

Written for the Canadian Illustrated News.

THE HON. RODERICK MATHESON,
SENATOR, PERTH.

It is sixty-one years since the Honourable Roderick Matheson placed his humble services at the disposal of his sovereign and his country. Honours have followed service, and they were interlaced to the latest hour of his life. Indeed they ceased only when he laid down his wearied life and when the quiet earth claimed its kindred. His career as a soldier began in the year in which the first Napoleon entered on his fatal expedition against Russia, and it ended in the week in which the third Napoleon breathed his last, as an exile at Chislehurst. Those three—score years represent a sketch of startling history whose every page is burdened with strange lessons; not the least remarkable of which are those which record the deaths on English soil of the First and Third Emperors of the French!

Mr. Matheson was a Highlander by birth, a native of Loch-Carron, Ross-shire. Though a man of much humility of character, he was naturally proud of his country, and he was especially so of his clan, and, as we believe, exceedingly well acquainted with the heroic passages of both. From Mr. Logan's history of the clans of the Scottish Highlands we learn that the clan Matheson maintained a rare reputation for barbaric courage and rough address. Indeed its faith in the strong arm and the long claymore, in the strong will and unswerving resolve, would compare favourably with any of the independent tribes of Caledonia. Nevertheless the belligerent tastes of members of that tribe seem to have been not only destructive but incapacitating ones. It fought itself out of condition, and from an excessive expenditure of blood and force became reduced in numbers, in influence and in possessions. At length its strength was finally broken by the turbulent inroads of its more populous neighbours, the long-legged sons of Glengarry, who, as we have heard, were adepts at "lifting" cattle, "tying roofs," and annexing freeholds. But though the clan was reduced in numbers and strength the comparatively few persons who remained religiously preserved the tenacious qualities that had distinguished the character of their fathers. They may have admitted the ruin which befell them, but they suggested no reproaches either for the policy or the pluck by which it had been brought about. Montaigne's estimate of true valour was fairly expressed by this remnant of clan Matheson:—"It was stability not of legs and arms, but of the courage and the soul" which they valued. If legs should fail a Matheson, let him fight on his knees. Such an one is overcome not by his foe, but by fortune." "He is killed, not conquered," for "the most valiant are sometimes the most unfortunate." "The part that true conquering has to play lies in the encounter, not in the coming off. The honour of valour consists in fighting, not in subduing." Thus the Mathesons seem to have thought, and having acted in accordance with such thought they gradually became the prey of their more powerful neighbours, and consequently they fell, not from honour, but from the condition of influence which they formerly enjoyed.

The name, according to Scottish rendering, originally was "MacMhathain," or "Mathaineach," a combination which, in the opinion of some writers, is probably derived from "Mathain," heroes, or rather "Maon," a hero, a term now obsolete. Mr. Logan, already quoted, observes that "the form of the English translation is somewhat unaccountable," but he cautions unlearned folk not to confound the Mathesons of the Highlands with those of other parts whose names are merely corruptions of Matthews-son. The subject of this notice was most anxious to avoid all such confusion, and was consequently tenacious as to the right spelling of his name. Indeed he would admonish the authors of such mistakes in no wise to repeat them. Of course there is much that is obscure, as well as much that is attractive in such subjects, and we may fairly excuse the ancient house of Lochalsh for thinking a good deal of its heroic history.

Mr. Matheson was the only surviving son of John Matheson, by Flora Macrae, his wife. His great-grandfather was Dugald Matheson, of Balmaera, Lochalsh, Ross-shire, who married the daughter of Mackenzie of Dachmalnack, and was killed in the action of Glen Shield, Glenelg, on the 10th June, 1719. Their eldest son, Roderick, married the daughter of Kenneth Mackenzie, by his wife Mary, daughter of Mackenzie of Applecross. John, the eldest son of Roderick last mentioned, married Flora, daughter of Donald Macrae of Strath Conan. The subject of this notice was their only surviving son. He was twice married. Firstly to Mary, daughter of Captain Robert-

son of Inverness, Scotland, who died in 1825, and secondly in 1830 to Anna, daughter of the Rev. James Russell, Minister of Gairloch, Ross-shire, Scotland.

