

# SIR JAMES WHITNEY—AT HOME

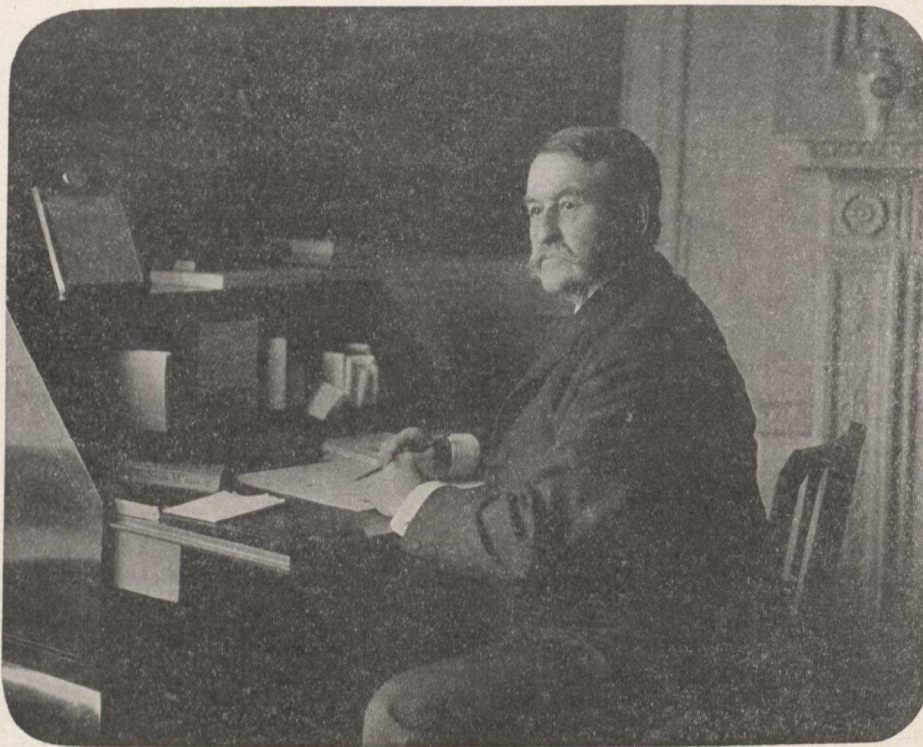
*A Biographical Sketch—From Country Barrister to Provincial Premier.*

By J. SMYTH CARTER

IN a quiet, yet pretty, little St. Lawrence town east of Brockville and not as far as Cornwall, there lived, once upon a time, a lawyer, just a plain every-day lawyer, with his coterie of clients, estate matters to care for, John Brown's creditors to awaken, the accustomed round of conveyancing, etc., but who afterwards rose to eminence in the political life of his own province. The town referred to is none other than Morrisburg, in the County of Dundas, and the lawyer is now Ontario's worthy Premier, Sir James Whitney.

So oft have we heard and repeated the old adage, "A man is not without honour save in his own country," that we have come to consider it almost, if not altogether, a truism. But there are instances where it is most inapplicable. Often, yes very often, individuals who rise to higher things politically, commercially or otherwise, acquire such a standing outside the boundaries of their own county, if not their own province. Not so, however, with Premier Whitney, a native of the County of Dundas, which county he has so long and well represented in the Legislature.

He was born in Williamsburg, one of the front townships of that county, October 2nd, 1843, and is a son of Richard Leet Whitney and Clarissa Jane Fairman, his wife. A few years later the family moved to the west side of the Township of Osnabruk, County of Stormont, on the river front, where J. P. spent his early life on a farm. After leaving the public schools he continued his education at the celebrated old Cornwall Grammar School, the most historic institution of its kind in the old Eastern District. Finally he began the study of law in the office of the late John Sandfield Macdonald, at one time Premier of the old Province of Canada and also the first Premier of Ontario. He gave up his legal studies for a time, resuming the task later, and was called to the bar of Ontario in Trinity term, 1876, after which he began the practice of his profession at Morrisburg. Ten years later he was a candidate for parliamentary honours and now, for more than twenty years, has represented his home constituency in the Provincial Parliament. From the time of his entry therein Mr. Whitney took a prominent place in the House, and in the councils of his party, and on the retirement of Mr. Marter in April, 1896, was unanimously chosen leader of the Opposition. The confidence thus reposed in him rapidly increased, so much so that three years later, March, 1899, he was presented by his followers with a valuable testimonial of their regard. A member of the Church of England, he has been a representative of the Diocesan, Provincial and General Synod. The only public offices held by the Premier before entering the Legislature were those of high school trustee, and commissioner for consolidating the statutes, to which he was appointed by Sir Oliver Mowat. In 1890 he was created Queen's Counsel by the Govern-



SIR JAMES PLINY WHITNEY AT WORK.

