

JOHN ROSS ROBERTSON.

BY A. S. DICKSON.

PERHAPS there is no living native born citizen of Toronto who has earlier made his impress upon its history and so closely identified himself with its development and progress than the subject of this sketch. True, Toronto can boast of hundreds of her sons who have attained high distinction in National and Provincial politics on the ladder of municipal fame or in the ranks of the erudite professions, but it is questionable whether in all that noble army there is one who has more prominently labored with his fellow-citizens in their successful efforts to bring the city to its present metropolitan greatness, or whose name and person are so familiar in all circles of the community than John Ross Robertson. Nor is it in his native city only that Mr. Robertson's influence and personality are felt. Throughout the wide Dominion, in the bustling city or humble hamlet there are many or few who have known or heard at some time or other of the energetic Toronto newspaper proprietor. In the busy marts of commerce across the border or beyond the sea, in the great throbbing heart of the Empire itself, can be found those to bear willing testimony to his great capacity for industry and perseverance—qualities which more than all else assist to establish a permanent reputation, and for which in this instance his hardy Scotch extraction may claim some of the credit.

Mr. Robertson, who is the eldest son of the late John Robertson, senior member of the well-known pioneer wholesale dry goods firm of John Robertson & Sons, was born on the 28th December, 1841. As a boy his inclination led him to the case, and he early acquired his trade as a printer by learning to stick type and run the presses in the old Globe office, and also in Alexander Jacques' and the Guardian offices. His earliest publishing venture, and the one, perhaps, that gave him the grasp on notoriety which he has never since relinquished, was during his school days at Upper Canada College. It is now thirty-four years ago since the College Times made its first appearance. The office of publication was in the old Robertson homestead on John street, and if its advent did not startle the city generally it certainly created an interesting sensation in the limited world with which it was supposed to deal. The literary me-

chanical and clerical work was, of course, done by young Robertson, who had a few willing assistants among his boy companions. The paper, a monthly, four-page sheet about the size of ordinary letter paper, was from the outset characteristically aggressive, and professed to exist for the main purpose of correcting abuses in the management of the College and submitting suggestions with a view to reformation. An exceedingly vigorous onslaught on the college authorities for an attempt on their part to dispose of a portion of the grounds hitherto sacredly devoted to play, aroused such a feeling that the Principal, to partly destroy its identity with the institution, demanded that the title of the paper be forthwith changed, and, in obedience to the mandate, the second issue came out as *The Monthly*

Times. The alteration did not affect its popularity in the slightest degree, and soon the organ of the College boys grew in favor, and as an evidence of its marvellous success attained in a brief period to a circulation of five hundred. It existed thus for a year when its "entire staff" was transplanted to the Model Grammar School, for the purpose of pursuing more advanced studies, and while these were in nowise neglected, the ruling passion was still active, and ere long *The Young Canada*, a spicy little journal devoted to boyish athletics and sports, came forth periodically to charm the juvenile heart. With the inevitable change in its promoter's circumstances, this too passed away peacefully, and his next venture was one which doubtless many readers will still remember. The Gruntler was a more ambitious attempt than any that preceded it, and possessed more claim to



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general attention and support. It was a weekly, and aimed to be both comic and satirical. That it was successful is shown from the fact that it retained its hold on popular favor from 1863 until 1865, when its proprietor embarked on the higher and more troublous waters of journalism. For a year or so he was connected with the local and advertising departments of the *Leader*, and for a few months was a member of the staff of the *Hamilton Spectator*. In 1865 he joined the *Globe* staff as city editor, and did some notable work during his incumbency. One of his reportorial achievements, as tradition relates, was that for a single issue of the paper he himself gathered and wrote up no less than 175 local items of news. It was during this period that he displayed the keen, tireless news-