

Former Occupants of the Editorial Chair

Men Who Have Played a Large Part in Moulding the Public Sentiments of the People of British Columbia During the Last Forty Years

In the course of a life of nearly half a century a newspaper necessarily enlists the co-operation of many people in making it what it is. So interwoven are the several departments, the editorial, the news, the mechanical and the business branches of a paper, that it is difficult to define the limits within which the efforts of either of them have been chiefly effective. Therefore a page devoted to the individuals who have written the editorials or have been instrumental in determining the general policy of the paper, would not be fully representative of the makers of The Colonist. Yet it seemed fitting to give our readers portraits and brief sketches of the careers of the three gentlemen who were in the past most closely identified with the paper in the public mind, and also of two who, for short periods, occupied the editorial chair.

Concerning the founder of the paper, the late Amor de Cosmos, more might be said than the space available at this time permits. He was a typical pioneer, a Nova Scotian trained in the political school of which Joseph Howe was the leader, a man of resource, fearless in the expression of his views, far-seeing and full of energy. Of Mr. D. W. Higgins, who is still with us, and who at any time may "bob up serenely" in public life or a journalistic career, it would be superfluous to say anything more than is contained in the short biographical sketch which appears below, and the same is true of Messrs. Bogle and Gosnell. They are yet in the prime of life, and in the natural order of things may be expected to give a good account of themselves. Of the late Henry Lawson little need be said in addition to the appreciative editorial which is reproduced from The Colonist of the day following his death, except that as the years roll round his memory remains ever fragrant in the memory of all who knew him.

It was in Windsor, Hants county, Nova Scotia, that Mr. De Cosmos was born, on the 20th August, 1825, and it was there that he received his education. At fifteen his school days terminated, and on the removal of his family to Halifax he commenced the battle of life as a clerk in the wholesale grocery firm of Chas. Whiteman & Co. At the same time, his ambition to secure an education such as would enable him to make his mark in the world induced him to take the fullest advantage of the facilities afforded by an excellent night school over which Mr. John S. Thomson, father of the late Canadian premier, presided, and it is a certain fact that the wholesome advice and intelligent counsel of his instructor in these impressionable days of boyhood materially affected his subsequent useful and distinguished career. The opinion that a newer and broader country offered to him greater opportunities for advancement than did his native Nova Scotia, induced him in 1851 to join in the exodus to California, where the gold discoveries of a few years before were leading an indomitable and energetic army of workers from all parts of the East. There were no railways in those days bringing Atlantic and Pacific into close companionship, and so, the steamer having landed the adventurous young Canadian in New York city, he started thence on the tiresome and apparently interminable tramp across the continent. His journeying to St. Jo., then the rallying point for the west-bound caravans of white-hooded wagons, was devoid of special incident or importance. At this breathing space on the border of the unknown he fell in with a number of equally ambitious emigrants, and with them he made the passage to the golden land of promise, the laborious crossing of the prairies being made anything but monotonous by several skirmishes with predatory bands of Indians and one pitched battle with the redskins, in which two men and one of the women of the little party lost their lives.

On two other occasions the company were obliged to give up a great portion of their slender stock of provisions to conciliate the none-too-friendly reds, and thus it was that their original plans were sadly disturbed, and when the green fields of Utah were reached a halt was called perforce, and not until the following spring was it possible to take up the

march California-ward. The golden state was reached some eight months later, further uninvited and undesired meetings with the natives of the West having greatly increased both the length and hazard of the trip to the Coast. At Sacramento the party, that had been as one big family on the dreary passage of the plains, disbanded, and while some went to the agricultural lands of the Santa Clara valley, the young Nova Scotian, with the de-

Cosmos—during his residence in the California gold diggings embarked in business as a general trader, at the same time engaging from time to time in various speculations in which he displayed a sagacity that was alternately designated as luck, intuition or common sense, according to the tastes and dispositions of his critics and fellow citizens.

All were, however, compelled to admit that his fortunes steadily prospered, and that De

can guess. His residence in the land of the Argonauts was too quickly terminated for this to be determined, and with a long cherished desire to be once again under the old flag, he was one of the first to turn his eyes to Vancouver Island when the stream of gold-seekers began to flow in this direction.

It was in '58 that Mr. De Cosmos landed in Victoria, then a city of tents and transient fortune-seekers on the outskirts of an inhospitable forest.

