LORD BEAVERBROOK

MY EARLY LIFE

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MY EARLY LIFE

by

LORD BEAVERBROOK

AN ATLANTIC ADVOCATE BOOK

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Lord Beaverbrook on his last public appearance, at the dinner of his 85th birthday, May 25, 1964

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MY YOUNG DAYS in New Brunswick

1

"Writing about me"

THE LIVES OF MEN who have become prominent in any direction always possess a keen interest for the great mass of mankind. This feeling of curiosity is tinged either with admiration, condemnation, or envy. There may be the desire to emulate the example, or a feeling of repulsion, due to the methods by which the man has climbed to power. Again the onlooker may feel instinctively that he possesses neither the talents nor the inclination for such a career. But the curiosity is there.

The student is fascinated by the story of the statesman, the man of peace by the tales of the man of war, and even the saint will stand and gaze at the millionaire, while the rich man will look with envy upon the career of the Minister of the Gospel.

To the majority, the interest is a more practical one than that of intellectual curiosity. Men ask "How did the fellow do it? In reading his record can I pick up some hints which may be useful to myself?" If there is such a thing as a secret method of getting things done, surely the only way to discover it must be to study the minds and conduct of the men of action.

It is useless for the sceptic to declare that the search is like that for the philosophers' stone. Mankind will not believe it—and on the whole mankind is right. The belief that man, however small his beginning and however poor his opportunities, is master of his fate, is at the root of the greatness of Anglo-American civilization. That faith keeps alive mental and moral talents which would otherwise atrophy, it feeds the flame of hope, and quickens the promptings of ambition to work, to suffer and to achieve.

Conversely, there is plenty to satisfy the critic of the life of energy and drive in all the age-old and world-wide stories of the man who has fought his way to the top of a large business or manufacturing enterprise. The physical decay in early middle age has rewarded so many men of action for the excessive exertions of their youth. In all this there is much to console the indolent or the unfortunate with the reflection that mediocrity has its advantages.

None the less, for all of us it is the story, not the moral, which is the main thing. Is the character interesting? Has the life been exciting? Have there been hairbreadth escapes and striking triumphs? Has the scale of operations been wide and varied? Will the central figure amuse us, and strike home to the imagination, or is he, in spite of all his sublimated virtues, merely a pompous fool, who has fluked into fortune? Is he making altogether too much of his abilities and altogether too little of the "tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune"? The Teacher tells us "Surely the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong;

neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill, but time and chance happeneth to them all."

All these doubts and questions must be answered in a satisfactory manner before such a life becomes really worth reading by the public in general. If the written answer given to them in these notes is not satisfactory, the fault will lie with me and not with the life I've led.

Many epithets, favourable and unfavourable, have been applied to my career, but the word "uninteresting" is not one of them. For in the space of 50 years my activities cover three successive adventures in the most vital spheres of modern affairs—Business, Politics and Journalism. I left finance just as I had scored a preliminary success pointing apparently the way to vaster triumphs in a continent where at that time the business man was king. I left the politics of the House of Commons at the same psychological moment. I turned away, as in a mere mood of petulance, and flung myself once again into a new sphere of journalistic activity, of which I was wholly ignorant. Was I really quite sane?

How can I explain these quick and complete reversals of policy, concluding separate phases of life characteristic of my career? Unforeseen by myself and unforeseeable by others, the clear-cut strokes severed me irrevocably from a financial world just at my command, and from a political preferment in the House of Commons which was just within my reach.

However, it is clear that this story will not be one of banality—of good talent slowly sharpened by experience and rewarded by gradual promotion, but one of swift pounces and rushes, of the results belonging to years attained in months, of shifts of venue and changes of front bewildering to friend and foe alike.

By 30, I had established for myself a good place in the business world of Canada, and retired with a fortune. For ten years of British home politics, I was the colleague and confidant of the leader of one of the great historic parties. Much has been written in praise and blame of my part in the decisions resulting in the defeat of Prime Minister Asquith of the other great historic party. The rise and fall of Lloyd George furnishes material for my critics and also for friendly historians.

Then, turning swiftly aside to Fleet Street, at the age of 40, I started with the bankrupt *Daily Express* on a journalistic career, created the *Sunday Express*, and added the *Evening Standard*. And everywhere this sudden rise excited the fiercest animosities.

I found time for writing even in the turmoil of Fleet Street journalism with its fierce rivalries and violent conflicts, and swift decisions of vital

consequences. I had written down, in the First War, voluminous notes which might be called an "eye witness" account of the many political events. These notes I resolved into two small volumes entitled *Politicians and the War* (published in 1928, Vol. I; and in 1932, Vol. II.)

A series of essays on "Good Fortune" found favour with publishers. Ten or twenty editions have been put out by publishers in home and foreign languages under several titles and with many variations.

Just a few days ago Churchill asked me "What are you doing?" "Writing" I replied. "What do you write about?" he asked. "Me" I answered. "A good subject," he said, "I have been writing about me for fifty years, and with excellent results."

"There's not much time left to us. We've both done our threescore years and ten," I said, and then I sang (shouted)

A few more years shall roll,
A few more seasons come,
And we shall be with those that rest,
Asleep within the tomb.

Often I have meditated on that verse during Church service at St. James's on the Hill in Newcastle. In youth I did not gather the full impact of the hymn. Now I am not so sure of the "few more years". So it is time to set down in writing something of my early years in the "Kingdom by the Sea". Here is as much as I can remember.

In this story of my early life which formed my character, I hope you will find something to admire, I am certain you will find much to condemn, more to amuse, and I believe everything to interest.

2

“Life in New Brunswick was a hard one”

I WAS BORN IN Maple near Toronto on May 25th, 1879. I was of Scottish extraction. My father, the Rev. William Aitken, was the son of peasant people in Torphichen, Linlithgowshire, who like so many others were enabled by the magnificent educational system and tradition of Scotland to send their clever boy to the University. William Aitken graduated at Edinburgh, and then entered the Church of Scotland. At that time this Church was making vigorous efforts to ensure that the outlying parts of the Empire were not deprived, in their early days of struggle and poverty, of an effective Presbyterian ministry. They therefore held out inducements to young men of parts, as my father certainly was, who were not afraid of roughing it in the cause of the Lord, to emigrate and reinforce the Church in Canada. This form of gift made by the Churches in the 19th century to the Empire has never been properly recognized.

The new Minister found himself attached to the ministerial service at Maple, and it was there that he married Jane Noble, the daughter of a prosperous storekeeper and farmer of the neighbourhood. My mother's family were of Ulster descent, and had emigrated in the previous generation. But the Scottish population of Ulster has, in the course of nearly 300 years of settlement, inter-married with the old Irish stock. My ancestry might therefore be put down as four-fifths Scottish and one-fifth Irish. The racial admixture is a clue to my character.

There is all the "dour" duty side of the Covenanters, ancient and modern, and the industry, the exactness of the Lowland Scot. But there is also a Celtic strain which gets up and dances.

There were ten children in my father's family, of whom I was the sixth.

When I was a year old—in 1880—my father was transferred to the Manse at Newcastle on the Miramichi.[1] It was therefore in Newcastle that I grew up—in a country of rolling forests, with distant glimpses of hills and valleys and of broad rivers, full of big salmon and running down over rapids and shingles past tree-clad islands to meet the great tides sweeping up from the Miramichi Bay. It was in my youth a land for the huntsman, the fisherman, of lumber and saw-mills and possessed of a tiny coasting trade, and in the distant past a ship-building industry, where great ships were launched.

It would be hard for the lads of this Province, whether bred in town or country, to realise the kind of life led by an ordinary family in New Brunswick in the eighties of last century. The Town of Newcastle was not the Newcastle of this day. It was a country town—and it was a district, a scattered area, extending up and down the river for miles and miles, where

many small farmhouses stood in the clearings made in the overwhelming mass of dark forest land—an almost trackless region where the stranger would be hopelessly lost before he had gone far from the nearest pasture or house. This tangled woodland, with its mysterious sounds and scents, its beaver brooks and tracks of strange animals, has been brilliantly described by our own Charles G. D. Roberts, in his famous stories of wild life. The bear could be shot by the sportsman, the wild partridges came down to feed off the crops, and the great moose had been known to pay a visit at night and stamp with his mighty hoofs on a garden in the main street of Newcastle.

Recently I have studied some of the papers of Peter Mitchell, famous father of Confederation, one-time Prime Minister of the Province, Senator, first Minister of Marine and Fisheries, proprietor of the *Montreal Herald* and for fifteen years Member of Parliament for Northumberland, Miramichi. These documents give a vivid and exciting account of mid-nineteenth century life in New Brunswick, and recall to me the lines from the beautiful poem of Mary Howitt, with the charming title "Buttercups and Daisies".

He who gave them hardships
And a life of care
Gave them likewise hardy strength
And patient hearts to bear.

The centres of such a community as Newcastle were of course, the Square, the Churches, the School, the Court House, the Waverly Hotel, and, to me, the Manse. There were three prominent doctors, three lawyers, two druggists, and three merchants. I can never forget John Brander, J. D. Creaghan and George Stables. Two banks were important to the community which relied extensively on borrowed money. Today Newcastle is a fair-sized and flourishing town, soon to become a city. But such a development lay far ahead seventy years ago. The life we are picturing is therefore that of the countryside and not of the town as we understand the term. Nor is it even the life of the Canadian countryside in Upper Canada.

For six months in the year the land was bound in the impenetrable grip of frost and ice and snow, "and the rain is turned to a white dust, and the sea to a great green stone."

The sun shining brightly, but intense cold, and skating and sleighing were the only forms of traffic. The rivers and the estuaries were blocked with the ice, the stoves in the wooden houses were kept red-hot, and life was hard for man and beast.

Then when the spring returned, the great ice-block in the streams began to melt, and to go out to the sea. Down came the logs which had been cut

and piled on the banks in the winter months. And as they floated down in their thousands, they tended to form great "jams" stretching from bank to bank. The lumbering population turned out to break these jams, and the boldest, stepping from log to log and into mid-stream, sought to loosen the central obstruction which was keeping the whole flotilla back—a fine game for a reckless boy.

Then came the summer in a riot of foliage flung through the far-stretching spruce woods. The power of the sun grew so intense that it would be unbearable but for the fact that the climate was quite dry—just as winter would be impossible but that the air was still and the sky cloudless. Or so it seemed to me in my early youth.

The river Miramichi comes down in its mile-wide flood, and swimming at the Marsh, canoeing on the river, poaching the magnificent trout and salmon, or sailing the long reaches, became the play of the season.

But life in New Brunswick was a hard one in the '80's and '90's of last century. The Province is one which has been rescued from a forest—the soil was light—minerals were unknown. Nova Scotia possessed a far greater bulk of industrial resources for its size.

The population of Newcastle was not wealthy and, since the more ardent spirits sought out the richer soils and opportunities of Western Canada or the United States, not particularly hard-working according to modern ideas of intensive industry. Those who remained were chiefly the philosophers, who would do enough toil in field and pasture to give them a moderate subsistence and then console themselves with the amenities of life which that glorious country supplied to a man fond of rod and gun. New Brunswick was therefore in those days rather the nursery than the career of prominent Canadians. It has indurated the brood and sent it forth to richer climes to conquer. And so it proved in my case.

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[1] In a not very distant parish, as distances go, there had lived as Presbyterian Minister the Rev. Mr. Law, father of Bonar Law—the future Premier of Great Britain. Twenty miles to the North lived Mrs. Dunn, formerly a resident in Newcastle. She was a widow at 25. Turning to the new invention the telegraph for a means of livelihood and support for her infant orphaned son, she became the local agent of the Western Union Co. The boy became the Sir James Dunn whose name and doings play so large a part in Canadian industrial history.

3

“They live on porridge”

LOOKING BACK, IT IS difficult to recollect any evidence of warmth in the relations of my parents and yet there is no occasion when a quarrel comes to my memory. My mother invariably spoke of her husband and to him as Mr. Aitken. And I cannot recall any time when my mother was called Jane.

One recollection of them, however, always remains clearly before me. An interesting ceremony was performed before church on Sunday morning. My father's collar was buttoned by my mother and his bands were carefully adjusted. He always managed to button his collar on other days, so the ceremony must have had some emotional meaning rather after the manner of the loving wife who buckles on the soldier's sword when he is about to go into battle.

Our family life had a formality about it not preserved in these modern days. Occasionally, not too often, after the hour of supper which took place at six-thirty, my father would sing, without any grasp of tune, the Scottish folk songs. A general feeling of warmth would spread through the dining-room and occasionally, with no better sense of tune than my father, I would try to join in. I know well those Scottish songs, in tune deficient but word perfect.

While the singing of Scottish songs was occasional, prayers before and after meals were inevitable. "May the desert rejoice and blossom as the rose, and the barren places become fruitful. And now O Lord what wait we for?" How I longed to cry out "My breakfast!", but I had the good sense not to give way to this impulse.

On one Sunday morning just before Church in summer time, when I was very young—just within my recollection—my eldest brother Traven shot himself. He had been given a rusty pistol. He tried to explode the cartridge without success so he put the barrel of the pistol to his belly and tried to extract the ammunition with a knife. At that moment the percussion cap came into action and he had a bullet in his spine.

I can recall seeing the bullet wound while he stood up trying to reassure his mother. There was no church for us that day. I doubt if there was church for anybody for I'm sure my father never reached his pulpit. But I can recall vividly walking along the back road driving the cow to pasture at the glebe and carrying on a conversation with God. Many prized though trifling possessions I agreed to give up. Much reform I promised with strict obedience to all the Commandments, particularly the third Commandment. All these pledges were offered, if He would let my brother get well again.

I can remember how for a whole month we were driven away from home by day and required to observe strict silence by night while my

brother's life was in danger. After we got over the sudden sense of shock we had a magnificent time—no discipline, no chores, while silence reigned in the house. All day long we were out of doors, in the streets, on the marsh. Time stood still. Night and day were just the same to us while my mother gave up her whole energies in the struggle for the survival of my brother. She won. He lived with the bullet for many, many years, in Newcastle, in contentment, and in popularity. He sang the folk songs of the province.

My brother died, not young nor old, and he was buried in the graveyard at Newcastle. Nine graves of my father's family are scattered over two continents;

Their graves are sever'd, far and wide
By mount and stream and sea.

Four of us live on and in the order of seniority I am next for the list of "departed". I am content, for I have been blessed far beyond my deserts. And my last home will be where my heart has always dwelt.

I am now seven years beyond the allotted span of life. I live on the bonus system. It may be interesting to many with a missing heart beat to know that for just this reason my application for a twenty-year endowment policy was rejected by the Equitable Life of New York on December 9th, 1901, fifty-five years ago. That rejection bothered me, for I needed the policy as a flimsy item of security for the Bank of Nova Scotia in Halifax, where Mr. Payzant, the President, and Mr. Flemming, the Manager, were well disposed to me and my financial operations.

I have kept that notice of rejection to this day.

Son of Man, what is that proverb that ye have in the land of Israel saying The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth?

My child life seems to me very curious as I look backwards. The contrast between riches and poverty, between London, England and Newcastle, New Brunswick, between Fleet Street with its many presses, and my first tiny newspaper, would strike the most sluggish imagination. Great changes, whether for good or evil, better or worse, produce in the human mind a sense of impermanence and unreality—till faced with the sudden question—"Have these things I remember really happened?"

I do remember. An early recollection is the memory of the rebellion of half-breeds in the North West. These were French settlers who had intermarried with the Indian tribes. Their language was French, their religion Catholic.

In 1885, when I was five years of age, the rebellion broke out led by Louis Riel. When his short rule collapsed, he was hanged. I was a violent young partisan in strong support of the hangman.

Years ago I purchased many Riel papers, which rest in the Bonar Law-Bennett Library at Fredericton. Now I am equally voluble in defence of Riel.

The soldiers, marching from the East to quell the rebellion, sang their "Tipperary", which was the beautiful and haunting chorus "Remember the Red River Valley". I have been singing that song ever since and for over seventy years. To me, however, the River Valley is the Miramichi, the River that has always been home, and in the room where I usually sit in London, immediately within my sight is an absolutely accurate model of the Old Manse at Newcastle, with a view of the garden path where I worked most reluctantly on many a summer evening, hoeing the weeds.

A sense of the need for more money was the dominant note of my early life. My father possessed a stipend of twelve hundred dollars a year. With these resources he had a family of ten to feed, and as the Minister to keep up a decency of appearance. There was no room for luxuries. Often there would be shortages. "Doing without", not as an act of moral choice, but as an unavoidable necessity, was the rule of family life.

My father never sought another parish with a bigger stipend. With his wide knowledge of books, his fine upstanding figure and his long white beard, he might have been an important preacher with a pulpit in a big city. He was content, probably through fidelity, to remain always, to the end of his ministerial career, in the town he too loved so dearly, faithful to the Church on the Hill.

There was a negro in our town whose name was Treadwell. We called him Black Sam, even to his face. An old man, or he seemed to me an old man at that time, and he was well-liked.

When the New York sportsmen came down the river after the salmon fishing season—and there were plenty of fine fish—Black Sam would lay in a stock of them, and of course for free. Then he would walk the streets carrying with him a salmon on a string, seeking to find a customer at a good price.

It was in a moment of confidence mixed with desire that I asked Black Sam to go to my house, where I felt sure he could sell the salmon. But Black Sam turned me down, saying somewhat contemptuously: "They don't eat salmon at your house: they live on porridge!"

I was a conspicuously naughty and rather idle boy, redeemed only by a passion for reading. In the cold weather I would raid my father's library of

Scott and Stevenson, and, after starting off ostensibly for the school, would steal into the barn and hidden in the hayloft I would devour my capture.

Scott was my favourite author. Allan A. Davidson, my father's most intimate friend, told me his vivid recollection of me was on the occasion of a visit paid to my father. I was eight or nine. I was crouching down by the fireplace in my father's study and, with the poker gripped in my hand, was declaiming from Ivanhoe. I hammered the grate to point the defiance I was hurling at the foe from some battlemented wall.

Even in my old age I recall with nostalgia many of Scott's verses, and I may weary many friends with recitations from the Sheriff. If listened to with appreciation or an appearance of interest, I am likely to quote at length from a minor poet who fired my imagination in my very early days. And here it is.

Leonainie—Angels named her;
And they took the light
Of the laughing stars and framed her
In a smile of white;
And they made her hair of gloomy
Midnight, and her eyes of bloomy
Moonshine, and they brought her to me
In the solemn night.

In a solemn night of summer,
When my heart of gloom
Blossomed up to greet the comer
Like a rose in bloom;
All forebodings that distressed me
I forgot as Joy caressed me
(Lying Joy! that caught and pressed me
In the arms of doom!)

Only spake the little lisper
In the Angel-tongue;
Yet I, listening, heard her whisper
"*Songs are only sung*
Here below that they may grieve you,
Tales but told you to deceive you,
So must Leonainie leave you
While her love is young."

Then God smiled and it was morning
Matchless and supreme,
Heaven's glory seemed adorning
Earth with its esteem:
Every heart but mine seemed gifted
With the voice of prayer, and lifted,
Where my Leonainie drifted
From me like a dream.

My good companions in my boyhood were William Corbett, Hubert Sinclair and Jack Sweet, the son of the Church of England Rector. Three of us survive. Jack Sweet was killed in the First World War. But for that tragedy he might be well and happy on this very day. Life in Newcastle guarantees length of happy days.

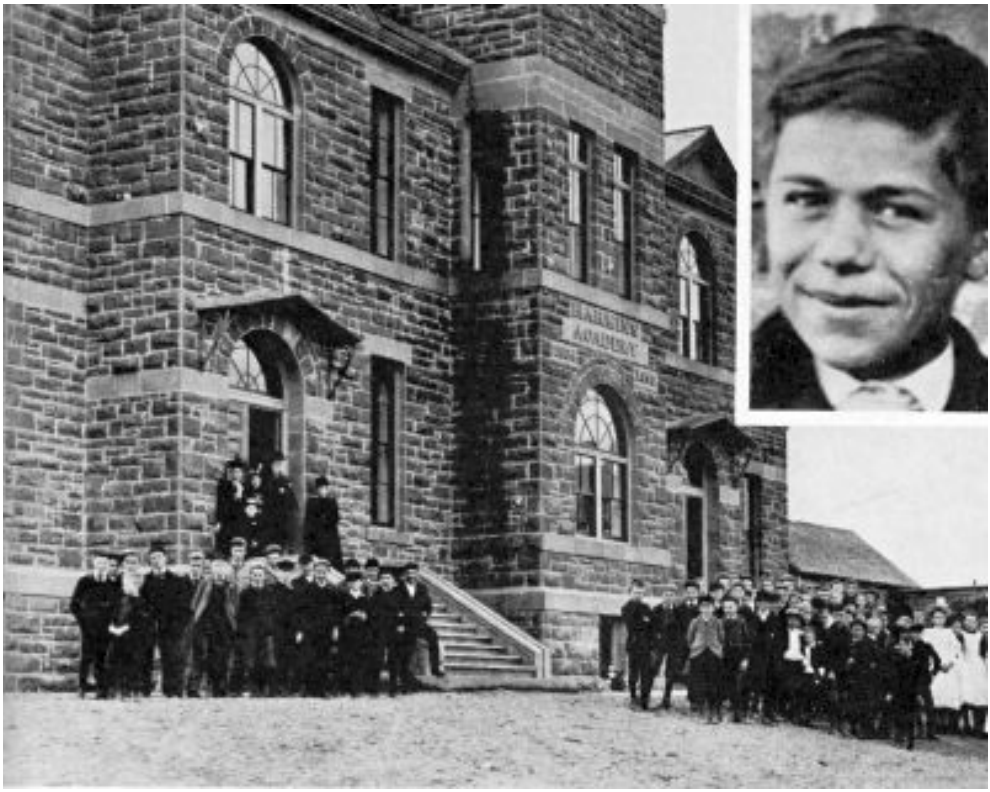
4

“Going barefoot gives one remarkable advantages”

A VISITING COMPANY OF players came to our railway station where many youths kept watch over arriving and departing trains. A tiny girl actress maybe ten years older than I caught my attention. It was "love at first sight". I had the great good fortune to carry some bags for the big chief who gave me a pass to the first performance—and I regretted the only performance—in our town. That night I was more than "on time", possibly an hour or two early. The play was "Uncle Tom's Cabin" and my little heroine had the part of Eva. What a sensation of excitement that swept me into a vortex of human emotions, loosely described as the passion of young love—or calf love.

There was no stage entrance at the Masonic Hall (gone). The front door was the only way. There I stood with others, waiting for the object of my devotion, filled with a determination to speak to the little angel, just returned to life from the world of make-believe. It was not to be. In the words of the famous crest of the Bedford family adorning Covent Garden, *Che sarà sarà* —What will be will be.

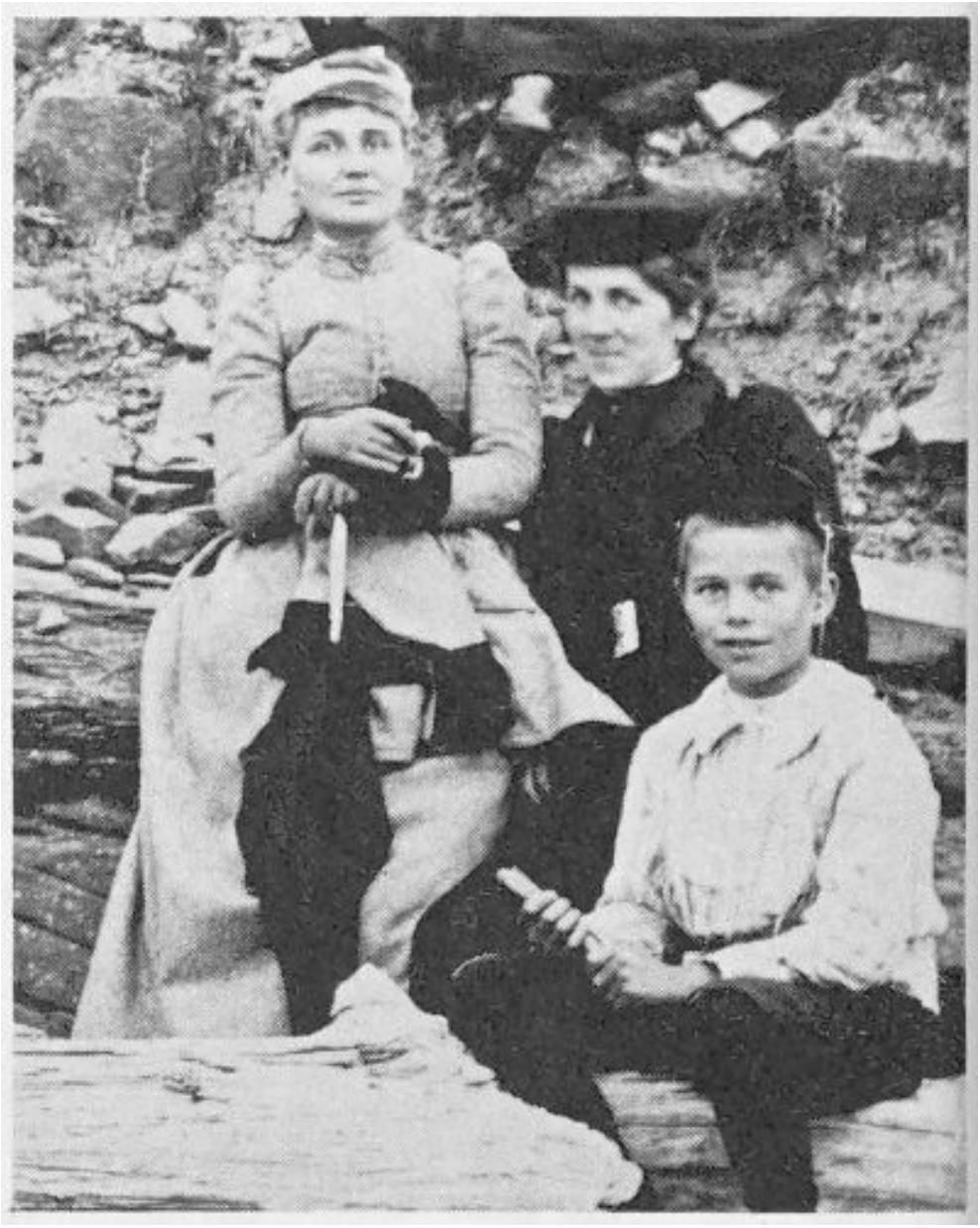
The glamorous Eva came out of the door of the old Masonic Hall in the company of no other than Simon Legree himself whose arm was about her waist. Shocking indecency, it seemed to me. Simon Legree of all persons. That he should dare to show familiarity with the saintly Eva. Was there ever such rascality! Should I assail him like a knight of old, snatching from his grasp the maiden of high degree? No. No. In shame I turned and fled, and through an hour or two of sleeplessness I wished so earnestly that Little Eva might be made aware by some miraculous revelation of her adoring Knight Errant and that I might serve her evermore.



