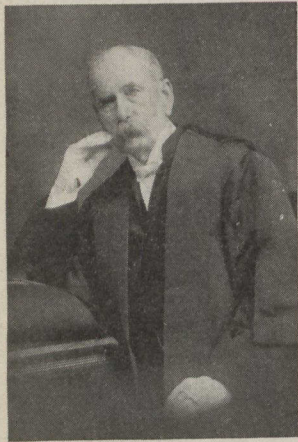




THESE are stirring parliamentary times. Things are taking place. New conditions are coming about. Precedents are being created. For many decades the Speaker of the Canadian House of Commons has been an ornamental figurehead. Suddenly he has become the



Trained in a Hard School.

pivot of a strenuous and significant situation. On his right he is confronted by a Government, strong in numbers, insistent in its determination to carry out its policy, ready and eager to recast the rules if necessary to accomplish its purpose. On his left he finds an Opposition which has not yet learned that the business of an Opposition is to fight and be downed, an Opposition which is militant and undismayed and led with much skill and strategy. Once already these forces have clashed, with the Speaker a central figure in the struggle. And the end of the battle is evidently not yet. Talk to members of either of the armed camps and they tell you how much hinges upon the Speaker. He is no longer the ornamental figurehead of yore. He is the man who counts. Big battalions will go for naught if the Speaker is with the enemy. Faultless tactics will avail nothing if the chair circumvents their strategic superiority.

Other Speakers might have quailed at the situation. Not so his Honour Thomas Simpson Sproule. He is no make-believe Speaker who reigns but does not rule. None of the great sovereigns of the middle ages could more seriously seek to play the part of terrestrial Providence than does the First Commoner of Canada. It is true he gracefully accepts the dictum that he is the servant of Parliament, but that is quite consistent with his recognition that he is its master. He gives his rulings—strange as it may seem—in terms which might have been taken from one of the Pope's encyclicals. Hitherto and no farther.

Speaker Sproule is one of Canada's oldest and most experienced parliamentarians. He entered the House in 1878—thirty-five years ago—and has sat continuously for the riding of East Grey since that time. He is Irish to the core, both parents from County Tyrone, and a hard and willing fighter. He has fought from the right of the House and fought from the left. He has been an "obstructionist" himself—a valuable one to his cause since he was always a ready and elaborate talker—and he fought the remedial bill of 1896 with typical Irish vigour. There were those who were satirical enough to suggest that the present Government's choice of Speaker was prompted by the fact that they no longer needed to depend upon his elocutionary longevity. But even the most volatile of gases becomes a driving force upon which one may rely if it is bottled up. As Speaker Hon. Dr. Sproule is a force to be reckoned with. None of the figurehead business for him. He thinks hard, slowly and consecutively. Some minds dart hither and thither much as the Numidian horseman careered round the march of the Roman legions. The Speaker is none of such. He is determined—headstrong, if you will, for he is true to his nationality—and has confidence in himself. Whether this is a defect or an advantage depends upon his wisdom.

For years he was head of the Orange Order in Canada. Under his leadership it developed and grew strong. But one of the deeply-rooted of all the superstitions about Dr. Sproule, and one which is most utterly fallacious, is that which represents him as a grim and uncompromising opponent of all that sniffs of Roman Catholicism. It may seem strange to those who have no eye but for the surface of things, no ear but for the familiar jingle of creed discord, to speak of Dr. Sproule as a man of liberal thought in such matters. True, he has little

sympathy for the Catholic Church, but he is too just a man, and he has too clear an eye, not to see the enormous advantage of that great attempt to guide mankind to a better order. His life is guided by high standards. He represses, as far as he can, all the usual vices of society, and one of his aims is to give a healthy, temperate moral tone wherever his influence reaches. His line is perhaps a little too severely drawn. If a man is not above it he is below it, and very few are constantly above.

Politicians speak of Dr. Sproule as a partisan. He was trained in a hard school. Some of the old party virus may still work in his veins, but there has been a visible rapprochement, slight, maybe, but unmistakable. Any such short-comings on the part of Speakers in the Canadian Parliament are faults not so much of the individual as of the system. Speakers are made part of the administration of the day. They owe their appointment to the Government, and they hold sway at the Government's pleasure. Bye-and-bye some Canadian statesman will arise who will practice British institutions as well as preach them. When that time comes Canada's Parliament, like Britain's Parliament, will secure a Speaker whose position is solely judicial and whose tenure of the high office is life-long.

THE annual dinner of the Parliamentary Press Gallery is a historic and thoroughly enjoyable function. That of last week, in accordance with long-established custom, was modelled upon the happenings of the existing session. Of course the present struggle of the two parties on the naval bill came in for a goodly share of satirical attention, with the emphasis naturally laid upon the endurance test which resulted for the weeks of continuous night-and-day sitting. In this connection capital stories of parliamentary experience were related by Premier Borden and Sir Wilfrid Laurier. Both leaders are good raconteurs and have a wealth of stories stored in their memories, some of which come forth annually at these Press Gallery dinners. The Prime Minister told of an incident which

occurred in the days when his own party was in Opposition. The House was in committee and a Conservative member became embroiled with the presiding chairman. Finally the latter lost patience and shouted to the member who had the floor: "Sit down!"

The member obeyed. Then up he rose again. "Mr. Chairman," he yelled, "I rise to a point of order."

Before he could go further the exasperated chairman roared back: "I decide it against you. Sit down!"

SIR WILFRID'S story was of his youthful days in the Quebec Legislature. The House was also in committee. At such times the chairman is often replaced for the time being by one of his own party.

A particularly verbose orator was holding forth. In the first stages of his long speech the chairman was a young and dapper member, but as the speech went on he was relieved by a quiet and unusually silent old habitant, who was a veteran in the House. As he proceeded slowly along, the member who was speaking happened to glance toward the chair and noted the change. Thinking to make a joke at the expense of the old habitant, he observed:

"Mr. Chairman, when I began to speak you were a young man. Now I find that your hair is white, your face is wrinkled, you have become an old man."

Quick as a flash the veteran replied: "Yes, one grows old quickly, listening to your speeches."

H. W. A.

New Tendencies in Art

THE Ontario Society of Artists opened its 1913 exhibition last Friday evening, several weeks later than usual, with much fewer canvases than ever before in its history, and with much satisfaction over what is considered to be the strongest show ever put on by the Society. There has begun to be considerable change in these exhibitions. Art has begun to reflect modern conditions in this country, though art always moves slowly in this direction, owing to accumulated traditions, the conservatism of older painters, and the sometimes worse conservatism of younger ones who imitate their elders.

But of course this is not a vote of censure on either old painters or young painters. As a matter of fact the CANADIAN COURIER has not yet seen the 1913 show of the O. S. A. We know, however, that it is an attempt to break away from the old idea of a wall-paper, tapestry show, such as used to be all the rage a few years ago. It has been influenced very strongly by the interchange of

THE SENSATIONS OF MOVING TIME



—Drawn by A. Clarke.

Wife—"John, I think it's perfectly horrid the way they're breaking the furniture to get it in."
Husband (sarcastically)—"Well, my dear, you don't imagine they're loading a freight car, do you?"