He at once cast himself with that restless energy that was his most marked characteristic into the making of history for the new town and colony, carrying out the project that even before he left California had been taking practical form in his busy brain, and presenting to the public shortly afterwards, a pioneer newspaper of the Canadian far west—the British Colonist.

It was vigorous and direct—a newspaper symbolic of the times and people, and consequently it grew in popularity and in influence. Popular government was not then in the hands of the people of this section, and it offered a theme which the editor of the British Colonist was ever ready to discuss. Naturally he spoke to an appreciative audience, and when in April of 1859 Governor Douglas took a step in the direction of restricting the liberty of the press, or rather with the object of crushing out of existence the local representative of the world of publications, it was found that Victorians as a unit were with the editor.

A Victorian and a Canadian first, last, and all the time, Mr. De Cosmos was one of the first to espouse the cause of Confederation, and government by the people, and although the unity of the provinces was ultimately accomplished upon a basis other than that he had originally championed, he was one of the most sincere in the rejoicing at the accomplishment of the natural destiny of the British North America possessions. Fearless and outspoken in his discussion of public questions, both with pen and voice, it was natural that he should have been selected, less than five years after his arrival in the colony—in 1863—as a member of the colonial legislature, or that he should have continued as a representative in that body, of the people whose interests he had so much at heart until the amalgamation of the island with British Columbia, as the mainland was then termed, under Governor Strong. New Westminster was at this time the capital, but Mr. De Cosmos concluded that Victoria by reason of its greater population and important commerce was the more suitable place from which to direct provincial affairs. He therefore entered with zeal into a campaign for the transfer of the capital, in which he was ultimately successful. Victorians have, therefore, to thank the pioneer statesman whose demise brings his career into prominence, for the position which their city occupies today as the executive centre of Canada's most western province.

In 1866 his persistent demand for popular government led to the summoning of the Yale convention, which formulated a bill of rights and called for the extension of self-government to the people of British Columbia. Success was not immediately achieved, but the convention was nevertheless not without its practical and important bearing in the accomplishment of its desired aim.

In 1866 Mr. De Cosmos paid an important visit to the Eastern provinces, his mission being nothing less than to advocate the confederation of the provinces from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and returning to his home in the West he bent his every energy to the tremendous scheme of building up a united nation. In 1870 his formulated project was laid before the local legislature, the government scheme for the accomplishment of the same great object under other conditions being at the same time considered. The government plan prevailed, and in July, 1871, the province became a part of the Dominion.

Three years after this Mr. De Cosmos was chosen premier of the province and president (without salary) of the executive council, this being upon the resignation of the government, led by the Premier (now Justice) McCreight. At the same time he was representative of Victoria in the Canadian House of Commons, his capacity for work appearing to have no bounds, and his attention to the needs and opportunities of his constituents being generally admitted as unassailable. Upon the abolition of dual representation, Mr. De Cosmos chose to represent his constituency in the Dominion house, and accordingly resigned the premiership and threw himself with augmented enthusiasm into national affairs. During his representation at Ottawa of the city whose interests he made his own, he persistently urged the desirability and necessity of providing a first-class graving dock at Esquimalt, and upon his efforts in this direction being rewarded by the vote of \$250,000 by the Dominion government, in lieu of the guarantee stipulated in the terms of union, he promptly followed up the advantage gained by visiting London and prevailing upon the Imperial authorities to contribute a similar amount towards the accomplishment of the important public work in question. Before

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termination to learn for himself the full value of the gold mines that had tempted him westward, passed on to the diggings, in which he spent four years of varying fortune, crowded with adventure and profitable experience.

Realizing that profits were to be made from miners as well as from mines, Mr. De Cosmos—or Smith, for that was the name of his parents, although to gratify his craving for a less commonplace patronymic a convenient legislature enacted that it should be De

Cosmos' views on public affairs were as sound as the basis upon which he built his business success. Politics, whether national or bounded merely by the necessities and actions of a mining camp, he entered into naturally and with enthusiasm, so that even those who disliked the man—for he was too strongly opinionated to invite universal friendship—were compelled to admit his power as a leader of men. To what place in the making of California history he might have aspired no one

pitiable forest. He at once cast himself with that restless energy that was his most marked characteristic into the making of history for the new town and colony, carrying out the project that even before he left California had been taking practical form in his busy brain, and presenting to the public shortly afterwards, a pioneer newspaper of the Canadian far west—the British Colonist.

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