

PROMINENT CANADIANS—XXXIV.

SKETCHES of the following Prominent Canadians have already appeared in THE WEEK: Hon. Oliver Mowat, Sir Daniel Wilson, Principal Grant, Sir John A. Macdonald, K.C.B., Louis Honoré Fréchette, LL.D., Sir J. William Dawson, Sir Alexander Campbell, K.C.M.G., Hon. William Stevens Fielding, Hon. Alexander MacKenzie, Sir Samuel Leonard Tilley, C.B., K.C.M.G., Alexander McLachlan, Hon. J. A. Chapleau, Sir Richard Cartwright, K.C.M.G., Sanford Fleming, C.E., LL.D., C.M.G., Hon. H. G. Joly, Hon. P. J. O. Chauveau, Sir William Buell Richards, Hon. Wilfrid Laurier, M.P., Hon. Honoré Mercier, Q.C., Hon. William Macdougall, C.B., Rev. Principal MacVicar, D.D., LL.D., Prof. Charles G. D. Roberts, M.A., George Paxton Young, M.A., Hon. Auguste Real Angers, Principal Caven, D.D., William Ralph Meredith, LL.D., Q.C., M.P., Sir William Pearce Howland, C.B., K.C.M.G., Senator the Hon. John Macdonald, the Hon. John Hawkins Hagarty, D.C.L., Chief Justice of Ontario, Lieut.-Col. George T. Denison, Sir Antoine Aimé Dorion, His Grace Archbishop O'Brien, Charles Mair, F.R.S.C., and Chief Justice Allen.

SIR JOHN THOMPSON, K.C.M.G., Q.C., MINISTER OF JUSTICE FOR CANADA.

NOVA SCOTIA can claim some of the brightest stars now shining in the intellectual firmament of Canada. This little Province can proudly point to Sir William Dawson, Principal of McGill University, Montreal; and Rev. Dr. Grant, Principal of Queen's University, Kingston, twin stars of the first magnitude in the constellation of Canadian educationists. Sir William Dawson has won a high reputation as a gentleman of great scientific attainments. Rev. Dr. Grant is not only a leading educationist, but his public addresses on any subject always command the earnest attention of the whole Dominion, and, whether the subject be theological or political, he invariably exhibits a broad mindedness and catholicity of tone characteristic of the best type of Nova Scotians.

In the realm of constitutional and parliamentary law, another Nova Scotian, Mr. John G. Bourinot, is one of the brightest lights. His reputation as an authority on questions touching the Canadian Constitution and parliamentary procedure extends beyond the Dominion, and he has on more than one occasion been selected to lecture before leading universities and historical societies in the United States on the Canadian Constitution.

And in the realm of light literature and Canadian journalism, Nova Scotia, the home of dear old Sam Slick and the gifted and insufficiently appreciated Prof. De Mille, has to-day a very clever representative in Mr. Martin J. Griffin, now Parliamentary Librarian at Ottawa, who left his native city of Halifax to become the editor of the *Toronto Mail*, in which capacity he wielded a remarkably vigorous pen for some years. As the contributor of the articles "At Dodsley's," which have appeared weekly in the *Montreal Gazette*, he has displayed all the qualities of a cultured, charming and clever critic, and it is to be regretted that his arduous duties as Parliamentary Librarian now prevent him from giving to the public more frequent demonstration of his genuine literary talent.

If we survey the field of Canadian politics and wish to ascertain the views of representative Canadians upon the political future of Canada, no more talented or more thoroughly informed political quartette can be selected from the ranks of the great parties that divide our Dominion than four Nova Scotian politicians, Sir Charles Tupper, his sturdy and life-long antagonist, Hon. A. G. Jones, M.P. for Halifax County, Sir John Thompson, the Minister of Justice of Canada, and Hon. J. W. Longley, Attorney-General of Nova Scotia.

Sir John Sparrow David Thompson, Q.C., P.C., K.C.M.G., etc., recently completed his forty-sixth year, having been born at Halifax on the 10th of November, 1844. His father, John Sparrow Thompson, was a native of Waterford, Ireland; and, when young, emigrated to Nova Scotia, where he filled several important public positions—having been Queen's printer and subsequently, for a number of years, Superintendent of the Money Order system of Nova Scotia. He was a frequent contributor to the editorial columns of the *Nova Scotian*, then edited by the late Hon. Joseph Howe, and enjoyed a high reputation as a graceful and scholarly writer and an accomplished gentleman. In the battle for Responsible Government, he was a most ardent follower of Hon. Mr. Howe, Nova Scotia's greatest son, whose name, abbreviated with affectionate familiarity to "Joe Howe," is cherished with a warm regard by the people of his native Province, who love to tell of that great tribune's sparkling wit, his wonderful eloquence, and the many gifts of his poetic mind, which rendered him irresistible as a leader of his countrymen, and the recollection of which is now among the dearest treasures of his memory.

