

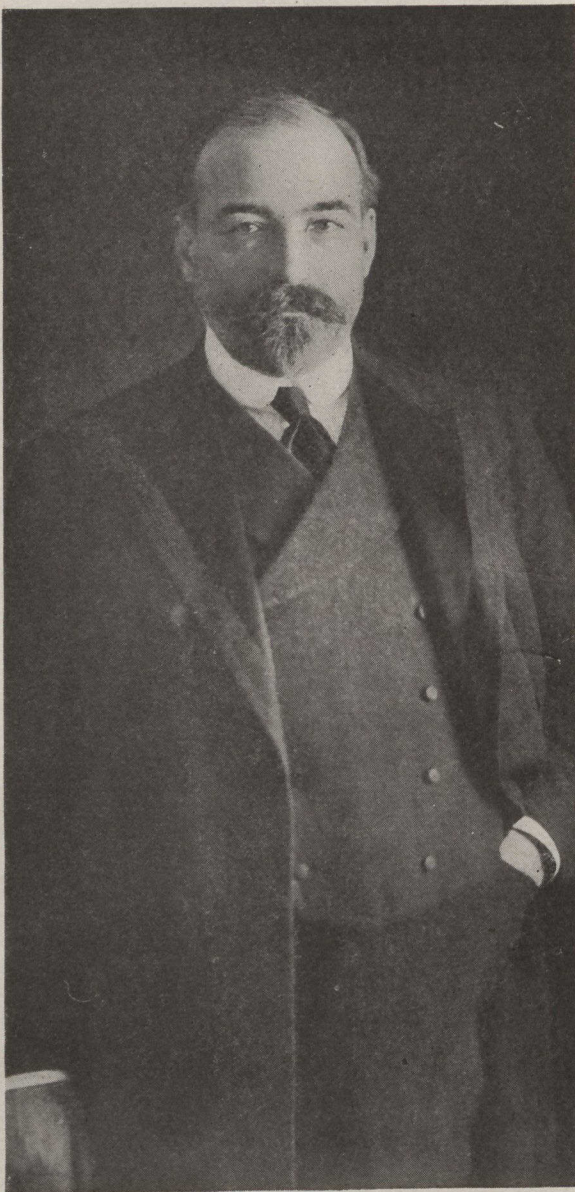
# Personalities and Problems

No. 28—Sir Donald Mann

## *A Big Man's Views on Some of Canada's Big Problems*

By AUGUSTUS BRIDLE

co-related personal enterprises of Sir Donald Mann, it has meant: several thousand miles of railway between Yarmouth, N.S., and Port Mann on the Pacific; a line of ocean steamships; smelters at Port Arthur; iron ore mines at Moose Mountain and docks at Key Harbour; collieries and whaling industries on Vancouver Island; a trunk line from Toronto to Sudbury and another from Buffalo to Ottawa; from Montreal to Quebec; from Edmonton to Port Mann, to the foot-hills towards the Rockies, to Athabasca Landing at the gateway to the Peace River; from Prince Albert to the Pas,



"Developing his ideas along with his work into the evolution of a system."

feeling out the Hudson's Bay route; a new city in prospect behind Montreal mountain and a tunnel soon to be completed through Mount Royal; a new town, Leaside, not yet annexed to Toronto, and to be the site of carshops; these and a hundred other things that explain what Sir Donald meant by—Detail.

As a combination of plain, primeval work and constructive ideas this programme would be hard to beat. There is no use denying that Sir Donald Mann has hugely enjoyed most of it. He was built for work. He has the muscles and the chest and the spring of a man to whom it was once a joy to tussle tamarac and swing a broadaxe and peavie logs in a river jam, and to limber good, honest day's works out of other men by hundreds and thousands; and to whom it is now a hundred times more joy to develop his ideas along with his work into the evolution of a system.

Sir Donald is now just sixty years of age. He has no present intention of letting up on his labours. But when a man has spent the best part of twenty years in a programme of constructive ideas, it's a natural law of his own personality that he should begin to take a good deal of his joy from a con-

templation of the work done, the problems it creates and the ideas which it suggests. Seven years has made a big change in that programme. Then Sir Donald spoke as one who was just beginning to do things. Now he speaks as a man who wants time during the next decade to apply his mind to the problems that arise out of the things.

I think the late Herbert Spencer would have seen a sound philosophy in this.

So a few days ago Sir Donald suddenly stopped in the middle of a swirl of detail, opened a drawer in his desk and drew out a box of cigars.

Sir Donald is a connoisseur in cigars. And he thinks best when he is smoking. Most men do. Good tobacco has helped to solve many a problem. The men that don't smoke make problems; but they don't solve them—not as a rule.

"Now," he said, as he lighted up, "you've asked me a pretty big question in economics."

HE talked reflectively and wheeled his chair sidewise to gaze at the window without seeing out. For the time being he forgot the roll of maps that hang on the north wall of his big office and the battery of buzzers at his desk. He shut out of his mind the master of construction who might be in any moment about the most economical and efficient way of building a new piece of road, or lifting the rails from one section to lay them on a side line somewhere—depending on the grade or the ratio of traffic to the life of the rail—the best way to solve the problem of a long fill here, a long cut somewhere else, or a bridge that from present symptoms won't be ready by the time the steel gets to it, or how to shift a few hundred men from one part of the west to another hundreds of miles away, how to get men enough; and a hundred other things equally soothing to the nerves.