The clan, as we have said, fought itself out of condition, and those who were left made matters worse by generally placing themselves beyond the protection of the law, as they heartily espoused the lost cause of the Stuarts. It was not difficult in those days to impoverish a Jacobite, and we have little doubt that the house of Lochalsh was made to suffer for its opinions as well as for its conduct. Roderick Matheson at the outset of his career had no wealth besides that which is the common heritage of his countrymen. He had the good luck to be born a Scot, and he must be an indifferent specimen of the race who, with the advantage of having the Tweed to the south of him, cannot make his own fortune.

Young Roderick Matheson proved no exception to this common rule. The work was hard at first, for the stream and the tide were against him. Happily he did not give up. He put his back to the past and its black histories, while he turned his face to the future and its bright hopes. Moreover he did not paddle his canoe alone; his mother was there to aid, to bless, and to comfort him. In speaking of the portion of his life that was passed in the Town of Inverness the *Perth Courier* says:

"His character was formed in childhood by a mother whose means were of the smallest, but whose heart and spirit were of the highest—an ideal woman whose deep and fervent faith in God, and high sense of duty, gave balance and steadfastness to a character which might otherwise have been warped by a too vivid imagination and fervent poetic faculty: a woman, too, of so loving a spirit that she, poor herself, was always ready to deny herself for the sake of those whose need was greater: a woman whose influence was as great over the hearts of her children, after she had lain for three-score years in her grave, as though she had been with them but yesterday. Mr. Matheson often spoke of his delight as a child in listening to his mother's singing of Gaelic ballads for hours together—ballads of the nature of Danish Sagas; recounting the brave deeds of bold warriors in the by-gone times. The mother stirred her boy's imagination and fired his heart by telling him tales of the brave deeds of his forefathers, who fought and suffered gallantly in the Jacobite cause. To the last days of his life he cherished the deepest affection and admiration for his devoted mother."

"He was but a boy when his brother—an only brother, several years older than himself—brought him out to Canada; but his abilities were so promising that the schoolmaster in Inverness grieved greatly over losing him from among his pupils, and remonstrated warmly with his brother for removing him to Canada at so early an age; but Farquhar Matheson, the elder brother, who was then serving in the army in Canada, wished to have his brother near him. Roderick attended school in Lower Canada for some time after coming to the country."

We do not know in what year young Roderick Matheson left the Lower Canada school, but having done so he probably went to the old Johnstown District, and possibly visited the Village of Perth, the place which eventually became his home. What his plan of life then was we are not informed, possibly he had made none, for it was difficult in those angry and evil days to adopt either a peaceful or a profitable calling. Human passions held high carnival. All Europe was aglow with war. France hated England, and found in the United States a government prepared to sympathize with such hatred. Napoleon planned for the conquest of England, while the United States merely desired the annexation of Canada. The time had come when both objects appeared to be within reach. England was isolated and without allies in Europe, while her army was occupied in Portugal and Spain. Austria and Prussia had become the confederates of France in her war against Russia. At such a moment, when thus engaged in a death struggle for the liberation of Europe, the United States showed their respect for liberty by declaring war against Great Britain, the only asylum of freedom then remaining in Europe.

The England of that day did not blench at the new menace or shrink appalled from the new danger. She neither quibbled about her duties nor shirked her responsibilities. She accepted the cartel of her treacherous foe, and made preparations to deal with it manfully. Sir Isaac Brock was President and Commander of the Forces in Upper Canada. That eminent soldier did not win his promotion by competitive examinations, and hence he did not wholly occupy himself with analyzing the strength of competing States or gauging the forces of opposing armies. He was a patriot as well as a soldier, an enthusiast as well as a commander. Moreover, he had a talismanic way of communicating to other souls the spirit which animated his. His speech to the Legislature of Upper Canada, delivered in February, 1812, pulses with hope while it is nerved with confidence. Such a speech from such a man silenced doubt and inspired courage. To use the words of Earl Bathurst, Brock "displayed qualities admirably adapted

to dismay the disloyal, to reconcile the wavering, and to animate the great mass of the inhabitants against successive attempts of the enemy to invade the Province." General Brock called the militia of Upper Canada to the front, and to the front that gallant militia came, willing to do and to dare all things for so good a cause, and for so gallant a commander. The words spoken at York were borne to all parts of the Province, and especially reverberated through the townships of the old Johnstown District. Stormont, Dundas, and Glengarry sent their men to the front—old and young volunteered. Grey beards and striplings, animated by the like spirit, presented themselves for the like purpose. Each and all were anxious to save their hearths from an enemy whose designs were as wicked as they were unprovoked.

