

PROMINENT CANADIANS.—VIII.

HON. WILLIAM STEVENS FIELDING, PREMIER OF NOVA SCOTIA.

THERE are few instances of political preferment in the history of Nova Scotia politics that will bear comparison with the rapid promotion of Hon. William Stevens Fielding to the Premiership of the Province. Three or four years ago Mr. Fielding was a comparatively unknown man beyond the borders of his native Province. Recently, however, his name has come prominently before the people of England and the United States as well as before the people of Canada. This publicity is due, in large measure, to his connection with the Repeal movement. His ardent advocacy of the return of Nova Scotia to her pre-Confederation status drew the attention of the continent to the Repeal struggle, and in a remarkably short time Mr. Fielding's name became as familiar to Canadians as the names of the best known politicians. But while Mr. Fielding has become thoroughly identified with the active politics of Nova Scotia, and to a lesser degree with the politics of the Dominion, few are acquainted with his history or with the extent of his influence, and fewer still with the secret of his strength. The apparent ease and rapidity with which the Premier made his way into the vanguard of Provincial politics has been somewhat of a mystery to those who are not conversant with his life and character, and not a little of a surprise even to his most intimate friends. It often happens when a man comes to the front with the celerity which characterized Mr. Fielding's political progress that his career resembles the growth of the gourd rather than that of the oak. This is not so, however, of the gentleman whom I am sketching. His political growth, in a certain sense, has been gourd-like, it is true; but its celerity has had a strengthening rather than a weakening effect. Every day Mr. Fielding is becoming more deeply entrenched in the affections of the people of Nova Scotia. His popularity grows with his growth and strengthens with his strength, and there is good reason to believe that he is destined, in the absence of physical casualties, to take a large part in the Provincial and Federal politics of the future.

Mr. Fielding is a self-made man in the fullest sense. At quite an early age the embryonic statesman started out on the highway of life. Scholastic pursuits were thrown aside for the more congenial atmosphere of the practical work-a-day world, and at the age of sixteen young Fielding found himself in the business office of the *Halifax Chronicle*. His connection with that journal began in December, 1864. In August of that year the *Chronicle* came under the management of Mr. Charles Annand, its present proprietor. Previous to that time the *Chronicle* was issued as a weekly and a tri-weekly; but Mr. Annand felt that a field for a daily journal was opening up in Halifax and the Province, and accordingly started his venture with bright hopes of success—hopes which, I may say, have been since fully realized. When Mr. Fielding entered the office the editorial department was in charge of Jonathan (afterwards Judge) McCully. When the paper was made a daily Mr. Charles Annand took charge of the business department, having for his first lieutenant Mr. John Dunn, the present business manager. At a later period the editorial matter was written for the most part outside the office by a corps of chosen contributors. At different times Messrs. Howe, Annand, sen., Foley, Garvie, and others—all of them accomplished writers—were members of the editorial staff. It was at this juncture, when Mr. McCully was chief editor, that young Fielding became an attaché of the *Chronicle*, and no doubt the vigorous and graceful writing that filled the *Chronicle's* editorial columns at that time inspired him with a spirit of ambition, for in less than three years after entering the business office, and whilst yet in the teens, his first editorial appeared. This was printed side by side with editorials by the Hon. Joseph Howe, an association that must have fired the youth with a new and a keener ambition. The anti-Confederate battle was then passing through its most exciting phases, and the grand opportunities which it afforded for the employment of "thoughts that glow and words that burn" led Mr. Fielding to dedicate his initial editorial to the anti-Confederate literature of the day.

The first few years of Mr. Fielding's connection with the *Chronicle* were years of severe journalistic schooling. The reportorial staff at that time was limited. Division of labour in newspaper work had not been reduced to the almost scientific system which obtains to-day. On many occasions Mr. Fielding found the whole reportorial work devolving upon him, in addition to proof-reading, shipping, and various other labours within and without the office. Of a naturally active disposition, however, and having his whole being bound up in increasing the reputation of the *Chronicle*, Mr. Fielding never shirked anything that happened to be thrown upon him by the force of circumstances. Those who have not passed through the experience of rising from the lowest round in the journalistic ladder to the crowing rundle can have but a faint idea of the perseverance, the diligence, and the ability involved in the achievement. These three qualities Mr. Fielding possesses in a marked degree, and hence his success as a journalist and as a politician.