Harkins Academy, Newcastle, N.B., rebuilt in 1893. Rev. William Aitken stands in the doorway. Inset, Max Aitken, a pupil, aged 14.

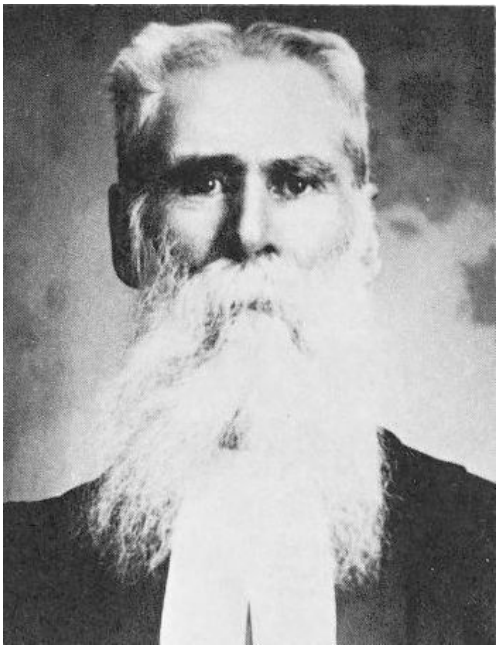
The Manse at Newcastle. Rev. Mr. Aitken on the step. Max Aitken in the background over his shoulder.

The Mowing Machine . . . “and that cracked brain.”



Mrs. John Fleming, Kate Thomson (Lady Stavert) Max Aitken (Lord Beaverbrook)

At the departure of Uncle Tom and his company by the evening train for the next town I was there. And so were Little Eva and Simon Legree. She passed out of the sight of an unhappy lad, experiencing for the first time the need of human sympathy.



Rev. William Aitken

Lovely Little Eva. Where did you go? What ever became of you? Did you have a happy life? Did you dwell so long in the land that you borrowed from time and perhaps from fortune, too? Your raven locks, your soft and musical voice. I conjure up at this moment a brilliant picture. Possibly not a true picture. Just a fanciful vision of the mind, a recollection of my early youth coloured and adorned with precious jewels of fond memory.

There have been several Little Evas since that night of sorrow, more than three score years ago.

Maybe a year or possibly several seasons after the departure of Little Eva, a family moved into our town. Mr. Jones (not the real name) was the head of a firm of merchants, or possibly a bank manager. He was an important personage and the advent of this addition to the population was most agreeably received by the citizens. But more pleasantly acknowledged by me.

For Mr. Jones had a very pretty daughter with pink and white complexion. She was bashful and demure. But I had become bold and audacious. My courtship was not favourably received by her family and friends. And after I ventured out into the world she vanished from my memory. Recently in New York's Central Park I walked and talked with her two married daughters, beautiful and intelligent with pink and white complexions.

For the rest, I seem to have been one of the "bad boys" of the town—mixed up in many of the various scrapes invented by mischievous youth—an awful example of what not to be. There exists a curious photograph which shows what I must have looked like about this period. It is a picture of Howard Williston's "Jewellery" shop. It was on the Square, and though dignified by name it was really a watch-repair shop. I well remember that I pushed my way into the photograph, possibly because Olie Larson, the photographer, was trying to drive me off. On the extreme right is my schoolmaster, Mr. Yorston.

In another photograph, I can be detected instantly, sitting dressed up in my best clothes among a crowd of students, male and female, girls and boys together. The uneasy grin is that of the boy caught and starched and posed; but even the grin promises a wild sort of fun, as though to say "Just let me out of this, and I will show you what I can do in the way of mischief."

Now, Harkins Academy was quite near the jail. My friend Will Irving was the jailer. He always kept a few prisoners in the long and comfortable corridor with a view overlooking Harkins Academy. I called on him very often—but I wasn't always seeking the companionship of Mr. Irving, for I had a joy and delight in talking to the prisoners.

They filled me with curiosity and also stimulated my imagination. In fact on one occasion, my imagination carried me a bit too far, for I told a prisoner a most ingenious story of which he made full use when he came to plead his case in court.

Will Irving was not pleased. He told me that further flights of imagination on fancy's wings would result in disclosure to my father. That was enough to curb my enthusiasm for the poor prisoners who had lost their liberty.

A dog and also a cat were members of our household. The dog was named Tasso. He was a spaniel. I was devoted to that dog. Tasso died and was buried in the Manse garden beneath a hedge of spruce trees, marked with a deal end. I've since looked for the spot but there is no trace.

Forty years on I still lovingly remembered Tasso and when I bought a little white mongrel at the gate leading to my house for the sum of five shillings, I named him in high hope "Tasso". My confidence was justified. The little dog won my affection. Everywhere I travelled, up and down London, yachting in the Channel, Tasso kept me company. At night he slept under my bed, in town or country.

One day when I was returning from a yachting journey with Tasso under my arm, his bright and affectionate eyes watching my every humour, I was waiting for the train to town on the Up platform at Southampton. A stranger spoke to me, plainly an American.

"Will you sell me your dog?" he asked.

"Yes, indeed," I replied.

"I'll take him," he said. "What price?"

"One million dollars," I answered.

"No dice," he said.

The name of Tasso given to my dog was, of course, a call back to my youth and my "fixation" for the Miramichi, the name of my first steam

yacht. Tabusintac and Tracadie, my diesel yachts. Nipisiquit, Restigouche, Shediac, Petitcodiac, Nashwaak, horses that ran in my colours, but not much faster than the rivers from which they were named.

Always and inevitably over the years I have been longingly trying to reach back to the place where my heart dwells, the place I call home.

We had two kitchens in our house and a well, covered in and attached. Monday was always a day of misery, for my mother did the washing in the morning, hanging out the clothes to dry, and then the ironing before night fell upon us.

Bread and black molasses was the Monday ration for two meals, with Scots butter of local production if we were lucky—just "firkin butter" on very bad days. Following a Sunday of outward evidence of "pure in heart" by abstinence from games and other such like devices for enjoyment or even occupation, our cheerless Monday left us with only five regular or commonplace days in each week. Even these gay and carefree hours were always interrupted by the tasks of drawing the water from the well, sawing and carrying the wood for heating and cooking. There was no other fuel in the town except for a limited and expensive supply of coke from the Gas House. Who took in gas I cannot now recollect; certainly no such luxury at the Manse.

Then there was another chore in which I took real delight. That was the milking of the cow. Providing others would drive the animal to and from the pasture, known to us as the glebe, I would be the cowman. Here I must record that my interest in milking cows has never languished. In England I set up through the years some farms and several milk rounds.

Just recently I surprised and impressed my guests at Cricket Malherbie, my principal farm in Somerset, by taking the place of a missing cowman from our Guernsey staff. But not for long. Ten cows each is our rule. I was at the stretch on that one cow. Many readers will say "What? No milking machines?" No! No milking machines for first-class pedigree Guernsey stock. Each cow personally attended and positively treated with individual care and attention. That's the way to milk records.

Knowledge of farming has given me deep and abiding interest in the problems of British agriculture.

In furthering my political campaign for Empire Unity or Empire Free Trade (as I called the movement) my platform performances always involved a plea for the exclusion of foreign food products in favour of Empire production.

At Douglas in Ayrshire, the home of the favourite British strain of beasts, I was on one dark winter evening engaged in making a plea to an important local audience during a by-election. “Let us bring to the Empire the employment given to milkmaids who work for us in Denmark and Holland and Belgium,” I argued. To fortify my claim to farming lore, I told the story of driving our cow from glebe to byre twice daily.

In Scottish dialect, a man in the audience asked: “And what did ye dae wi’ the coo when ye brocht her tae the byre?”

I answered, “Milked her, of course.”

“That’s what ye’ll dae tae us gin[2] ye get your Empire preference plan,” he replied.

My meeting was not so good thereafter. I forget the by-election results.

Now I had no difficulty in understanding the Lowland Scottish dialect or in answering with the same intonation.

My father spoke in his native accents on many social occasions, and I often imitated him. More than his influence was the effect of my association with the Corbett family living opposite the Manse across the Back Road (now named differently). Both of the parents spoke naturally in broad Scotch as we called it. This family was most attractive in its domestic relations. The head of the house held the respect of the community and the affection of my father and many others.

He was seriously injured in a railway accident during a heavy fall of snow which blocked all traffic on the route to Campbellton. Mr. Corbett was sent out to clear the road-bed. He was in charge of a snowplough, driven by a locomotive running immediately ahead of the Maritime Express. When entering a siding at Dalhousie Junction the Express overtook the snowplough special and Mr. Corbett was pinned in the wreckage which caught on fire. He was burned most seriously. His right hand was destroyed and his right leg was desperately injured.

His life was saved because a man shovelled snow on him until he was released from the wreckage. His recovery was marvellous, and surprised the doctors.

His wife was my good friend, protector, and defender from the consequences of my youthful escapades. She was indeed a “wholesome body” as the Scottish people say. Her bread was always the best and the butter was laid on with generosity and even extravagance. How many times I turned to Mrs. Corbett for comfort and support cannot be counted.

The family of boys and girls were scattered.

There was a General Election in 1891. I was eleven years of age. I recall the hustings and the Masonic Hall in Newcastle when the oratory of the Adams family—our Adams family, not the New England Adams—won me over to the National Policy of Sir John Macdonald. At home I was silent about my new faith, because I didn't want to displease my father, who still clung to the traditions of the Toronto Grits.

There is little to be said about the system of education which prevailed in the town of Newcastle. It was wholesome, sound, non-religious and common to all. The school was attended by boys and girls alike, by rich and poor together, by the well-dressed and those who were clothed in shabby suits, by the children of the leaders of local society and the sons and daughters of the outcasts, for there were outcasts even in Newcastle. There was the usual quota of illegitimate children, who justified to the full the quotation about the sins of the fathers or, it might be apter to say, the sins of the mothers.

It was a good form of education, surpassing that given at public schools (Eton, etc.) in England. There was free contact with every class in the community. That was very valuable. It gave the child a wider knowledge of human nature, a better understanding of the rules of the game, and a deeper sympathy with the disabilities and misfortunes of his neighbours.

If I had the education of my boys to supervise over again, I would not send them to English public schools, (Eton, etc.). I believe they would get a better preparation for life at Harkins Academy in Newcastle.

In summer time, when the weather was hot, it was the habit of boys in my home town to go barefoot. I did so through choice, although the lads who continued to wear boots came, on the whole, from the more respectable elements in the village.

Every lad knows that going barefoot gives one remarkable advantages. But when the time comes to take to boots again, you are clumsy in the use of them. Boots have become a burden which you bear. They are an impediment, a nuisance. It is only by being barefooted for a spell that you realize what an encumbrance boots are.

All the same, I am not sure that boots have not been a benefactor to me.

One autumn when I had put on my boots for the first time, a passing mowing machine drawn at the tail of a cart attracted my attention. Along with others, I took hold of the pole, meaning to run along with it. I do not know why one should want to hold something on these occasions. No doubt, the pole acted as a pacemaker.

My boots, to which I was not yet accustomed, brought me down in the road and the wheel of the mowing machine passed over my head, the cogs making a mark on my ear which I carry to this day.

I was carried off, I suppose. For, of course, I remember nothing of what happened after that. When, in a few days, I wakened up, I was conscious that there had been an accident but I was not at all clear about what had happened.

But one thing that happened was this:

When I took hold of the pole of that mowing machine I was a stupid boy, showing no remarkable qualities whatever. I do not believe I was born with an astute brain. There was certainly nothing to prove it up to then.

But when I returned to consciousness after the accident, I was a clever boy!

I am ready to prove that proposition against any doubter. Probably there is no mystery about it at all. The crack which the wheel gave to my skull possibly gave the brain room to expand, which it needed.

Doctors can make what they like of the incident. I have made a lot of it.

One day I will tell you to what use I put that cracked brain of mine.

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[2] if

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“Hired at 25 cents a week”

THE MANSE AT NEWCASTLE was a big house set upon a small knoll. Indeed there was need for plenty of room. "How many may you be?" the poet asked. The maid replied, "Seven in all are we." But in our home we were ten children, and only one of us in the churchyard. Try to accommodate eleven members of one family in a house of six bedrooms. The result does not make for harmony.

My brother and I shared a small and ill-ventilated room up a flight of stairs, broad and easy, then another flight, narrow and difficult, to the third floor, with a tiny window deep-set in the eaves of the house. Unbearably hot in summer and bitterly cold in winter. Yet I never thought of discomfort or complained. But the Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe was not my favourite nursery rhyme.

When a telephone was set up on the wall of our library by Mr. Davidson and Dr. Pedolin, joint promoters of the service, progress had overtaken us. The telephone was not of any practical use, because there were few other subscribers. We were decoy ducks or guinea pigs in the promotion plans for a telephone system in our town, now boasting more than 2,500 installations.

The telephone was no longer a novelty when a simple system of central heating was installed in the cellar. A furnace, burning wood, gave out heat which was conveyed in large sheet-metal pipes to holes in the floors of the principal rooms.

A woodpile surrounding the furnace provided winter fuel. Here I built myself a hideaway which sometimes served me as a schoolhouse in winter. My textbooks were Scott's novels, Stevenson, and Thackeray in a limited measure. No Dickens. I could not abide that public favourite in youth, nor in old age.

My lighting system depended upon a lantern, which was not a satisfactory device.

But we were accustomed to oil lamps. Electricity never came to the town in my boyhood. Paraffin was our illuminating oil. We called it "coal oil", according to the Scottish tradition. The burners smoked and the globe protecting the flame was nearly always blackened by soot. It was a nuisance. How I hated cleaning the dirty smudge from the lamp chimneys.

We did not turn on taps or pull plugs in our town. There weren't any. And that was serious. The boys of Newcastle, who have grown to old age with me, must have deplored through the years, as I have, the neglect of our municipal fathers who subjected the children to the rigours of our sanitary arrangements in the backyards in midwinter snow and ice. During the

summer months conditions were not so severe, though for the want of taps and running water there were other miseries inflicted upon us.

All through the nights after the thaw, two men with a team of horses operated the primitive sanitary systems.

The progress of this crew throughout the principal residential section of the town was clearly indicated by the disagreeable odour that persisted through the next day.

For a season I trained with Annie Nicholson in the mysteries of shorthand. What a sweet young woman was Annie! She died in early life and of the disease of tuberculosis, which carried off so many of our people in those distant days before science overtook and destroyed many a scourge of humanity. Annie's brother, Robert Nicholson, was a prominent doctor in practice in Newcastle. His son Jack[3], an illustrious Harkins Academy export, has ventured far and accomplished much in the same realm of science. His work during the war in the production of artificial rubber has given us a new Canadian industry.

Many will say that the Government is responsible for the rubber industry, but I have always insisted that the effort of an individual is the reason for all progress and also much human misery in our world of sin and woe.

It is said that Henry Ford was the product of his times. But I am of the school which holds to the belief that the times were made by Henry Ford. Even in greater and far more important issues, men, few in number, determine and decide, while we obediently perform the miracles required of us.

Thus it is, sometimes, when we are caught up by war. So it has been in many dreadful and terrible holocausts through the ages.

The war of 1939 was for me an "unnecessary war" which should never have been undertaken. Churchill was responsible for the phrase "unnecessary war", but his reasoning follows a different course from my beliefs. He says the war could have been avoided by taking early decisive action. Whereas I am convinced we did wrong to engage in battle for Poland or any other foreign interest. I am an Empire Isolationist, subject only to companionship with the United States. True, when battle was joined against Germany nearly a score of years ago, I gave over my opposition to that war and took all means at my disposal to work for victory.

But when the Empire interests are jeopardized, as in the case of the Suez Canal, which does not belong to Egypt but to the Empire, then, in the words of John Galt: "We shall not sheath the sword until . . ."

It was at Harkins Academy that my first newspaper benefactions were bestowed upon a waiting public.

Here is an extract from Dr. F. P. Yorston, principal of Harkins Academy from 1892 to 1900:

> *About this time he (Max) began his first effort in journalism. He came to me with the suggestion that we should have a school newspaper.*

My generation will remember Fred Yorston and most of our citizens will recall his brother-in-law, Hugh Harrison, who was principal of the School at Chatham.

At an early age—about 13—I produced another newspaper. That was in the year 1893. The paper was called *The Leader*. It cost a cent. Many copies are now in my keeping, though I had none when I grew up to man's estate. But since then friends have sent me several files. These are bound in a leather case. Not because I admire the paper. I don't. But I admire the kindness of the persons who see enough merit in me to send me copies of it.

I had colleagues in the enterprise. We set up our own type, and drove the press by hand power. This paper was sold in the streets.

The whole thing ended through a delay in publication caused by dilatory habits. The paper should have been published on Saturday morning, but we were still labouring to produce it in the early hours of Sunday morning.

The newspaper enterprise was broken up by my father, who appeared at the office on that dreadful morn at 2 a.m.

He was shocked by the desecration of the Sabbath day. Work of necessity, yes. But labour over unessential tasks, never. Sunday newspaper publication was unnecessary and undesirable, and in direct contravention of the commandment, "Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work", preached by my father.

After his death I installed an organ in his old church at Newcastle, with an inscription "I give thy voice to speak now his is still". Fortunately for me the voice of the organ is only a metaphor, because I now produce every Sunday four million copies of a newspaper.

The vigorous intervention of my father on that Sunday morning deprived me of my pending issue of the newspaper, and my income from sales. The advertising revenue, too, was lost to me.

Mr. Anslow of the *Union Advocate*, the proprietor of our plant and the owner of our supply of newsprint, demanded payment for the work done on the newspaper issue that never was. But I could not pay. I offered to assign

my future profits from the Saint John *Sun*. My plan for delayed payment was rejected. I was desperate. Would he apply to my father for the sum of money, small, but to me immense at that time? Now my father was a stern parent, for I feared frightfully that he would be told of that crisis. Indeed I was terrified. I have been through three great financial panics, in 1907, 1914 and 1929. In two of these I had many cargoes at sea and plenty of reasons for anxiety and worry. But those crises, though giving me just cause for worry, did not bring such intense and almost hopeless despair as the personal economic upheaval of 1893, when I could not pay Mr. Anslow. Several merchants, too, asked impatiently for the return of their prepaid advertising money. What happened? Mr. Anslow added another terror to my life. At the sight of him I fled down side streets, into doorways and up steep hills. (He was stout and lame.) Two years on, I repurchased my freedom from fear.

One day, I regret to tell, Mr. Anslow lost himself in the forest while on a hunting expedition and he was never heard of again until, twenty years on, his bones were found with watch and chain intact.

On the river Miramichi, the fourth commandment was obeyed—"But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates." We were forbidden all forms of sport on Sundays. The result was that we resorted to another, semi-secret, game, called "Birds in the Bush",[4] a game of chance which was invaluable to me because it gave me such insight into human nature.

Dr. Philip Cox, my first schoolmaster, Principal of Harkins Academy from 1884 to 1892 and one-time Professor of Biology at the University of New Brunswick, gave an account of my schooldays which I repeat in part:

> *When he came to my class he was twelve or thirteen years old. He sat near the front—for I was always anxious to keep the lively ones where I could see them. He impressed me as being an absent-minded boy, as if he were always thinking of something beyond the subjects of the classroom, or perhaps of the next prank he could carry out with success.*
>
> *He war not regarded as a clever student but only as a fair average, though unquestionably he possessed a marked talent for mathematics. Of course, he took all the subjects of the high school including Latin and made fair progress. Mathematics, however, were his specialty. His absentmindedness was due largely to a very active imagination. On the general subjects of the course, as I have said, he was only a fair student,*

but on mathematics he would always concentrate. He was certainly among the boys frequently detained after school.

I saw in him nothing whatever out of the ordinary except his lively imagination and extreme restlessness. Simply because of his inability to concentrate I never believed that he would make any great success of his life.

The good doctor often complained of my wandering mind. He brought me back to reality by pulling the lobes of my ears. Then I began to take up the habit when I was at study, and, for the same reason. That is why I have such long ear lobes.

Dr. Yorston has also written on my schooldays, an account which I consider quite favourable, which I put before my readers.

During his last year in school he paid no attention whatever to any subject of the school. He sat in a little chair by himself up in front. He was placed there to prevent him from annoying the other pupils and distracting their attention from their work. The subject of literature was Macaulay's essay "Warren Hastings". I did not believe, at the time, that Max was even aware of the subject of my reading. He paid so little attention to me. At the end of the term, however, I asked the pupils to write a critical essay on this subject and, to my complete surprise, Max handed me one from himself. It was by far the best essay submitted by any of the pupils. It was a masterpiece for so young a boy and I took it with great pride to his father, who had, by that time, almost despaired of him. His father, like myself, was astonished at this literary talent so unexpectedly revealed.

He never finished the high school course. He left school while in the tenth grade. I never believed then that he would be in any way successful. This was simply because he never stuck at anything but was switching from one idea to another. There was never any doubt about his ability but he was so mischievous that I did not believe his ability would ever possibly carry him to success.

Howard Williston's "Jewellery" Shop.
MAX AITKEN, aged 7.

"The Halifax Hotel, long since torn down, became my headquarters. From that old and venerable inn I made many journeys . . ."

"Halifax, with its beautiful harbour, naval station and military garrison . . . Climbing to the top of the old fort which crowns the steep hill above the town, the onlooker will see a great land-locked bay stretching out towards the Atlantic . . ."

There were two or three citizens who believed in me, not for any good reason, but "just because" as we used to say in my childhood.

Mr. R. R. Call was one friend. He was a magnificent citizen. There's a book about him in the Old Manse Library in Newcastle. That book records the funeral sermon preached by my father, and I must say it's a very good sermon of remarkable restraint considering Mr. Call and my father were on most intimate terms.

I have a vivid recollection of Mr. Call. His son Joe was engaged to marry my sister Rahno. He went off to the West to gather a fortune. Within a short time, perhaps a week, word came to my father from Denver in Colorado that Joe Call was dead. He was asked to inform the family. There were at least two stricken households in our town, certainly the Call household and also my own home.

I recall vividly my mother rocking to and fro on a chair upholstered in horse hair, crying in grief and misery over the untimely and tragic death of

John Fitzwilliam Stairs

Joe. I was terrified and added my cries to the general confusion. My mother did not give any attention to my panic and for long the death of a member of our community distressed and frightened me.

The funeral ceremonies of little children who died in our congregation brought on tempests of despair in my tortured brain. For I was often, or perhaps always, called on to act as a pallbearer. At the graveside I had much difficulty in suppressing a sense of panic bordering on hysteria, and my relief was brief when we returned from the churchyard. We pallbearers usually wore white cotton gloves served out by Colonel Maltby, the undertaker. These mementos of gloom I carried home and hid in a little loft over the wing of our house.

One day I collected the set of gloves and burned them in a frying pan in the barn loft, at the risk of setting the whole place on fire. Foolishly I never confessed my panic to any person. I was ashamed, particularly as certain doubts obsessed me which brought me down often and again in unreasoning fear.

To know the mind of a child is given to few persons, and even such experiences as I sustained in my early years have not brought wisdom or understanding in my old age. I don't know how or why my

Izaak Walton Killam.
"His judgment was good, his courage knew no high."

anxiety complex was dissipated. But it was.

Doubt and uncertainty have given way to a supreme and confident belief in the teachings of the Westminster Confession of Faith, once the textbook of the Presbyterian Church and now shunned and dodged by most of the brethren.

Fate plays many strange and curious tricks. Mr. Call himself died instantly in his own sleigh attending the funeral of Mr. Fleming, who was the stationmaster.

But I've wandered far from my story of Mr. Call. He didn't like walking, so sometimes he would give me five cents to go to the post for his mail. I always tried to be close to Mr. Call when mail time came around.

There were other sources of supply more rewarding but not quite so agreeable. I could always earn a little money (not much) by picking potato-bugs. Up and down the rows of potato plants the labourers walked, not like Nehemiah's servants with a trowel in one hand and a sword in the other, but with a can and a stick. Two cents for each full can was the reward, if I remember rightly. The bugs were dumped on a fire of green sticks. A tough task in midsummer during holidays. The youth of New Brunswick can be grateful for the introduction of chemical methods of destroying potato-bugs.

Then there was the spoolwood. Mr. C. D. Manny was the boss, father of the gifted and energetic Louise Manny, with the well-stored mind. The wood was shaped by machine and shipped abroad in packages for use in the manufacture of spools. It was necessary to tie the sticks together firmly so that the cargo might be securely packed on board ship. We called the process "bunching spoolwood". Tying up the "bunch" was a knack. I was never good at it, but I tried. Many a time Will Corbett[5] would tie the knots for me. Bunching spoolwood was not a holiday pursuit. It involved "playing truant" and I was highly skilled in that black art.

We formed an association and called it the "Truants' Club". Our refuge was known in that day as Brown's Brook. Maybe the name has been changed. There seems to be a passion for setting up new names in old streets. But I do hope that the Browns have not been deprived of their Brook.