The subject of the present sketch attended one of the common schools of his native city, and subsequently took a course at the Free Church Academy in Halifax, whose Principal was for many years a remarkably successful and popular teacher. Young Thompson on leaving this Academy selected law as a profession and became attached to Mr. Henry Pryor, D.C.L. At that time in Nova Scotia, as in many other places, a large part of the daily work which the junior articulated student was expected to perform was of the dullest and most useless character, such as writing out copies of the voluminous writs and pleadings then in vogue, and generally performing the class of work now done much more neatly and expeditiously by the office boy or girl with a Remington or Caligraph. It was a formidable undertaking even to pursue an ordinary set of the pleadings of thirty years ago; it was more formidable to write out a complete copy of a set, but the superlative was reached by the bewildered student in the

endeavour to understand the precise points of the super-subtle technicalities then expanded upon so many reams of foolscap and called "pleadings." Nowadays in order to throw light on some of the passages of Browning, clubs are formed for the special study of such writings, but the most ambiguous passage of Browning is lucidity itself compared with the intricate phraseology to be found in some of the writs in the last generation. No conception of the author of "Sordello" could approach in puzzling profundity and distracting depth a "Demurrer" or a defence under the old practice, but there was no law club or law school to help the law students of the last generation who groped along as best they could, aided perhaps by an occasional suggestion or word of explanation from the busy practitioner with whom they were articulated. Young Thompson was an extremely industrious student and not only found time to study the principles of the law but also studied stenography, and became so proficient as a stenographer that after his admission to the Bar he filled the position of official reporter to the House of Assembly of Nova Scotia for several years. Stenography even in its highest plane is a profession too little appreciated by all those who have not attempted to master that difficult art. The general public have the impression that there is really very little difference between the stenographer who takes down from dictation a few letters every morning in a merchant's office and the stenographer who reports the two hours' speech of a politician, and soon afterwards hands to the printer his report absolutely faithful in every respect, except that where improvement in literary style is desirable such improvement is made according to the necessity of the case, all redundancies and errors disappearing in the process of transcription. There is as much difference between the ordinary amanuensis and such a reporter as there is between the ordinary sign-painter and a first-class scenic artist. An expert reporter is expected sometimes to summarize a ten-column speech so that it will not occupy more than the space of one column of the newspaper, and yet have no salient point omitted; and on the other hand it sometimes is his duty to compose and substitute for the awkward and ungrammatical dozen words of another speaker an elegant and highly embellished oration so that the particular speaker may not see himself as others saw him. In short stenography in its most difficult branches demands not only more mechanical speed but endurance, patience, discretion, and a knowledge not only of oratory and its sister arts, rhetoric and logic, but also a knowledge of human nature and of the tastes of the public.

Young Mr. Thompson became a remarkably proficient stenographer and found that art a most useful ancillary to the profession of the law, and there cannot be any doubt that to the experience he then gained in reporting the public men of that day may be attributed in some degree the fluency, precision and gracefulness which characterize all his own public addresses. He was admitted to the Bar in 1865, being then twenty-one years of age. For the first few years of his career as a lawyer, his practice at the Bar was small, but he won his way to the front steadily, and at the age of thirty he was generally recognized as one of the leaders of the Nova Scotia Bar. He served as an Alderman of the city of Halifax for several years, and was also for some time Chairman of the Halifax Board of School Commissioners. For several years he was President of the Young Men's Literary Association, and also of the Charitable Irish Society of Halifax, and he was also one of the Senate of the University of Halifax while that University existed. During his active professional career he was connected with almost every important case then coming before the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia for decision. He was one of the counsel for the United States Government in 1874, before the Fishery Commission which sat at Halifax under the Washington Treaty, and there can be no doubt that the close study necessarily given to the whole fishery question at that time has been extremely serviceable to him on more than one occasion since, and notably when representing the Government of Canada at Washington in conjunction with Sir Charles Tupper in 1888.

In 1878 he entered the local political arena, and at the Provincial elections in October of that year, he was elected to represent the county of Antigonish in the Local Legislature, the Conservative party at these elections carrying almost every county in the Province. Hon. Mr. Thompson became a member of the new Government and Attorney-General of the Province, and while he remained in the Legislature was the *de facto* leader of his party, although the Government was generally known as the Holmes Government, the Premier and Provincial Secretary being Hon. S. H. Holmes of Pictou County. There were very few opportunities at that time in the Local Legislature for the display of great debating ability, there being practically no opposition in the House. Attorney-General Thompson discharged the duties of his office with conspicuous thoroughness and satisfaction, while at the same time carrying on his ordinary business at the head of the largest law firm in the Province.

The most important measure introduced into the Legislature during the regime of the Holmes Government was a scheme for the consolidation of the railways of the Province under the management of an English syndicate, and the construction by the syndicate of certain branch lines. While the opposition to this measure in the House of Assembly was extremely feeble, the scheme was attacked with remarkable force and ability in the editorial columns of the *Halifax Morning Chronicle*, the writer of the articles being Mr. W.

