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George Aiken - Model Gardener

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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March 11, 1969

STATEMENT OF SENATOR MIKE MANSFIELD (D., MONTANA)

GEORGE AIKEN, MODEL GARDENER

Some months ago, a rumor made the rounds of the Senate cloakrooms. It was to the effect that the Majority Leader was no longer speaking his mind. If you really want to know what Mike Mansfield is thinking--so the story went--listen to what George Aiken is saying.

With a Republican President, a lot of things have changed--including rumors. It is now reported that if you want to know what George Aiken is thinking, listen to what Mike Mansfield is saying.

The rumor is plausible enough since certain political thorns have shifted from the Democratic to the Republican side. It is definitely not the case, however, in what I have to say now. I am my own spokesman tonight. And George Aiken is speechless in his own right.

My words have nothing to do with power politics. Rather they are concerned with flower power.

The warm human being who has brought us together for this occasion does not defy description. It is only that his simplicity makes description difficult. George Aiken is not an "old shoe" as I once heard him called, although the phrase conveys something of his quality. Nor is he a piece of Vermont granite even if there are rocklike qualities in his character. He is of New England and yet of more than New England, with the sparkle of its streams in the sunlight but of streams which gather their flow from deep forests and distant mountains.
It is not surprising that George Aiken is a leading authority on wildflowers or that he has written a delightful book on the subject. Rather it is in keeping with his aliveness. Wildflowers and George Aiken understand each other. The one grows unheralded in a quiet field, on a rocky ledge, or in a wooded glen. The flower demands life; it asserts life; it affirms life. It is a simple thing and yet it emerges from one of the most complex of chemistries. And in its unfolding the entirety of life finds expression.

That is how it is with George Aiken, "old shoe," "Mr. New England," "able farmer," "author," "Senate owl" and many other well-deserved and admiring apppellations. His is the simplicity which comes from the complex which has formed into an integrated and harmonious whole. He has dug deep into the soil of understanding. He has planted kindness and tenderness. He has touched, with patience and tolerance, all that that his hand has reached.

In the dedication of George Aiken's book "Pioneering with Wildflowers," he tells more of himself than anyone could possibly say when he writes:

"Dedicated to Peter Rabbit in the hope that flattery will accomplish what traps and guns have failed to do and that the little rascal will let our plants alone from this time on."

I want to close by expressing once again my deep affection and admiration for George Aiken. I have long since regarded him as an outstanding colleague and an understanding and beloved friend. I am delighted that he has been fit to reissue his book on wildflowers and so share with us some of the well-springs of his warmth and wisdom.

I have one request of make before concluding. I would hope that the author of "Pioneering with Wildflowers" would now turn his exceptional talents to another book. I wish that he would write this time on how to win a Senate seat with both Republican nomination and Democratic endorsement and to do it as he has done it, on total campaign expenditures of $17.09.