The question to which he referred was one that has occurred to a good many men during the last few years of development in Canada; the kind of question that comes to a business man on stock-taking days. It might have been asked of a professor of political economy; but the answer would probably have been of more use to a college student than to the average man.

"It's time," he said, "for the swift ones to go a little more slowly and give the rest a chance to catch up."

"Perhaps you might define that?"

He smoked again—in silence.

"Well—for a number of years this country has been going ahead at a rate never before known in the world's history."

"Thanks to—railroads, for instance?"

"This company is eternally being asked to build trunk lines. People don't like being on side lines. But they prefer a side line to no line at all. To build a trunk line through an unproductive territory is a costly business. As a rule we build trunk lines over areas that begin to earn expenses of building as soon as possible. Unproductive areas are usually the most expensive. That's part of the irony of railroad building."

He had in his mind—muskegs that swallow ballast and probably mountains that eat up dynamite.

"And while we are consolidating a trunk line, from a dozen parts of the country at once we hear about people who to get cheap land went ahead of the steel. They—want railroads. We—build them. What happens? Well, several things. The railway serves a section of producers; and that's good economics."

Another puff of smoke. No cigar ever gets a chance to go out when Sir Donald talks.

"But the bad economics begin—with the subdivisionist. He follows the railway like crooks follow a circus. He expects to get rich quick without investing much. No railway can keep him out. He stakes out the prairie, sticks up an office, buys an automobile and makes it his business to get suckers to see visions of values based upon population."

Silence again. Sir Donald's silences are like those of a sphinx; they mean something.

"This land gambler—for he's just as much a pure gamester as any bookie at a racetrack or a man that buys stocks on margin—makes it his aim in life to produce other gamblers. He can't play the game alone. But the other people have the money. When

TRAVEL in the west anywhere on a trunk line of the C. N. R. and you come presently to some little town right near the end of the steel. You ask a resident—probably unloading his settlers' effects from a waggon:

"Is this the last town on the road?"

"Nope," he says, laconically. "But it's as near the last as the Company has got yet. Come around three years from now—you'll find this is an old town and some other homesteader hundreds of miles from here will be tellin' you the same as I'm doin' now."

This is a crude illustration of what it feels like to write anything like an adequate character sketch of Sir Donald Mann, first vice-president of the Canadian Northern Railway. A number of people have tried it. But almost while the proof of the article was being corrected the checkerboard changed.

Most printed sketches of Sir Donald describe his life down on the bush farm near Acton, Ont.; his career in the lumber woods at Alpena, Mich., and the river drives at Parry Sound, Ont.; how he joined the first trek west about 1878 and took contracts getting out ties for the C. P. R., first east of Winnipeg and afterwards building sections of the road west as far as steel went; how as contractor for the C. P. R. he met a man named Mackenzie, another contractor; how after the C. P. R. was built he went to the State of Maine, down to Chili and over to China—still hankering to build more railways; in 1895 joined up with William Mackenzie to operate the old Manitoba and Northwestern, which, when built into the Dauphin country, became the nucleus of the C. N. R., now with more than 7,000 miles of steel, with 15,000 men in its construction camps and links going in east and west and south and north, as Macaulay said in his lay of Lars Porsena.

Every now and then this story, coloured one way or another, appears in some paper or magazine outside of Canada. It has been told in several countries and is still much like a chapter of wizardry in most—and even in this country the fact of the C. N. R. generates every little while some new phase of an epical romance.

ONE man says it's part of the second romance of Canadian development as the tales of Champlain and La Salle were the first.

Another explains that the careers of such men as Sir Donald Mann are the result of a big cycle of expansion that had to come by force of circumstances, and that developed the necessary men as it moved ahead.

Another says—"No, it's the men themselves."

Which is an old argument never yet settled by philosophy.

However, it is absolutely true that to understand the tremendous development of Canada during the past fifteen years more is got by studying men than by investigating the things they do. The world has thousands of men who, but for circumstances, might have expended marvelous energies in other directions. If steel had not been a great fact in United States development Carnegie must have found some other material. So with oil and Rockefeller; social reforms and Lloyd George; modern writing and Kipling; modern music and Wagner; electricity and Edison; philology and Max Muller. All such men have been evolved by practical necessity and a great appetite for work. And they would have been very miserable in any kind of heaven or Nirvana. Call it creative activity or any other name; the men have been necessary to the work that needed doing—and the work when it came profoundly modified the men.

Seven or eight years ago, when the writer first interviewed Sir Donald Mann, the railway builder was asked—what he might do when the C. N. R. should be finished. He said:

"Do? Why, keep right on building railroads."

Last week, referring to the same prospect, he said:

"Some day when we get this system all linked up, I hope to escape a lot of this detail and get time to do some thinking."

That seven years has made as much difference to the outlook of D. D. Mann as it has to the system he has helped to create. To the system and to the