Of course we had to carry food with us, and for supplies we relied upon eggs—these were easy to come by.

Our club was destroyed when Hubert Sinclair, driving down Creaghan's Hill in an old-fashioned buggy with his sister, Floss Sinclair, afterwards

Mrs. McKane, met our teacher Miss McLaughlin, who welcomed him with congratulations on his swift recovery from serious illness. It was, of course, a truant illness.

Thereafter trouble, trouble everywhere. And the "Truants' Club" was dissolved.

The ladies of our congregation of St. James's on the Hill were devoted and dedicated workers for the glory of God. Now that the Church on the Hill has become a mixture of many religious philosophies it astonishes me that the spiritual urge is as vigorous as of old. For I held the firm and fixed view that our strength depended to some considerable measure on a competitive system which has always meant much in spreading the Good Word; at any rate, to the heathen races.

When I was 11 years of age the Women's Auxiliary installed a Pipe Organ, which was the pride of the whole community. I was hired at 25 cents a week to "pump" that organ. It was worked on air, and I supplied the air by means of a bellows. During church services when there was light and heat I had no complaints, for I sheltered behind a screen where I was free to read, and, strangely, my favourite reading was the Old Testament and in particular First and Second Samuel.

But on choir practice nights when the church was cold and the light dim I detested my job, even though I had the advantage over members of the choir of vigorous exercise in pumping up-down-up-down, keeping a steady rhythm lest the organ notes varied in tone through excessive pressure.

On a dull and dreary Sunday evening in midwinter after a sleepless night, I fell into slumber, dreaming of pumpkin pie. I was not aroused by the voice of the Minister announcing the hymn—"A few more years shall roll."

The organ gave no response. Silence was all about. When Mr. John Brander awakened me I grasped the pump handle and worked desperately with too much energy. The organ gave out a wailing noise, as though a restless spirit was trying to escape from the graveyard.

I got the sack. Dismissal was my portion. The next Sunday I was compelled to sit in the Manse pew, in the front line, in face of the congregation. Surely it seemed everybody was looking at me and disapproving without pity of my dreadful conduct. My brother took my place behind the screen at the pump which controlled the flow of air to the organ. He made no mistakes—no errors. A perfect performance. Thus it was that I lost my first job and my salary of 25 cents a week.

[3] Jack Nicholson was a Beaverbrook scholar in 1917.

[4] *Editor's Note*: "Birds in the Bush" was a variation of the game of marbles. One boy concealed a number of marbles between his hands, shook them and asked his opponent to guess the number. If the opponent guessed right, he won the marbles; if wrong, he had to hand over his own supply. A subtlety of the game was the use of different sized marbles, so affecting the sound and the space occupied. A study of psychology doubtless played a big part in the game.

[5] *Editor's Note*: The following is an extract of a letter which *The Atlantic Advocate* received from Mr. William Corbett:—

> "Sixty years ago September 1st, I was unfortunate, while on the way to the marriage of a friend of mine. We met with an accident, in which I lost my right leg. I was taken to Chatham to the Hotel Dieu Hospital where the doctors found it was necessary to amputate the limb. Max Aitken was at that time with L. J. Tweedie in Chatham studying law. And he used to come to see me quite often, and I have always had very fond recollection of those visits, and his words of encouragement to me. I had known Max for about ten years previous to this time, and always we were friends, and attended Harkins Academy together when Dr. Philip Cox was principal.
>
> "On his fiftieth birthday I had a cable from him from London, England, saying that he was making me an annuity of a thousand dollars a year for the rest of my life; was I ever surprised, and glad of that gift! Dr. Philip Cox was one of several others who received similar annuities that day. I have been receiving that now for twenty-seven years, and also Max's very warm friendship through all the years. He has surely done a lot of good for the town of Newcastle and also for the Province of New Brunswick."

6

"The principal newsboy was, naturally, me"

MY RECORD OF SCHOOL attendance is not good. The Government reports of teachers in the 1890's to the Department of Education do not add to my reputation.

Recently in Beaverbrook I was opening a new school and advising the children in the usual commonplace terms, when Dr. MacDiarmid, the famous Superintendent of Education, produced the teachers' records of their classes disclosing the dreadful account of my absenteeism. The children who were present at the school opening on that day really liked Dr. MacDiarmid's revelation.

"Playing truant" was not an easy role when Dr. Cox was Principal. When he called us "Barbarians" we swiftly knew about "crime and punishment". The "Back Room" was the "chamber of torture".

Dr. Cox left us for St. John High School and a Chair at the University of New Brunswick. In school days I respected and admired him, and ever after looked on him with affection and devotion.

Journalism, my last love, was also my first. Newcastle, of course, did not boast a daily newspaper, but Saint John, the commercial capital of New Brunswick, 200 miles away, produced two morning newspapers. These had to be taken from house to house to subscribers, or sold in the roads or streets of the town. The principal newsboy was, naturally, me.

I am still selling papers. The margin of profit has improved. Prices are up from one cent to two-pence per copy and the sale has increased. The delivery rounds were shorter of old, and I was my own roundsman. Now the distribution area has been enlarged ("from Dan to Beer-sheba" as my father would have said) and there may be ten thousand news agents, or possibly twenty thousand. One or many, the principle is the same.

I became the local correspondent of the Saint John *Sun*, sending in the items of local news. Since I was paid by the column at the rate of $1, it was necessary to agonize on occasion to spin out the material when news was short.

Not content with selling the newspaper and writing for it, I also set out to solicit annual subscriptions for delivery by mail in country districts. On 21st October, 1893, there appeared a notice in the Saint John *Sun*: "W. Max Aitken is collector for the Daily and Weekly Sun along the North Shore."

At that time I was 14 years of age.

Under other conditions a boy born with these aptitudes would probably have gone straight into journalism. In fact, I lament that I did not do so. What I might have forfeited in cash by leaving my business career out, I would have made good by a life full of human interest. But these flights of

nonsense on the part of the successful in one sphere, casting longing glances at another, are not to be taken too seriously. That, however, my inclination to journalism was not the mere fancy of the businessman or politician who thinks he would have done better as a teacher or a preacher is proved by my later career.

The matter was really settled by urgent practical considerations—as the initial careers of men without money backing nearly always are.

No favourable conditions obtained in journalism in New Brunswick in the time we are dealing with. There was hardly a living wage for any man in the profession, and the prospects in that sparsely populated area appeared less than nothing. I was one of a large family, all of whom had to earn their bread as quickly as possible, as soon as we passed out of boyhood. These necessities pointed directly either to business or the bar.

For a business career, as for journalism, I had qualified myself in some sort, and on the same battle-ground—the open streets. There I measured myself against my contemporaries in the art of appraising values—chiefly of marbles, and in that judgment of character and opportunity which leads to a profitable "swop". I was a calculating youth, (my pranks forgotten): there was no doubt a certain measure of determination as I clinched the bargain, and my hand swept down to grab the prize. In that moment of the deal I was all Scot. It is not perhaps a very pleasant picture of youth. But what would you have? The pietists disapprove the naughty boy, who may turn out to be a paladin or a poet—and acclaim the quiet-mannered youth of sublime common sense who hoards his pennies or uses them for profit. The humanists, on the other hand, can forgive naughtiness with reason, but condemn the infant with too shrewd an eye for appraising the value of a marble. I have had the worst of both worlds. My critics have fallen with sharp swords on my admission that I had a premature capacity for snatching at the main chance. My parents and teachers, on the other hand, totally failed to appreciate the restlessness of the natural boy. A Presbyterian Manse is not exactly an ideal setting for pranks, harmless or otherwise. As in every Evangelical household the moral standard was high—too high for the natural gay spirits and frailty of boyhood—and the discipline was severe.

Indeed, an extraordinary Apocrypha of me has sprung up.

These stories have various characteristics in common. I was always wicked and the other fellow who tells imaginary incidents was always clever. These yarns cannot be quite right. The consistent goodness of the other fellow should make my neighbours suspicious.

In any case, my wickedness was certainly punished for I invariably got the worst of it, according to this Apocrypha.

I don't complain. For there were so many disreputable adventures that the romantic talents of some of my fellow citizens need not be called into account.

There is a story connected with a ship that came into port from Norway to take on a cargo of deals. The crew was Norwegian. A row broke out on shipboard, and a sailor was killed. He was of the Lutheran faith, and when my father buried him in St. James's churchyard his companions—possibly his murderers—erected a cross to mark his grave. But in those days in our Church we didn't contemplate the cross with equanimity. By many of the congregation it was looked on as a Roman Catholic symbol, that was the teaching of John Knox. To this day, of course, Presbyterian churches in Scotland are surmounted by a cock instead of a cross. However, one of the church members, who had squinting eyes, pulled the Lutheran cross from its foundations and with a Jennie Geddes gesture threw it over the fence.

Now our little band of companions may not have been outraged by the member's conduct, but we certainly took advantage of the incident. We gathered round his house, shouting "Cockie-eyed cut-throat, who stole the cross?" We did not do any physical injury to the church member, but my father did considerable physical damage to me when he was informed of the affair.

My father and the trustees restored the cross. Is it still standing? The location of that grave was west of the old Sunday school, now torn down, and on the line of the old fence along the street.

I have had more joys than sorrows. And by reason of much strength nearly four score years of splendid companionships, though most of them have been sundered by time. Although I wandered far, I was never separated from the friends of my young days. Fraternal associations that were never disturbed by time or distance.

At the turn of the half-century my intimate circle of friends and I were like sturdy trees left standing in a clear felled forest. Then suddenly almost without warning came the "blast of the terrible ones as a storm against the wall".

My dearly loved and greatly trusted friend, W. D. Ross, a native of Nova Scotia, invaded the West. He was Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario and I went to Toronto for the purpose of seeing him in his vice-regal setting. Then again I journeyed to Ontario to see him once more when in the fullness of time W. D. Ross was dying of old age, with his faculties undamaged, his wit undimmed, and his faith untarnished.

The end of Izaak Walton Killam was to me a great grief.

J. P. Bickell, a son of the Manse, was my constant companion in his last years and we travelled together on many journeys and in distant lands.

McCullagh, the proprietor of the *Globe and Mail*, was possessed of such charm that he won friends everywhere. And I was under his spell.

Sir James Dunn, my first friend. Of him and of his unrivalled talents I will write again.

How I miss them. The trees that were still standing in the clear felled forest, now fallen. What a weariness in the Autumn of life.

Trees perish and can be replaced. It is impossible to replace the human beings that disappear from our lives.

We cannot make new friends easily and the gaps are not often filled up again. Hubert Sinclair, a companion of my early years, has come back into my life again, and I hope to hold on to him for the future. He is strong and sure to outlive me. We shared many escapades in youthful days—certainly not to the credit of either of us.

Under the influence of the attractions of mixed company we joined the "Band of Hope", which was a subsidiary of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, managed by Mrs. Park. We were taught to believe in life-long abstinence from drink, and we sang many pleasant and jolly choruses together in praise of temperance.

We slipped and fell from grace in the cellar of the Manse, and we became practised backsliders when we managed to get access to the private stock of Mr. Edward Sinclair. Years afterwards I asked Hubert Sinclair why we had never been caught in our raids on his father's cellar. He replied: "Because too many persons drew upon it."

There may have been a mixture of naughtiness and common sense in my venture in my young days into the production of eggs.

I kept hens in the barn attached to the Manse and fed them on scraps collected from friendly neighbours. The eggs were sold to the townspeople. The story now is that I raided my mother's pantry and sold a cooked egg to one of my customers—the local druggist. When he opened it to make an egg-nog, he got a cooked egg. My own opinion is that the story was cooked and not the egg.

The most interesting version of this fable was written by Lord Castlerosse, who visited me at Newcastle. I now repeat it.

> *Besides, he kept chickens, but this was a strictly private venture.*
>
> *The town of Newcastle is replete with stories about these chickens and the cow, all of which Lord Beaverbrook now denies.*

However, this is certain, that by the age of eight, Max Aitken had established an organised egg market on his own account.

On one occasion he received a sudden call for an unexpected number of eggs and he ran short. In the kitchen reposed a fine store belonging to the household. They would not be wanted, but his mother was out.

Max Aitken took a quick decision. He borrowed the family eggs, leaving no note to that effect.

The next day he met his client.

"Max," she said, "were those eggs fresh?"

"Why, weren't they?" replied Max in the most innocent tone of voice.

"Well," continued his victim, "they were the first fresh-laid eggs I have ever seen arrive in the world hard-boiled."

"Ah!" said little Max, now all effrontery. "I was frightened that that thunderstorm we had yesterday would affect the hens." And before his astonished client had recovered from her surprise, he had effected a quick retreat.

There was a Saint John weekly paper called *Progress*, in which a Newcastle column began to appear. It was clever and cynical. Many believed that I wrote every word of it. I have been shown on one occasion a cutting with the remark, "See what you wrote in 1893?" I did not write for *Progress*. The story belongs to the Beaverbrook Apocrypha.

As the paragraphs in *Progress* were rather tart, some aggrieved persons who could not be convinced of my innocence complained to my father. In any case, I had a pretty bad time and my father must have been greatly troubled about his wayward son, who seemed to be qualifying for a career which could only end in hell-fire. What was to be done with a boy who in school seemed able to do anything but would in effect do nothing? How could he deal with a lad required to translate *Gallia est omnis divisa in partes tres*, the old tag about Gaul as a whole being divided into three parts, who dodged his task, declaring he would rather learn how to divide 25 cents into three parts?

Once things came to such a pass that I ran away from home. I decided to go to the forest and stay there free from any mumbling word. With a very small sum of money I bought a second-hand ticket to Kent Junction, which was to have been my base. But instead of carrying with me the necessary equipment for such an expedition, I took my beloved little book-case which had been given to me for a Christmas present, neglecting altogether my tiny

collection of books. I did take a jack-knife and the last issue of the "Presbyterian Witness", for I meant to lead a godly though lonely life.

My father made a journey to reclaim the prodigal—and all for a time was forgiven.

Very little has been said so far of the personal characteristics of my parents. Yet it is interesting, if sometimes fanciful, as modern students of heredity maintain, to trace our mental attributes to our immediate forbears. My father was a man of good intellectual parts, with a natural turn for scholarship and a taste for wide reading. This interest he transmitted to me—or else the mere fact that a quick-witted boy had a good library at his disposal turned his mind in the direction of letters. How I found time for my reading in the course of a career terrifically active is something of a mystery to my friends, but that I always read on a wide if somewhat eclectic scale, and still so read, is a fact.

My father was a tall man, with a long white beard, always beautifully brushed. He looked to the full the part of ministerial authority. His disposition was amiable—possibly too amiable. He was popular, but that popularity was apt to be purchased by the avoidance of unpleasant problems. So long as his parishioners would defer to him outwardly he was content and cared more for this than the reality of getting his own way—a man easy-going by nature, intellectual by temperament, and by no means averse to the good things of this world—when they came his way, as they did when I began to acquire wealth which must have seemed to him a large fortune.

His library, the most important collection of books in our town, was his prized possession. His conversation always turned to books and authors. He even owned the Encyclopaedia. Possibly he might have written a work of his own if he had been ambitious. But he was not.

The book collection was set out in a small and attractive room on the ground floor of the Manse. The book shelves were built in, and all occupied.

My father's study was on the second floor in the wing. Here he would sit all evening and into the late night, three or even four o'clock, reading and smoking one pipe after another. His supply of tobacco came in plugs. In winter the little study was overheated by a stove set up in a corner of the room and often red-hot. It was a smoke-filled room and the single window and door always closed.

The only interruption of this reading routine was sermon day. On Friday my father would prepare in his own large and careless handwriting two Sunday sermons, on paper specially adapted to his purpose. When this task was over, my mother would stitch the sheets together with needle and

thread, and, I noticed, without ever stopping to read those religious works. I have sought out relics of my father, but never, never can I find a sermon in his own handwriting. What may have been the fate of that vast output of half a century I cannot imagine.

For many years after I had settled down he sent me bundles of books, always carefully selected and invariably including one or two homilies on Christian duty. He wrote me many letters, sometimes lengthy, often amusing, and occasionally disclosing considerable descriptive powers. He sent me one short letter giving me a large and generous collection of his books. Here it is.

Newcastle, N.B.
Oct. 2nd, 1902

My dear Max,

Sent you today (Thursday) Box of Books. I found that to send it by Express *was too expensive. It would have cost considerably over a Dollar. I resolved therefore to send it by* Freight *which transmits at a much more reasonable price. You will find enclosed* Bill of lading*—I see the weight is 60 lbs.—a tolerable weight for the size of the box. Anderson*[6] *took it up to the Railway Station and Mrs. Fleming told him that it would cost 38 cents. I left you to pay this: which you can do when you present your Bill of lading at the Station and get the box sent up to the Roy Buildings. Transmission by* Freight *does not entitle to the* delivery *of goods in Halifax. The box will certainly be at Halifax Freight Station by Friday noon. Hoping you may like the books. Let me hear from you after receiving them.*

Love from all here

Yours affectionately
W. Aitken

The signature is interesting—I have examined a series of family letters written by my father, always signed 'W. Aitken'.

Many years ago he sent me a version of the 23rd Psalm which I have kept. It is a departure from the metrical version in the Scottish Book of Psalms and, to me, most beautiful.

The Lord himself my Shepherd is
Who doth me feed and safely keep
What can I want that's truly good
While I am one of his own sheep?
He makes me lie down and rest
In pleasant pastures, tender grass
He keeps and gently leadeth me
Near the sweet streams of quietness.

For my knowledge of the Bible, for my devotion to books and for my love of literature I am indebted to him. I am my father's son.

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[6] "Anderson" is the family nickname for Allan Aitken.

7

“Required to wash empty bottles”

IT WAS MY MOTHER, hale and vigorous to the age of 84, who bequeathed me energy and drive.

She also bequeathed me, involuntarily, the curse of asthma. Her own attacks of this nervous affliction often gave way to bronchitis. The warning note would be sounded in the early hours before daybreak, when her laboured breathing would summon my sister to action. There was no adrenalin in those times to give easy and quick relief. Dr. Pedolin would be summoned, and simple yet successful remedies would be applied.

My mother's hand would be lifted from the control of the household for a time, and with disastrous results.

Discipline was abandoned and rules of conduct were relaxed. Our daily bread, which was baked by my mother twice weekly, rising magnificently at her command, was heavy and dejected when my sister was responsible for the family loaf. And the biscuits, light and fluffy under my mother's care, became flat and sad as though grieving for her illness.

A woman of remarkable strength of character and practical ability, it was on her shoulders that rested the main burden of bringing up a large family on exiguous means. It was her determination and shrewdness—in itself the long inheritance of an Ulster stock, which transmitted to me courage, beneficial or destructive as the reader may choose to consider it, and such driving force as I have displayed. And my high spirits are a present from my mother. She always treated me with an affection tinged by a kind of tolerant humour as though my peerage and all the rest of it was a joke—one of those pranks which must be forgiven to a clever if slightly eccentric boy. Shrewd indeed, and quick at repartee. When someone in England said to her "I know your distinguished son," her reply was—"Which one?"

Certainly she must have envisaged an interesting destiny for her children for she gave them curious names. Rahno, a strange name for a woman; Traven, after Tartraven in Scotland; Magnus, a Scottish name not often heard in Canada.

My name was not curious—William Maxwell—but it was not without implication. For when I grew up with my name shortened to Max, I was in my early days sometimes mistaken for a Jew, because of course the name is common with that race. In our town we weren't conscious of Jews. One who came from foreign parts had adopted the very appropriate name of Rich. Maybe he has been forgotten. Perhaps the family name is now MacGregor. Mr. Rich asked me to arrange his naturalization papers, and Mr. Tweedie's office, carrying out the task for a fee, paid me two dollars for introducing the business. Mr. Rich, however, was not at any disadvantage because of Jewry.

We had no conception of race differences but just looked upon Jews as other citizens.

The Jews are clever. Their industry is prodigious. They are shedding much of their international unpopularity. Jewesses have always appealed to me. Once I considered marrying a Jewess. She is beautiful and brilliant, like a glittering diamond set in large green emeralds—loyal and truthful and with all her beauty there is much wisdom.

Before the war in the Jewish community in Vienna there was a group of high-spirited, intelligent and cultured citizens and their company was most agreeable to me. It was there and in such surroundings that we met. When Hitler came in, the Jews were of course subjected to dreadful persecution and torture. This young Jewess fled to England where she found friends to comfort her and set her in the way to work. Little she knew of English literature and customs. But she worked steadily, acquiring an excellent grasp of London newspapers. Writing was her natural talent and she made full use of her gift.

When world war broke out dreadful tragedy was her portion. Her father and mother, living in Yugoslavia, were seized by the Germans and suffered the same fate as the French Royalists during the Revolution, but without the dignity of the guillotine. Human sympathy brought little comfort to their daughter. Should I ask her to marry me? Surely she would have accepted. Possibly I did wrong to hold back.

But she was young and I was old. She had many admirers of youthful and imaginative bent, while I was fixed and set in my ways. "Many desire, but few or none deserve" was the poet's flight of fancy describing this young woman, sought out and flattered by her court of admirers.

One winter day at noon, in cold and blustering weather, she called on me to say she would marry a man of real ability and good position, with widespread influence. I at once wrote him "You are marrying a woman of rare character. She has so many good qualities that I cannot think of any other living person who is her equal. Then her great beauty and her gay conversation and her inimitable wit place her first in the list of those who fascinate and bewitch us."

The day of the wedding was an occasion for gaiety, mixed with emotion.

Oh! ever thus, from childhood's hour,
I've seen my fondest hope decay;
I never loved a tree or flower,
But 'twas the first to fade away.

My glamorous and happy marriage to Gladys Drury, a member of that distinguished family of Saint John, New Brunswick, remains the most cherished of all my memories. She died when her beauty and energy were untouched by age. Her place in my heart can never be filled.

It may be that the most wonderful triumph in my whole life was the love and devotion that I inspired in Gladys Beaverbrook. That bright guiding light of recollection can never be extinguished.

There is, however, unpaid the debt I owe to Jane Aitken.

It was from my mother's side that springs a strenuous caution in my own nature, that frequent clinging to second thoughts, those refusals to be intoxicated by flatterers, which have saved me time and again from the ruin which my enemies often, in my early life, predicted for me.

But all this could not be realised or foreseen by my mother in New Brunswick in the 1890's. Her main anxiety was to give me the best education available and then turn me to earning my living. It was clear that I had passed beyond the capacities of the school and the town—both from the point of view of education and control. Accordingly in my 16th year I was sent to Dalhousie University in Halifax.

The applicants for entry to the university were assembled in a classroom and required to write. My work was quite good and for two days the examination papers presented no difficulties. The third day was given over to Greek or Latin or both and my hostility to these dead languages overwhelmed me at the very outset. Revulsion set in. The paper was solemnly returned to the examiner with my declaration that a university career held no attractions as it involved unnecessary and even useless labour in futile educational pursuits. My prospects of college class rooms were over for good and all.

Again my father, patient as ever, was anxious to send me to a bank as a clerk. It was not easy in those days to get a nomination, but he was assured that he had the necessary influence to secure me a place in the Bank of Nova Scotia. Passive resistance resulted in the collapse of this plan. Now, and for many years, my name is enrolled in the list of the clients of that same Bank of Nova Scotia. It has been better to be a customer instead of an employee.

Back again to Newcastle and to another cycle of disgrace with criticism. Independence then became a pursuit. E. Lee Street gave me a job in his drug store with a salary of $1 weekly. My newspaper correspondence was resumed, still at the rate of $1 per column. My time in the drug store was taken up in attending to the wants of those who required the remedies already prepared. The dispensing of drugs ordered by prescription from

doctors was a mystery to which I would have been initiated in due course. But fate decided otherwise. A disposition on my part to diagnose and prescribe remedies, led to some prankish tricks. But there was no pleasure in life at the drug store. For I was required to wash empty bottles for hours every day. It was a tiresome task and I could not any longer put up with it.

A change of occupation became my obsession.

An important customer was in the habit of visiting the drug store at the Christmas season. He would buy many bits and pieces of "fancy goods" as this stock was called. His purchases were given out to his friends as Christmas presents. Many simple and even humble homes were gratified by Mr. Edward Sinclair's bounty.

I was greatly interested in the profit margin of my employer. A basket costing four dollars would bring seven of Mr. Sinclair's money.[7] But I never disclosed the excessive gains of E. Lee Street, the owner of the drug store, even though my mother was the recipient of that basket. Mr. Sinclair always remembered her at Christmas.

It was taking advantage of the season's goodwill when I told Mr. Sinclair of my wish to study law under Richard Bedford Bennett down the river at Chatham. He promised to help me. And I had the benefit of his generous and bountiful assistance.

It was several years after this gift supporting my educational programme, that I repaid the sum. To my deep regret he was dead by the time I began to make real headway in my life. He never knew that his student had turned up trumps.

Now a large building with excellent equipment provides recreation for the young people of Newcastle. It is called the Edward Sinclair Rink. And it is an inadequate yet grateful recognition of my devotion to the memory of my benefactor.

The new project as a student at law opened up admirably and with mighty hopes and no fears. The examining board at Fredericton passed me through my preliminary examination with approval. Possibly my place was second in the list of applications for admission to study law.

Was law the real objective? No! My motive was a desire to emulate R. B. Bennett, the rising young barrister of 26 years of age who was my hero and pattern of worldly success.

He had been a schoolteacher at Douglastown, a town lying between Newcastle and Chatham, where the great firm of Gilmour and Rankin operated with such credit in the early years of the century.

