 'Order,' snapped Mackenzie. 'I did not say it was wrong to give a Jesuitical answer,' replied Sir John. 'What did he mean,' said Mackenzie. 'I asked a question and the hon. member said he never heard of it.' 'How is that Jesuitical inquired Mackenzie. 'The hon. gentleman might have asked the Minister of Justice to give an answer,' suggested Sir John. 'I suppose he would have been able to answer it; but I will merely say that there is no truth in the statement, no such appointment ever being intended, ever asked, or suggested, was the final and conclusive reply, which one would have imagined could have been given in the first instance. But such was his way.

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