

Words Not to be Forgotten

By [Myron Gananian](#) (May 2024)



The Lobby of the House of Commons –by Liborio Prosperi, 1886

What with all things left to us from more than a generation ago disappearing beneath the axe and flame of disdain we would be well served to at least snatch a glance at a gem from the past prior to its demise.

I submit to the reader words from a true wordsmith who not only manipulated words but in doing so always assured that they were brimming with thoughts and feeling. Follows an excellent example of his art from Anthony Trollope's *Palliser Novels*, a unique depiction of Victorian political and high

society life.

Plantagenet Palliser, now Prime Minister, writes to his wayward, ne'er-do-well son who, as a Liberal, has won a seat on the House of Commons in contrast with his Conservative father. What follows is only a small portion of a long letter in which the father does not allow his distress to overshadow his affection, and including love for his nation in so doing. He has also sent ahead for our current politicians to head.

My Dear Silverbridge,

I am glad that you are in Parliament and glad also that you should have been returned by the old borough; though I would have that you could have reconciled yourself to the politics of your family. But there is nothing disgraceful in such a change, and I am able to congratulate you as a father should a son and to wish you long life and success as a legislator.

And this is where it become masterful.

There are one or two things I would ask you to remember; –and firstly this, that as you have voluntarily undertaken certain duties you are bound as an honest man as scrupulously as you were paid for performing them. There was no obligation for you to seek the post; –but having sought it and acquired it you cannot neglect the work attached to it without being untrue to the covenant you have made. It is necessary that a young member of Parliament should bear this in mind, and especially a member who has not worked his way up to notoriety outside the House, because to him there will be great facility for

idleness and neglect.

The next paragraph should be entirely in italics.

And then I would have you always remember the purport for which there is elected a Parliament in this happy and free country. It is not that some men may shine there, that some may acquire power, or that all may plume themselves on being the elect of their nation. It often appears to me that some members of Parliament so regard their success in life—as the fellows of our colleges do too often, thinking that their fellowships were awarded for their comfort and not for the furtherance of any object as education or religion. I have known gentlemen who have felt that in becoming members of Parliament that they had achieved an object for themselves instead of thinking that they had put themselves in the way of achieving something for others. A member of Parliament should feel himself to be the servant of his country—and like every other servant, he should serve. If this be distasteful to a man he need not go into Parliament. If the harness gall him he need not wear it. But if he takes the trappings he should draw the coach. You are there as the guardian of your fellow-countrymen—that they may be safe, that they may be prosperous, that they may be well governed and lightly burdened—above all that they may be free. If you cannot feel this to be your duty, you should not be there at all.

What a contrast with our current political classes, from dog catcher, School Board, Architectural Review Board all the way to the Presidency. Virtually every one called to those services shares a commonality, an attraction to the seats of power inherent in controlling others' lives. This indeed is

the ultimate sense of power, a residual of Kings and Emperors. It is the killer of democracy. And what may be the greatest irony of having finally established a true democracy in this hallowed land, that the very freedom that is our bedrock, by its very permissiveness, has led to the current schism between the powerful and the powerless. That is the source of the anger boiling up in so many of our nation who heavy feel dispossessed, marginalize, and disregarded. All sentiments common to revolutions, including our own. We are not governed lightly, as demanded by Palliser of his son. On the contrary we feel the very heavy hand of the government at every turn.

There is no predicting where all this will lead. There can be no gainsaying that this turmoil that has befallen our nation and is characterized by a disregard of Trollop's profound wisdom must be reconciled. It cannot be allowed to continue. The first hope and requirement is that the solution will not be worse than the problem. That means that it cannot be left to our government for its resolution. This is not the wolf guarding the chickens, it is the threat of ham-fisted governmental efforts at anything it touches, guaranteeing failure. We no longer can rely on our academic institutions, churches, or families, all having been degraded.

There is no better way to respond to the question of what is next than to recall the death-bed moments of Gertrude Stein with her companion, Alice B. Toklas. The former is purported to have said, "What is the question?" Answering herself she said, "If there is no question, there is no answer." So we face the eternal human dilemma, how to alter a past and a present in which we live in distress, feeling always on the edge of a precipice, without pushing each other over the edge.

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