

PROMINENT CANADIANS.—XII.

HCN. J. A. CHAPLEAU, M.P., SECRETARY OF STATE.

In 1881, as Mr. Chapleau was in the course of a speech to his constituents, at Ste. Thérèse, the bell of the parish church suddenly struck, whereupon the orator stopped, bowed his head for a moment, then casting a glance over the vast audience, said in a voice that betrayed emotion: "Forty-one years ago, my friends, that same bell rang me to my christening; its sound has guided my footsteps many a time since; and it has often recalled me to a sense of duty to you." The incident is a key to Mr. Chapleau's character, seeking to make impression through the fancy and softening the asperities of political discussion by delicate reference to the beautiful things of this world. There was both eloquence and statesmanship in the allusion.

Joseph Adolphe Chapleau was born at Ste. Thérèse de Blainville, in the county of Terrebonne, on the 9th November, 1840. His ancestors emigrated from France, and were among the early settlers of the seigniory of Terrebonne; but the father of Mr. Chapleau was an humble, hard-working mechanic, of whom the son was not ashamed and who instilled into the latter principles of honour and devotion to duty. From the earliest age the boy displayed a taste for learning, and his mind was so active that means were found to put him to school where he grounded himself in the elements of grammar. Thence he was sent to the neighbouring village of Terrebonne, where a college had been established by Madame Masson, mother of the ex-Lieutenant-Governor of the Province of Quebec, and where he pursued his studies until transferred to St. Hyacinthe and put through a course of solid studies which left their impression on the whole of his subsequent career.

On leaving college he wended his way to Montreal in search of a profession suitable to a youth of his tastes and aptitudes. He chose the law and, encouraged by his success, devoted himself to criminal practice, acquiring a position therein, which set him, within a short time, in the highest rank among his youthful associates. But this was not sufficient for his buoyant nature. He launched into politics at the age of nineteen, mounting the hustings with assurance and maintaining himself thereon, in the midst of the most violent campaigns. He went further, and took up the pen in defence of his political views and principles. With a couple of congenial spirits he founded a newspaper called *Le Colonisateur*, and for three years used its columns in an attempt to reach those readers whom his voice could not attain.

From these very beginnings Mr. Chapleau made his mark and the political leaders soon foretold that he would lose no time in taking high rank. His physical appearance was in his favour. Tall, well built; with a shapely head; wavy black hair thrown back over his neck like a plume; a musical, flexible voice; an abundance of animal energy; a fearless spirit that shrunk from no difficulty, he readily placed himself at the head of his companions, with their full acquiescence and as if by natural right. Another advantage which the future statesman enjoyed at the opening of his career was that he found himself the representative of the young men coming after the radicalism of 1848, when the French revolution of that year had its echo on this side, and the cry of annexation rang through the whole of Lower Canada. This period of acute crisis was followed by a long term of bewilderment and unrest, called the decade of transition, when party lines were only faintly drawn, because every one felt that there should be a reunion of all forces in order to insure the future of the common country. From 1860 to the year of Confederation, the young men kept on growing in the school of strife and trial, but none grew more perceptibly and with fuller promise of future strength, than the subject of this sketch.

His opportunity came at length, and he was not slow to seize it. In 1867 the British North America Act proclaimed to the world a new nation, and the Province of Quebec, without knowing it, and almost in spite of herself, entered into full possession of her autonomy. She was presented with her own Lieutenant-Governor; her own legislature, consisting of two Chambers and a long scroll of rights and privileges, which practically made the people of French-Canada their own masters. The general elections took place, and Mr. Chapleau, going straight into his native county, asked to be made its first representative in the Provincial Parliament. He was returned by acclamation, and has retained the seat to this day, through the ordeal of at least a half dozen elections. That first session at Quebec was a memorable one, with such members as Chauveau, a man of high temper and noble spirit—as Premier; Joly, the political Bayard, as leader of the Opposition; Cartier, Langevin, Irvine, Chapais, Marchand and others of hardly less note. In such a presence the representative of Terrebonne took his place, at the age of seven and twenty. Within a few hours he arose, and the eyes of a crowded house were fastened upon him, as he proceeded to discharge the honourable function of moving the Address in reply to the Speech from the Throne. His first effort settled his position at once, both as an orator and a public man, and thenceforth the legislative career of Mr. Chapleau was secure. He went along quietly for several years, making himself acquainted with the new order of things under Confederation, when the Province took an upward bound, and everything revived—business, agriculture, literature, and the national spirit—imbuing himself with the principle of practical politics whereby the development of the country's material resources should be fostered. The time came soon when he was called upon to apply these schemes in a higher sphere, and another forward step was taken. Mr. Chapleau was sworn in of the Executive Council, and appointed Solicitor-General in the beginning of 1873, with the sanction of his whole party and the approval of his political adversaries. And away, in a quiet London street, and on a bed of sickness from which he was never to rise,

Sir George Cartier heard of the promotion, and wrote that it was no more than the reward of merit. The great man, who was the friend of young men, and who took pains to train them in public life, was comforted at the last with the thought that one of his favourites had entered on the paths of responsible office.