S. Fielding, a gentleman then but little known in the political world, but now the very successful Premier of the Local Government of Nova Scotia, and the most popular politician in Nova Scotia. The attack on the "Syndicate Scheme" by the *Chronicle* was powerful and persistent, Mr. Fielding aiming his blows with a precision that seemed most effective. Both houses of the Legislature, however, endorsed the scheme by large majorities, but on appeal to the people of the Province soon afterwards the Government, to the surprise of everybody, were defeated, the Liberals eventually having a small majority in the new House. The struggle at the polls had been a fierce and exciting one and the result for a time was so uncertain that the Conservative party carried on the affairs of the Province for several months after the elections, with Attorney-General Thompson as Premier, Hon. Mr. Holmes having retired from the political arena. On the formation of the Liberal Government in the same year, 1882, Hon. Mr. Thompson accepted a position on the Bench of the Supreme Court of the Province. He had been appointed a Q. C. in 1879, and was President of the Nova Scotia Bar Society for several years previous to his becoming a judge, and, at the time of his promotion to the Bench, was undoubtedly the ablest and most successful lawyer at the Nova Scotia Bar.

While on the Bench he displayed in a great degree the qualities of an ideal judge, prompt in his decisions, invariably courteous to every member of the Bar, and in all his duties exhibiting an eminently judicial mind.

As a judge he possessed a remarkable faculty for quickly discovering the crucial point in the most intricate cases argued before him, even when that point was hidden under a huge mass of other and apparently relevant questions. The exercise of this faculty naturally sometimes laid him open to the criticism of being perhaps too prompt in coming to a conclusion upon the question at issue, and too tenacious in holding to that conclusion. The writer of this sketch does not consider himself qualified to testify as to whether such a criticism in the case of Mr. Justice Thompson was ever justifiable, but as such a criticism when made is generally made by the counsel whose argument in the case has failed to convince the judge, it should be received with considerable caution and is generally groundless.

While a member of the judiciary, Hon. Mr. Thompson took an active part in the founding of the Law School at Halifax in connection with Dalhousie University, and on its establishment generously consented to become one of its lecturers. He also rendered valuable assistance in connection with the preparation of the Nova Scotia Judicature Act and Rules by which the system of pleadings and practice in the Province was greatly simplified upon the lines of similar acts in Ontario and England.

An excellent proof of the high reputation he enjoyed as a lawyer is to be found in the fact that his lectures at Dalhousie University were not only attended by the law students of the University, but also by a large number of the barristers of the city, who enrolled themselves as general students of the college for the purpose of hearing his lectures on "Evidence." These lectures on one of the most difficult of all legal subjects were remarkably able addresses, characterized by lucidity, precision and scholarly finish. In September, 1885, he resigned his position on the Bench and entered Dominion politics, becoming Minister of Justice in the Dominion Cabinet. After a sharp contest he was elected in Antigonish County, and his subsequent career in the House of Commons is familiar to every person in Canada. At the last general elections he was again elected for Antigonish by a majority of 40.

The *Halifax Herald* and other Conservative newspapers have occasionally referred to Sir John Thompson as the next leader of the Conservative party, and he has many qualifications for the position. He is a sound jurist and a polished and persuasive orator. His reply to the American case on the fishery question in 1888 is a singularly able state paper, in which he displays the astuteness and acumen of a first-rate lawyer. When the Riel agitation was at its height, as Minister of Justice he was called upon to defend the position of the Government, and his address on that question in the House of Commons was so clear, comprehensive and convincing that he established for himself throughout the whole Dominion a reputation as an able constitutional lawyer and a most eloquent and powerful debater. I have heard a Liberal friend of mine, who is not prone to acknowledge ability in opponents, concede in regard to that address with a reluctance that made his statement all the more forcible, that it was not only the greatest speech of that great debate, but one of the ablest speeches ever delivered in the Canadian Parliament, and this indeed was the outspoken opinion of Liberals and Conservatives in the House of Commons at the time. Sir John Thompson has a mind peculiarly judicial in cast, and his unimpassioned and judicial manner, while not best calculated to win the cheap cheers of a campaign crowd, make him a most effective debater when addressing a deliberative assembly. His great speech in the House of Commons on the Jesuit question was an eminently characteristic one, and will remain a monument of the oratorical and legal ability. The powerful argument of the brilliant lawyer became irresistible when delivered by one apparently showing "the cold neutrality of an impartial judge." He has a personal, professional and political record of unquestioned purity, and he is unmeasurably superior in ability to any of his colleagues in the Cabinet. In discharging the ordinary departmental duties of Minister of Justice, his business-like qualities have won the admiration of the lay mind, and all persons having official business with him recognize his