In the company of those Volunteers was young Roderick Matheson, not then twenty years of age. He was quiet and unassuming in manner, lithe and active in person. His courage was of the silent order, but none the less real because it was noiseless. He enlisted we know not in what regiment, and wore we know not what uniform. It must suffice that it was the regiment and uniform of his "Sovereign Lord the King." The young Volunteer must soon have shewn himself a soldier of promise, for a short time only elapsed when, on the 6th February, 1812, he received a commission of Ensign in the Glengarry Fencibles, a corps organized for especial service in Canada. The regiment was officered by men who are still remembered with pride by many, and in whose families their names are cherished as "household words." Colonel McDonnell, Aide-de-Camp to General Brock, and who fell beside his chief at Queenston Heights, was of that regiment. Aeneas McDonnell, late Warden of the Penitentiary, and his kinsman, Bishop McDonnell, if we mistake not, were of that regiment. Chief Justice Sir J. B. Macaulay, the dear friend of Mr. Matheson, as well as Colonel FitzGibbon, in like manner were of that regiment. These, and others, whom we might name, were such men as Tecumseh liked, for they were men "of big hearts." They, and their rifle green uniforms wrung many a complimentary warwhoop from Brant and other chieftains, who from their ubiquity, and their colour, used to call them the "Black Stump" Brigade. "Ah, Brant, is this you?" said Roderick Matheson to the chieftain one day, "you seem glad to see me." "What Indian," was the answer, "would not be glad to see a 'Black Stump'?" The enemy had frequent reason to beware of the "black stumps," for on more than one occasion they discovered to their cost that "the stumps" were instinct with life—especially when fire at short range issued from forms that were supposed by them to be wooden and inanimate.

War was declared by Congress on the 18th of June, 1812. Three days after that declaration, Wellington crossed the Agueda to commence his Salamanca campaign, and three days later Napoleon passed the Niemen on his Russian road to ruin. Events in Europe hurried on apace, nor did they move slowly in America. Commencing in the west the war soon ran along the line and thoroughly occupied the combatants on the two frontiers. In Central Canada skirmishes of more or less moment were of frequent occurrence, and the Glengarrys took their full share in all such enterprises. Roderick Matheson, for example, received his commission of Ensign on the 6th February, 1812; on the 5th August, 1813, he was gazetted as Lieutenant and Paymaster. On the 24th December in the following year peace was concluded at Ghent between Great Britain and the United States. The war lasted only two years and a half. During that period the subject of this notice was engaged thirty-three times with the enemy, twice he was wounded, once at Sacket's Harbour very severely. He was present with his regiment at the actions of York, Sacket's Harbour, Cross Roads, Fort George, Lundy's Lane, and Fort Erie. If in conversation the minor engagements on the Niagara frontier were referred to, Mr. Matheson could generally guide the narrative because, as he quietly used to observe, "I was there."

Not only was Roderick Matheson present when duty required him, but he had a plucky habit of volunteering for dangerous service. Despatches, for example, were to be carried from Kingston to Montreal at a time when long reaches of the river were controlled by the enemy. On such an occasion he was embarrassed and knew not how to proceed. Thinking, however, "that fortune favours the bold," he with his crew of eight Indians, in a bark canoe, determined to run the "North" or "Lost" Channel of the Long Sault rapids; an experiment which was creditable to his courage and to his high sense of duty, one which nearly resulted in the loss of his dispatches and of those who bore them.

If young Matheson was skilful in a canoe, he was equally at home in the saddle. When serving on the Niagara frontier at a critical moment when reinforcements were needed a messenger was required to go to a distant post. "Send me," said the young subaltern. And he was sent. He rode sixty miles across the country in eight hours, killing one horse, and probably with difficulty getting another, but arriving in time to effect the service on which

he was sent. Beneath his quiet manner much character lay hid. His superior officers discovered that he was discreet and trustworthy as well as courageous and persevering, and hence his services were gladly taken advantage of when the work to be done required thought as well as energy for its successful performance.

