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A MAN TO
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J. S. WOODSWORTH

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A Man to Remember

(Woodsworth)

By GRACE MACINNIS



TORONTO

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J. S. WOODSWORTH

A Man to Remember



TO MOTHER
WHO UNDERSTOOD

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A NOTE OF THANKS

The help and interest of many people have gone into the making of this book. There are a few, however, whom I must mention by name, because their contribution was an essential part of its completion. My thanks go first to Arnold Webster of Vancouver who, a dozen years ago, urged me to write my account of the life of J. S. Woodsworth, and who has constantly encouraged me to finish the task. Also of Vancouver is Grant MacNeil who gave invaluable reminiscences of my father during his first parliamentary years. To Professor C. B. Sissons of Toronto and Mrs. Edith Osberg of Ottawa, I am indebted for the use of letters from the Oxford and other periods prior to the All People's Mission days. The staff of the Parliamentary Library at Ottawa has been generous in its reference help. I deeply appreciate the assistance of Blair Fraser of *Maclean's Magazine* in introducing my partly-finished manuscript to the publisher and in acting generally as guide, philosopher and friend. To my sister-in-law, Miss Christine MacInnis, I owe a debt of gratitude because she took over a large portion of my household duties for several months so that I might have time to revise the manuscript. To my mother, Mrs. Lucy L. Woodsworth, I am deeply indebted. She made her letters and her memories freely available to me and trusted to my wisdom in using them, a trust so complete that she will first read this story in its printed form. What shall I say in thanking Angus MacInnis? Simply that at every stage of the work he stood ready with help and advice of the most useful kind and was steadily more confident than I that the book would eventually see the light of day.

Grace MacInnis

FOREWORD

This is the story of the evolution of a great soul. For J. S. Woodsworth was at once "a great Canadian, a great man and a great soul".

I met him first when he spoke to a small group in an attic room of the old Labor Temple in Regina. Its bare walls, its uncomfortable benches, and the small audience were anything but inspiring. Yet, he spoke as a prophet, with all the fervour and much of the flavour of the Prophet Amos.

A few years later Mr. Woodsworth had become a familiar figure to people in all parts of Canada as he travelled across the country with his heavy suitcases of literature, addressing various gatherings of labour, farmer, Church and other groups interested in social problems.

Inconspicuous in the crowd he was nevertheless recognized and greeted warmly and respectfully by railway workers as they hurried to and from their duties on the trains. That he was regarded with affection and esteem by the men who operated the trains, the conductors and the porters who met him from time to time, was obvious. They remarked they had served Mr. Bennett, Mr. King, and other prominent public figures, but, they would say with pride, they had *known* J. S. Woodsworth.

Often he was entertained in private homes. He was a delightful guest. Children took to him at once. His kindly smile and his bright sparkling eyes seemed to draw them to him. He loved to tell them stories about people, of his trips to places like Japan and European countries, as well as of men and women of many races whom he had met on his frequent tours of Canada. This was a side of the crusader for the better life that Parliament and the public scarcely knew or seldom saw.

J. S. Woodsworth

Mr. Woodsworth was under no illusions as to the task he had undertaken. Should he meet Progressive or Labour candidates who had been defeated in parliamentary elections he would invariably encourage them to try again.

He impressed upon his followers that it was a great cause for which they stood, even if it was unlikely that he or they would witness its ultimate success. Very simply he would state that so great a cause was worthy of every endeavour and of every sacrifice.

Owing in large measure to his efforts, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation was formed in 1932. For the next ten years, until his death, those who were closely associated with him, whether as officers of the CCF or as colleagues in the House of Commons, grew not only to admire but to have a deep personal affection for him. His fearlessness in espousing unpopular causes, his struggle for economic justice and his abhorrence of poverty, misery and war marked him as something more than a party leader and a House of Commons man. These he was but he was more, much more; for he was, in the truest sense, a dedicated crusader for the good of all mankind.

