

It won the hearty applause of leading men in the House, who were surprised to hear the young member from Quebec discussing important questions with a facile mastery of English which any speaker in Parliament might have envied. In 1877 he was given a cabinet position as Minister of Inland Revenue, in the Mackenzie administration. His tenure of office was brief, as the Liberal Government was defeated in the following year, and from that time until the 23d of June, 1896, Mr. Laurier was in opposition.

Sir John Macdonald's return to power in 1878, backed by a very large majority, inaugurated the protective policy, and the Conservative party became strongly entrenched in office. Thus denied an administrative record, Mr. Laurier nevertheless steadily increased in the respect and admiration of both House and country, and, on the resignation of the Liberal leadership by Mr. Blake in 1887, he was chosen to succeed him. His elevation to the position did not result from any of the self-seeking arts of the aspiring politician; but it proved his possession of certain qualities much needed in the guiding counsels of the Liberal party. It is well known that he was strongly averse to the leadership, and had to be solicited with an urgency and unanimity which amounted to a command. His predecessor was a man of great intellectual force, and, though not very successful from a party point of view, was of a political eminence sufficient to cast a shadow on the candidature of any but a potent successor. It was generally thought that both Mr. Mackenzie and Mr. Blake, however admirable in other respects, had shown themselves somewhat insensitive to the popular appreciation of winning address, and that their reserve and austerity of manner had something to do with the long term of Liberal failure. In the selection of Mr. Laurier his political friends could not fail to note the gifts of the popular orator, enhanced by a personal manner which won all who came under its influence; but, while crediting him with the possession of more solid talents, they were, perhaps, not quite so sure that he had the strength of will and political adroitness so necessary to restore the fortunes of his party. He had not been tried in many difficult situations, and the leadership intrusted to him could not be wholly disengaged from the risks of an experiment. The result has proved the wisdom of their choice. Mr. Laurier