The exact date at which the subject of our sketch graduated from the reportorial department to the larger sphere and graver responsibilities of the editor is a matter of doubt. Mr. Fielding himself is not able to draw the line of demarcation, so gradual was the evolution. Frequently in the course of a single day he would write up the local column, do the work of the shipping department, perform the duties of the proof-reader, and having accomplished these several labours would begin the task of writing the days editorials. The diversified character of these various employments was no barrier to their thorough execution. Everything was done well. "Thorough" was ever the motto of the editor, as it has since been the motto of the Premier. Indeed it is doubtful if a more active, thorough-

going, hard-working man ever filled the Premiership of Nova Scotia than the present incumbent. Ofttimes till the hour of midnight Mr. Fielding may be found in his official quarters looking after the interests entrusted to his charge. I am assured that the clerks under his immediate control never had a master who attended so minutely to every department of official work. Industry, in short, is inherent in the man. Enforced idleness would be the severest punishment that could be inflicted upon him; unremitting toil is his best pleasure. A man gifted with this restless energy is destined to win the race. On the theory of Jan Waloeno that genius is but an intuitive talent for labour, or on the assertion of Hogarth that it is nothing more than labour and diligence, I would certainly be justified in calling Nova Scotia's Prime Minister a man of genius, although the ingrained modesty of the man would make him most vigorously repudiate the idea.

Mr. Fielding's introduction to public life was as brilliant as it was unexpected. His twenty years' connection with the *Chronicle* gave him a large number of acquaintances; but previous to 1882 he was comparatively unknown outside the city of Halifax. In that year he stood in the Liberal interest for Halifax County, and was returned by a decided majority. No sooner had he entered the field of active politics than his conspicuous ability as a debater, coupled with a rare degree of mental clearness and activity, brought him immediately to the front ranks of his party. On the resignation of the Holmes-Thompson Government in 1882 a convention of the Liberal party tendered him the position of Premier and Provincial Secretary. These honours were, however, declined. Shortly after, he entered the Administration of the Hon. W. T. Pipes. In May, 1884, he resigned his seat in the Pipes Cabinet, owing largely to his inability to attend to both editorial and departmental duties. Two months later Mr. Pipes himself retired, and at the request of the Lieutenant-Governor Mr. Fielding assumed the task of forming a new Administration, taking with the Premiership the office of Provincial Secretary. On going before the people for re-election a month later in consequence of his acceptance of office Mr. Fielding had the satisfaction of learning that his course had been approved by the electors, and that his reputation had largely increased. During the two following sessions Mr. Fielding continued in the Government leadership. In the spring of 1886, Hon. James A. Fraser, member for Guysborough, submitted his annual Repeal resolutions, with the result that the Government pledged itself to appeal to the country on the issues therein contained. A few months later the general elections were precipitated, the Repeal battle was fought on the old anti-Confederate lines, with the old anti-Confederate ardour, and a rousing victory gained by the Government. Mr. Fielding came back to power with thirty-one supporters at his back in a House of thirty-eight members. His own majority in Halifax city and county was over 1,200, a grand tribute to himself and to the cause he so vigorously espoused. Last session the Government had absolute sway, the Opposition amounting practically to nothing.

Such, in brief, is the political history of the Hon. W. S. Fielding. His public career has been short, it is true, but it has been brilliant. On each occasion that he has appealed to the people his growing majorities have testified to his growing popularity. In the campaign of 1886 the Opposition candidates were swept away like chaff before the wind; and in the legislature the Premier, with his wonderful verbal facility and almost encyclopædic knowledge, is much more than a match for any one on either either side of the House.

It may be thought that had the Government appealed to the people simply on the strength of their record in the June contest of 1886, the Conservatives might have won the day; but it is extremely doubtful if anything of the kind would have happened, for the Government's record is about as stainless as any government record could well be. The victory would have been far less signal, no doubt, had the subject of Secession been kept in the background. For the success of the Repeal cry was truly phenomenal. The result of the contest far exceeded the most sanguine expectations of the most sanguine Repealers. During the progress of the struggle the Unionists laughed at the apostles of Secession for expending their powder and shot on a "phantom," and loudly declared that the Repeal cry would not be worth the giblets of a guinea-fowl. But before the echoes of the campaign had died away these same Unionists had tearfully decided that he who laughs last laughs best. In regard to Repeal itself, it might be observed that "there is a good deal to be said on both sides," as Chas. Lamb remarked of predestination. At present the issue is in a state of pronounced quiescence. How long it may remain so it is not easy to foretell. Much will undoubtedly depend on the outcome of the Washington negotiations. If the Fishery question is settled on the basis of reciprocity in some profitable form the discontent in Nova Scotia will be largely allayed; if not, it will certainly increase. It is argued by the Confederates that Mr. Fielding's Repeal agitation was irremediably shattered in February last by the election of a majority of Macdonaldites. On the surface this contention would appear to be a sound one. But the Repealers hold, on the contrary, that a full and fair expression of the *vox populi* was stifled on that occasion by shady Ministerial devices. Whether this be true or not it is certain that the Secession movement received a decided set-back, even if it has not been ticketed among the dried fruits of politics. Mr. Fielding was unquestionably placed in a most awkward and embarrassing position as a consequence of the February elections, and notwithstanding that "Repeal" is still sweeter in the ears of many Nova Scotians than the most enchanting minstrelsy, it must be conceded that even Julius Cæsar could not have gathered his mantle about him with effect had he been in Mr. Fielding's place on the 28th of February last.

Mr. Fielding's success as a politician may be attributed in large meas-