His sympathies and efforts were not confined to his fellow-citizens of Canada. The whole human race, regardless of colour or of creed, were his brothers; the world was his fatherland.

No party leader has ever had more completely the confidence and affection of those associated with him than J. S. Woodsworth had as leader of the CCF. From the time of the Munich Conference in 1938, it became apparent that there was a growing difference between his attitude and that of most of the other members of the CCF caucus toward the position Canada should take in the event of war. When the storm burst over Europe, that difference came to a head. Grace MacInnis tells the story of the meeting of the CCF National Council in Ottawa early in September 1939. It was hoped that in spite of obvious

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differences of opinion a statement could be drafted which, while supporting Canada's declaration of war against Nazi aggression, would at the same time satisfy the National Leader's desire to keep young Canadians from the battlefields of Europe. That the attempt to achieve such a compromise failed is now past history.

The National Council refused to allow Mr. Woodsworth to resign as President of the movement. His colleagues in Parliament were determined to retain him as their parliamentary leader. This they did in spite of the fact that his followers in the House gave their full and complete support to the fateful decision that Canada should declare war and participate in the great struggle for democracy which so soon became apparent.

"J. S.", as we called him, had spent a quarter of a century in denouncing war and war preparedness, yet when the wartime election of 1940 came, young Canadians overseas, electors of his constituency of Winnipeg North Centre, joined with those at home in re-electing him to the House of Commons. This was a great satisfaction to him during the next two years of physical incapacity and of pain.

His final illness began just seven weeks after the election of March 26, 1940. On May 14 he rose in the newly assembled House of Commons to support the election of his fellow-Manitoban, Mr. James Allison Glen, as Speaker. He looked very worn and tired. Only two days later, when attending a harmonious meeting of the CCF National Council and parliamentary group, he suffered a severe stroke. His old friend, Dr. Gershaw, then a member of the House of Commons, was in the Parliament Buildings and when called came at once to see him. He ordered him immediately to the hospital. He told his friends that the hemorrhage was severe. From then until his death, on March 21, 1942, he was unable to rise to speak in the Chamber where he had played so distinguished and important a role. When he appeared briefly one afternoon in November 1941 he was greeted affectionately and with prolonged applause.

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When his death occurred in the spring of 1942 striking tributes to his memory and to his unselfish devotion came from members of all parties in the House of Commons. His greatness was recognized by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation which devoted a nation-wide programme as a tribute to this unassuming and devoted Canadian citizen.

To-day, as we look over the years in retrospect, there is general recognition of how much the people of Canada owe to this friendly, kindly, and dedicated man. His life was indeed one of service to his fellow-men. The inspiration he received in the home of his father, the lasting effect of his post-graduate experiences at Oxford, and at Mansfield House in the slums of London, largely account for his activities thereafter. But most important of all were the years he spent in charge of All People's Mission among the immigrant population in North Winnipeg. There he was in daily contact with the problems of the underprivileged. His experiences during the Winnipeg Strike and as a longshoreman on the Pacific Coast, finally determined the path he was to follow for the remainder of his life.

As a parliamentarian his influence was as unique as it was wide. Almost alone at first, he pioneered the old age pension legislation of 1926. He kept constantly before Parliament the need for relief against the misery of unemployment through a national insurance plan. Nor were his activities confined to the problems of labour and the industrial worker, for, equally, he exposed the disabilities and the suffering of the drought-stricken farmers of his native prairie country. Because he loved and trusted his fellow-men of every race, creed and colour, he fought every form of discrimination. To his efforts citizens of Oriental origin owe to a large extent the gradual removal of discrimination against them. Often he told an antagonistic House of Commons that thousands of Doukhobors had become law-abiding citizens of our land and that one day, given sympathetic understanding, the difficult minority might become good citizens as well. Himself a victim of the undemocratic use of legislation during the

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period of the Winnipeg Strike of 1919, he struggled strenuously for the removal from our statute books not only of Section 98 of the Criminal Code, but of every other infringement of civil right and liberty.