Peace in America was succeeded by war in Europe. It was of short duration, for the victory of Waterloo restored the olive branch to the world. On the 18th June, 1812, the Congress of the United States declared war against Great Britain. On the 18th June, 1815, in the final rout of the French army, the Congress of the United States might have read, had there existed an Ocean telegraph to inform them, how thoroughly the seal of failure had been set on all their schemes of conquest!

With the prospect of enduring peace in Europe and in America the military establishments of the mother country were reduced. Regiments were disbanded, officers retired and sought in civil pursuits for congenial and remunerative employment. In December, 1816, Lieut. Matheson went on half-pay, and in the following year settled at Perth. Whatever may have been the charm which the place presented, it at all events had the special attraction of being the chosen abode of many of his most cherished friends. He made his election, and having done so he clung to it with conservative fidelity; for in after-life he neither changed nor sought to change his place.

The influence which a wise and just man can exert in the backwoods of Canada, can scarcely be overrated. A well-chosen Magistracy is a real blessing to a country. Officially they are conservators of the peace, and incidentally they may become ministers of goodwill. Men of the contrary mould are the curse of a neighbourhood. They are the physicians of evil, creatures who suggest strife that they may inflict fines for healing it. Canada, unfortunately, has not been free from this type of offender, and localities have suffered accordingly. Previously to the appointment of County Judges, many of the duties that are now performed by them were discharged by the Chairman of the Court of Quarter Sessions. The person appointed to the last mentioned office was necessarily chosen for his fitness, to say nothing of his social qualifications, his high character, and what may be termed his judicial experience. It is complimentary to the subject of this notice that he held the appointment in question for a long time with credit to himself, and as we believe, with advantage to the community.

As was to be expected, a good many district duties devolved on him and naturally any work of a military character was most properly assigned to one who had shewn singular address and capacity when soldiering was the reverse of holiday work. For many years Col. Matheson commanded the old First Military District of Upper Canada. He knew something of the militia of Upper Canada, and even when the force was sneeringly described as a "power only on paper," he was confident that the slightest menace, the most trivial touch of trouble, would revive its slumbering energies and awaken it to life. The volunteer movement had his hearty co-operation. It was in his opinion an element of defence whose importance could scarcely be exaggerated. Hence it was that many of the volunteer companies enrolled in the neighbourhood of Perth and L'Orignal were, as we are informed, organized with his advice and under his supervision.

In 1844 Col. Matheson was recommended by His Excellency Lord Metcalfe for appointment to the Legislative Council, but he did not receive his commission until the 27th day of May, 1847, when similar commissions, of the same date, under the sign manual of the Earl of Elgin and Kincardine, were issued to the Hon. Hammett Pinhey, an English gentleman well known and much respected by the people of the Ottawa Valley, and the Hon. James Ferrier, the popular and energetic Mayor of Montreal. The Legislative Council was then what the Senate is now, a nominated body, and Mr. Matheson at all events was exceedingly averse to its becoming an elective one. The threatened change grew more and more imminent, and hence Mr. Matheson was moved from his quiet Parliamentary life to meet it by asking the Legislative Council to commit itself to a series of resolutions of an anticipatory character which should have the effect of blocking the way to a change which he abhorred. Unfortunately for Mr. Matheson, but possibly not so for the Legislative Council, his very sensible resolutions were got rid of, as many a disagreeable subject is got rid of in Parliament, on a question of order. It was so adroitly raised that the resolutions did not get beyond the notice paper. They never found their way into the journals. In the following session the obnoxious bill again came up from the Commons, and finally passed the Legislative Council. The Hon. Mr. Matheson, with ten others, protested against the bill. The protest was, we incline to think, a weaker document than were his resolutions of the previous session. In passing it may not be out of place to note that the progress of change, from natural or other causes, in a nominated body, is more rapid than some persons are apt to suppose. In 1847, for example, when the Hon. Mr. Matheson took his seat in the Legis-