

# MEMORIES OF MR. MASSEY

By ROBERT RILEY

*What was the secret of the triumph of William Ferguson Massey as Prime Minister of New Zealand for close on thirteen years? He was in the clamour of political conflict for thirty-one years; never made a real enemy; won the personal esteem of his King; was hailed as the trusted comrade of the Empire's leading statesman; and had his service and the high merit of his character commemorated in Westminster Abbey. The question is informatively answered in the following special article for THE LADIES' MIRROR by the Associate Editor of the Christchurch Sun, who was the close journalistic friend of the late statesman for over a decade, and accompanied him in an official capacity to the Peace Conference in Paris and Versailles.*

—Editor, LADIES' MIRROR.

LIKE Cecil Rhodes, the great Imperial democrat of South Africa, whose tomb lies far and lonely in the Matoppo Hills, Mr. Massey was buried in an exalted grave on Point Halswell, Wellington, overlooking the haunts of his vigorous activities in life, and commanding in eternal peace the majestic solitude of the wide Pacific and the mantled peaks of lofty mountains North and South in his island home. It was an appropriate close to a great career, a noble place of rest for a strenuous worker for the State. His vision was always above the mists in the valley of politics.

There were features of his life and administrative achievement that are worthy of appreciative thought and emulation. His homely character was ever beyond the barbed arrows of criticism. Honesty was the foundation of his policy and it was the strength and success of its practice. Thousands of people in New Zealand had no time for his politics or party (which is the way of the political world), but no one really disliked the Man. His home life was a pattern of simplicity, affection and trust. Home to him was his castle, too strong in its character and happiness ever to yield to any unhappy invader. And now, as Oliver Wendell Holmes would have tenderly phrased it: "There are only two feet on the fender now."

## *The Secret of His Triumph*

WHAT was the secret of his personal and political triumph as Prime Minister of New Zealand for close on thirteen years, and these the most difficult in the history of the Dominion? He fought hard and conquered, but had no enemies. He won and was given the personal esteem of His Majesty the King. He was hailed and farewelled as the trusted comrade of the leading statesmen of the British Empire. And in the grey day of his final passing from the familiar scenes of men, the high merit of his service and character was commemorated by the most responsible representatives of the British nation in Westminster Abbey, the mausoleum of illustrious men. The answer might well be his epitaph: He made fulfilment of duty the goal of his life.

A few weeks before the end came, and when the lamp of life was dimly burning, King George was first in sympathy and hope. The Royal mes-

sage was in itself a rare tribute: "I remember the great services rendered by you to your country and Empire. I earnestly trust that your valuable life may be spared." It was a kindly, but a vain hope. Even then the sun of his strong life was westering, and the shadows lengthening. The grip of the dire malady that had dragged him unwilling from his post could not be relaxed. But it is good to know that in the last few days of alertness, which in reality presaged the rapid approach of the Pale Messenger, he was able to learn the range and sincerity of sympathy that had been flashed to him from all parts of the Empire. Thus was he sustained to the dark corridor through which every man must pass to reach the Light.

## *A Visit to Windsor Castle*

MR. MASSEY had cherished memories of many great occasions. Of these one of the most memorable was the manner in which he was received and treated by the King and Queen on his special visit to Windsor Castle as the guest of their Majesties. The late Prime Minister, who had been invited to spend a week-end at the beautiful palace of British Kings, had been naturally apprehensive. He was a plain, homespun man more familiar with the cottage of a peasant than with the palace of a king. He soon discovered that his anxiety "to do the right thing" (to recall one of his favourite expressions) had been wholly unnecessary. No man could have had a happier experience. There was no formality at all at any time of the visit, and the New Zealander was at home by the hearth of the Royal family. And he knew the pleasure of strolling with the King on the terrace at Windsor in the soft twilight of an English summer day. On that occasion the King presented Mr. Massey with several illustrated volumes portraying the history of Windsor Castle—a beautiful souvenir.

## *His Place in Politics*

IT is really not necessary to discuss his Parliamentary career, and his place in the political history of his country. Although he was first and last a great party leader and an expert political campaigner, he had a national outlook, and laboured with all his strength to advance the



*THE LATE RT. HON. W. F. MASSEY, P.C.*

*Mr. Massey was an enthusiastic Freemason, and this photograph shows him in his regalia as Grand Master of the Lodge of New Zealand.*

*S. P. Andrew, Studio, photo, Wellington & Auckland*

best interests of the Dominion. He was a man of action, staunch in character and ideals, and wise in counsel. Only once in the turmoil of Dominion politics was life threatened. This was during the industrial strife at the outset of his administrative career, when the industries of the Dominion were held up to the point of widespread ruin. He explored every avenue of conciliation before deciding to make an end to the industrial warfare, and he taught disruptive Labour a lesson that has not been forgotten to this day. At that hectic time several wild agitators threatened the life of the sturdy Prime Minister, but his courage did not wilt under the threat. Timid friends even provided a weapon of defence for him, but it was kept in a drawer unloaded. He knew his limitations as a marksman. "I could not hit a haystack," he was wont to say, when chided for walking home unarmed after midnight when the country was disturbed and agitated. In any case nothing could divert him from the path of duty.

He entered Parliament in 1894, and immediately gained the confidence of his party. Soon he was appointed Government Whip, and then leader of the Opposition. For nearly eighteen years he had to fight uphill all the way, against a powerful and popular regime. He was never dismayed, and got his reward on July 10, 1912, when he was appointed to be Prime Minister of New Zealand. The post became a prize for life. It was supposed popularly during the term of the Na-

tional Government to be shared with another, but that, of course, was merely an illusion. He was a single-minded administrative ruler and required no co-operative counsel. He had one ambition, which was not achieved. He had hoped to exceed the great record of the late Richard John Seddon, and just failed to do it. Mr. Seddon took office on May 1, 1893, and died at sea, on June 10, 1906. Mr. Massey's term of office lasted from July 10, 1912, to May 10, 1925. Thus he stopped short of the Seddonian reign only by a few months. In view of the greater stress of the later period the record of Mr. Massey was the more impressive. The historic Liberal regime enjoyed comparatively easy going all the way.

## *Among the Peacemakers*

THOUGH Mr. Massey thrived well on the adversities in political warfare he could also enjoy freedom from its wranglings. He was happiest and at his best on the wider field of Imperial politics. His opportunity came with the World War, and contemporary history has proved that he did not neglect them. It was the writer's good fortune to study his work at the Peace Conference in Paris, and throughout the innumerable sessions of the British Empire Delegation at the Quai d'Orsay. My estimate of his service under a supreme test can well be ignored in favour of that given by eminent statesmen. In the words of

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