But this new period, from 1873 to 1879, was a stormy one, and not the least exciting incident was the defence, at Winnipeg, by Mr. Chapleau, of Lépine and other Half-breeds, implicated in the North-West troubles of that period. In September, 1874, the Ouimet Government went down on the outcry about the Tanneries Land Swap, and Mr. Chapleau, after a vigorous defence of his conduct in a public speech, withdrew into private life. But in January, 1876, he was recalled as Provincial Secretary, and remained in office till the disruption of the Boucherville Cabinet, by Governor Letellier de St. Just, in 1878.

Another opportunity was here afforded, of which he took prompt advantage. In a mass meeting held at Montreal he was chosen leader of the Conservative party and of the Opposition, and at once set to work to prepare the way for the downfall of the Joly Ministry. This he accomplished within a little beyond the year. In October, 1879, Mr. Joly resigned, and his opponent was summoned to form a government, which he at once did, adding to his position as First Minister the department of Agriculture and Public Works. The same tact, energy, and general ability which he displayed as leader of the Opposition, where the best qualities of a public man are tested, Mr. Chapleau manifested as head of Government and he lost no time in turning to a business policy. The chief measure of his Administration was the sale of the North Shore Railway, to relieve the exchequer of the Province. The subject gave rise to violent debates, and led to a division in the Conservative party itself, but subsequent events have justified it in a measure, and effectually removed the danger of a powerful corporation being turned into a mere party machine, with nameless resources of corruption. The general elections came on in 1881, and Mr. Chapleau swept the Province, carrying fifty-three seats out of sixty-five. This seemed to crown his Provincial career, and the project long cherished by his friends of his promotion from Quebec to Ottawa was urged upon him with great force. Strong objections were adduced on the other hand, however, and Mr. Chapleau was warned against taking a false step; but there is reason to believe that the state of his health, shattered by the wearing and worrying labours of the previous two years, turned the scales at the end. In the summer of 1882 Mr. Chapleau resigned his position as Prime Minister, and accepted the portfolio of State in the Government of Sir John Macdonald.

It is only they who are acquainted with the modes, the habits, and the general situation of French-Canada who can measure the difference existing between Quebec and Ottawa. Many of Mr. Chapleau's critics foretold that he would be out of place in his new field; that the showy qualities which had won him so much distinction and power among his own people would go for very little with the cool, practical politicians of the Dominion capital, and that while he was supreme in the Provincial arena, he would prove only third or fourth rate in the Federal competition. The readers of this paper can judge for themselves how far these predictions were fulfilled. Foes will agree with friends in stating, as a simple matter of justice, that the influence of Mr. Chapleau has not waned since he became a member of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada. On the contrary, he increased his strength before the whole country by the bold and consistent stand which he took in the Riel affair. None but those who know the French-Canadian people, how they are attached to their race, some of them cherishing the odd feeling that they are not treated with becoming justice and respect by the other elements of the population, and none but those who dwell in the Province at this time, and witnessed the morbid excitement, the hopes, the fears, the anxiety which prevailed throughout the whole crisis, can have the faintest notion of the gravity of the situation. Against this universal outburst Mr. Chapleau, with his two Quebec colleagues, had to make a stand, and in the large Montreal district, over which he has recognized control, he was obliged to bear the brunt of the onset alone. All agencies were set to bear against him. At first he was tempted and cajoled. If he put himself at the head of the movement, all parties would join in his wake, and he would be the master and idol of the Province. Then intimidation was hinted at. If he ventured to set his foot in Montreal, he would be hooted and mobbed. There were several weeks, after the meeting in the Champ de Mars, when the tide of passion ran high, argument was useless, and but for the good sense and honest purpose of the best classes, a serious rupture might have ensued. From their point of view this indignation was natural, and it was respectable, springing from motives of injured patriotism, and aggravated by the definite promises which the party papers published, even on the eve of the unfortunate man's execution. There are two sides to every question of this kind, and the readers of Ontario and the other Provinces should take the particular circumstances into consideration in judging of the movement which almost rent the Province of Quebec asunder.

The record is that the Secretary of State remained calm and collected through it all. Knowing his people as he does, he understood all that he was risking, and the bright prospects which his ambition was throwing away, but, on the other hand, he seems to have seen his duty clear from the start, and, like a man, he did it. Without being defiant, he was fearless throughout. And he was outspoken. In a letter addressed to his countrymen, on the 28th November, 1885, he broaches the question face to face, saying that his oath of office was inviolable, even at the risk of losing friendships and emoluments, and that he had the profound conviction of the injustice of what was demanded of him as detrimental to the best understood interests of the Province. "I saw," he adds, "as a logical