I saw him for the first time on the wharf at Douglastown when the river steamboat[8] called there to take up passengers for Newcastle. He was slight of figure, with a freckled face. He was wearing a Derby hat a bit too big for him. His clothes were neat and for our community he would be described as a well-dressed young man. Tall, austere, forbidding, conscious of greatness, yet he was self-deprecating to a degree. He was too polite, and yet again and again he would burst out in angry indignation against slights and injustice, fancied or real, using tough and tiresome language. The storm would not pass quickly. His conversation often flattered those about him. His praise had a touch of insincerity, yet he was intellectually an honest man. He talked much of Disraeli, and it could be sensed that he hoped to emulate the career of the British Prime Minister. He quoted often and with rhetorical effort Disraeli's phrase "Look further, look further yet, what there to remedy and redeem!"[9] Even in his youth his confidence in himself did not seem out of place. Surely he would go far.

His account books show he set down from day to day every cent he spent. He was at that time parsimonious, tightfisted, and even miserly, though he afterwards became big in spirit, free in spending, and in his closing years utterly regardless of money.

He travelled that day on the steamboat to Newcastle. The fare was ten cents. I always travelled free. In that short journey of four or five miles I formed a strong friendship that lasted for more than fifty years.

Bennett was deeply religious and a belligerent Methodist. It was my habit during our long relationship, if I wished to arouse him, to raise doctrinal questions. In particular I dwelt upon the doctrine of predestination. He never could sustain the argument with any show of moderation. He taught at Sunday school. In fact, he liked to teach, it was a role that suited him. In his young days in New Brunswick he carried a Bible about with him when he travelled, and through the years presented me with many volumes of the Temple edition. He denounced profanity on every occasion. Card games did not please him, dancing he deplored. No smoking, no drinking, was his habit which he insisted earnestly on trying to impose upon those about him.[10] His appetite for sweets was insatiable and his resentment was swift if this custom should be likened to the drinking excesses of some of his companions (me). This devotion to Methodist principles in his youth influenced him throughout his long life. In his years of retirement in England he surprised and astonished me by reading the lessons in the Episcopalian Church near Leatherhead. He was buried by three Episcopalian Bishops and the General of the Salvation Army. Not a Methodist Minister present, so far as I could see.

I loved the man.

It was the custom in New Brunswick to complete legal training on the apprenticeship basis instead of by taking a course of study at a school of law. Only those who were fortunately placed could afford to attend law classes. Others were compelled to resort to actual experience of the lawyer's office. Thus it was that my career of study was launched under Bennett along with his senior partner L. J. Tweedie, and at Chatham a few miles down river.

I lived at the Adams House (still standing), called after the distinguished political family and owned by Thomas Flanagan. There was, of course, a Back Room hidden from view. Drink was on sale and Parker Hickey, the clerk who allotted the rooms to visitors, was also sole and only keeper of the Secret Chamber.

He had many customers, not always as interesting as Mr. William Richards, important lumberman of the Miramichi. Mr. Richards had been careless in his youth when handling a mill saw. Resting, talking, walking, eating, he rubbed continuously the stump of the missing thumb resulting from the unfortunate encounter with a buzz saw.

Mr. Richards, when residing at the Adams House, always visited that Back Room in the early morning and always rubbing that stump. He would ask most politely for a glass and some sugar. He added Angostura bitters and a small measure of hot water, just enough to dissolve the sugar. Du Kuyper gin completed the mixture. Then a big breakfast.

We had a gay time in the little Back Room. It was our club, our forum. Here we discussed all the important events of the day, both world-wide and local. In the summer time, we would hire a horse and buggy and drive off to a dance in the country. The dances were called "Bonnet Hops" and we were advised of their whereabouts by the village fiddler. But we were always welcome for we went well supplied with refreshments from the little Back Room. The lumberjacks were glad to see us. They were gentle and kindly by nature but quarrels would sometimes flare up as the refreshments flowed. We didn't wish to provoke a fight but were never disappointed when a small altercation broke out.

Mr. Tweedie of my law firm took an interest in Parker Hickey, who left for Montreal with a letter of introduction to the traffic manager of the Canadian Pacific Railway. Mr. Usher, for that was his name, appointed my friend Parker a night clerk at the Place Viger Hotel. He climbed up and up in the service until he became Chief Steward at $75 a month salary and keep, and all the cigars and liquid refreshment that he cared to consume.

Soon after Parker went to work on the passenger boats plying on the St. Lawrence River. Again promotion. He became head waiter on the principal tourist ship, the *Rapids King*. Then he began to work himself down from head waiter to assistant head waiter to waiter. The end of the summer season saved him from being demoted to dishwasher!

These river boats on the down journey were crowded with passengers running the rapids. It was most exciting when the ship tossed about in the swift and stormy waters. The passengers pretended that they were facing a brave duel with death, but everybody on board understood that there was really no danger. On the return journey when the rapids had to be navigated at slow speed there were no passengers, just crewmen, who spent, drank and gambled all their tips and pay.

Parker had many adventures that summer. Money was always either flowing freely or gone forever. But Parker was enterprising, and his memory was good. He recalled that in New Brunswick the breweries, when visited by prospective customers, were hospitable and disposed generously of their products. So one day at Prescott he gathered some of his pals who were also broke and called on the local brewery. For three miles they trudged eagerly through dust and heat expectant of reviving refreshment. Not at all. A stony-faced attendant showed them through the plant. They were allowed the smell of the beer, but not the taste. Back along the hot and dusty road Parker's popularity, high at the outset of the journey, had sunk to a low ebb.

Employment in winter was always a problem and Parker saw that the gay, but far from gainful, life he was leading would take him nowhere. He solved his puzzle by joining the brokerage business of the Montreal Stock Exchange. From that day forward Parker Hickey forgot the past and started constructively to employ all his energies. In time he became a partner in the brokerage business he had joined, and his own house of Hickey, Donaldson and Co. was soon formed.

Now Parker Hickey is wealthy, able, greatly respected and much loved. Never himself the recipient of financial aid, he has founded most valuable scholarships at the University of New Brunswick for the exclusive benefit of residents of the North Shore of the Province.

The *Royal Reader* in use in the schools of New Brunswick taught us:

'Tis a lesson you should heed;
Try, try, try again.
If at first you don't succeed,
Try, try, try again.

Parker tried three times before he made the bull's eye. I had four shots at the target.

That is the end of my story, with a footnote. Many, many years ago, Mr. James Mackintosh, the schoolmaster, said: "Jimmy Dunn and Max Aitken think they are very clever fellows, but Parker Hickey is cleverer than either of them."

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[7] The profit margin did not seem unreasonable to me when I bought the Montreal Rolling Mills for four million dollars in March and sold it for seven million in July.

[8] The name of the steamboat was *The Miramichi*. She was superseded by a ship named *Max Aitken*, built at Newcastle on the Old Ferry Slip wharf.

[9] This quotation may not be accurate, it is written from memory.

[10] When he took up residence at Leatherhead in England, on an estate adjoining my place, his butler served champagne to guests and offered cigars and cigarettes. The champagne was real good stuff.

8

“I never did become a lawyer”

ONE DAY CHATHAM WAS given a charter, not the charter of a city, just a town. There were to be a Mayor and a Board of Aldermen. R. B. Bennett diffidently suggested one morning that he should stand for election. I seized with enthusiasm on the idea and promoted him to the point where he announced his candidature.

My friend, J. L. Stewart, the proprietor of the *Chatham World*, was persuaded to print a number of leaflets advocating Bennett's cause. Then I borrowed Bennett's bicycle, riding up and down the streets of Chatham distributing the leaflets and sometimes calling on citizens urging them to vote for my young hero, Richard Bedford Bennett—destined to be Prime Minister of Canada and when he retired, my next-door-neighbour in the valley of Mickleham Downs, Surrey. His body lies in the village churchyard. I hope one day New Brunswick will claim the mortal remains of her distinguished son.

If I remember rightly, Bennett's majority was very small. But I certainly took to myself the credit for the election. And on the night of victory, he agreed with me. The next morning he was not so sure! He came down to his office in a very bad temper, claiming that I had committed him by promises and pledges. Who could guess that "*upon night so sweet such awful morn could rise*!"

In Chatham I remained for a year and a half, but when R. B. Bennett left the firm, in order to take up another partnership in the far West, the incentive to study came to an end.

There was a farewell dinner. The local paper reported it as a "banquet". J. L. Stewart made the speech proposing the health of Bennett. He said —"People go to the lawyers in trouble and are soon in greater trouble. It is like seeking surcease from pain or sorrow in opium or alcohol. The last stage of the poor devils is worse than the first. The only good I can say of the profession, and the only thing that mars the guest of the evening, is that Mr. Bennett belongs to it. Lawyers pounce upon the estates of the deceased, and, with help of the judges, gobble them up. Creditors who try to get bankrupt estates out of the lawyers' hands are in danger of being made bankrupt themselves. Witnesses are browbeaten until sensitive and self-respecting persons would rather see guilty persons escape than appear against them. Judgments are sometimes withheld till half of the interested parties have died. No two courts, and no two judges seem able to agree on the simplest questions of law and justice. Instead of protecting liberty and property, the courts endanger the liberty and absorb the property of those who get into them. But it is necessary to keep on the good side of the

profession, for fear of the consequences in case one gets entangled in legal toils, and hence this toast."

It was not a popular speech and indeed as a consequence Mr. Stewart[11] lost some of his advertising revenue.

It was in the last days of 1896, when I was 17 years of age and Bennett had left Chatham on the first stage of his journey to Calgary, that I wrote him an immature letter.

Chatham, N.B.
Dec. 23rd, 1896.

Alderman R. B. Bennett L.B.B. Esq.
Pompeiiii
Hopewell Cape
Albert Co. N.B.
Dear Mr. Bennett

There is a letter here for James Russell c/o R. B. Bennett containing "No Correspondence". Shall I give it to Mr. Russell? One letter goes forward to you tonight. James McCarthy has sent money, saving costs, and same has been sent to Mr. Savoy.

The office is very dull today, and an air of tranquility rests on all the Town.

Mr. Tweedie has opened a branch office at Pallens Corner and business is brisk.[12] *This ink is frozen, this pen is bad, and this office is cold.*

The signature is obscure and the direction is interesting because, of course, it was an attempt on my part to imitate Bennett's own signature.

It is right to say that I have omitted a portion of this letter.

Bennett, who was marked with distinguished abilities and splendid force of character even in his young manhood, exercised a complete influence on me. He aroused my ambitions and steadied my purpose. He recognized latent, if immature, talent. However, he expected humanity to be made all of one piece, and he required boys to conform to his conception of the precepts of the Shorter Catechism.

The impression he made on me in my boyhood was one both of friendliness and firmness. His friendship for me withstood many tests and lasted with a single break from our first association through all the idiosyncrasies of my early life; in the days of my prosperity and in trouble and adversity.

When I developed political convictions I failed on one occasion to possess his entire confidence. In fact, to use a colloquial expression, "He got me wrong".

The difficulty arose on account of an interview I gave to the Toronto *Globe* in the month of May praising a Canadian budget introduced by the Liberal Government granting improved preference to Britain. This interview was not published until the autumn of the year, on the eve of a General Election, when Bennett was successful in defeating his Liberal opponents. As the interview appeared in the *Globe*, the obvious inference was that I was supporting Mackenzie King instead of Bennett. I was doing nothing of the sort. On the contrary, I was taking no part in Canadian affairs. At that time my interests were entirely confined to Empire policies.

Bennett abused me roundly. He sent no answer to my telegram of congratulation and, on arriving in England, he did severe damage to the cause I was advocating by saying in a speech: "Empire free trade is neither desirable nor practical." Such a sentiment was, I may say, entirely opposed to his own beliefs. This speech was delivered two nights before a bye-election that I was contesting on this very issue. I won, in the face of Bennett's intervention. After my victory I was taken by surprise when Bennett called me on the telephone at my house, declaring as an opening gambit—"I suppose my picture is turned to the wall!" The conversation ended with a reconciliation, which I greatly desired. Bennett later gave several interviews in effect endorsing Empire free trade, and throughout the negotiations for the Ottawa Agreements in which I was deeply concerned, he talked to me by transatlantic telephone almost every day. Thus it was that the storm passed and we renewed our friendship.

Bennett had turned the half-century and was on the home stretch, while I was over fifty years of age when our quarrel separated us for a brief space of time, and this work is dedicated to My Young Days.

"*Backward, turn backward, O time, in your flight,*
Make me a child again, just for tonight,"

sang the poet. I must try to fulfil Elizabeth Akers Allen's plea, although only, I regret, in the written word.

On his departure for western Canada Bennett urged me to continue to apply myself seriously to the study of law. He wrote to my father predicting a brilliant future for me in this career, and urging a Law School education. My father answered in the following terms.

My dear Mr. Bennett,

Your very kind letter reached me in due course, and I should have answered it long ago. But the fact is, it opened up before me certain possibilities and probabilities which were not easy to answer at once. Max had spoken to me about College just a little while before I had your favour. I did not myself feel very certain about the propriety of the step, and simply said to him that I would consider the matter. Your letter set me in a train of thinking, and at once raised suggestions which had been shaping themselves out in my own mind. Would a College Course be now a benefit to Max? My deliberate opinion is, that it would not. His nature is such as would never make a first class student. He is too eager to grasp the practical. And now that he has got a taste of business and a liking for the business intercourse of the world, I believe that he could no more set himself down to a course of theoretical study than he could take (or rather think of taking) a journey to the moon. He would do no good at College now: in fact he would be sure to learn indolent habits and suffer harm. Many, many thanks for your kind interest in Max! Your influence on him, in the past, has I know been very beneficial. Max is the better of having some one near him, to whom he can look with respect and for guidance. It would be selfish in me to express a desire that you had remained in Chatham. I cannot do that—But had you remained there I feel certain that you would have imparted to Max ambitions and energies and moral motives which would have helped him materially in the successes of life.

I think my father was right. Bennett was interpreting a general talent as a special one.

In any case, the wandering instinct, the restless mentality, had not yet been burnt out in me.

Bennett had gone away to Calgary. Could I hope to sit one day in his chair, to succeed him in the partnership with Tweedie? Certainly my talent for business was considerable even if my industry faltered and stumbled. That empty chair was my desire and moreover it was my overwhelming ambition. One day, I felt certain, Tweedie and Aitken would be the inscription on the office door. The name-plate "Tweedie & Aitken" was nothing but fancy's flight. Dreams do come true—sometimes. Sixty years on, His Worship Mayor Cripps gave me joy and gladness when I was asked to unveil a bright inscription in brass fixed above that same door, recording the association of Tweedie, Bennett and Beaverbrook.

Not for long was I left with my dream of a new law firm of brilliant performance. One morning early, and it was a cold morning, Charles Mitchell, a law student and a university graduate—also from Newcastle, and a nephew of Peter Mitchell, Father of Confederation—walked into my little back office and told me that he would occupy Bennett's front room. He had been chosen by Mr. Tweedie for the place. He assured me of his goodwill and regretted my bad luck. Thus my hope of succession to Bennett crashed. Bitter disappointment was my portion. Misery and despair overwhelmed me. There was moreover the humiliation of being pushed out by a boy from Newcastle. Bennett gone, there was nobody to offer me any comfort or encouragement.

Lonely and depressed, forlorn and deserted, would comfort come from anywhere or anybody? What would Mr. Sinclair say? His student had failed him. Just disappointment and despair. Mr. Tweedie had forgotten me. Plainly he had little confidence in my abilities. So I turned to Mr. Justice Wilkinson, an old man of benign countenance and kindly disposition who was County Court Judge. He advised me to make a change. So I decided to go hence and seek fortune, if not fame, in other Courts of Law. But first I must get admission to the Bar.

To Saint John and the Law School was the best way. I had a small sum of money, the amount is beyond my stretch of memory. Possibly not much more than the price of a railway ticket.

Out of Newcastle I travelled in the noon train, called in those days the "Accommodation", carrying my little ornamental book-case and a bag full of books including a treasured law treatise called "Pollock on Contracts". Before many years, the lineal descendant of the writer of that textbook was to be employed by me at the London *Daily Express* as leader-writer, then Editor. Now in old age and retirement he is my friend and companion.

Saint John! The station was lively with passengers hurrying up and down the single platform, arriving and leaving; all was movement. The waiting

room where my books and the little case of shelves were deposited. Out into Mill Street and on my way to adventure.

Then the wide streets, with the exceedingly bright lights. It was a fascinating moment. As I walked through Dock Street in the early evening I turned the corner at Blair's Bank and up King Street, which seemed to me the very centre of the whole American continent. The great plate glass windows with the rich display of goods, the heavy traffic and tired horses dragging the carriages up the hill.

Now looking back over these many years and after frequent visits to Saint John I am convinced that the city had a livelier spirit in those days. The houses were in better condition. There were no slums. Charlotte Street was the residential section with fine houses all the way to Queen's Square. Germain, from Princess to Pagan Street, looked important to me. The Royal Hotel with many visitors moving in and out and a group of spectators, sitting in easy chairs pleasantly occupied in watching those who passed by. The Dufferin Hotel on King's Square. What vivid impressions, what exciting sensations, what wonderful prospects for days and nights to come. I would gladly live in that glamorous city always. Life would be joyous and gay. Certain it was that there would be too much emphasis on gaiety. I would struggle against that fault.

Yes indeed. I would do big things, write successful books, make great speeches. Perhaps I would be Mayor one day or even Member of Parliament. Why not? I had the ability, or so I thought, when I entered Saint John at that Union Station gate.

I stayed that night at the Dunlop Hotel on King's Square, paying one half dollar for my room.

I registered at the Law School on 10th November, 1897, and set up my much treasured book-case in a back room at Carvill Hall in Waterloo Street, then a beautiful building under Miss Gillespie's management. She was pretty, with flaxen hair and bright blue eyes. She was well dressed and of her I formed my first impression of the meaning of the word **soignée**.

Of all the students then in attendance at the Law School, I am the only survivor. None of the lecturers is now alive. Possibly the high death rate may have been due to the insanitary conditions of our class rooms. Perhaps lawyers have short lives, thus giving proof of the saying "the good die young". And I never did become a lawyer.

It was the custom in those days to combine classes in law with service in an office where experience of actual practice could be gained. It was my good fortune to find a place in the office of a kindly and generous young

lawyer named John Montgomery. I reproduce here his letter of encouragement.

Mr. W. Max Aitken,
Chatham, N.B.
Dear Sir;

I have your favour of the 8th inst. and in reply would say that there will not be the slightest difficulty in the world in getting into a law office in St. John, but of course you would be expected to attend to work very closely and would find that your work would not always be strictly legal but of different kinds. If I can do anything to help you just let me know.

Faithfully yours,
John Montgomery

P.S. As a rule Law Students in this City receive no pay but when one is a typewriter he sometimes manages to get $2 or $3 a week and sometimes to get a little more by doing legal reporting for the papers and there is also a chance to get outside typewriting. I suppose you would want pay enough to cover your board and that is where the difficulty comes in. J. M.

There was no great prospect of "experience in actual practice". John had little enough to do for his own occupation, and nothing left over for me. He was a friendly and fatherly character with a cheerful countenance and an abundance of free time to engage in admirable conversational homilies. Meanwhile I banged at a typewriter and also augmented my income by actively engaging in various commercial enterprises with emphasis on insurance, life or accident or fire—just as opportunity offered.

Money was scarce and I had to "make do" on every possible occasion. My lunch would consist of an apple on many and many a day. But I liked apples. So possibly I only imagined my self-sacrifice. The McIntosh is my favourite—from the St. John River Valley for choice. In my mother's house when I was at home, one dollar a barrel was the prevailing price and apple sauce formed a staple dessert throughout the winter. There was much pleasure in apple sauce and some pain, for I was required to peel the apples far more frequently than the other eight children in our family.

Compensation has often come my way for suffering and misery endured in my early years. And there was a measure of compensation for the tiresome labour endured in peeling apples. The family cow was my particular care and I was really fond of the old animal, and proud of the milk

yield, for which I received much praise. Since that cow thrived on the peelings my devotion found expression in cutting off generous slices of apples in the peeling process. My mother complained and, after many admonitions, deprived me of my task. My brother became the principal apple peeler. Virtue has its own reward.

Saint John was for me a lonely place. Little notice would be taken of a young stranger from the North with only one suit of clothes and no particular attainments or show of talents and no family associations in the big city. Homesick, too, for the Miramichi, where the people knew and spoke to each other in kindly manner. Friends were hard to find in Saint John and it was difficult for a boy of no importance to make them. I was often lonesome, unhappy and sometimes depressed by gloomy forebodings of failure, though I knew my talents were considerable. Probably I was an unattractive youth. Probably my aggressive and argumentative temperament closed the door to many a good companion. Three older men, all lawyers, took notice of me: Ned McAlpine, R. R. Ritchie and Daniel Mullen. A mixed bag of tolerant and kindly members of the Saint John Bar.

One friend came out of the vacuum, who gave me comfort. Heber Vroom, a marine insurance agent, though of an older generation, conferred on me the gift of his companionship. He was a real wit and he had a sharp tongue, which he seldom used because he was gentle and generous and over kindly. He saw merit in my understanding and gave heed to my lively and possibly original outlook.

There was in that day an annual merry-making in midwinter, known as the Assembly. Invitations (subject to paying for a ticket) were given out by a middle-aged committee to the gilded youth of the town and also to the privileged and well-connected lads and those with family associations in Saint John. I could not make claim to any of these classifications. But Heber Vroom kindly proposed to me that he should put my name forward for an invitation to the Ball. I gladly consented. But what about a dress suit? I hired it, possibly from Mr. Scovil.

A dress shirt was a major problem. Buttons for the cuffs would not conform to the standards of fashion. Cuff links I could not afford, even of tin or brass. Two safety pins must serve the purpose.[13]

How about dancing? I had been given lessons in Chatham at Miss Gillespie's Dancing School. But the waltz was not in her repertoire, and the waltz was in fashion. There was an old gentleman in Canterbury Street whose name I have forgotten. He gave lessons that lasted all afternoon at 25 cents. I went off at once to his schoolroom on the third floor of a rickety old structure, which seemed to sway to the movements of the dancers. The

instructor was vague in his directions, and it made no difference, for the pupils all appeared to be proficient in the dancing art. Probably they had more interest in their partners than in their instructor. I had little difficulty in finding my way around that dance floor and in partnership with a very pretty and extremely pleasant girl, whose name I think was Duncan, I had a very good time. So I was ready and waiting for the big night in high spirits, with great expectations, and thoroughly prepared to acquit myself at the party as a young man of fashion. All day long I was waiting too for the invitation. When the day was done I asked Heber for news. He had no word. Nor I either. There was still time! So I dressed myself up in the hired finery, admiring my lively appearance in the mirror. But when the night fell and the invitation failed me, I changed again to my only suit of clothes, and wandering out into the streets I walked past the Assembly Hall and, hearing the music of the waltz, I meditated upon my unhappy and wretched loneliness . . .

It was not long before I made up my mind to follow Bennett.

By this time he had established himself in the West. The firm of Lougheed and Bennett was important, with many big and wealthy clients. A railway ticket to Calgary was not expensive and there were special rates for emigrants. The little book-case that had been my special and loving care ever since my late childhood and the tiny collection of books gathered together over the years were my only valuable possessions. These were packed and got ready for the train journey and I set off for the mysterious land that was new Canada.

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[11] *Editor's Note*: At the end of the First War, Mr. J. L. Stewart believed that he had fallen upon evil times. He was given an annuity by Lord Beaverbrook of several thousand dollars for the joint lives of his sister and himself. It was continued until the end of Mr. Stewart's life. At his death he left nearly $19,000. His sister had predeceased him.

[12] Impertinence on my part.

[13] The following quotation from a London newspaper of January 1939 discloses that Lord Beaverbrook was still relying upon safety pins.

ELEGANCE . . .

The Duke and Duchess of Windsor, with Lord Beaverbrook, Mr. Colin Davidson and Sir Terence O'Connor, the Solicitor General, were talking together at Cannes during the weekend, when the conversation turned to cuff links.

The Duke of Windsor stretched out his arms and showed his. They were magnificent, and he explained that they were a present from the Duchess.

Sir Terence turned back his cuffs and displayed a pair of links that were simple and good. And Mr. Davidson was wearing a pair which were engraved with his regimental crest.

. . . AND ISOLATION

Lord Beaverbrook said little. But the Duchess noticed that under cover of the conversation, he was stealthily pulling down his coat sleeves.

She called attention to it and demanded that the cuff links should be shown.

Reluctantly Lord Beaverbrook drew up his sleeves again—and exposed a pair of safety pins.

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“It was past time for bigger and better things”

My sojourn in Calgary gave me many opportunities to establish myself in professional or commercial enterprise. But hesitancy of aim was manifested in all of my doings. There was no evidence of stability or fixity of purpose.

In a brief space of time I wandered off to Edmonton where a young lawyer of great promise and high determination was making himself a place in that small but rapidly growing community. His home town was in New Brunswick. His name? James H. Dunn! Although he was my senior by several years we had been companions on the North Shore where his widowed mother was telegraph operator at Bathurst, not far from Newcastle and connected by the old Intercolonial Railway. Travelling facilities over the forty miles of railway were quite simple. Tickets were not required of ingenious lads. And James Dunn and I were both looked upon as interesting examples of the art of improvisation. It was near Bathurst, on the seashore, that our family occupied in the summer a small cottage. James Dunn and I talked about many things. Never about our prospects and projects. I cannot remember any discussion of future plans.

Market Slip, Saint John, at low tide. Right foreground: barrels of lime from a quarry above Indiantown.

Arthur James Nesbitt in his youth. "It was in the Halifax Hotel that the imaginative genius of this promising young man appealed to me . . ."

But in our conversations together in distant Edmonton, I was influenced by his arguments and outlook on life. He was, himself, preparing to return to the East because opportunity in Montreal gave greater promise. The West, he said, must pay tribute to the East.

The East! Why not for me, too? But the East meant in my case New Brunswick.

So off I went to a friendly bank manager, Mr. Wilmott of the Merchants' Bank of Canada. I borrowed from his trusting institution a sum sufficient to see me back again to the Province by the Sea.

