

among the most brilliant French orators of his own Province; so that which marked his entry into the House of Commons, in 1874, carried him at one bound to the distinction of being almost without a peer among the English-speaking debaters of the Dominion.

The occasion was a solemn one, and never to be forgotten by any of those who were present. The subject before the House was the expulsion of Louis Riel, the rebel of the North-West, who,—while under accusation of the murder of Thomas Scott, and a fugitive from justice,—had just been elected member for Provencher, and had had the oath administered to him in that capacity, although he had not dared to occupy his seat. The question was a burning one, and the public mind was terribly inflamed by the passions it aroused; while race antipathies added fuel to the fire. Mercy, justice, peace, and brotherhood were words that had lost all significance in many ears. It required, in very truth, a master of eloquence to undertake the defence of the absent insurgent before his bitterest enemies, and to thread his way without falling or stumbling, among the masses and mazes of prejudice which rose up all around the Métis chief.

The debate, which was violent and heated, had been going on for two days, when at last Laurier rose.

“Mr. Speaker,” he began.

Laurier was known to be eloquent. He had already addressed the House in French at the opening of the session. No one thought, no one dreamed, however, that he would risk his reputation by attempting a speech in *English* under such hazardous and trying circumstances. Great as was the general surprise, the revelation was greater. In my belief, no orator (unless, indeed, it be himself) has since achieved a like success in any of our deliberative assemblies.

As, in the elegant and academic diction of which he is so thorough a master, the brilliant speaker entered calmly into the heart of his subject,—a silence as of the tomb spread itself through the great Chamber, and the English members listened in hushed amazement to this charmer who wielded their own language with so much more grace than they could pretend to do themselves, and who dealt them such cruel home-truths in a tone they could not resist applauding. Astonished glances were exchanged on every side.