

Lord Beaverbrook and His Latest Book

"Politicians and the Press."

By W.R.D.

There are two ways to thoroughly enjoy a good book. One is to read it in bed. The other is to sink into a comfortable chair before the library fire on a Sunday afternoon and read a little and doze a little, as one feels inclined. Reading in bed is a most delightful and restful pastime, and there is really no time when it is quite so enjoyable as between 12 p.m. and 2 a.m. Those people who have not cultivated the habit of settling their nerves for a good night's rest with the aid of an interesting book are missing something worth while. But I did not read Lord Beaverbrook's "Politicians and the Press" in bed. I read it on Sunday afternoon before the library fire. Nor did I doze once, because it held my intense interest from cover to cover. His Lordship might have spent a few more pounds in its production for it is worthy of better paper and binding than it has received. Still, we presume, if it was more expensively produced it could not be sold for 35 cents, and then, too, the jacket does make up for a lot, with its cartoon from Punch. It depicts Lord Beaverbrook astride a big Canadian steer that has just landed in England "on the hoof." His Lordship has a pair of kettledrums in front of him, the draperies of which are decorated with the maple leaf and according to Punch "The Baron of Beaverbrook" is singing:

"Oh, the roast beef of old Canada
And Oh, the Canadian roast beef!"

This cartoon was published at the

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time when Lord Beaverbrook, through his paper the London Daily Express was waging war against the Canadian cattle embargo.

"Politicians and the Press" is a little book of 130 pages in which Lord Beaverbrook tells in an intimate and interesting way of his relations with the leading politicians of Great Britain and Ireland since he acquired The Daily Express. There is no mock modesty about Lord Beaverbrook, nor should there be any. He admits that he is an egotist, and declares that no man can be great without being one. Everybody knows that he went over to England and with his brains, ability and money quickly reached a place at the very top, and became a power in the making and unmaking of ministries and political leaders. To a newspaper man, the rise of The Daily Express is most interesting. The circulation grew so rapidly that it became a burden and it was necessary to arbitrarily curtail it. When Lord Beaverbrook bought it about 1918, it had a circulation of 350,000 copies daily. The daily output is now about 1,000,000 copies. In England they are not newspaper wasters. For years the Daily Express was only eight pages and only recently was it increased to 12 pages.

Lord Beaverbrook and his paper played an important part in the settlement of the Irish question, and it was he, who did much to bring about the fall of the Coalition Government of Lloyd George. He opposed Stanley Baldwin's appeal to the people on the protection issue, and his paper gave the Ramsay MacDonald government the fair treatment which he thought they deserved. The Daily Express ties itself to no party, but boldly supports what it thinks is in the best interests of the country and vigorously opposes both men and measures when anything is advocated that Lord Beaverbrook believes to be inimical to the welfare of the British Empire. To Canadians the part Lord Beaverbrook played through his paper in connection with the abolition of the cattle embargo will always be gratefully remembered. He caused the defeat of Sir A. G. Boscawen in the Dudley By-election in 1921. Sir Griffith Boscawen was Minister of Agriculture in the Coalition Government, and a personal friend of Lord Beaverbrook's, but so keenly did he feel on the matter that he set aside personal feelings and used the powerful Daily Express to help defeat the Minister. As a result of the defeat of Boscawen, great bitterness of feeling developed against Beaverbrook in the Conservative party and he was practically asked to resign from the Carlton Club. Remembering a saying of Mr. T. M. Healy, however, "Don't resign, wait till you're kicked out," he paid no attention to the letter and nothing happened. The Conservative press continued to attack him with vigor, and the Morning Post published the following verses, which are quoted in "Politicians and the Press," with evident relish:

BENEFITS FORGET.
Lord Beaverbrook, your accents rude
Reveal a gross insatiable
The true that hither none may bring
Canadian beasts for fattening.

Whoever may that rule arraign,
The last should you be to complain,
Tis our affair, not yours, to rue,
That, spite the law, they let you through.

After dealing in a brief way with the many public questions in which The Daily Express has either cooperated with the politicians or opposed them, Lord Beaverbrook sums up the status of the independent newspaper as follows:

"If we sum up the story of the relations between the independent Press and the politicians as set forth in these pages, nothing creditable to either interest is to be discovered in the connection. That the politicians adopt a correct attitude towards the newspaper the argument fully proves, for it shows them seeking to persuade the journalist that they are right, co-operating with him when both parties are in agreement, and fighting him when they fail to persuade. All three attitudes, persuasion, co-operation and opposition, are perfectly legitimate. The story reveals the independent newspaper as pursuing an equally proper course. It is animated solely by public motives in the policy which it adopts. It, too, seeks to persuade the politician to adopt the same view, works with him and supports him when it succeeds, and attacks him when it fails. And the newspaper has an equal right with the statesman to choose his own public policy, and subordinate its relations with individuals in accordance with how far they agree or disagree with it on the national issue.

But this last the politicians will not allow. The independent newspaper pursuing a national course, uninfluenced by and often cutting across, party interests, is a new factor, and one extremely inconvenient to the dominant executive of the day. It is, therefore, resented, like all fresh influence."