On the journey through Toronto and Montreal I arranged for myself various insurance agencies in Saint John and then set up in business there. It was, however, an inglorious retreat. With the joy of return to the home of my choice was the shame of defeat. Was it my destiny to lose every battle? Was failure my portion in life? I was a foolish youngster, too feckless to place my footsteps on a sure path.

At 19 years of age, back again in New Brunswick, life was something of a problem to me. I seemed unable to settle down and stick to anything. In contact with men of affairs, I showed some inkling of business talents. However, there was no continuity of purpose.

I was already giving signs of the power of impressing my personality on others. But there was not much progress in the insurance business. What was really wanting was application.

Steady work was beyond my competence. A little money in the pocket meant a long bout of idleness and the pursuit of foolish inventions—mostly dice, poker and billiard games. It always was hard to give up the dice. And the mathematical probabilities of poker fascinated me. These experiments and the theories of games of chance did not protect me against losses. When

The first Lady Beaverbrook, daughter of General Charles Drury, who had taken over the Command of the Halifax Garrison from the British.

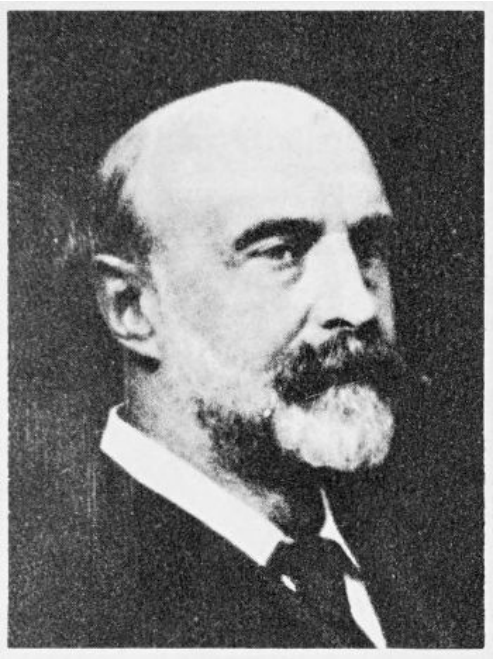
the cash gave out the need for business activity came in, but only for a time. More money—less work.

Probably I was difficult in my social relations. Still difficult, some would say. Who knows? Not me.

Years ago, in 1941, Churchill sent me to Moscow to negotiate with Stalin for collaboration and co-ordination in the war against Germany. As we were flying in a Soviet airplane at several thousand feet over the flat forest lands of Northern Russia, with here and there small patches of cultivation, our airplane was fired on by Russian batteries. Shells were bursting about us, but fortunately the gunners were not too good. Our pilot dived down to the treetops on the plateau, and literally sought shelter in the surrounding cover.

At Moscow Airfield where the Commissars met us on arrival with a military band, and a guard of soldiers who carried rifles (loaded) the apologies poured out, but no satisfactory explanations. Mr. Harriman, now Governor of New York, and Admiral Standley U.S.N., his naval adviser, were members of our Mission and travellers in that Russian airplane. They were most curious to know the sequel to the bombardment by the batteries. They could not get any information. Where they failed I could not succeed. But rumours were many and various, always reaching the same conclusion, that a colonel in charge of the gunners had been shot out of hand. I didn't believe it.

On the way back we flew from Moscow to Archangel and boarded the cruiser *London*. At the port where we arrived in the late evening, a storm raged, a bitter winter storm with perishing cold blasts of wind. The *London* had been taken out to the Bay for safety. A British mine sweeper named *Harrier* carried us to the ship. The sea was exceedingly rough and our little British vessel, though manoeuvered with skill, was in danger. Passengers were taken aboard the *London* with difficulty. I was almost the last to leave



Sir Edward Clouston, Bart., General Manager of the Bank of Montreal 1890-1911. "My relations with him improved steadily and developed into intimacy."

the deck of the tender, and secured by ropes I made a long jump. On landing safely on a suspended gangway, ingeniously devised by the warship, a great cheer went up. A vain man would have been gratified by a warm feeling of popular acclaim. But I did not give way to any such flight of fancy. It was clear that the *London* could not put to sea without me. And as there were German submarines in the White Sea my friends on board cheered for relief and joy over the prospect of immediate "anchors aweigh". After many days and nights of fog and ice and threats of German fighter and bomber attacks, we arrived at Thurso in Scotland.

Maisky, the Russian Ambassador in London, made a courtesy call on me at my house, Cherkley, to congratulate me on my safe return. It was Sunday. "Maisky," I said, "you told Uncle Joe (Stalin) that I am a quarrelsome fellow."

"Did I deceive him?" asked Maisky.

"You are a Mongolian," I retorted by way of reprisal.

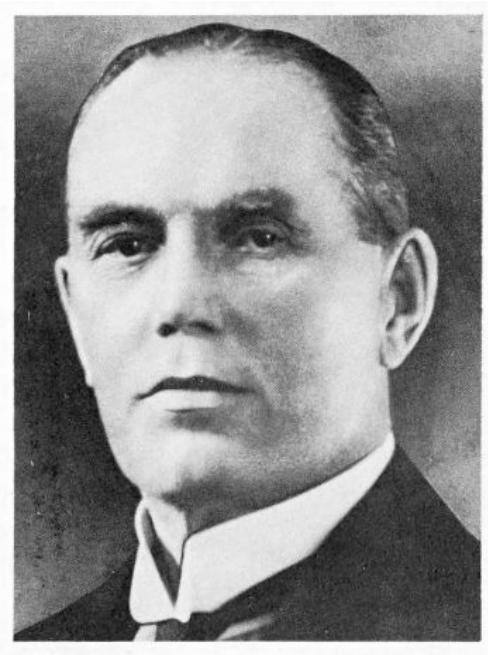
The little Russian (shorter than I) replied, "Yes, I have Chinese ancestors, and what admiration you Canadians must have for the most civilized race in the world."

"Maisky, you are a porcupine," I said, breaking off the engagement.

It is not my habit to take too much interest in the past. The future concerns me because I am going to spend the rest of my days or years there.

But to the record of my youth I must return to complete here and now the story of *My Young Days in New Brunswick*.

War broke out in South Africa in 1899. But that event made little impression on me. Possibly just another occasion for argument and dispute. My brother Magnus (known as Mauns), who lived in Fredericton, and I both



Sir Herbert Holt, President, The Royal Bank of Canada 1908-1934; Chairman of the Board 1934-1941.

offered to enlist as private soldiers. But as there were more volunteers than places, he was accepted and I was rejected.

Many friends and relatives travelled to Quebec to see the soldiers off on the troopship which sailed on all but the last day of October, 1899. I was there. It was a jolly occasion. For several days and nights we all made merry together. Parting was a sweet joy. The troops were glad to go and "The Expeditionary Force" was full up. Those who sailed were looked on as heroes and those who stayed behind were not regarded as *embusqués*. The soldiers were the lucky fellows; the spectators were condemned to remain at home.

And so for two years my little life, eventful in small things, uneventful in great ones, went on.

I appeared to be settling down to the principle of not settling down—to be accepting the rather careless hospitable traditions of feast and famine which marked my surroundings. "Joy and gladness, a feast and a good day" was my way of life. It would have required no mean prophet to discern in me one of the hardest workers of his time.

For what had I proved up to the eve of my twenty-first birthday, now approaching in the May of 1900? A boy of parts, certainly—with the parts marred by a kind of obstinate naughtiness, and vitiated by persistent interludes of complete idleness—something of a reader, something of a talker, a real good story-teller, plenty of ability, more than a touch of laziness—possibly a touch of genius, but the genius of the untried.

As I look back on those twenty-one idle years there may have been a subconscious educational process that prepared me for a life of hard work and much effort. Long hours of careless reading may have helped me over the stony ground and through the thorns.

Hero worship was an inspiration. My choice of men of might conformed to early instruction. There was first and foremost John Calvin, who

Charles Rolls, (1910) upon whose death in an early airplane accident Lord Beaverbrook bought one half the voting capital in Rolls-Royce.

acknowledged the high authority of kings. Yet he assailed their injustice and inhumanity. Then there was John Knox. His place in history is not fairly recognized by this generation. It was his political philosophy that I admired most of all. Norman Macleod made a lasting impression on me. His magazine *Good Words* had an important influence on my reading habits. I gave a complete set of this publication to the Old Manse Library. But Louise Manny, the Librarian, a beneficent tyrant, returned the volumes to me. They were not sought after or even asked for by the citizens of Newcastle. *Good Words* did not have any message for the readers at that Library.

I asked a simple question of a Scots girl, a university graduate —"Who was Norman Macleod?" She could not tell me anything about him. How swiftly great men are forgotten!

"*He don't plant 'taters, he don't plant cotton,*
And them that plants them is soon forgotten."

It was different among the humble and uneducated peasants who were contemporaries of the Scottish preacher, editor, leader. On my first visit to the land of my fathers I was deeply moved, and recalling Sir Walter Scott's lines:

"*Breathes there the man, with soul so dead . . .*"

I made my way to the graveyard at Torphichen, where the early generations of the Aitken family were buried. There I met an old man, known as the Beadle. He asked me to his cottage home. In the living room there was a great four-poster bed of mahogany, an imposing and important furnishing in a room rather bare. "Do you know", said the Beadle, "who slept in that bed?" I guessed Elizabeth, then Bloody Mary and even Mary Queen of

Rt. Hon. Andrew Bonar Law

Scots. Perhaps Victoria. "No, No!" said the Beadle, and in a tone of reverence he informed me "Norman Macleod slept there." That name meant more to him than the Kings and Princes and even the mighty rulers of Scotland.

It is not generally known that this distinguished journalist actually came to Canada in the middle of the 19th century. He preached at Pictou and in his collection of letters he recounted —"We baited the horses at an old fellow's house, who came here when a boy from Lockerbie in 1786. What changes had taken place here since then! He remembered only six "smokes"[14] where there are now probably forty or fifty thousand—one house only in Pictou; no roads, etc. He said he was driven out of Isle St. John, now Prince Edward Island, by the mice, in 1813. A mice plague appeared in that year over all Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. They filled the woods and villages; they filled houses and crawled over beds, nibbled the windows of shops, ate up crops and herbage; they swam rivers; they were met in millions dead in the sea and lay along the shores like coils of hay! If a pit was dug at night, it was filled by morning. Cats, martens, etc., fed on them till they died from overgorging. Oh! It makes me sick to think of it! Yet such was one of the forms in which danger and starvation met the early settlers."

Who ever heard of the "Invasion of Mice"? Did you know about it? Mrs. Leonard O'Brien presented me with *Memoir of Norman Macleod* by the Rev. Donald Macleod, published in 1876. In that good book I read this strange story. Did the Lockerbie lad tell tall tales to the master of *Good Words*?

On 25th May, 1900, I celebrated my twenty-first birthday. It was past time for bigger and better things. At 21 the youth has become a man. He is supposed to have outgrown childish things, and to be a responsible member of society. However, instead of going to work I went off to play. My

"celebration" took the form of a three days' fishing party on a lake in the forest near Truro in Nova Scotia. Several friends joined the excursion and there was an ample supply of whisky to make the party go. There was present, however, one unexpected guest—a lad of energetic temperament who some years before had left Nova Scotia and plunged into the active business life of the United States. He talked of his career there, of his struggles, of his incipient conquests, and of all that he meant to do in the fullness of time. His name has perished, and if he survives he is probably quite unaware that he was arousing my ambitions, as the glowing logs threw up their light to the darkling trees, on that night of May long ago. Something in the expatriated lad's manner and way of talking, his delineation of new ideas of effort and achievement set the match to the tow of latent and fiery ambition which must have been present below the threshold in the mind of one of his hearers. The next morning I announced abruptly that I was going back to work, and left the party. "Now farewell horses, dances, songs and delight," sang the gypsy poet.

I never loafed again. I seemed to shake off in an hour of reflection the careless habits of my early years. My intellectual make-up remained the same, but a sudden and tremendous reinforcement was given to the active and aggressive side of my character. Effort was worth while, labour was rewarding, ambition was a worthy goal. A devouring flame in me seemed to shrivel up and destroy the lazy and pleasure-seeking and wasteful ways that had dominated me and my conduct for so long and with such disaster.

Whatever the explanation of these sudden changes in disposition, mentality or belief, they do undoubtedly occur, if rarely, in actual life. In religion they are known by the Evangelicals as 'Conversion', by the Salvation Army as 'being saved'—and the atmosphere in which I was brought up makes the analogy not altogether inapt. Whether some old Covenanting ancestor was suddenly released from the recesses of my brain, or whether the sudden realization that the ideal of ambition was the expression of my personality effected the miracle, it is impossible to say. But the change was made: the idler became a demonic worker; the spendthrift a rigid economist; the man of casual habits, punctual, exact and unswerving in attention to business.

My friends did not believe in my reformation. "Wait", one fellow declared, "until Max goes up against an opportunity to sit in at a good game of cards." True I had been for several years an inveterate player of the game called poker, which was a widespread practice of that age. Would such an ingrained habit persist? Or would the new era in my life put me off the pursuit of this harmless joy? Ambition conquered, habit was defeated. From

the moment of my 'Conversion', I laid down my hand at poker and refused to pick it up again.

One hour of temptation overtook me on the day of Queen Victoria's funeral. I was marooned at Sydney in Cape Breton. At a Club there I was moved once more to recapture the charm and excitement of the game. Nothing doing. The cards failed to hold my attention and after losing several dollars with indifference I turned to conversation about the beloved Queen. Our remarks were reverent and respectful, I am sure, though I cannot remember. How differently we now treat her memory. Lytton Strachey wrote a life of Victoria. He was neither respectful nor restrained in his narrative.

Lady Lloyd George wrote in her diary on April 11th 1921—"Went down to Trent over Sunday after hectic week of unfruitful negotiations over coal strike. P[rince] of Wales came on Sunday with Mrs. Dudley Ward. He spoke of Strachey's life of Queen Victoria, which had just been published and the Prince said: 'That must be the book the King was talking about this morning. He was very angry and got quite vehement over it.' P[rince] of W[ales] had not seen the book, so we showed it to him and presently was discovered in roars of laughter over the description of the Queen and John Brown."

John Brown was, of course, Her Majesty's Scottish coachman. He lived at Balmoral where a statue was put up to his memory by Queen Victoria and torn down again by King Edward.

What has become of two gold medals ordered by Queen Victoria, commemorating the death of John Brown in 1883? And a memorial brooch of gold, with the gillie's head on one side and the royal monogram on the other, designed by Her Majesty and presented to the Highland servants and cottagers at Balmoral, to be worn by them on the day of John Brown's death with a mourning scarf and pin? Possibly diligent and intelligent search might reward the antiquarian with valuable mementos of Her last great Majesty but one.

Gilbert Harding, the foremost living story-teller in my circle of friends, gave me a most exciting account of a Highland journey[15]. I repeat my version of his story.

Queen Victoria on a journey to the Highlands went to the head of Loch Shiel, near Glenfinnan, where there is a monolith. At the base of the monolith there is a four-square plinth, and on each of the four sides of the plinth there is an inscription; one in English, one in French, one in Latin, and one in Gaelic. The Queen, dumpy, with Hanoverian features and time-worn countenance, muttered her praise of the English, French and Latin

inscriptions, which she could understand. They all said the same thing, which goes something like this:

> *This stone marks the spot where Prince Charles Edward Stuart (the Young Pretender) began his rash attempt to overthrow the Government of the country.*

She warmly approved of that inscription. She also approved of the Gaelic, which she could not understand. And the Gaelic recited:

> *This stone marks the spot where His Majesty King Charles III (Prince of Wales) sought in vain to restore liberty and happiness to his people. He failed, but reigns forever in our hearts.*

And, in truth, it might have been different with Prince Charlie. His march from Edinburgh to Derby—100 miles from London—was unopposed by the population, utterly indifferent to the rule of Stuart or Hanover. The vast majority of the clergy of the Church of England were willing to give allegiance to the Pretender. His army won the battle of Prestonpans at the outset of the adventure, and the battle of Falkirk after the retreat. The advantage of surprise was on their side. They failed for want of spirit.

We are what we must
And not what we would be.

Charles Edward dallied in Edinburgh when he should have been marching on London. He gave himself to the companionship of Lairds and Ladies when he should have been with soldiers. He engaged in court ceremonies when he should have been occupied with tactics and strategy.

Now Court Ceremonies are intended to impose on the people a sense of superiority of Royalty.

It does not always work out in practice. In 1936 the British people under the influence of the same Church of England which had been ready to accept Prince Charles, decided to reject their King Edward VIII. They gave him notice to quit.

Then they selected another to take his place.

In any other country but Britain, government would have passed over from a limited monarchy to a Republic. Not so in the United Kingdom. The people are too steady in character and conduct.

Lessons may be learned from the stories of Charles III and Edward VIII. Both were loved of the multitude. A moving and tender song tells of the sad

fate of Bonnie Charlie.

The poet has not yet written of the sacrifice of the Duke of Windsor, who gave up his throne which he had a right to hold though marrying the woman of his choice. He was convinced that if he retained his Kingship dissensions would arise in the Kingdom and in the Empire. He chose unity for the nation and abdication for himself. A good man, and a worthy member of any Royal Family, passed from his own, his native land into exile. "To do well and be ill spoken of 'tis the lot of kings."

I have come to the end of my story, telling faithfully of the follies of *My Young Days in New Brunswick*. But it is an error to suppose that hours of frittering away opportunities in pursuit of dissipation are entirely lost in the process of forming a character, or in laying the foundation of a career. Man will get to know his fellows when he has seen them in their hours of ease. Human nature is best caught off its guard.

"Master," cried the small servant of the Beloved Vagabond, "there is a man here who says he saw you in Moscow leading a bear."

"Yes," was the retort of the Sage, "I have been in Moscow and elsewhere and *I know the wickedness which is in the heart of man*."

Some of my readers may recollect that I was opposed to the administration of Mr. Stanley Baldwin, Prime Minister of Great Britain. The Rt. Hon. J. H. Thomas was one of the most distinguished members of Mr. Baldwin's Cabinet. In the midst of a tough election when I was supporting anti-Government candidates Mr. Thomas, speaking at the Albert Hall in London to an enthusiastically approving audience, said: "Max Aitken was born in Newcastle, New Brunswick. It was too small for him. So he went to Halifax in Nova Scotia. It was too small for him. He left for Montreal, the commercial capital of Canada. It was too small for him. He came to London. It is too small for him. He will go to hell. It won't be big enough."

Now I am coming to believe that I *was* born in Newcastle. I certainly wandered from that blessed river far and wide, with many adventures in the "best of possible worlds". Now I return again and, like Candide, I will settle down to "cultivate my garden".

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[14] A Scottish word for chimneys of homes and shops and industrial plants.

[15] *Leaves from the Journal of Our Life in the Highlands* is an interesting record of Queen Victoria's literary efforts.

PART II

MY EARLY LIFE

10

“Royal Securities Corporation was me”

A Garden is a lovesome thing, God wot!
Rose plot,
Fringed pool,
Ferned grot—
The veriest school
Of peace . . .

GARDENING MAY BE AN expensive joy, but it is not with folded hands in an easy chair, but on your knees, weeding and working, that you find happiness. Whether your pursuit is in garden, farm or industry, toil is the way to contentment. My garden in youth, was industry—finance. There were weeds in plenty. But I was careful to cultivate sound produce.

Very little can be said about my first serious efforts in commerce and finance. They were on a small scale, though energetically pursued.

The feckless insurance agent had become a thrusting and pushing youngster of diverse interests. A new-found friend, Mr. W. B. Ross of Halifax, told me about the Brazilian Light and Traction Company. He may have been a director. I at once made myself familiar with the economy of the Company; and on arranging a supply of shares through the firm of Burnett of Montreal I began to offer my wares to men of means up and down the provinces of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. The most promising market was, of course, in Halifax where most men of fortune dwelt.

Following the advice given by Tennyson in *The Northern Farmer* I decided to "go where money is". The Halifax Hotel, long since torn down, became my headquarters. From that old and venerable inn I made many journeys up and down the countryside, with occasional visits to Montreal for the purpose of re-negotiating the terms of my commission on sales. I was swiftly adding to my lists of securities, occasionally buying small blocks of shares on my own account and reselling at a meagre profit.

The conversion was complete, from idleness to industry, from the playboy to the man of business.

Though my heart was in Newcastle, though my spirit has always brooded over the river and the forests of maple, spruce and birch, my temporary resting place was in Halifax.

It was a home at last, even though only a hotel room on the second floor back. My tiny little treasure was there. My hopes and expectations, my days of energy and nights of laborious plans and projects for the future.

Halifax in Nova Scotia, the scene of my foolish scholastic performances. Halifax, with its beautiful harbour, naval station and military garrison, and

long line of wharves, was, indeed, the most considerable commercial centre to be found east of Montreal. Climbing to the top of the old fort which crowns the steep hill above the town, the onlooker will see a great land-locked bay stretching out towards the Atlantic to welcome the incoming liners. Inland the country, though neither so well-wooded nor so hilly as New Brunswick, is full of broad lakes and delightful copses. Only a narrow flat tongue of land, through which the railway passes, joins what is, in effect, a great island to the continent. But the peninsula, unlike the adjacent mainland where lumbering and farming and fishing were almost the only ventures undertaken on any scale, had at that time all these and considerable deposits of coal and two steel plants. The financing of industries naturally centred in the comparatively wealthy seaport and trading city, which was the Nova Scotia capital.

Basing myself on the experience I had attained and the detailed knowledge of pools of money which I had acquired as an insurance agent, I became a successful seller of bonds and shares. I possessed good judgment. As my advice to investors proved sound my business flourished, but it was a one-man concern dependent on my individual exertions, and the amount of money to be earned by it was strictly limited.

The Bank of Nova Scotia had a kindly outlook on my early financial operations and their loans enabled me to buy blocks of bonds for resale on the door to door system of canvassing investors. The President of the Bank, Mr. Payzant, was pleased with me. But my real strength came from Mr. Flemming, the Secretary and Manager, who liked my rendering of the 23rd Psalm.

* * *

I was fortunate to find at this time a man nearly thirty years older than myself, who believed in my abilities. John F. Stairs was one of the best-known and most brilliant financiers taking part in the rising fortunes of Halifax. He came of a long-established family in Eastern Canada, tracing descent from Dennis Stairs, of Northern Ireland. The family settled in Granada, British West Indies. John, son of Dennis, went to school in Philadelphia and then went to Halifax in 1783. Henceforth these newcomers dominated the iron trade in the land of their adoption.

I met John F. Stairs on a railway train journey from Truro to Halifax. We talked. He asked me to his home for "supper" after church on the next Sunday night. I was delighted, and to Mr. Stairs' church—Fort Massey—I

presented myself with every intention of "trailing along" for the evening of great expectations.

His house was in South Street, No. 170, in those days. To say that I was fascinated would be a mild and restrained statement. In many years, and after a great era of experience, I now declare I never knew a happier household than the home of John F. Stairs. It was there that I first saw "the charm and poise of gracious living". It was my fortune to dine at that blessed house on many occasions, and always with joy.

After dinner every night the maid would bring to the drawing-room a tray littered with bottles and glasses and a jug of milk. We chose if we wished (and I always desired) a glass of Scotch whisky and soda. John F. Stairs himself filled a tumbler half milk half soda, and slowly drank it, evidently with a relish as if he had been taking a glass of champagne.

From this beginning a close intimacy culminating in partnership arose. This set the door of opportunity ajar for me. I was by no means limited to selling bonds and shares in the extended scale of my operations under Mr. Stairs' patronage.

Promoting and reorganising Joint Stock Companies now opened out for me. Amalgamation of two banks was my first success.

The sale of the Commercial Bank of Windsor to the Union Bank of Halifax (now merged in the Royal Bank of Canada) brought me a reward of $10,000. That was in the spring of 1902.

The sum was invested in the capital of a company formed by me, named Royal Securities Corporation. Mr. Stairs became its president. I was its manager. Three other leading citizens of Halifax were associated with me in this project: Mr. Stairs' brother, George; R. E. Harris, afterwards Chief Justice of Nova Scotia; and C. H. Cahan, who became Secretary of State in Bennett's Conservative Government at Ottawa.

Royal Securities Corporation was me. These most important citizens who came in gave me standing, and, as I was 22 or 23 years of age, I needed the support.