J. S. Woodsworth has left an example of service to humanity such as the world has seldom seen. Though he has passed on, his work has lived and his influence has grown. Social legislation which he pioneered has become a part of our national heritage—accepted by all. Some reforms he advocated have still to be made but he founded a movement which remains to press on toward their achievement. Indeed he was a—

“Statesman, yet friend to truth! of soul
sincere,

In action faithful, and in honour clear;
Who broke no promise, served no private end,
Who gained no title, and who lost no friend.”

House of Commons, Ottawa

May 1st, 1953

M. J. Coldwell

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CHAPTER I

BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION

WE CHILDREN always felt that our father was different. We could not have put the difference into words, but it was there. Other children called their father "Daddy" and looked on him much as one of themselves, only older. We called ours "Father", and there was formality and a shade of awe mixed with our affection for him. At home or a thousand miles away, he was the keystone of the family arch, the centre round whom we grouped our living. His dominant personality made it so. Furthermore, he was buttressed by Mother, who felt that this was the natural order of things.

Mother loved us children deeply, but we knew that Father came first, and we felt that that was only right. For we sensed very early that he was doing important work in the world and that he needed all the help he could get. Our help consisted of subduing our noisy play when he came home tired, of being quiet while he slept, and of learning to do our chores about the house with the minimum of delay and argument.

Mother kept urging such conduct upon us, of course, and her reasonableness was exceeded only by her persistence. She knew his urgent need for quiet, knew that home was the safe harbour into which he sailed after his voyages into the world, voyages which drained him of the courage, endurance and vitality with which he was so richly endowed. Spent and in sore need of rest, he would make for home, only to be up and away again as soon as he was able. It was Mother who through the years made our home his safe anchorage, the refuge he knew was always waiting.

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Conscious that our father's work was important, we children sensed its purpose very well. When I was about eight years old the teacher at school one day asked each of us in the class for our father's middle name. There was much giggling and curiosity as unusual middle names were dragged from reluctant children. Finally my turn came: "What is *your* father's name, Grace?" asked the teacher. "James S. Woodsworth," I answered. "But what does the 'S' stand for?" she pressed. A long, uncomfortable pause. Then, defiantly: "It stands for 'Shaver'. But I don't care because he's doing all he can to make the country better!"

My first memories of his work date from the days of the Mission House where we moved when I was four years old. At the time I was born, my father was assistant pastor at Grace Church, then the fashionable Methodist church of downtown Winnipeg. There he carried on the regular routine of Sunday sermons, young people's work, pastoral visiting. Life was comfortable and secure and he enjoyed the esteem of his fellow-citizens.

But he could not forget the sights he had seen in London's East End during his years as a student in England. Misery and poverty had made those appalling slums during the very time that England's growing industry and commerce were piling up fabulous wealth in other parts of the city. Expansion and riches had gone hand in hand with degradation and poverty to make the largest metropolis in the world. Now here was Winnipeg, gateway to the West, expanding rapidly and becoming rich. At the same time people were pouring in from all over the world, poor people driven to seek the security in the New World that the industrial revolution had taken away in the Old.

What about these people? Did no one care that they were crowding together into Winnipeg's fast-growing slums? Did no one realize that in Winnipeg, in Canada, we were starting down the same road that had led to the slums of London?

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There was no need for it. Miles and miles of wide prairie stretching in all directions gave space and sunlight and freedom. Yet unless something were done quickly we would soon have all the old evils reproduced in Canada.

Father thought about this problem constantly. He talked it over with Mother. A few years later in his book, *My Neighbor*, he was to set down the thoughts that would not let him rest:

"If through indifference or selfishness we protest, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' there comes the inexorable reply, 'The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground.' *Someone* is responsible! Every unjustly-treated man, every defenceless woman, every neglected child has a neighbour somewhere. Am I that neighbour?"