In considering Lord Beaverbrook's observations on the value of an independent press, one must always keep in mind that he is a very wealthy man and can afford to do pretty much as he likes. Then, too, we must remember that he is writing about a powerful daily published in the seat of the Empire. In Canada there are not, so far as I know, any daily newspapers controlled by



This menu depicts Mr. Lloyd George dancing on the plates of the diners and the chef (Lord Beaverbrook) looking on at the effect of his surprise dish on the editors.

any party. There are papers giving support to the policy of either the Liberal or the Conservative party, but they are privately owned and not controlled in any way. The Toronto Globe is severely criticised for the independent attitude it adopts, but after all it must be remembered that The Toronto Globe is a private business institution and is operated as the owners think best. The Toronto Telegram, on the other hand nominally supposed to be supporting the Conservative party. The Mail and Empire and the Montreal Gazette are perhaps the only two metropolitan papers left in Canada that give unflinching support at all times to the party they adhere to. Whether the changed conditions are good or bad for the country, it is not easy to determine. Wounding costs have forced daily paper after daily paper out of business in Canada, and there have been, in Ontario particularly, absorptions and amalgamations all over the province. Kingston and Belleville are the only two of the smaller cities of Ontario that to-day support two papers. London, Hamilton and Ottawa are in a different class. The trend of the times in forcing papers to amalgamate has muzzled strong editorial opinion. Twenty years ago public questions were debated in the local papers with ability and vigor by editors who were admittedly partisan, but were also careful and conscientious students of public affairs. Political questions were threshed out by both sides and because of this very fact the people were better informed on the issues of the day than they are to-day. It is a common thing nowadays to pick up daily paper after daily paper when some important issue is being debated in Parliament, and find no comment on it at all, or if it is mentioned it is in a colorless way that will offend no one. The newspaper of to-day is a business institution, and it looks as if it will continue to be so. An independent paper can be useful in Canada, but, of course, cannot hope to play an important part in moulding Dominion-wide opinion, or exercise the power which The Daily Express does in London. The situations are not analogous.

In the course of his interesting book Lord Beaverbrook mentions most of the leading statesmen of to-day. His references to Mr. Lloyd George are most apposite in view of the recent row between Mr. George and Lord Oxford. Lord Beaverbrook says:

"Mr. Lloyd George, the greatest living force in British politics, has been rendered half impotent by the disloyalty of his followers in the House of Commons.

"Such continual reverses and discouragements as pursued Mr. Lloyd George from 1922 to 1924, would have driven any ordinary man to despair and retirement. Though our political path is apart, I still find in him the resilience of genius—the still courage which enabled him to fight through the blackest periods of the war. It is impossible to believe that the British Empire will not make use of his talents."

Further on he refers to Mr. Lloyd George's speech at the famous dinner which Lord Beaverbrook gave to the Canadian editors in 1924 at the Queen's Hall, the menu cover of which is reproduced on this page. It was through that dinner that I first became acquainted with Lord Beaverbrook. In 1923 I went to England on behalf of a group of Canadian weekly newspaper editors who were contemplating an overseas trip in 1924, to see what I could arrange in the way of entertainment over there. The Empire Press Union of which a number of us were members, was taking a great interest in our visit and had most of the arrangements in hand. I was advised by a prominent Canadian, however, to try to enlist Lord Beaverbrook, to try to enlist arrangements for the interview, which had to be conveyed from the Daily Express to his lordship's secretary. At that time Lord Beaverbrook had an office in the Temple, off the Strand, and I remember as I climbed up the stairway in the old

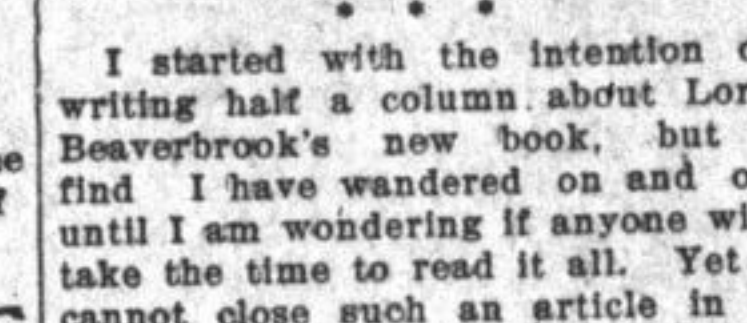
beautiful home, Hall Barn, Beaconsfield. Lord Beaverbrook was given the last night, and it was one never to be forgotten. There were over 600 invited guests. All the usual places were too small so his lordship hired the Queen's Hall, and had it specially decorated for the occasion. In addition he had the central portion of the floor torn up and a new floor laid for dancing. It seemed as if everyone was there. Lloyd George, Viscount and Viscountess Birkenhead, Winston Churchill, Timothy Healy, the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough, the Earl of Derby, Viscount and Viscountess Buryham, Sir Hamar and Lady Greenwood, Col. Grant Morden, Hon. N. W. Rowell, Premier Armstrong of Nova Scotia, and hundreds of others. It was a wonderful affair, arranged and managed with the same attention to detail that Lord Beaverbrook gives to everything. Lloyd George delivered a great oration on Imperial Ideals, and although according to "Politicians and the Press" Lord Beaverbrook was disappointed because the Welsh Wizard did not declare himself on the Imperial Preference which had just been revoked by the MacDonald government, it was a speech long to be remembered by all present. And here let it be said that one of the wittiest speeches I ever heard (and I've heard Owen Seaman) was that in which Lord Beaverbrook introduced Mr. Lloyd George.