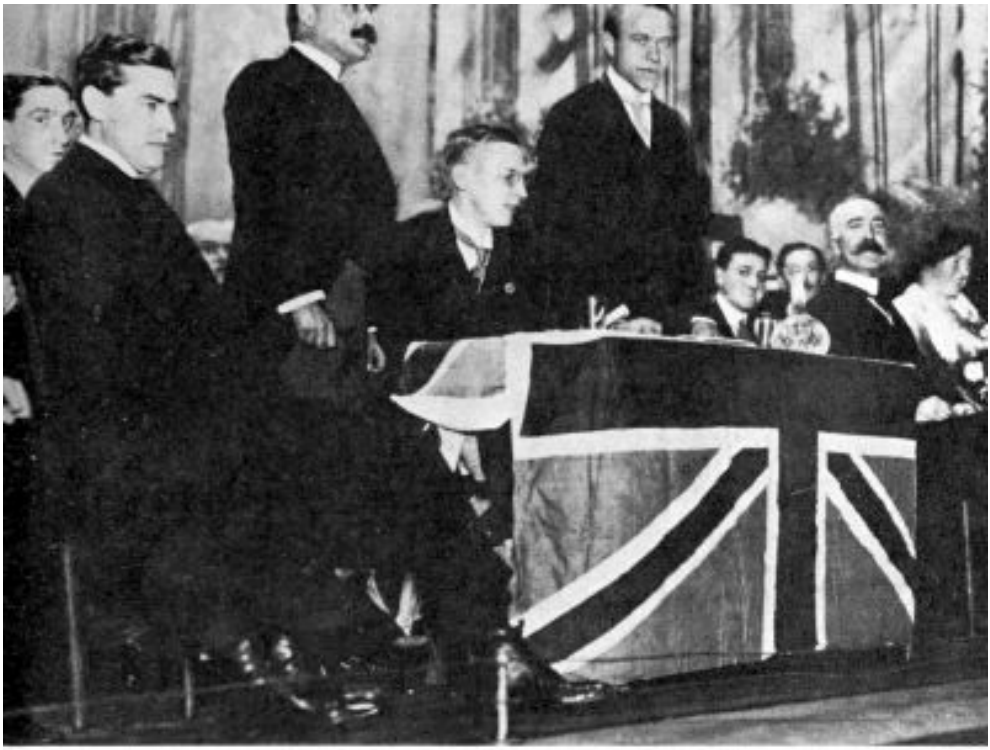
A new era of electric lighting and electric tramway construction was setting in. We began to investigate opportunities for organizing some of these undertakings—and since Halifax looked east and south across the seas as well as westward to the continent, attention was directed to the British West Indies and to Cuba and Porto Rico. I journeyed from time to time to the West Indian Islands. Franchises were secured, existing and inadequate lighting plants were purchased. Then the necessary new capital was negotiated and always at reasonable profit for the Royal Securities

Corporation. Thus it was that I emerged from the bond-selling era and entered upon a successful career of promotion and management of Joint Stock Companies engaged in public utilities.[16]

At Newcastle on Christmas afternoon 1902 we made merry. When night fell I took to a sleeping car on the train to Montreal. A dispute arose about my berth and impatience possessed me. The porter did not receive my complaints at all agreeably and said: “It’s a good thing for you that you had a father before you,” meaning of course that I was travelling on an inherited fortune. He could not be blamed for this, as my very youthful appearance and arrogant manner, which was the outcrop of success, would certainly deceive him. His remark delighted me, for of course everyone has to have a father before him. Thereafter the porter and I got on famously.

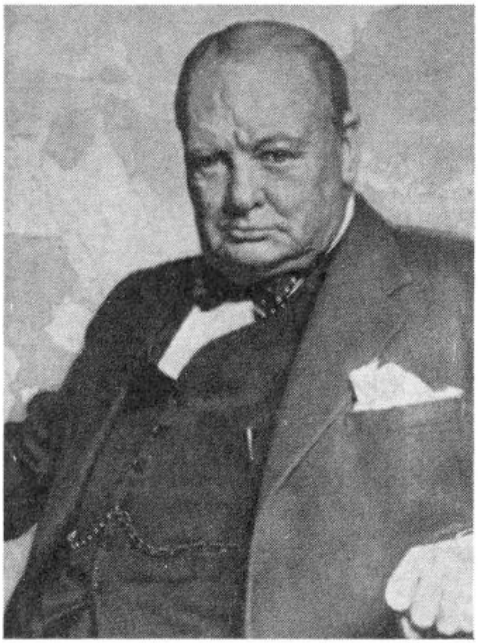
I have struggled always against arrogance and rancour, and often I have sustained defeat.

Certainly my arrogance was not inherited, nor my intolerance. I was impatient of opposition and of resistance to my schemes.



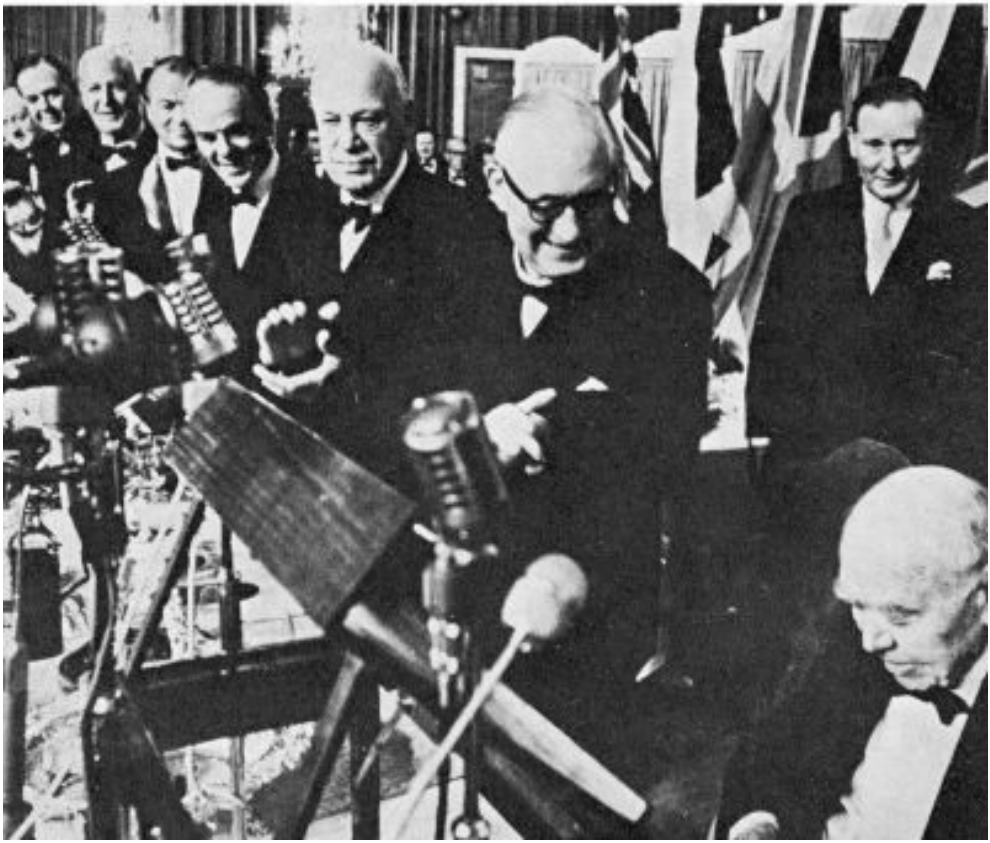
"The photograph was taken at a meeting in Ashton-under-Lyne in October, 1912. Standing up with me is my principal supporter. And his name is Rudyard Kipling. You can see the beaming face of Lady Beaverbrook." The caption was written by Lord Beaverbrook shortly before his death.

LORD BEAVERBROOK in 1921, aged 42.



Sir Winston Churchill. “His name became another term for good temper, good wit, good feeling for his fellow men.” The painting is by David Jagger.

Lord Beaverbrook and Mr. Averell Harriman sign the Aid to Russia agreement at the conclusion of the Three Power Conference at Moscow in 1941.



LORD BEAVERBROOK rises to make the last speech of his life at the birthday dinner given in his honour on May 25, 1964, by LORD THOMSON OF FLEET at the Dorchester Hotel. Standing solicitously behind him is his butler, A. H. MEAD, who served him for twenty years. On his right are LORD THOMSON OF FLEET, the EARL OF ROSEBERY, the RT. HON. W. F. DEEDES, M.P., the HON. GEORGE DREW, LORD POOLE, SIR ISAAC WOLFSON, LORD NORMANBROOK.

My father tried to teach me that I must not allow any man to make me hate him. Certainly he did not have complete success, though he surely influenced me for good. He was a most attractive companion, talking well and with erudition on books and writers, mostly of the nineteenth century. His pleasing presence was always delightful and I sought out his company on every opportunity.

Though he was worried by uncertainties and harassed by doubts about his income, the gaiety and good humour of his contacts with family and friends never deserted him.

Just as my prospects began to improve my father's fortunes seemed to fail him.

Many members of his congregation had become dissatisfied with their Minister. They said he was too old and too much given to repetition of sermons.

The criticism had a depressing influence upon his work. Sermons were produced in an atmosphere of anxiety.

In addition it was about this time that a most distressing affliction, known as aphasia, overtook him.

He would be standing in his pulpit, delivering his sermon. Suddenly he would find himself at a loss for words. For a full minute he would stand unable to utter a syllable.

It was distressing for my mother, who sat in the Minister's pew, always upset if an attack developed; and quite happy if the sermon finished with no untoward event.

The congregation at an annual meeting voted on a motion asking their Minister to retire, and his majority was not a comforting result.

How closely my father's story resembles that of many other faithful Ministers who, old and weary, have nothing put aside for declining years, clinging to tasks and duties through sheer necessity.

The entrancing story by John Galt, *Annals of the Parish*, has always appealed to me and in my imagination I compare the times of the Rev. Micah Balwhidder to those of my own father and his Ministry at Newcastle.

Galt's Minister, preaching his farewell sermon said, "I therefore counsel you, my young friends, not to lend your ears to those that trumpet forth their hypothetical politics, but to believe that the laws of the land are administered with a good intent, till in your own homes and dwellings ye feel the presence of the oppressor—then, and not till then, are ye free to gird your loins for battle—and woe to him, and woe to the land where that is come to, if the sword be sheathed till the wrong be redressed."

My father's philosophy did not differ from the teaching of the Rev. Micah Balwhidder.

He decided to retire.

He did not complain of the impatience of some members of his congregation. St. James's Church treated him generously. They gave him a retiring stipend of $200 yearly. It was a goodly sum in the opening days of the twentieth century.

By this time I assumed responsibility for the family home at Newcastle. My father took to the open road. When winter came to the Miramichi, he moved off with his family to a warm climate.

When he was no longer mobile he travelled in a private railway carriage and his liking for this popular method of movement among railway officials and also New York men of wealth gave him much pleasure.

Family and friends accompanied him in his autumn expeditions to the equitable climate of St. Augustine in Florida, where he stayed for months at a fashionable hotel named the Homestead Inn, never knowing the rates charged to their patrons. If he had found out he might have moved. Free from responsibilities, his spirits soared even if his health faltered.

In September 1902 he visited me at Halifax, for the second time staying at my rooms in the Roy Building which had become my home. He passed many happy days wandering about the old city.

From Newcastle he wrote me:

> *You are doing well—<u>that</u> I could plainly see. I sincerely hope that you will go on from prosperity to greater prosperity. You spoke to me declaring your firm belief that <u>principle and uprightness</u> are at the root of a manly life. You are quite right. Hold on by them—never let them for a moment leave you and you will be successful in the best sense of the word.*

After he retired from the Ministry of St. James's Church, my father gave up the Manse and built a home of small proportions just opposite Maltby's house on Blarney Lane. It had been the site of after-school fist fights and many a time I had suffered defeat and humiliation where the foundations of my father's new home now stood. Its name, Torphichen, was derived from my father's village in Scotland where my interests are varied, with more cousins claiming me than I can honestly claim.

The house was built by James Falconer and, according to his receipt for money, now in my possession, the contract price was about one thousand dollars.

Occasionally I would leave Halifax by the Maritime Express at four o'clock in the afternoon; and arriving in Newcastle before midnight, I would walk alone down Bell's Hill in the dark. Turning right at the Back Road one block west was Torphichen.

My father, after many adventures in this house, had the misfortune to fall, breaking his leg. He died peacefully, not of a broken leg, but of the disease known in those days as "the old man's friend" (pneumonia).

Newcastle always seemed to be "home" to me. No matter how strongly business affairs in Halifax and elsewhere called me, the return to the town

on the river thrilled me with happy emotions and feelings of deep affection for the people.

Strange that I should have felt such devotion for the scenes of my youth. Bell's Hill leading to the Back Road is forever in my joyous recollection. But the house Torphichen was not to my liking. My father or my mother willed it to me and I sold it to Mr. Flett for $7,000 and divided the money among the Newcastle churches.

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[16] Trinidad Electric, Demerara Electric, Porto Rico Railways, Camaguay Electric.

11

"I was too fond of using the shillelagh in business"

THE ROYAL SECURITIES CORPORATION was now my whole life. It could be properly described as a one-man company in every sense of the word.

As the business expanded I made my first important appointment to the staff, Izaak Walton Killam.

He was a native of Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, 21 years of age. Tall, wide-eyed, and a teller in the Union Bank at Halifax. He had a big head and he was more than intelligent. Each day when he accepted my deposit we exchanged conversation.

I cannot remember Killam's salary as a bank teller. I gave him $3,000 for one year on trial, possibly more than three times his bank pay.

It was a mistake to give him too much money. For when he joined me he also joined a club, perhaps the City Club, and devoted himself to the game of bridge. His card sense was admirable. Afternoon and evening and often quite late at night he sat at the card table, indifferent to the call of our exciting ventures into the money markets of Eastern Canada.

When the engagement of one year came to an end I reduced his salary to $1,500 with a percentage of our profits. A change came over him the next day. The bridge table was forsaken; the Club life was forgotten. And when the next twelve months ran out Killam's share was more than double the original salary of $3,000.

It was in 1919 after fifteen years of co-operation and collaboration that I sold him the Royal Securities Corporation. He had no money so he paid me in notes of hand, and in a large new issue of preferred shares of the Corporation. His debt to me was discharged, not quite promptly, but postponements were always by agreement and Killam kept faith, with much satisfaction to both of us.

Now when Killam purchased control, the Royal Securities Corporation had large holdings in Canada Cement, Price Bros. and Steel Company of Canada. I retained these interests, but sold to him the shares of Calgary Power and Camaguay Electric.

He owed me and eventually paid for the Camaguay holdings at $55 a share and sold them within a few years for $250 each.

My control of Calgary Power was sold to Killam for $500,000. Thereafter Killam and other shareholders took up $1½ million in additional shares. It is, however, quite certain that Killam's investment in Calgary Power did not exceed $2 million.

He ploughed back the profits for over thirty years. More important, he held on to Geoffrey Gaherty, the manager, only son of Mrs. John F. Stairs. Geoffrey had joined the Royal Securities as a youth, and swiftly developed

into the most capable engineer and manager of public utilities in Canada. He knew how to take hold and he would never let go. The triumph of Calgary Power over many obstacles was the achievement of Geoffrey Gaherty.

Killam's interest in Calgary Power, when he died, was worth more than $30 million—possibly as much as $40 million.

Maybe the shares he held with me in the consolidation of Cinema Exhibiting Companies in Great Britain gave him swifter results than he or I expected. His interest here amounted to 200,529 shares. He never got around to paying me the purchase money until I had negotiated the sale of the entire business to Ostrer Brothers. Killam paid £200,529 for his interest. He sold for more than £1 million and he realised this striking gain in a brief season.

He was not only my first employee, he became my close friend.

Truthful, upright in conduct, entirely devoted to his financial interests, he was indispensable in our business. His judgment was good, his courage knew no high. The sky was the limit. His death at the age of seventy in 1955 saddened and distressed me. How I miss him.

Royal Securities Corporation was a tremendous money spinner. With Killam's help and the support of other members of the staff, my net takings from the concern amounted to more than $6 million. Killam's activities, centred in this famous institution, brought him a fortune of more than $150 million, in part I am glad to say, due to the development and expansion under his direction of sound concerns founded by me and handed over to his keeping.

Another boy who joined me was Arthur James Nesbitt, a traveller for the firm of Vassie, wholesale dry goods merchants of Saint John.

It was in the Halifax Hotel that the imaginative genius of this promising young man appealed to me. At two o'clock in the morning, after he had gone to bed, the notion of engaging him for the Royal Securities Corporation occurred to me. There was no telephone service in the rooms in those days. So I sent a message to him, asking if he would join me. He replied that he was in bed, and that it was late. He would like to have stayed where he was. But I persisted, and he came to me. We talked about the wholesale dry goods business and other subjects. When he was exhausted, I asked "How much are you getting?" He said: "$2,100". I said: "I will give you $1,800, if you will go to Montreal and open up there a branch of the Royal Securities Corporation." He said he would have to consider it. By this time it was daylight on Friday morning. He said he would give me an answer on Monday.

Now Arthur Nesbitt was highly religious, with an evangelical turn of mind. Sunday was sure to be a day of meditation, with possibly a prayer for guidance. He also sought advice from Mr. Walter Foster, sometime Premier of the Province and the boss of the firm of Vassie and Company.

Early on Monday morning he telephoned, accepting my offer, and almost at once he went to Montreal.

We were associated in business for several years. Then one day he joined a man named Wilson and set up a rival institution. But not for long. Wilson was not an easy man. So Nesbitt set off on his own account. His firm was Nesbitt, Thomson and Company. His house expanded. He became a leader in finance, and his many enterprises have grown into very large and profitable businesses under his wise guidance.

He died too soon, leaving behind him a big fortune and two sons who are actively engaged in carrying on most important concerns in Montreal.

Another young man from Saint John joined the Royal Securities Corporation. Ward Pitfield was a different character from Nesbitt and Killam. His decisions were quickly reached and he was a daring pilot.

> *A daring pilot in extremity;*
> *Pleas'd with the danger, when the waves went high*
> *He sought the storms.*

Ward Pitfield died before he reached the full flower of his abilities. He was the victim of a rare infection, usually fatal, named actinomycosis. Strange coincidence. I am a survivor of the same disease. The remedies that worked a cure in my case failed to give results when applied to Ward Pitfield. If he had lived to old age he would have returned again to the Province of New Brunswick. His heart was there.

Horace Porter of Saint John was another colleague. He turned to the Law, and at our last meeting, shortly before his death, he was working on the Consolidated Statutes of the Province. He was an attractive member of his profession and a model of rectitude. The reader will observe that recruits were gathered from the City of Saint John with a reinforcement from the Province of Nova Scotia. I chose my associates wisely and well, from the most fertile Provinces of the Dominion when judged by the character and ability of their citizens.

Blake Burrill was recruited from Yarmouth, the home of Izaak Walton Killam. He joined me in Halifax on the recommendation of Judge A. K. McLean, formerly of the Supreme Court at Ottawa.

Blake was capable and quick with figures, but short of calm judgment, like many another popular and attractive companion. He was the negotiator

who opened up the purchase and development of the Fredericton electric undertaking, which is now part of the Maritime Electric Company. It was in Fredericton that the abortive attempt to take over the enterprise of Alexander Gibson came to a dead end. Too bad. The Nashwaak might have been a centre of a pulp output, based on that river and the St. John. I would have liked that labour.

It was more than half a century ago that I tried to take over the Gibson affairs. These were tangled and involved with many debts to several banks. A firm of accountants from Montreal, Creek, Cushing and Hodson, carried out extensive audits on my behalf. My master, Mr. Stairs, Mr. R. E. Harris (afterwards Chief Justice of Nova Scotia) and I went to Fredericton one late winter day to negotiate with the old lumberman. He was 82 years of age. But Mr. Gibson would not relinquish his authority and my friends would not venture under his control, which on account of his years had become somewhat confused.

Well I remember Mr. Gibson on that stormy day in the late winter or early spring when snow was falling. He was impatient of inquiry into his affairs and contemptuous of banking rules and regulations. The meeting took place in the parlour of his spacious house in Marysville, where he sat in a swivel chair. His long white beard and long black shoes, reminding me of Buffalo Bill and Brigham Young, gave him a patriarchal appearance. My friends, Stairs and Harris, and I were lunching with him. It was at a late hour that he opened the door to the dining-room, walked in, placed himself at the head of the table, saying "Gentlemen, be seated."

The ladies of his household waited upon the luncheon party. When Mr. Gibson had finished his portion of food, he got up and led us from the room without further ceremony.

When we parted in the late afternoon, Mr. Gibson urged me to undertake the reorganisation of his business on his own terms, which of course were quite impossible. His last words to me were well worn, "If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done quickly."

Unhappily it could not be done unless Mr. Gibson would relinquish his authority. He refused. The Bank closed in on the old man. It was a sad day.

The old homestead has been destroyed and there is no mark or sign of the dwelling-place of the most colourful and, in his day, the most important lumber operator on the Nashwaak and St. John rivers. I always take off my hat when passing the place where Mr. Gibson lived.

In my boyhood a folk-song about Mr. Gibson and the Intercolonial Railway was quite popular.

The British Government had guaranteed the money for that project and took part in discussions about the route. The St. John River valley was favoured by Mr. Gibson and his colleague in another railway venture—Senator Snowball. The North Shore of New Brunswick was the route supported by the Members of Parliament for the Miramichi, Peter Mitchell and John Mercer Johnson, both Fathers of Confederation.

The British Government really settled the dispute on strategic issues but New Brunswick knew nothing about that decision made at the Colonial Office in London. Mitchell and Johnson were given the credit by our people. So we sang:

Hail storm, black Tom,
Ain't goin' to rain no more.
The railroad runs on the Northern side,
Ain't goin' to rain no more.
Snowball and Gibson will pay for a ride,
Ain't goin' to rain no more.
Mitchell and Johnson will jump on behind,
Ain't goin' to rain no more.

After the folk-song had been almost forgotten on the Miramichi there was a popular number in the United States, about the Old Folks who could tell that "It ain't going to rain no more," which seemed to me "another version of the same", as we say in the Presbyterian Church of some of the Psalms of David in metre.

Other folk songs of New Brunswick may have influenced the American writers of recent times.

There was a lesson in song about the inferior crops of potatoes in the State of Maine, U.S.A.

Oh potatoes they grow small over there
Oh potatoes they grow small over there
Oh potatoes they grow small
'Cause they plant them in the fall
And they eats them tops and all over there.

When I heard the American troops in London in 1918 singing their patriotic war-whoop "Over there, over there—the Yanks are coming, etc.", I was reminded of the words and tune of our anti-American potato folk-song.

"Over there" is, of course, a war song, though "How in hell can the Old Folks tell, It ain't going to rain no more" may be termed a sentimental ballad, with undertones. Our "potato song" and also our "Black Tom" were

political ballads. And it was to political subjects that I was turning in the year 1903.

Mr. Stairs was the Chairman of the Conservative Party in Nova Scotia. He had been a member of the House of Commons and at one time leader of the Party in the Nova Scotia Legislature. He brought me into the circle of Sir Robert Borden, Halifax lawyer and for long Prime Minister of Canada. I formed a good understanding with Sir Robert and in after years our relations developed into a warm friendship. But a greater political influence in my life flowed from Mr. Stairs than from any other association.

Good fortune was my portion in the men who influenced me. R. B. Bennett was an important example. He was my boyhood friend and companion. A native of Albert County in New Brunswick he trained at the Normal School in Fredericton. After teaching school for a few years, he became a lawyer. Settled in Calgary, his law practice was immense. Latterly much of his time was taken up with my western interests.

But John F. Stairs, by giving me his trust, by correcting my errors with patience, by providing in my formative years a shining example of good conduct and honest and upright dealings has conferred benefits beyond any other contact in my long long life in finance, politics and journalism.

Early in my association with him we were journeying out of Montreal on the way to Halifax. The train left at noon. He was of such importance that E. L. Pease, one-time President of the Royal Bank of Canada, came to the railway station to see him off.

I was following in the footsteps of my master. Pease turned to me with a glowing countenance and said quite cheerfully: "Oh, you are Mr. Stairs' son." "No," I said, "I'm Max Aitken." The pleasant smile was wiped away. He turned from me with indifference, although he had no notion of my identity. This encounter remained always in my recollection. Mr. Pease was not my favourite banker although we often did business together. When my fortunes improved, Pease showed me a pleasing countenance on many occasions. He once told me the only possible method of buying a Bank. I took the opposite course and the deal went through.

Stairs was very much respected and, fortunately for me, he was a man of fixed views. He had a favourable opinion of me, and nothing in the shape of attack on me could alter his favour.

Needless to say, there were plenty of disparaging comments on me, for my growing success roused endless jealousies in directions where I least expected to find hatred and enmity. This phenomenon is inevitable in any small community, from a college to a town, to a city, when a strange

personality impinges on a society in which every man knows his neighbour by repute if not by sight. Hatred and liking, belief and incredulity, band themselves together into linked antagonism and fight it out. But the reputation over which they contend is considerably battered in the process.

Then there were old friends, with whom I had dwelt in the paths of idleness. Some had not moved up, and they did not cease to expect that I would be moved down again.

I was too fond of using the shillelagh in business when milder methods would have served my purpose as well. Intolerant of opposition, I sometimes rode roughshod over obstacles when there might have been an easy way around. Hence that myth of stern methods and a merciless nature, which sometimes shrouds the peak of my reputation with a cloud of mist.

It was not for the want of sound counsel that I failed occasionally or perhaps quite frequently to take into account the temperament and idiosyncrasies of those who stood in my way.

I never was unreliable in business. There is no occasion when I took advantage of ignorance or simplicity. The securities issued from my house were always good. And those who placed trust in me were not betrayed. I never lost a partner or severed my connection with an associate in anger or dispute. One friend broke a promise made to me in exchange for a consideration. I did not quarrel with him. But I didn't forget either.

In the autumn of the year 1904 John F. Stairs, my beloved patron and generous protector, was seized by angina pectoris. We were together in the morning at breakfast at the King Edward Hotel in Toronto. Mr. Stairs was negotiating for the sale of bonds in the Nova Scotia Steel and Coal Company. The blow fell before he had begun to carry out his task. During the month that elapsed between the first attack and his death I remained in constant attendance.

Toronto was a strange city, far from my office in Halifax. There was no thought of leaving him except when he sent me on an overnight mission to Quebec. I was ready to be called at any moment to serve my master. My business was neglected. My friends were forgotten. My ordinary pursuits were abandoned.

Dr. Caven was Stairs' medical attendant. He was a distinguished doctor. Like myself, he was the son of a Presbyterian Minister. Perhaps on that account we were drawn together.

He told me frankly that my master had no chance of life, although he did not adopt such a fatalistic tone in talking with Mrs. Stairs, a woman of singular beauty and great charm. She was devoted to her husband, and

nursed him with tender care. But nothing could save him. He died slowly and magnificently.

Know thou, O stranger to the fame
Of this much lov'd, much honor'd name
(For none that knew him need be told)
A warmer heart death ne'er made cold.

It was a night of sorrow, of utter and extreme misery.

A sense of loneliness and of futility came over me.

I would gladly have divided my remaining span of life with Mr. Stairs.

It was the first time that I had had to accept challenge and defeat and here, indeed, the defeat came in crushing form.

I travelled home with the body in a private railway car and in the company of his family. They were good to me and kind.

On the day of the funeral, I was invited to walk next to the family in the procession.