He decided that he *was* that neighbour and immediately proceeded to follow the dictates of his conscience. He did not rest until the Church authorities gave him a chance to work in Winnipeg's North End among the crowds of arriving immigrants. He was appointed to take charge of Maple Street Mission near the C.P.R. station. With very little equipment he set to work to make the Mission a community centre in the fullest sense of the word. His enthusiasm was infectious and within a short time he had established a host of activities. After two years he moved deeper into the North End to establish Stella Avenue Mission where the whole process was repeated. But this time the family moved with him—to the wrong side of the tracks.

I remember quite a bit about the Mission House from the time it started. There was the battle against the cockroaches, something quite alien to our experience and very exciting. There were Grandfather Woodsworth's visits, always marked by some little treat—like the ice-cream we enjoyed, seated on the boxes and crates of the moving. Then while Mother continued to

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cope with the problems of settling, Father worked with tireless energy in the Mission next door. It wasn't long before the whole building was a hive of activity.

I remember the kindergarten, a sunny, happy place where the mothers brought their children, struggling at the same time with winter wrappings and the English language. We children attended that kindergarten and never forgot its brightness and interest. There was the swimming-pool in the basement where the cement walls echoed the Tarzan-like yells of boys and girls for whom bathing was an amazing luxury. There was the library whose books had been donated by "more fortunate" people in other parts of the city, that splendid room where I made the acquaintance of *Alice in Wonderland*, looking eagerly at the pictures and longing for the time when I could read the text.

Upstairs there were all sorts of classes, cooking classes where the women made fragrant dishes of all kinds, sewing classes where they sometimes brought their embroidery from the Old Land, exquisite stitching in gorgeous reds and blues and purples. There were the classes in English where my father often taught. I remember watching him as he said slowly to some shy and awkward man who followed his encouraging expression: "I get out of bed . . . I put on my pants . . . I put on my shirt . . . I put on my socks . . . I put on my shoes . . ." He would accompany each sentence with appropriate gestures and wait for the learner to repeat it, often many times, until it became clear that he had grasped its meaning.

On Sundays there were services at the Mission, hymns and talks radiating friendliness. Sometimes on Sunday nights there were lantern slides and talks about them. In the summer there was a fresh air camp on Lake Winnipeg for children otherwise condemned to the baking heat of the city.

Yes, the Mission was a busy place and Father was its dynamo. Stella Avenue Mission and earlier ones were known collectively as "All People's Mission". Father would smile as

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he told of one new Canadian's efforts to get his tongue round the name, finally calling it "All Paper Machine". Any description less accurate it would be hard to find!

In course of time, conscious of the need to set a good example in many fields, Father set to work on our garden. I remember him spreading steaming manure in early spring, and planting the seeds, drawing the drills carefully with a stick along a taut string, leaving the empty seed envelope as a marker at the end of the row. Soon the little plants came up and before long we were eating tender green lettuce and plump radishes. Then he had to chase away the big boys who made raids on the garden. I can still see him, running quickly round the corner of the house to scatter the marauders, his eyes very determined under the sailor cap that made him look so much like pictures of the new king. The boys used to shout "King George!" as they disappeared in record time. An earlier resident had armed the top of the fence with broken bottles. He did away with these fortifications, undertaking patrol duty instead.

As other activities got under way at the Mission, the boys left the garden alone. But I don't remember him gardening much. He really didn't like it because he had so many other things to do that seemed more important. However, he always cherished the idea that some day he would acquire a farm and leave the city for good. I've often heard Mother agree laughingly to the farm, provided he would undertake to stay there with her, instead of being off on a speaking trip somewhere.

Father took us for walks about the neighbourhood which was so different from the one we had left. Here the sights and sounds and smells were colourful and vivid. We got used to the bright kerchiefs of the women, the rough sheepskin coats of the men, and everywhere the queer talk we couldn't understand. We got used to the unpaved streets of North Winnipeg, to the children playing about in the mud, and even to seeing pigs and chickens cluttering up the dooryards.