

THE CANADIAN THEMISTOCLES.

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PLUTARCH'S LIVES: "As for moral philosophy and the polite arts he [Themistocles, when a boy], learned them but slowly, and with little satisfaction; but instructions in political knowledge and the administration of public affairs he received with an attention above his years: because they suited his genius. When, therefore, he was laughed at, long after, in company where free scope was given to raillery, by persons who passed as more accomplished in what was called genteel breeding, he was obliged to answer them with some asperity. "'Tis true I never learned how to tune a harp, or play upon a lute, but I know how to raise a small and inconsiderable state to glory and greatness."

"Themistocles was a follower of Mnesiphilus . . . a professor of what was called wisdom, which consisted in a knowledge of the arts of government and the practical part of political prudence."

"In the first sallies of youth he was irregular and unsteady, as he followed his own disposition without any restraints. Helived in extremes, and those extremes were often of the worst kind. But he seemed to apologize for this afterwards, when he observed that the wildest colts make the best horses."

"This [the public production of a tragedy at his own expense], gained him popularity; and what added to it, was his charging his memory with the names of the citizens, so that he readily called each by his own name."

"But that which rounded most of all to his honor . . . was reconciling the several Grecian states to each other."

"At the next Olympic games [after the defeat of the Persians], as soon as Themistocles appeared in the ring, the champions were overlooked by the spectators, who kept their eyes upon him all day, and pointed him out to strangers with the utmost admiration and applause. This incense was extremely grateful to him; and he acknowledged to his friends that he then reaped the fruits of his labors."

"At last the Athenians . . . banished him by the ostracism."

Pat as these extracts from Plutarch, the most entertaining of all biographers, are to Sir John Macdonald, it is not my intention to strain the parallel. It is only in the most general way that I would call the man, whose life Mr. Pope* has written so well and so eloquently, the Canadian Themistocles.

The Greeks as a people, more so in their public men, were the most acute politicians the world has known. We draw many of our political terms from their language. Statecraft, political sagacity, or, as Plutarch calls it, "political prudence," party strategy, were all fine arts in which they excelled. With them moral exactitude was not necessarily joined with political sagacity. But political sagacity was the one thing the Greeks looked for in their public men. Aristides the Just, the rival of Themistocles, we are told, "managed the concerns of government with inflexible justice," and, therefore, managed them only for a time, and soon went into banishment. Aristides did not possess this very complex and essentially requisite characteristic of "political sagacity." With Pericles and Themistocles it ran from every pore.

Sir John Macdonald, more so than any other Canadian, as much as any public man on the American continent, was surcharged with this political prudence. In his case, political sagacity meant a thorough knowledge of men and how to handle them, of men in the mass and individuals as they came shot out from the lot—and most of all, in having the knack of carrying on the government. A statesman, one of those who have made themselves famous, is a man not of a principle or principles, but who has an end in view, and carries on the public affairs at the same time. Another name than statesman must be invented for those men who are in public life, and make a stand for a principle. Themistocles had no great principle at heart, but he always had two ends in view, one to carry on the government, the other—best expressed in the phrase of Plut-

*Memoirs of the Right Honorable Sir John Alexander Macdonald, G.C.B., First Prime Minister of the Dominion of Canada. By Joseph Pope. Two Volumes. Ottawa: J. Durie & Son