

SIR JOHN ALEXANDER MACDONALD.

Knight, Grand Cross, of the Order of the Bath,
Member of Her Majesty's Most Honourable Privy Council,
Premier of the Dominion of Canada.

Born 11th January, 1815.
Died 6th June, 1891.

Between these curt lines lies the story of a great life and the history of a new nation. Men come and go, and each leaves some impress of his individuality; but in the vast majority of cases force of circumstance, combined with mediocrity of character, makes such impress insignificant in effect, and the circle of its influence confined to the narrowest limits. But to the larger minds and more imposing characters opportunities often come which enable them to occupy such positions in their country's history that the most markedly successful epochs of its life are evoked under their personal guidance or are directly traceable to their influence; to such men naturally belongs a renown which, great and far-reaching through life, is still more widespread after death has claimed them. The great statesman for whose death all Canada mourns, is a remarkable example of this. So potent a factor has he been in the national life of this country for a third of a century, that his presence and power was felt to be almost co-existent with the Constitution, and when suddenly struck down with mortal illness the shock throughout the Dominion was as if a ghastly wrench had been given to the fabric of government. To where he fought so persistent a battle with Death were directed the thoughts of almost the whole nation. Sir John Macdonald dead? The statement seemed preposterous, and even now, many days after, it is hard to believe, so wound up had he been in the reins of politics and government. And yet it is so; the tall spare form known so well all over Canada is sleeping its last sleep in the quiet cemetery of Cataragui. Monuments, no doubt, will be raised to his memory; but the greatest monument is the Canada of to-day,—consolidated by his marvellous skill, and nationalized by his wise statesmanship.

HIS BIRTH AND EARLY TRAINING

The year in which Sir John first saw the light was one of importance both to Great Britain and to Canada. The battle of Waterloo has made 1815 ever memorable; and the signing of the treaty of Ghent brought to a close in this year the last unnatural war between the Mother Country and her former colonies—a war in which the then feeble and struggling Provinces of Canada were the battle-ground, and which developed in the Canadians of that day the germs of mutual self-reliance in the face of invasion and attack. In the light of history, not the least of the noteworthy events of that year must be reckoned the birthday of the Dominion's uncrowned king. He was born in Glasgow, on the 11th of January, the second son of Hugh Macdonald, who had moved to that city from Sutherlandshire; his mother's maiden name was Helen Shaw, of Badenoch, in Inverness. The family consisted of three sons and two daughters; the elder and younger of the sons, named respectively William and James, died young; the daughters both grew up to womanhood, the elder, Margaret, becoming the wife of Professor Williamson, of Queen's University, Kingston; the

younger died unmarried. In 1820 Mr. Macdonald decided to emigrate to Canada, and came out to this country on the ship "Earl of Buckinghamshire," together with a large party of sturdy Scotch colonists bent on seeking homes and a competence in the new Britain across the sea. After landing in Quebec, the Macdonalds went on to Kingston, at that time the commercial metropolis of Upper Canada. Here they remained for four years, after which Mr. Macdonald moved to Adolphustown, on the Bay of Quinte, where he opened a store. In the meantime, however, the boy John had been sent to the Royal Grammar School, the principal educational establishment of Kingston, and when the family removed he was suffered to remain at the school to avoid detriment to his education. His father's venture did not turn out a success, and within a few years he had returned to the city, going into business on Princess street. In the meantime the lad had kept steadily to his studies, visiting home only in the holidays, and although fond of jokes and larking, showed marked ability at his work, being especially brilliant in classics. After leaving the Kingston school, he was sent to the Upper Canada College in Toronto for a short time—it being then, as now, the foremost educational establishment in the Province; and in 1831, when sixteen years of age, he settled down to man's work, entering the law office of G. Mackenzie, of Kingston, where he became an articled clerk.

PROFESSIONAL LIFE.

Young Macdonald was now approaching manhood, and buckled on his legal armour in downright earnest. Between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one he had passed all the examinations qualifying him for the position of a barrister, and, in fact, was fully prepared to enter on the active practice of his profession some time before he could legally do so, not having attained his majority. This interim he devoted to the management of the law business of Mr. Lowther Macpherson, of Picton, during the absence of that gentleman in the West Indies. This engagement ceasing, young Macdonald struck out for himself by opening an office in Kingston, with no partner, and without any backing but his own ability and knowledge of his profession. Clients soon came—many poor and of little note, but a few of wealth and influence, and the foundation was laid of a successful and lucrative practice; he was appointed solicitor to two important corporations, the Commercial Bank and the Trust and Loan Company.

Canada had just entered on the dark and troublous years of 1837-38, which preceded the brightness of 1841, and the Union which the close of that year saw a *fait accompli*—the first step towards the Confederation of twenty-six years later. Insurrection against the government broke out, and criminal trials came thick and fast; in these the young barrister took a prominent part, and was retained for the defence of several of the suspected rebels. Of such, Von Schultz, who commanded the insurgents in the bloody fight at

Windmill Point, on the 13th and 14th November, 1838, was one of the most noted; and for the life of that criminal John Macdonald pleaded with a fervor and ability worthy of a better cause; but the offender's guilt was too apparent to admit of the slightest chance of escape. The young advocate received the congratulations of his fellow-members of the Bar, and also those of the press, for his able speeches at that trial. From then down to the period when political and national duties absorbed his attention, his legal practice was very extensive, and he stood in the front rank of his profession at the Upper Canada Bar. Among the young men who entered on the study of law in his office were two destined to occupy prominent positions in Canada's history; one was Sir Alexander Campbell, now Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario, and the other was the Hon. Oliver Mowat, whose continued political success in our great sister province is only excelled by that of him who has so recently been taken from us. In August, 1843, Sir John became a benedict, marrying Miss Clark, the daughter of Mr. A. Clark, of Dolnavert, Invernesshire. Previous to this he had aspired to municipal honours, having been elected alderman for the good city of Kingston. It is said that the young men of the city worked day and night for his success, he being a great favourite with that class on account of his bright genial nature and love of joke and humour. His opponent was a popular and well-known citizen, and the election was a close one. On the result being declared, the young fellows mounted Sir John on a moveable platform and attempted to carry him in triumph through the streets; as might have been expected, the effort was a failure, and the successful candidate was ignominiously upset in the mud. On brushing his clothes he laughingly said: "Isn't it strange I should have a downfall so soon," at which the crowd cheered him. In the City Council he was the life of the meetings, and was always ready to give a comical turn to the proceedings, although attending strictly to business. Anecdotes of his doings there are plentiful, and show vividly the cheery genial nature which has always been so marked a trait of his character.

HIS ENTRANCE INTO POLITICS.

But the true sphere of John Macdonald's usefulness was to come. In politics and in statesmanship were to be developed to their utmost those qualities of tact and energy of the possession of which he had already given such good proofs. At the general election of 1844 he was nominated as candidate for the city of Kingston, and won the election by a substantial majority over his opponent, Mr. Manahan. From that time down to the sad day of his death he served his country in her legislative halls; only three years more and he would have completed fifty years of active parliamentary life. The government of that day was known as the Draper-Viger administration, and the Speaker of the House was that fine old loyalist, Sir Allan Napier McNab; a large number of names well-known to students of our history appear in the list of representatives. Although quite a young man and new to the business and procedure of the House, Mr. Macdonald at once took a position, if not specially prominent, by no means insignificant; his speeches were concise and to the point, based on the most approved English parliamentary method, and avoiding of unnecessary oratorical display. Within his first year he was elected a member of the Standing Orders Committee.