When the procession was forming up, an old gentleman, Mr. J. C. Mackintosh, who was a leading elder in the Fort Massey Presbyterian Church, tried to push me out of the way. He thought that leading elders should take precedence of me.

Mr. George Stairs intervened. But precedence of place made no sense. My heart was filled with gloom.

The death of Mr. Stairs affected me so deeply that it was impossible to get down to my tasks.

My sorrow interfered with my work and I hated my office which Mr. Stairs had usually shared. I brooded over the events leading to the loss of my hero. Where could I find a friend to help me out of the pit of despair?

Charles Porter, Director of Music at the Halifax Presbyterian College for Young Ladies, and turned Insurance Agent, was my frequent companion at dinner at the Halifax Club. On Sunday he took me to his own home. As I was seeking comfort and companionship in my wretchedness, I gladly turned to him. Instead of giving me sympathy in my disaster, he analysed my position in harsh and critical terms. He told me that all hope of further progress had departed. The tiny struggling Royal Securities Corporation would now die of paralysis. "Get back," he said, "to the Insurance Rate Book. There is your hope for years to come."

At once my self-pity turned to pride and my grief was mixed with fury. No more patronising counsel for me. Mr. Porter had made me whole again. Possibly that was his intention in refusing me the solace of sympathy.

I went out into the night surly but determined. Next week the business was on the move again.

12

“My wife had a lively interest in me”

IT WAS GENERALLY BELIEVED in Halifax financial circles that Mr. Stairs' death would prove my ruin. While the "great man" lived, it was said, he had been the shield of the boy's audacities and, deprived of Stairs' experience, the new craft must inevitably founder. The wish was father to the thought in many breasts in Halifax. I was by no means popular in all circles in that city. My talents indeed were admitted, but I had risen into prominence there too swiftly to suit the ideas of some of the established men of affairs. Many regarded my success as a mere fluke or as the accidental result of my association with Mr. Stairs. Such considerations, however, might have amounted to very little if I had been in the least deferential in manner or conciliatory in methods. That I was not. In these years the "good companion" side of my nature vanished altogether. I was desperately set on winning my financial battle.

But the prognostications of my critics were, however, utterly falsified by the event. I shouldered the burden of my dead friend with complete success. And there was a burden for my willing back. Mr. Stairs had planned a merger of local banks. To further his project, he had purchased a large block of shares in The People's Bank of Halifax, a small institution with many good accounts and some bad debts. Just after the death of Stairs the bank sustained immense losses amounting to many hundreds of thousands of dollars, and actually exhausting its surplus and seriously impairing its Capital Funds. Disclosure to the public in the next balance sheet must necessarily have resulted in a withdrawal of deposits with consequences that could not be measured.

The People's Bank directors decided to seek security for depositors by selling out to the Bank of Montreal. The terms of sale were disastrous and in consultation with the executors of the Stairs estate the Bank of Montreal offer was rejected.

George Stairs, brother of my dead master, Harris and I travelled to Montreal and demanded a higher price for People's Bank shares. On being refused by Sir Edward Clouston, General Manager of the Bank of Montreal, George Stairs withdrew in anger, declaring he would appeal to the Dominion Government for assistance for the People's Bank. Sir Edward Clouston after a brief interval sent a message to our deputation that he wished to see the young fellow with the big head. It was not certain what meaning I must give to the "big head" message. But on application I was received cordially and a new and much better bargain was offered, which Stairs and Harris agreed should be accepted. This was my first contact with the great banker of Montreal. My relations with him improved steadily and developed into intimacy.

On returning to Halifax, I joined with Mr. George Stairs and Mr. R. E. Harris, in assuming liability for three-fourths of Mr. John F. Stairs' bank shares at a price which relieved the estate from loss too heavy to bear. It was a crippling sum to me at the time, but I had no doubt about the course of duty. Mr. Stairs had made me. I must be faithful. The debt I paid to the memory of my friend swept away the greater part of the fortune I had so recently and rapidly acquired.

The secret of the Bank's weakness had indeed been long in my possession but I never took advantage in the market of my inner knowledge before the true state of affairs could be generally known.

The rumour spread that I had made money through the deal by selling shares before the bad news became public. But it was shown not only that I had not sold any shares, as was alleged, but that I had taken over a quarter of Stairs' liability. While nothing was further from my mind than benefiting from what I regarded as a just sacrifice, I did in fact gain greatly in status and name as a result of the accusations and their refutation. Mr. T. E. Kenny, President of the Merchants' Bank (now Royal Bank of Canada), rose up in my defence. He spoke in words of praise. Thus it was that I did not lose because of the false and damaging charges made against me for my share in the transaction, but in fact I benefited greatly by the attacks and the reaction when Mr. Kenny made known that my conduct had been disinterested.

As I have written, Mr. Stairs left behind him what might be called "uncompleted business". He was the President of the Nova Scotia Steel and Coal Company. Recent building expenditure had far exceeded estimates. The company was in a difficult position. The liquid capital was exhausted and large debts had been contracted. He was in the act of arranging a new financial structure when death took him.

The Board of Directors were in a dither. They were like lost sheep. So the task of finding the money fell to me, and I was glad to get the opportunity.

Mr. Harris of Halifax asked me to couple my acceptance of the duty with a demand that he should follow Mr. Stairs as President of the Steel Company; in return he would see that I became a director.

He got the job, but he did not make me a director. It was a bitter setback and a real betrayal. I could and would stand and resist the opposition of many critics in Halifax and elsewhere. But when my friend Harris kicked me downstairs, as it were, I fell into a real bout of depression and dismay. Was anything worth while? Would I continue my association with the perfidious President? But there was still the financing of the Steel Company.

Mr. Stairs had died while in charge of the assignment. I would complete the task on his behalf.

Forthwith I told the Steel Company I would buy 1,500,000 of second Mortgage bonds for $1,250,000, thus providing the sum required to complete their programme. Two banks were persuaded to lend me the money. I had to pledge everything as security. What an ending to a daring act, almost an act of revenge on Harris.

The bonds were quickly sold in the East and in Toronto. My profit amounted to short of $200,000. More important, my confidence was restored.

Although I made a large sum of money, my loneliness was obsessing me. It was difficult to throw off the depression that had seized me. The memory of my friend was always with me. I formed a very bad habit of going off to the cemetery every Sunday afternoon to stand beside his grave. On the tombstone was the text suggested to Mrs. Stairs by me, which has been my cloud by day and pillar of fire by night, even though I have lost my way on many occasions.

To do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.

Dwelling mournfully on the past did not become me. Looking hopefully into the future was surely my temper. Despondency and despair must not be my companions. Then came deliverance from depression.

It was a new interest that came into my life and changed everything in the twinkling of an eye. The interest was Gladys Drury, tall and slight with golden hair and large green eyes.

She was a daughter of General Charles Drury. He had taken over the Halifax Garrison from the British, becoming the first Canadian in charge of that Command. General Drury was a native of Saint John. He could not afford to live in the Headquarters provided for his illustrious predecessors, mostly wealthy members of aristocratic English dynasties. He had a salary which was quite insufficient to meet the needs of his very large family. Moreover he and his wife were required by their position to "keep up with the Joneses". This added to their difficulties. With his family of three beautiful daughters General Drury took up a temporary residence at the Halifax Hotel. My dining place was forthwith transferred from the Halifax Club to the Halifax Hotel. Nightly I waited for the appearance in the dining-room of the Drury family.

Gladys was a child, just eighteen years of age. She had no experience of the world. She was simple, though clever, and most beautiful, with charm

and sympathy. She spoke well of everybody, even my bitter enemies.

She never knew what envy was, nor hate,
Her soul was filled with truth and honesty.

In January 1906, when she was nineteen and I was twenty-six, we were married at the Garrison Church in Halifax.

My wife had a lively interest in me. I had my business, my affairs, my liabilities, my difficulties, my worries, all pressing on me every hour of the day. I had not time for pleasure, no chance for recreation, and a nervous system under so much pressure that it was by no means attuned to leisure.

In these circumstances, my wife undertook to make my conditions as easy as possible. All of this she carried out with such devotion, such endless patience, that she became quite indispensable to my happiness. That sort of devotion is seldom seen though it carries its own reward.

On our wedding journey, during which I was surrounded by business obligations all the way, we went out to a shop in Boston and bought an evening cloak. It cost $55. She protested that the price was too high. The expenditure, she said, was a form of extravagance. Why, the wedding band had only cost nine dollars!

But that was the beginning of a habit which, I am bound to say, developed pretty rapidly. It was the first and last time that I knew her to protest at paying high prices for pretty clothes.

We bought an automobile. It was, I think, a steam-driven vehicle. The engine required the application of heat before resorting to a crank, hard to turn and liable to kick.

Thus we passed from the horse and buggy age, giving up our old mare "Blackthorn". The automobile ushered in another and different existence. Things were not the same. It was like dwelling in a new world.

There were troubles for the motorist in the Maritimes. The horse and buggy man resented the horseless carriage and the pedestrian was apt to take aggressive counter-action. My sister wrote on June 12th, 1906, from Newcastle where there was only one automobile in the district:

> *Mr. Robinson's automobile broke down a couple of weeks ago. It is not repaired yet so everybody is taking the opportunity of going out driving [horse and buggy]. I don't know what they'll do if Mr. McKane brings two with him.*

When my wife and I left Halifax on our wedding journey on that winter night in the last days of the first month of 1906, life in Halifax was a

memory of the past. There would be no return, except as a visitor. Montreal must be my next resting place.

It was a moment of expansion with greater opportunities and bigger chances.

My financial position was good. With considerable assets there were no liabilities to confuse or obsess me. Henceforth men of wider experience, higher prestige and extensive capital resources would be my competitors.

After a journey to Cuba with yet another Electric Light establishment as a result,[17] we moved into an apartment in a building of flats in Sherbrooke Street, in Montreal, and working premises in St. James Street, where offices of the Royal Securities Corporation had been set up.

My new career had hardly opened out when appendicitis laid me low. The operation was performed at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal, while my wife watched over me devotedly. James Bell was the surgeon. His fee was $500—too much for that day.

Just before the operation a telegram came from one of my clients R. E. Harris—telling me to sell for him his holdings of shares of every sort. Many of these were in companies organised and financed by me. He explained that he was giving these instructions though he was not aware of any inherent weakness in the companies concerned.

Naturally, this communication threw me into a state of extreme nervous alarm. Something terrible was about to happen. A financial panic might be descending upon the country. Yet I would be laid up for a long time. If your heart is where your treasures are, you do not look on that prospect with calm, especially when you are young and adventurous. It was a remarkably exasperating prelude to a major surgical operation.

But events moved swiftly. After my recovery from the anaesthetic, it was disclosed that the reason for Harris's decision was the impending failure of the Ontario Bank. My spirits improved. It was no longer bad news. There was no financial storm.

It took me a long time to get over my illness, which left me depressed, feeling that there was no objective in life. Retirement from the cares of business to a farm in Alberta was considered. We had plenty of money and a good income, far in excess of our modest expenditures.

But youth and vitality worked their miracle.

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[17] Camaguay Electric Company, established 1906—sold to American and Foreign Power in 1926 for 2½ million.

13

“Business is more swiftly dispatched if there are no easy chairs”

IN THE CLOSING DAYS of 1906 R. Wilson Smith, a former Mayor of Montreal, sold me control of the Montreal Trust Company for about $400,000. My total assets amounted to $700,000 at that time.

On the 1st February, at twenty-seven years of age, I walked into the office in the Place D'Armes, sat myself down in the seat of authority and took over the direction of the Trust Company.

In my new place of importance, it seemed to me that my life of adventure had ended. Henceforth sound banking principles and wise trusteeship would be my portion. No more swift decisions followed by daring ventures, with grave issues put to the test. Wrong again! There was more to come.

A financial panic in the autumn of 1907, which began in New York and spread over the whole continent, gave me much anxiety and determined without doubt my future plans.

I had promoted and financed the building of a hydro-electric plant in Porto Rico.[18] All the money was raised in the autumn of 1906 and before the Montreal Trust Company came under my management. Most of it was on deposit with the Trust Company of America in New York. That concern closed its doors.

Kingsbury Curtis, a New York friend, advised me to come at once and withdraw my cash balances there, which were held for the building of the Porto Rico plants. I just managed to catch the night train, arriving in New York at sunrise on a lovely autumn day. The old Waldorf Hotel, where I stayed, was next to the Knickerbocker Trust Company. Long queues of depositors were gathered about the doors, awaiting the opening hour. They would wait in vain. The doors never opened and the President, named Barney, shot himself in the vault. The sight of the unhappy clients gave me a real nervous shock.

While dressing in my bedroom before making off to the Trust Company of America, resounding explosions, which came from building operations at an adjoining site, startled me. Surely it seemed my nerves would destroy my judgments in this crisis. That would be disastrous. So I turned to contemplation of the most disagreeable event that had happened to me in my brief but eventful experience. The cure worked and by nine o'clock I drove into Wall Street with a cheque book and a pass book.

Alas! Another shock, and a shattering shock. There in my sight were long queues gathered about the doors of the Trust Company of America. Disaster. What could be done? Who would help me? Money must be found at once to pay wages and salaries in Porto Rico. Failure would mean

workmen's liens and winding-up proceedings. Default! What a terrible prospect. Failure! Doubts would arise about the concerns financed by me! Possibly the credit of the Montreal Trust Company would be questioned. Many doubters had predicted trouble because they believed my financial operations were expanding too rapidly. Would prophecies of evil come true? There was no time for reflection. Action, and at once.

A financial house of high repute was my first life line. There I appeared and waited for the arrival of the partner most likely to hear my plea. Explanations were simple and my misfortune easily understood. But money was almost unobtainable. Rates of interest were prohibitive. Security made little difference. Would my personal credit gain me a temporary loan? I got it! The price was high and part of my own equity was added to the charge. No matter. I had escaped from the whirlwind. The black cloud rolled away. Many banks failed and much damage was done before Wall Street recovered. After the storm passed, the Trust Company of America returned our money to us.

Now a depression is often preceded by a financial panic and 1907 was no exception. When prices fall and overproduction prevails the public becomes discouraged. It is like a fog. The fog lifts and the sun shines again. Some investors try to foretell market movements, with the hope of selling in times of prosperity and repurchasing when financial panic or depression brings down the prices. It is my experience over many years that it is best to buy and hold on. Moving in and out of the market is never as satisfactory.

It was Pierpont Morgan who said: "Don't sell the United States short." He was a commanding figure in my time. He was all-powerful and his name in financial circles was treated with reverence. I saw him once in the King Edward Hotel in Toronto, with a bevy of bishops in his train. He was a strange character whose private life did not conform to his public pretensions. He may have been a child of fortune.

That autumn—1907—gave me a better sense of values, and a greater appreciation of the need for courage and fortitude. But the experience also decided me against a banking career. Others could take deposits from the public. It was not going to be my affair. I did not want to be the victim of caprice, and panic and rumour and mass fear.

The great queues waiting outside the banks in New York had made up my mind for me. No more inside the bank. It was more comfortable to be in the queue, not behind the grille.

Besides, a first-rate prospect of an immense hydro-electric development out in British Columbia was awaiting my attention.

The Montreal Trust Company must be sold. I had little difficulty in getting rid of my interest to the Royal Bank. My profit on the transaction was just half as much as I had paid for the shares. If I remember rightly I paid $400,000 and sold for $600,000. I was well satisfied. I was glad to be relieved of the responsibility of management. I was free to follow my chosen path of providing finance for industry. The Royal Securities Corporation became once more my sole and only interest.

It was for me a good morning when I relinquished the responsibility for management of my Trust Company and gave henceforth all my time to selling securities and also creating them.

Sir Herbert Holt, the most important citizen in Montreal finance, was President of the Royal Bank. When the first meeting of the Trust Company under his Chairmanship was held, he spoke glowingly of my administration. He asked me to become Vice-President of the Trust Company under the new control. This speech opened the way to intimate relations between Sir Herbert Holt and me; relations which I have often described as a limited Partnership. I in turn asked him to join me as a shareholder and director of the Royal Securities and he accepted my offer.

I tried in after years to induce Sir Herbert to look favourably upon the Empire as a political unit. His support would have answered many objections made by unreasoning opponents in England, who declared like parrots, "Canada will not have it." He appeared to be interested, but there was no lasting effect.

He came with me to a great meeting, possibly in Glasgow. I cannot recall the place.

But I do remember during a long Empire campaign on platforms up and down the United Kingdom, through all the counties, appearing at St. Andrew's Hall in Glasgow.

A group of rowdy Communists had taken up a position in the centre of the great amphitheatre and as unemployment was distressing the Clydeside workers, they shouted in unison: "There is no unemployment in Russia."

Then a man of broad shoulders, wearing a cloth cap, rose in his place and asked his companions for silence while he addressed a question to me. The rowdies subsided.

"Mr. Lord Beaver," he said, "you were in Russia last autumn?"

An answer to an interruption from the audience is always dangerous. The questioner may have a bomb in hand for the speaker. But I replied: "Yes."

"Was there any unemployment there?" was the next question.

I answered: “There is no unemployment in Russia.”

Cheers broke out amongst my enemies. My friends were depressed. The meeting would surely go cold. When, by a stroke of good luck, I recalled to my mind that there was in Glasgow a famous and most extensive structure called Barlinnie Prison. I continued: “There is no unemployment in Barlinnie Prison, but I would hate to be there.”

My prestige was restored, and my enemies at any rate in that audience were for the moment silenced.

In the early summer of 1908, when my wife was 21, we went to Halifax for the birth of our daughter, Janet. We had chosen for the monumental event a tiny little house on the far bank of the North West Arm, standing on a high cliff of that inland sea. The house had been built to my own design after my arrival in Halifax at the turn of the century. A living room looking to the south with large windows, backed by two bedrooms and a bathroom with occasional supplies of hot water made up our accommodation. The ceilings were high and pitched. The rain pattering on the roof in the night was a pleasant inducement to sleep. Heavy thunderstorms of frequent occurrence brought reverberations as though we were involved in a great artillery duel. A kitchen wing and a bedroom fulfilled our service requirements. My faithful man James and his wife took over responsibility for that branch of the establishment.

My wife insisted on this out-of-the-way place for the birth of her baby. It is difficult to explain why she was allowed her own way and possibly encouraged by me.

Doctor Curry, well-known gynaecologist, was summoned. But his journey involved a passage by boat over the North West Arm, and of course he arrived after the child had been born. No harm came to mother and daughter and the secluded house on the North West Arm was a happy resting place for convalescence.

We expected a son, but the arrival of a daughter gave us equal joy. When the crisis was over (for it is of the nature of crisis, like every such occasion when the first-born appears), I returned to Montreal, where it was my custom to stand all day at a lectern in the general office, surrounded by staff. A private office is an inviting place for lengthy conversations. Business is more swiftly dispatched if there are no easy chairs.

My wife and her young daughter returned to Montreal in the autumn. Her arrival at the railway station was the first time she had taken on the guise of a grown-up woman. She had put off her era of childhood, and now she must be treated as a wife and mother too. As she walked up the long

railway station platform, assured and matronly in appearance, followed by a nurse carrying the child in her arms, I welcomed her with deep emotion. The consciousness of a family increased the intimacy of our relationship and possibly my own notion of egotistical importance to mother and daughter too.

There we were, a new family, established and well established in the commercial capital of the country. We were known and respected and sought after by important persons. We had a position of our own, with a circle of friends.

My activities in developing the resources of Canada, my enterprise and judgment, gave me a place in the financial fraternity of Montreal at an early age. I was accepted and approved by many leaders of the community.

On that day, as my wife moved towards me, smiling in a new assurance, with the promise of the future, which we were both building, I had, perhaps for the first time, a confident vision of my influence and a fanciful and even vain idea of dominating Canadian finance and industry.

We shall see.

In the autumn of 1908 I travelled to London accompanied by my young and vivacious wife, whose companionship made life for me a gay and exciting adventure. She always shared my disappointments with philosophic calm and she rejoiced in my triumphs with gaiety and glee. I was engaged in selling bonds and shares of Canadian concerns including the Nova Scotia Steel and Coal Company.

Now the firm of William Jacks was selling agent for the Steel Company in Britain. Andrew Bonar Law had been a partner. He lived in Whitehall Court in Westminster. I called on him with the intention of pushing the sale of my wares.

It was our first meeting. There was, I thought, a tie and bond between us. His father had been the Presbyterian Minister at Richibucto, New Brunswick, and my father had looked after the Scottish congregation at Newcastle, the next town north. Both Ministers had been sent to Canada under the auspices of an Augmentation Fund provided by the Establishment in the Old Country. Both of them possibly shared in the Temporalities Fund, another helpful source of income to those underpaid servants of the Church.

I was quite wrong. There was no tie. Bonar Law was not interested in me.

He told me in after years that he had been bored by my conversation and he bought a few thousand dollars of my bonds to get rid of me. For my part I was not impressed by the Conservative Leader, afterwards Prime Minister of

Great Britain. His head was too small, his conversation too narrow and his interest in Canada too obviously negligible.

It was not until two years later that I came to know him for a man of remarkable ability with a stainless character and a kindliness that won for him the esteem and devotion of all of his intimate friends and also a vast public who dwelt upon his words and followed faithfully his leadership until death took him.

I returned to Canada with a pocketful of orders for Canadian securities and an association and connection with a British financial house that served a good purpose in the future.

The year 1909 was my first real big year. And it was the first time I felt the barbs and shafts, the shots and shells, of jealousy and criticism from the established hierarchy of Canadian men of money and money power.

I was managing efficiently and with constantly growing authority a distributing organisation for the sale of bonds and shares, known widely and favourably as Royal Securities Corporation. Our own building in St. James Street, Montreal, was Head Office, with branches at Toronto, Quebec, Saint John and Halifax. A London office was set up in 1908. The Montreal Engineering Company, a subsidiary of Royal Securities, was expanding rapidly in the management and control of Public Utility undertakings. Possibly my Royal Securities had become the most vital and important finance house in Canada, and certainly the greatest money maker.

The Railway Carriage Company, known as Rhodes Curry, was my first issue in the early months of that wonderful year of 1909.

Two hydro-electric developments were also occupying my attention and the capital or money arrangements were carried out swiftly and with ease. My reputation for offering sound business ventures served me splendidly. The investors took my securities with such enthusiasm that there were more willing buyers than the available supplies of bonds and shares.

Calgary Power Company I have already mentioned.

Western Canada Power was a hydro-electric plant built at Stave Lake in British Columbia. The promotion required visits to Vancouver. The long train journey, moving so slowly over prairies and mountains, was a weary pilgrimage. Ten days and nights there and back again took much of the joy and delight out of this development. The British Columbia Electric Company took over our Power Plant in 1915, paying a handsome profit to the Western Canada shareholders.

My next venture was the Canada Cement Company, launched in September of that same year, 1909. This was a combine or trust embracing

all but one of the cement plants in the Dominion, excepting British Columbia. The issue of bonds and shares was much larger than any previous offer in Canada. The response of investors was excellent and the Company was favourably received by newspapers and public.

The management of such a vast assembly of divergent interests became a pressing need.

I undertook negotiations for a General Manager on behalf of my colleagues on the Board. My first effort was given to securing Frank Morse, a Vice-President of the Grand Trunk Railway. He declined. Frank P. Jones, Manager of the Steel Plant at Sydney in Nova Scotia, was my second choice. He made a satisfactory agreement with me which I had no hesitation in signing for the Company. The Board ratified the arrangement. Jones was a brilliant operator. He eventually became the leader of industry in Canada.

Fortunately a former salesman for the Montreal Cement plant was appointed Assistant Manager. His name, Jack Johnson. His genius guided the Company through the crisis of 1929 and over the war until in 1955 after twenty-five years of brilliant direction he relinquished his Presidency. He now occupies a seat on the Board.

Frank Jones and Jack Johnson were the architects of one of the strongest industrial institutions in Canada.

For me stormy weather followed almost immediately after the Cement Company was launched. Most bitter controversy broke out. One bankrupt company in Exshaw, Alberta, had ceased operations owing large sums of money to the Canadian Pacific Railway and lesser amounts to the Bank of Montreal. The shareholders of the Exshaw company, whose equity was worthless, tried to force me to take over their interests at a monstrous price and at the same time pay off their creditors, including, of course, the Canadian Pacific Railway and the bank. They made a great row which was for a time conducted in the privacy of board-rooms and offices. Eventually my Exshaw enemies carried the attack on me to extreme lengths, making use of Parliament, press and platform to further their evil designs. Of that struggle and the outcome I will write shortly.

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[18] Porto Rico Railways Company with three million of cash, founded by me in the autumn of 1906.

14

“The hostile financiers would never forgive me”

THE YEAR 1909 ENDED in a blaze of excitement. The Cement Company, the crown of my labours in joint stock company promotion, was well established and the appointment of Mr. Jones gave confidence to the wavering few who wrongly claimed that the combine suffered from over-capitalization.

The holiday celebrations at our home took on a joyous garb. Friends and colleagues gathered about the dinner-table each night from Christmas to the New Year.

Happiness and deep affection settled upon the family. My wife had become very dear to me and her second confinement, which was approaching, gave tenderness to the intimate and delightfully optimistic outlook on the future which we shared.

In the midst of my deep interest in bonds and stocks, journalism was always present in my meditations on future plans. January 8th, 1910, was the date of the first issue of an ambitious weekly magazine, badly produced, amateurish and old-fashioned in appearance, named *The Canadian Century*. This publication was launched in the hope of competing with the weekly journals of the United States. "Canada for the Canadians" was the watchword.

After a long spell of trial and error the market for weekly magazines was still held by the Americans and our labours ended in sale to a group of Montreal manufacturers. These industrialists were outraged by a Liberal Government proposal for trade reciprocity with the United States. They objected to the treaty which they believed would result in customs union with the Republic. When the Liberals submitted their policy to the electors in 1911 their administration went down in defeat.

With the end of the American trade treaty, the magazine died and was buried with all of the capital that had been invested in it.