I started with the intention of writing half a column about Lord Beaverbrook's new book, but I find I have wandered on and on until I am wondering if anyone will take the time to read it all. Yet I cannot close such an article in a Kingston paper without referring to Lady Beaverbrook, who is so well known here. A beautiful and charming lady, she takes a tremendous interest in everything that Lord Beaverbrook undertakes. In connection with the Queens Hall dinner, she went to no end of trouble beforehand in order that every guest would be comfortably seated with a congenial group. The deals and hobbles of each guest were inquired into and studied, and as a result every newspaper man and newspaper woman from Canada found themselves in the midst of a friendly and happy crowd as soon as they sat down, and instead of the usual stiffness and restraint that often accompanies the first fifteen minutes at a big dinner, from the moment when we were so warmly welcomed at the entrance to the gallery, by Lord and Lady Beaverbrook, until the last of the dancers called it a day about four o'clock in the morning, it was just a great big, jolly party that left an impression of Lord and Lady Beaverbrook's kindness and hospitality on the minds of the Canadian newspaper men and women that will never be erased.

Lord Beaverbrook received me in the most friendly manner. After I had explained my mission he said, "Well, what would you like me to do? Would you like me to give you a dinner or a garden party or both?" I replied that we would appreciate any hospitality. "Well," he said, "Come out and have lunch with me to-morrow at my villa, and we will talk it over. But," he continued, "I warn you that I live in the slums." The next day I went out to The Vineyard. It is a stucco villa out Putney way, and while not particularly imposing has played an important part in British politics during Lord Beaverbrook's occupation. I do not know whether he still occupies it, or whether he now lives in his suite at the Hyde Park Hotel when not at his country home "Leatherhead." In his little book he refers to the fact that when the Coalition was disintegrating, Winston Churchill, Lord Birkenhead, Hon. E. S. Montagu and others, used to visit him there, and discuss the political situation. It was at The Vineyard, too, that many conferences were held on the Irish question, and Michael Collins, Tim Healy and others were frequent visitors while the difficulties were being ironed out. During lunch the conversation turned on the Irish question, and Lord Beaverbrook referred very feelingly to the Irish leader who had recently been killed, as "poor old Mick Collins." There was only one other guest at the luncheon, besides myself, a Mr. Lyceat, an English tennis champion. At that time Lord Beaverbrook was putting on some kind of a tournament at Olympia, and he was getting Mr. Lyceat's help and advice. He left right after lunch and we chatted awhile and his lordship then drove me over to Olympia, to see the fashion parade in connection with the fair he was running, under the auspices of The Daily Express. It was during the drive that Lord Beaverbrook nearly overwhelmed me with his generosity. Up to this time we had not discussed my mission at all, but he had quite evidently been turning it over in his mind. I remember it was just as we were passing the famous cricket grounds that my host turned to me and he said: "How many do you expect to have in your party?" I replied about a hundred and fifty. "How long do you expect to be in London?" "Ten days." "Well," he said, "I want to help you all I can. Keep in touch with me and let me know when the other entertainment will end. I will arrange to take care of your party for the balance of your visit, from the time they get up in the morning till they go to bed at night, and I'll try to give them something new."

During the year that followed the London committee found itself simply deluged with invitations, for our party during the London visit, including a Garden Party at Buckingham Palace, where we were all presented to Their Majesties; a day with Major Astor and Lady Violet at Hever Castle, (Major Astor is chief owner of the London Times and Lady Violet is a daughter of Lord Minto); a visit to Col. Grant Morden's country home "Heatherden Hall," also to Lord Burnham's

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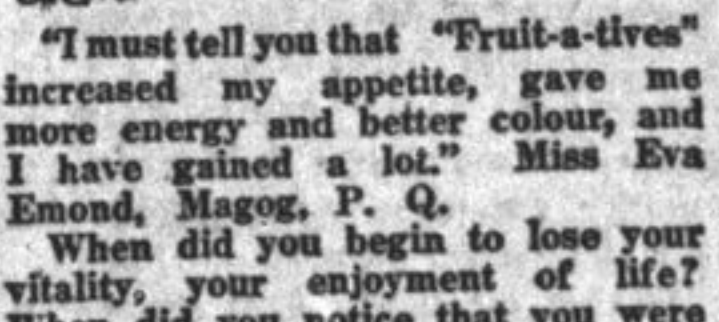
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