

HE KNOWS HIS PEOPLE

Sir Lomer Gouin, Premier of Quebec, is also the Political and Business Head of the Firm, Johnnie Courteau & Co.

By AUGUSTUS BRIDLE

A TINY statuette delivers a silent oration in the ante-room to the Premier's office in the Parliament Buildings of Quebec. Entertaining the visitor who may have to wait a good while before seeing the original. Magniloquently orating—on what? Perhaps on the rights of man; the ancient feudatory privileges of the French people; truth about the war—or the poetry of the superb scene—scape that swings in great billows of hills and river and sky right up to the window.

No doubt Sir Lomer Gouin is eloquent. I have never heard him in that role. What struck me most as I looked at the mannikin on the table was that the Premier of Quebec is above all things successful. When one reflects upon the shrewd hold this man has upon the practical emotions and political sympathies of a great province, it is to wonder what fine etiquette must have passed between him and Sir Robert Borden before the two Premiers met on the same platform in Quebec City a few days ago. It was a National Service meeting. The object was to stimulate recruiting. Sir Lomer believes in national service. He also believes in recruiting. Nothing pleases this master of political campaigns and administrative business more than the opportunity to do something for the social organism represented by his fellow-countrymen. Affairs of State absorb him. He has an inborn sense of public opportunity.

When I took the liberty of briefly interviewing Sir Lomer Gouin last summer, the Province of Quebec was much exercised over recruiting. Many Nationalists in the old city talked much about what other people seemed to consider was their plain duty to enlist. Military officers belonging to peace regiments were going about in civilian clothes. There was a camp in the city. Some sentry was forever standing guard. Now and then some soldiers marched—not many. Occasionally there was a bugle. But khaki was not the prevailing colour. In a city which has more military traditions than any other in Canada there was very little soldiering at a time when most of the world was at war. Sixteen miles up the river there was a large camp of soldiers in khaki. Once in a while Valcartier spilled over into Quebec, spent its money and dusted back again. A good many of the soldiers that came and went at Sir Lomer Gouin's Capital were French-Canadian. You never heard any plain clothes officer of French-Canadian breed find any fault with these patriots. It was a free country. Even in Quebec a man might enlist if he chose without earning the opprobrium of his compatriots.

THERE was, in fact, a good deal of earnest talk among some of the officers as to the facts and conditions of army-organizing in Quebec. On the Plains of Abraham there was the great Ross Rifle factory with its thousands of employees. Somewhere else in the city there was a munition factory or two. It was even said by one reasonable officer that the demand for labour in the various industries of war was so keen in that part of the country that it would be hard to spare a large percentage of men for the wearing of khaki.

Much talk of some sort of census or national register that should determine what the various parishes in Sir Lomer Gouin's Province might do by way of sending men into camps. East of the Ancient City—perhaps so many; west—so many. But in all, not a great many. You see, the province was so confoundingly busy on the farms, in the paper factories, in the cotton mills, in the mines, in the munition and rifle factories, on the boats and the rail-



DRAWN BY E. WYLY GRIER

The Premier of Quebec on the National Service Platform with Sir Robert Borden in Quebec City, Dec. 7, 1916

"I AM here," said Sir Lomer, "to say in the presence of the Prime Minister of Canada that this province will continue to do its duty. I do not want to be understood as excusing my province, for it does not need to be excused. We belong to a race that has traditions of courage, bravery and love of liberty. We will show that we have not lost their virtues or their courage. We still remember our cradles and our mothers. You have seen the example of this at Ypres, at Festubert, at Courcellette and elsewhere, and among the bravest who have bled and fallen there none have been greater than our men of the 22nd battalion."

ways, that it would be a matter of sharp arithmetic to determine how many thousands could be spared for the kind of national service represented by fighting.

So when Sir Lomer Gouin appeared on the national service platform of Sir Robert Borden, he knew pretty well what Quebec is or is not doing in the matter of soldiers. He was not opposing enlistment. Never. He is too shrewd at the idea of national service. He is too experienced in the art of meeting people and getting their points of view. Not necessarily to act on them.

The morning I met him he came out of his office with a bang.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting—"

Resonant, very distinct—I think Gouin enjoys speaking and might even enjoy acting. He was impeccably groomed, fresh as a youth in the morning.

"Busy—yes. But you should have sent me notice. I could show you about."

He wanted to know the subject on which he was expected to talk, supposing that the object of the visit was practical, when it was merely to get an impression of the Premier.

"How do you succeed in operating what is called a mediaeval Prov—"

"Ah," looking somewhat roused. "What is that?"

Evidently this was an echo of some opinions that had been blown across the Ontario border on a west-

wind. I had failed to realize how much of a "bete noir" the mediaeval idea is to Sir Lomer, who is no more of a mediaeval than Rodolphe Forget—begging each other's pardon for mentioning both in the same sentence, for you never can feel quite sure of your table partners in Quebec.

"A mediaeval Province by modern business methods," I concluded.

He did not answer this. It was what he might call a "faux pas." But it made no difference to his geniality. Gouin thinks bigger than Quebec. That is one reason he is so effective. I think he understands Ontario pretty well. One might compare him in this respect with two other famous and deceased Ontario Premiers, Mowat and Whitney. Less of a lawyer, more of a business man than Mowat, but as important to the Quebec of to-day as Mowat was to the Ontario of thirty years ago; as shrewd a Liberal, less learned in constitutional law, not less acute in diagnosis. But Mowat in Quebec would have been a foreigner; whereas Gouin in Ontario would feel very much at home. The Quebec Premier dominates his party as much as Whitney ever did his, and with more of it to dominate. But there never was a velvet glove on any of Whitney's tables, and the iron hand is seldom seen on Gouin's, who is not a ruler so much as a leader and a conciliator.

YET it used to be easier to get an interview out of Sir James, if he happened to be in the right indignant humour, than it is to worm anything for publication out of Sir Lomer. Gouin is a wary man. He falls into no traps. His geniality may be at top notch, but it never leads him into blabbing.

"Ah!" he admitted. "Make no mistake. Quebec is Liberal. Laurier? He never was stronger here than he is to-day, I am sure."

There had been doubts about this in some quarters. In Quebec it seems most of the Tories are dead. There is no Opposition. It takes a strong man not to become spoiled with such a majority. Sir Lomer Gouin is one public man who is able first of all to swing sentiment into a voting majority and afterwards to keep his head and stay as human as a Christmas tree

when he has an overwhelming monopoly of the people behind him as represented by Legislature.

Success of this kind is worth while to study from the inside out. Why is Sir Lomer Gouin the safest keeper of an obliterating majority in any Premier's chair in Canada?

Because he is first a politician. This is a simple thing to say. But in Sir Lomer's case not so simple. It would be much easier to play such a role in B. C. In Quebec there is a shifting game. Sir Lomer Gouin was no novice when he began to play it. He did not step up from a college to the stump. He had no flamboyant ideals to repress. Before he was a politician—he was a man of business or he would have been rattled by the temperament of Quebec politics. He took over the Premiership when he was law partner with Hon. Rodolphe Lemieux. He had been some years a member of the Legislature under Premier Parent, who was a dictator and no business man. The business of the Province was in a bad way: It was Lomer Gouin's first business to reconstruct the machinery. He did it: slowly, patiently, wisely—converting chronic deficits into surpluses, bad roads into good ones, fathering modern improvements and extensions of utilities, fostering great industries, always with the careful head of one who, with other clothes, might have been a priest among the people.

(Concluded on page 21.)