Photograph by Reginald Haines, London, Eng.

nor-General. In June, 1902, the University of Toronto conferred upon him the honorary degree of L.L.D. A short time afterwards, Trinity University, Toronto, gave him the honorary degree of D.C.L. and in October, 1903, Queen's University, Kingston, similarly honoured him with the degree of L.L.D. His translation to the Premier's chair on January 25th, 1905, was a most signal honour and the wise legislation which he has since directed has proven the wisdom of the people's choice. So greatly was his ability and statesmanship recognised, that at the Quebec Tercentenary the Premier had conferred on him the honour of knighthood, at the command of His Majesty, King Edward VII.

## MORRISBURG IN EARLY DAYS.

THE recital of Morrisburg's life and growth furnishes an interesting background to the picture story of the career of her illustrious son. Sixty-six years ago, which marks the birth year of Sir James, the site of the present village was little known but as a farming area. Here in the gaiety of youth, the sons and daughters of the early settlers romped and frolicked o'er meadow land, hill and glade. Society had not as yet outgrown itself and the most interesting topic among the "Four Hundred" of those days was that of the next "husking," the supper, the dance and the games to follow the logging. About the river the inhabitants, all and sundry, spent spare hours, fishing, paddling and reciting stories of Indian occupancy. This freedom, so ideal, suffered no interruption, until was begun the construction of the Williamsburg canal, paralleling the river in order that vessels might escape the dangers of Rapid du Plat. As a result of this, the nucleus of the present Morrisburg was formed about 1847. Two years later a grist mill was erected by Benjamin Chaffey. To this milling centre came the farmers and the farmers' sons for many miles about, and it is not unlikely that James Whitney, then a lad of junior years, residing in the township, came to the old mill along with his father and perchance visited the stores of the early merchants, Wm. Kyle, James Holden and H. G. Stearns. Those men, and others of their kind, were citizens of influence in the community. Those were the days when goods were sold in their purity. False labels had not arrived. The appointment of pure food commissioners was not then dreamed of and in parcelling out sugar, tea, rice, cotton, etc., the pound was a just pound, the yard a full yard and the quality undisputed.

The incorporation of Morrisburg was consummated October 17th, 1860, the name of the village being chosen out of compliment to Hon. James Morris, Postmaster-General of Canada. In view of the honour thus done him, Mr. Morris, a few years later, donated to the village the sum of one hundred dollars to aid in securing a bell or clock for the town hall.

But a look at Morrisburg when Ontario's Pre-

mier was a lad of eleven summers—a school-boy—cannot but interest, and in this connection a gentleman who for long years was a resident of Toronto, thus sums up in part the recollections of a twelve months' stay in Morrisburg: "The period thus embraced was during the year or two prior to the advent of railway facilities, which went into operation between Montreal and Brockville toward the close of the year 1855. Previous to this the chief mode of transportation during the season of navigation was by steamer, a choice of two daily lines being available. These were the Royal Mail line and the American line; of the former about the best vessel was the *Banshel* and of the latter the *Jenny Lind*. The new iron steamer *Kingston* came out later in the season of 1855 and was employed chiefly in moving the parliamentary paraphernalia from Quebec to Toronto during the then existing system of perambulating seats of government. In addition to the trim passenger vessels there were lines of freight boats and schooners, the latter being towed chiefly by old paddle boats, which had been superannuated from the passenger service. The

movement of all this variety of craft upon the bosom of the noble St. Lawrence created a most pleasing and inspiring scene, scarcely equalled elsewhere. Morrisburg was then a bright and thriving village with several live industries. Besides being an important grain market, the farmers also brought into town squared timber which was used at the mills and lock gate works. They also supplied large quantities of cordwood for steamboat fuel which was retailed from the wharves of I. N. Rose and Captain Farlinger. In addition to the merchants and hotel men to be seen on the streets were Lieut. Hilliard, one of the Duke of Wellington's Peninsular veterans; T. S. Rubidge, C.E.; A. G. Macdonell, barrister; Dr. Sherman and J. W. Rose, who was the parliamentary representative for Dundas about that time. The Crimean War, in which Great Britain participated, was then in progress and constituted an engrossing topic. The fall of Sebastopol was celebrated in Morrisburg by the lighting of bonfires in a field a little to the north-west of the business part of the village; rockets were improvised by saturating balls of candle wick in burning fluid, coal oil being, as yet, an unknown quantity. At the close of the fireworks function an adjournment was made to the ballroom of Waite's hotel, where patriotic and enthusiastic speeches were delivered by Mr. West, P.L.S., and Mr. Macdonell (Inch), the latter being quite conspicuous in the old tartan coat of his earlier years."

## SIR JAMES AS A SOLDIER.

NOT only is Ontario's Premier an able and far-seeing legislator, but his wisdom and ambition are quickly kindled when any emergency arises. Speaking figuratively, he is ready at any time to



The three second-storey windows on the right mark the offices in Morrisburg, of J. P. Whitney, Barrister.



Former residence of Sir James P. Whitney, in Morrisburg.