The Canadian Century was what might be termed "small potatoes". Another and really large project was brought to the stage of a formal agreement on 7th February, 1910.

The *Montreal Gazette*, the only morning newspaper in Montreal printed in English, was controlled by Mr. W. J. White (Willie White), an active and distinguished member of the Bar.

He agreed to sell the paper to me. The price was not unreasonable. There was, however, a condition in the by-laws controlling a transfer of *Gazette* shares—consent to a change of ownership had to be approved by the Bank of Montreal and the Canadian Pacific Railway. The Bank agreed to accept

me. The Railway rejected my name, no doubt on account of the controversy that was raging over the Canada Cement Company.

Another newspaper transaction in that year, 1910, gave better results for the political aims now uppermost in my mind.

On June 13th, 1910, the *Montreal Herald* building fell down. A water tower crashed from roof to ground floor. Fire broke out. Mr. Brierley, the sole proprietor of the paper, was ruined. His insurance was inadequate and, of course, for the future the interference with the production of the *Herald* was a dreadful blow.

On the same day, while smoke clouds were billowing through St. James Street, I completed a profitable agreement. Such a strange contrast! Brierley at one end of St. James Street ruined, while in my office at the other end of the same street the harvest of a great money gain was being gathered.

Late in the afternoon Brierley visited me and out of my plenty I gave him $150,000 without interest or security—sufficient to rebuild his plant.

The *Herald* supported the Liberal Administration. In 1911, however, Brierley was persuaded to advocate Borden's Conservative policy at the anti-Reciprocity Election, when a movement for closer trade relations with the United States was heavily defeated at the polls. The Borden plan involved closer trade relations with Britain.

Throughout the year 1912 Brierley maintained and strengthened his support for Borden and his Government.

A naval plan promoted by the Prime Minister found favour with my newspaper friend.

Prime Minister Borden called on Brierley. The meeting was most agreeable to both. By October Brierley was offering wise advice on the political difficulties of carrying out a naval contribution to Great Britain.

Both evening newspapers in Montreal, the *Herald* and the *Star*, were supporting Borden's naval policy.

The *Star* was, however, the leading newspaper and Sir Hugh Graham, afterwards Lord Atholstan, was the sole proprietor.

He indicated that he might sell. Negotiations extended over two years. Graham had many devices for selling his cake and keeping it. By November 1912 he came to the final decision that he would not part with the *Star*.

Though nothing came of my efforts to bring the *Herald* and the *Star* together, Lord Atholstan eventually acquired the *Herald* from Brierley, repaying me the sum of $150,000 which I had given Brierley in 1910 for rebuilding his plant.

What might have been my future if the *Montreal Gazette* and the *Herald* had come under my control? Often that speculation has occurred to me. But "what might have been" is an impenetrable mystery.

The hope of acquiring important newspapers certainly influenced another decisive turn in my association with finance and commerce.

The United States Mortgage and Trust Company, long since merged in other and larger institutions,[19] sought me out through the good report of Paul Cravath, a New York lawyer. The Chairman's place was within my grasp and it was difficult to resist the prize. But I feared that my nationality would have to be surrendered. United States citizenship was possibly the price. It was too much. The offer lapsed and Mr. John W. Platter became Chairman in 1910.

Was my chief reason for refusal the threat of United States citizenship? It would have been to me a complete barrier. But there was, too, a hankering after newspaper interests in Canada. I wanted so very much to seize an opportunity through journalism of taking part in the struggle for the great and glittering prize of Empire solidarity. True my path on the road that led to journalism was only postponed.

My son Max was born in February 1910.

We were living at 284 Drummond Street, a large house now differently numbered and differently laid out. It was a home with excellent facilities. The dining-room was spacious and the kitchen adapted to the preparation of food on a similar scale. There was, too, a wine cellar, unusual in Montreal in the first decade of the century.

While my wife was bedridden for two or three weeks according to the practice of the medical profession of the time, I negotiated the attendance of my young daughter at the dinner-table, though she was under two years of age. A rumour was in circulation that I had given our little Janet a taste of champagne. It was not conducive to the tranquillity of our domestic relations when my wife heard of this escapade. She reprimanded me for my disgraceful conduct.

My son just born was, however, a comfort and a joy, and for the first time in his life, though not the last, he was a unifying influence in our family.

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The amalgamation of all the car manufacturing companies in Canada was carried out under my care in early 1910.

The new trust was known as the Canadian Car and Foundry Company. For the first time in the history of Canadian finance I called in the Boston firm of Lee Higginson & Co. to sell the bond issue to their clients. It was the birth of a movement which has reached such proportions that three-quarters of all foreign holdings in Canada belong to U.S. investors.

The Montreal Rolling Mills was the name of a steel company dealing in finished products. The business was possibly the most important finishing plant in all Canada. I agreed about mid-March 1910 to purchase all of the shares of this concern. The price was generous but the prospects for future development were unlimited.

It was my intention to find a market in Canada for an issue of bonds and shares of a new company, retaining for my colleagues and me a fair proportion of the equity represented by bonus shares. It was necessary to borrow the amount of the purchase price, securing the loan by pledging my own assets, and liquidating my liabilities out of the sale of the new securities of the Montreal Rolling Mills.

My credit was good and any bank in Canada would have advanced the necessary funds.

By this time, however, I longed to make a journey to London. I had been reading the London newspapers and the exciting political situation over Chamberlain's plan for a united Empire filled me with enthusiasm.

Surely this was a vision of splendour and as always my admiration was aroused and I was fired with a desire to take part in such a glamorous adventure.

Why not try to set up a movement in Canada to co-operate with the British Tory Party which had by this time adopted Chamberlain's programme? The possibility should be studied in England whence would come inspiration for Canadian action.

And why not borrow that $5 million in the London Money Market? Possibly I could negotiate a lower rate of interest. A short credit was all that I required. Possibly a revolving credit would suit my needs. The right to draw upon a great bank at three months secured by a selection of my assets, which by this time amounted to a considerable sum.

By mid-April I had taken my decision. I would go to the London Money Market and also inquire into the political prospects of the Chamberlain campaign.

I informed my wife that I was leaving on a journey to London. She informed me that her duty to her husband conflicted with her devotion to her

young daughter and newborn son. She must make a sacrifice. And I was not the victim.

Care of my daughter and her brother was turned over to my mother, brought from New Brunswick and installed in the Drummond Street house.

On a day late in April we set out from New York for the Old World, as we called it. The voyage was stormy but the consciousness of the presence beside me of my beautiful and vivacious companion banished the dreadful discomforts of a desperately rough sea.

Arriving in England on the last day of April, I called on Bonar Law. Our meeting was cordial but for the second time I did not succeed in arousing his enthusiasm. Chamberlain was ill and unable to see me. He was not unwilling to encourage a young supporter from abroad but a stroke had put an end to his political career, though the fiction of his leadership was still maintained.

After a restless week in Britain, my return journey to Canada was undertaken on the day after the death of King Edward. The whole nation was in mourning, which impressed me as an admirable though solemn demonstration of loyalty and devotion to the monarchy. And of course the monarch was inevitably associated with my conception of a United Empire: Canada and the Dominions, Crown Colonies and India, in one customs union, and under one crown.

Home again by mid-May, the public placing of the securities of the new Montreal Rolling Mills was my chief concern.

It became apparent that a steel trust of all the plants in Canada excluding the Nova Scotian properties might be a wise and economical measure. A meeting of the competing company Presidents was called in Toronto. The first discussion took place in a private dining-room at the Toronto Club. The last conference at the Waldorf Hotel in New York. Within a week of the Waldorf meeting the terms were settled and the purchase price of every plant agreed, except my own Montreal Rolling Mills which was to be subject to an appraisal of value to be fixed by the Canadian Appraisal Company. The sum so arrived at was to be paid to me in cash and I was to have one-third of the total equity shares. I was to be responsible for the finance by selling bonds and preferred shares in sums sufficient to provide all purchase money.

The appraisal of the Montreal Rolling Mills turned out to be in excess of $6 million, or one million more than my purchase price. And of course I received one-third of the equity.

Already, as I have written, many Montreal chiefs of finance and industry had begun to take a dim view of my domination of Canadian money markets. Their leader was the President of the Canadian Pacific Railway,

who believed he had reason to complain of my rigidity over Canada Cement. And I was about to encounter the fury of the giants of finance whose authority and powers were being challenged by my activities.

My Montreal Rolling Mills bargain was violently denounced. My profit was excessive, said the tycoons. Hostility broke out in the offices of Montreal and Toronto big financiers.

Two men from the West, Sir Edmund Osler and W. D. Matthews, worked together. They were dominating shareholders in an Ontario cement company which had been sold to me for a large sum.

Now their substantial interest in the Hamilton iron concern passing to the steel combine was the electric spark that set their opposition to me in violent motion.

It was proposed by them that my portion of shares in the steel combine should be curtailed. A reduction of one half was the burden of their plan. Osler and Matthews talked about my huge profits as a travesty of public morals.

Osler and Matthews were both Presidents of Banks, directors of many companies, including the Canadian Pacific Railway. Their attack found much support amongst fellow directors and financial associates. The plan for bringing me in line with their demands was simple. The Bank of Montreal, which usually financed my operations, would be asked to require me to forgo half of my equity shares as a condition to providing the necessary large sums of capital required to "swing the deal".

But my enemies did not rejoice over me. They did not swallow me up. They stumbled.

One of the belligerent directors of the Bank of Montreal (Sir Thomas Shaughnessy) at the Board meeting called for my account, expected to find that I was depending on an overdraft at the Bank to finance my purchase. Then the screw was to be turned.

My account was produced disclosing a deposit of $5 million. This large sum was of course the result of a credit of £1 million granted me by Parrs Bank in London in the form of acceptances of three months' bills which I had taken the precaution of selling to Lee Higginson and Company in Boston.

It was a dramatic moment. The schemes of my opponents were squashed. But they were not done with me. They were to return to the struggle, and with deadly effect. They were to reap in the end a considerable revenge.

At the moment I gave no thought or attention to the storm of abuse in high places, and refused even to listen to argument or pressure from the financial oligarchy. I insisted on pocketing my million dollars and the one-third equity in the steel combine. My colleagues sustained and supported my stand. Sir Herbert Holt and Sir Edward Clouston, both shareholders in the Royal Securities Corporation, encouraged my resistance. There could be no compromise.

Osler and Matthews came again to Montreal. They asked me to hold myself in readiness to attend on them. My answer was a message of defiance.

No threats moved me. It was said that failing immediate submission the hostile financiers would never forgive me. They never did.

At 5 o'clock on the 17th of July 1910 the Steel Company of Canada came into existence. It has had from that day a splendid record of unbroken achievement. The shareholders have reaped immense benefits and the public has been pleased with the services of their giant Steel Trust. The management has been good from that day to this. Ross McMaster, chairman for many years was a great man. And when he retired others who followed have sustained the reputation and high efficiency of this leading concern in all of Canadian industry.

At nightfall on that same day in July 1910, my wife met me at the Royal Securities Corporation office and we drove straight off from Montreal on the way to London, England. The route to New York, terminus of the Cunard Line, was not a paved highway, just a dirt road. Two friends went with us.

We stayed on the first night at a hotel at Bluff Point, a name well suited to my recent experience with the Osler-Matthews group. During the night the sleepless hours were given over to meditation. I had much money, a fortune of more than five million dollars. My career as a financier and promoter had been good. My credit was sound. My business transactions were admired. The bonds and shares of my several companies were regarded with confidence and trust, even by my critics.

What of the future? Was finance the chosen portion for me? More and bigger mergers or retirement from the market-place? Which was the destined way?

Without doubt a longing to take part in the Empire plan was a controlling desire. But my ignorance of British public life was immense and my vanity led me to foolish conclusions. My success in making mergers in Canada had turned out so wonderfully well. Why not exercise the same

talent in making a worthy contribution to the effort of bringing all the Empire units into one commercial combine?

It was this foolish and even ridiculous conception which stimulated my longing to take part in the Empire plan. Surely my gifts would be useful to the cause of the United British Empire. What a wonderful vision!

Next day, weary and tired-out, I insisted on driving the open touring motor, very high-sprung and heavy. It was difficult for me to keep the car on the road. Then at last into the ditch the great motor skidded and came to an abrupt stop. My companions said: “Now, no more! As soon as we get the car out on to the highway again, we shall put someone else to drive, or we are going to sit on a rail fence.”

So I resigned the wheel, too tired to help the salvage operation. While my friends struggled with the motor, it was I who sat on a rail fence.

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[19] In 1929 merged with Chemical Bank and Trust Company, which joined the Corn Exchange Bank as Chemical Corn Exchange Bank.

15

“Like Churchill I was arrogant in my youth”

"TO SCATTER PLENTY O'ER a smiling land", hadn't that been John F. Stairs' favourite quotation? Well, I had scattered plenty. The public was well pleased with me. The little band of bitter enemies, though powerful, could not deprive me of my immense public following. True, in such a contest sentiment would be on my side. Nobody liked the "old gang" anyway.

Should I throw over these advantages and abandon all my prospects in finance and industry in Canada?

How did that quotation go on? "And read their history in a nation's eyes." That was still to do. That was for the future . . .

But after all I had made my fortune. More money would not mean more happiness. Surely the path of sacrifice for the sake of an ideal would give me a lasting purpose.

On the way to New York my car was stopped at several towns to receive messages from Canadians who wanted to start industries, to reorganise enterprises, to build waterpower plants. They all wished to interview me, and of course they all had one object—to raise money.

At Saratoga Springs, near New York, Sir William Price of Quebec joined me. He asked me to provide five or six million dollars to build a newsprint (paper) mill on his timber property on the Saguenay River in Canada.

An agreement was signed requiring me to supply funds in return for a like amount of bonds and one quarter of the common shares. Some of these shares are still held by me or by Beaverbrook Trusts.

That same night I discussed with my wife the agreement I had just signed committing me to find $6 million. Evidently my mind was turning back to business. The first temptation that came my way seemed to alter my plans. Would I turn again to finance? "No!" I said to my wife. "No!" said she. We would go forward to find, if possible, a place in the great conception, the mighty plan for a United Empire.

Finally we reached New York and sailed on the *Lusitania*. We had a new experience on the ship. When we went to the sitting-room in our suite the cabin was overfilled with flowers. These gifts were from men of business in Canada who had been intimately associated in financial events that were just ended. My colleagues there, and some of them are still alive, have never forgotten that summer of 1910. They still remember and often talk over the series of events extending over two years, up to that time the most exciting era in Canadian industry.

When we arrived in England at the end of July we determined not to put up with an hotel. My wife and I accordingly went to stay in a flat in Cavendish Square. Sometimes, when walking through the streets of London,

turning into Cavendish Square and looking up to an eighth-floor flat, the memory of the past is a mixture of joy and regret. Joy for what was. Regret for what is.

Here I was in London with no certain direction, no settled future, no certainty of occupation. The service of Empire surely beckoned, but would there be an opening? Could I take advantage of such an opportunity? Would I be given a chance? I sought out the home of Bonar Law, only to find that he was absent and the house was closed.

Meanwhile there was money to invest. Capital should not be idle. The death of Mr. Charles Rolls in an early airplane crash brought me the offer of one half the voting capital of Rolls-Royce, the British motor company. This purchase gave me effective control. I nominated two directors to represent me on the Board. One of them was George Rowe; the other was Edward Goulding, Member of Parliament for Worcester. Shortly after, he became Chairman of the Company and held the post until his death in 1936.

He was given to expressions of gratitude to me. But if we were to make a ledger account, it would be found that I had benefited much more from his influence. He was a great figure in politics, a leading authority in the Conservative Party. He gave me many lessons on Parliament and the politicians.

Years later, on a journey from New York to London, I met J. B. Duke, the American multi-millionaire and tobacco magnate. He endowed a university in North Carolina. The name was changed to Duke University. And he was concerned with Price Bros. in building hydro-electric plants on the Saguenay River in Canada. On board ship he wore a cutaway coat, with long tails, and a Derby hat. In this garb he paraded for hours up and down the decks.

I sold him my shares in Rolls-Royce at some considerable advantage to me. He and his associates must have gathered an immense profit.

Soon after settling down in Cavendish Square, my wife and I went off on a motor-journey to Scotland. We visited the little village of Torphichen in West Lothian on Sunday morning. Here it was that my grandfather had lived, and here my father was born.

The parishioners were leaving the beautiful church with the 15th century tower, famous in history, while we were seeking the graves of my ancestors.

The Beadle, an old man, gave us much information about the church and the neighbourhood.

It turned out that he was my father's distant cousin, a saddler, who had retired. He showed me many gravestones bearing my family's name, though

none marked my ancestors.

Then the Beadle took me to the house where my grandfather had lived. There it stood, deserted and almost tumbledown, with the land gone out of cultivation. It was not a favourable farming location according to my ideas.

The place, a mile or more from Torphichen, was named Silvermine. My grandfather had been the tenant.

The cottage, all on one floor with beds built into the walls of living-room and kitchen, was a stone structure of forbidding appearance. The byre adjoined the house and was of the same materials. Here, in these crowded quarters of this small and rather dark house, a family of several sons and daughters had dwelt together. They would be required to work in the fields at an early age. The land looked to me of stern and harsh fertility, suitable only for simple crops such as buckwheat. My grandfather must have been an upright and strong character. A letter written by him near the end of his life is a revealing human document.

Meanwhile the relationship between Bonar Law and me developed. It seemed that almost at once he was telling me the most intimate details of his life. He spoke so frankly and plainly that there was no doubt that he was making me his confidant.

Bonar Law was without any rancour and he never engaged in reprisals or sought after revenge.

On a visit with him to Manchester, where he made a campaign speech, he gave in my presence an excellent example of his good and kindly nature. We came by the station entrance to the Midland Hotel there. A young man bustled through the door with every indication of masterful purpose, and with obvious interest in the impression he was scattering about him upon an admiring group of excited supporters. It was the young Winston Churchill, and his followers were political fanatics, who had been listening to his flights of oratory (written out in advance) at the Free Trade Hall.

It was my first sight of the Liberal leader, who was always the opponent of my Conservative hero, Bonar Law. They came face to face in the hotel lobby. Bonar Law held out his hand saying cheerfully and in jest: "I shake your hand tonight because I may not be on speaking terms with you when I read the newspapers in the morning." And the newspapers did indeed carry an ill-natured and even vitriolic attack by Churchill on Bonar Law, which he read at breakfast with philosophical indifference. It was to me a lesson in tolerance.

Now Churchill had been a Tory. He had turned Liberal just at the hour when that Party came to power, receiving office in the new Government.

Conservatives didn't like him. He had changed his opinions on many vital issues. One subject that excited and infuriated the hosts of the Church of England at the time was called the "spoliation of the funds of the Welsh Establishment", usually described as "plundering the collection plate" or "robbing the charity boxes".

Churchill, an Episcopalian, had been an important platform speaker for the Tory programme in defence of the Church, and thereafter powerful in denunciation of that Religious Establishment in Wales. He had changed over to the party involved in pillaging that same church and all in the space of two years.

Bonar Law, a Presbyterian, remained steadfast for "Church and State". So when he was speaking on one occasion in reply to Churchill's oratory he said "Churchill has no more right to take the Welsh Church funds than I have to take the coat off his back". The audience (Conservative) cheered and cheered, and when the applause died down Bonar Law said "even though he has turned it". Then the people stood up to cheer.

That was not rancour, nor revenge. It might be described as the asperity of party politics. But in truth Bonar Law could not stand Churchill, though he didn't hate him.

Churchill in his youth and early manhood was always difficult when everything was going his way.

As the years rolled on he became more pleasing in his manner. Popularity was not easily won. But when the war of 1940-45 tried him in such measure that he was always "on the stretch", his name became another term for good temper, good wit, good feeling for his fellow men.

On many occasions at night during the war I was required to attend meetings of the Defence Committee in the fortified Cabinet quarters. My own sleeping apartment was in the basement, not far from the flat occupied by Churchill which offered slight protection from bombs and land mines.

Now Churchill had a rather large cat called "domesticated carnivorous quadruped".

In his book *The Hinge of Fate* he tells: "One night after my return from Washington, when we were in conference at the Annexe, I was vexed by a persistent noise, and said abruptly, 'Let someone go out and stop that cat mewing.' A silence fell upon the company, and I realised that this was the asthma of my poor friend."

Churchill, who was a kindly war leader, tells in his book that he expressed his regrets for muddling me and the cat. His dominating personality still controls the discussions.

It was not long ago, on receiving an invitation to visit him at a house he occupied on the hill at Rocquebrune, that I was troubled in finding my way. A friendly-looking French policeman, who appeared to be intelligent, was asked to guide me through the many turnings leading to the house on the hilltop. At once he opened the door of the car, took what might be described as a penetrating look at me, and asked: "Are you a journalist?" "Yes," was my reply. "Then turn back at once. You can't go to Churchill's house!"

I got there, the policeman sitting in the front seat and guiding us on our way. Churchill was delighted with the story and for days and days he retold it to his visitors.

Like Churchill I was arrogant in my youth. Unlike him, though the years rolled on for me too, arrogance is still sometimes my sin.

16

“Why not me?”

IT WAS UNDER BONAR LAW'S patronage that I took the plunge into public life, seeking at once an opportunity to stand for Parliament.

An opening arose in North Cumberland, a constituency centring on Carlisle.

A journey to the north and a week's stay at the Station Hotel in Carlisle in early September gave me my first experience of wooing a constituency.

Anxiety and even fear obsessed me—and why not? I had never made a speech. My knowledge of politics was confined to the Empire issue. The powers of the House of Lords did not interest me. Home Rule was a dangerous subject. I was not an opponent at heart. The Welsh Church meant nothing. I objected to Church Establishment in Britain, Canada, or anywhere. Controversy about schools was new. Yet these were the dominating issues in all Britain during the election contests of 1910.

Fortunately for me, a tour with the Political Agent throughout the constituency was a success. The local pundits and big-wigs, the important residents on whom my selection as candidate would depend, were impressed.

Well I remember that Presbyterian ministers, seeking new congregations, are required to preach trial sermons. Would the local Tories require a trial speech? But to my profound relief they did not. They signified their approval of the new and untried candidate.

On my return to London, invitations to semi-political dinners came from a group of progressive members of the Conservative Party—important and flattering to a young unknown aspirant to political preferment.

Sir Henry Page-Croft became my mentor. He was a real orator, arousing my wonder and admiration. It was he who took me off to a gathering in the Conservative Working Men's Club where I made my first attempt, in a wretched and ill-lighted hall, to address a public audience. The meeting was poor and my speech was poorer. But Page-Croft praised my sincerity, which he declared was all that mattered. His approval was gratifying, if unsound, for my efforts were shocking, my arguments disjointed and results despairing to any critic, even a friendly one.

However, Henry Page-Croft urged me on and his championship encouraged me.

Parliament was unexpectedly prorogued in November. Bonar Law said to me: "North Cumberland is not your constituency. It is too extensive, the distances throughout the county are too great. The electors will have no opportunity to see you. The time at your disposal is so short that you must find a borough."

He therefore set about trying to get me into Dulwich, which he was giving up to go north to fight in Manchester, the great citadel of Free Trade. It was said by the Liberal Opposition Free Traders that Manchester would not have the Imperial Preference programme. Bonar Law had determined to put that issue to the test by contesting a Lancashire constituency dominated by the Cotton Trade.

Dulwich was a brilliant prospect. The Conservative majority was overwhelming and the certainty of election was most attractive.

The constituency Chairman was a printer and my efforts in his company at the Constitutional Club and elsewhere, discussing his problems, gave me an opportunity to promote my own fortunes. He declared that he would support my candidature.

Then there came to London a deputation from Ashton-under-Lyne, asking Bonar Law to choose that borough as his battle-ground.

Ashton was not the centre of the Manchester group of seats. For him it must be the principal Manchester constituency and no other.

It was on a Saturday midday when the deputation came to Bonar Law's house, Pembroke Lodge, in Edwardes Square. We lunched. Bonar Law drank his lime juice as usual. Others, including myself, took to the excellent and possibly overproof Scotch whisky.

Conversation turned upon the glory of winning a contest in the constituency of Ashton-under-Lyne, where Liberals held the fort, which must be stormed by all-out attack. More and more my excitement got the better of me, and when Bonar Law repeated his refusal, not for the first time, the company was startled by my question—"Why not me?"

Why not?

The astonished deputation gave way, possibly influenced by the very audacity of the question.

Bonar Law reminded me of the chance of my selection for Dulwich, a safe seat. But nothing mattered now except the opportunity to follow him to Lancashire. Even defeat in attack would be better than mere election under a flag of favouritism.

The deputation became enthusiastic at the daring of my approach. They dined that evening at my flat, and when they took the midnight train back to Ashton they were far more anxious to get me than I was to get the nomination. My feet were growing cold. Why abandon the hope of Dulwich and the chance of an easy entry into the House of Commons?

Bonar Law gave me a severe lecture early on Sunday morning on the necessity for continuity in conduct and behaviour in political relationships.

He declared that my fate was determined. My way had been settled. “Ashton it was yesterday,” he said, “Ashton it must be tomorrow.”

Meanwhile the Executive Committee in Ashton was called together at Sunday noon to receive an account of my possibilities as a fit and proper candidate for Parliament. The result was a telephone message asking me to go at once to a meeting of the Conservative Association in the constituency.

My wife, who had been in Canada, arrived in England on Monday. On Tuesday we went to Manchester and took up our quarters in the Midland Hotel, six miles from Ashton.

Here we were, surrounded by a group of supporters, though strangers. The company was delighted with my wife. She had all the qualities that a candidate’s wife should have—beauty, youth, charm and vivaciousness. It also turned out that she was a good speaker, better than the Conservative candidate for Ashton, about to embark upon the uncharted waters of an election in a British constituency.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Some illustrations were moved to facilitate page layout.

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[The end of *My Early Life*, by Max Aitken (Lord Beaverbrook).]