

were occurring in another part of the Dominion, which were to have an important bearing on his future, for they ultimately resulted in his return to public life in the broader field of Federal politics, in which he has since won such high distinction. The incidents of the North-West rebellion, in 1885, and its suppression by the volunteer force under General Middleton, are matters of history, but closely allied to them was the course which the Government felt impelled to take in regard to this unfortunate uprising. From the very commencement of the outbreak, the policy of the Government was to stamp out the rebellion at whatever cost, and to teach the inhabitants of the North-West, both halfbreeds and Indians, that the authority of the Dominion was supreme in that country, and must be maintained, and this policy they carried out effectively. But on the capture of the instigator and chief leader, and his subsequent sentence, a cry went up against his receiving the punishment due to his crime; the Liberals in the Dominion Parliament joined the Parti Nationale of Quebec in protesting against the hanging of Louis Riel, which had been decreed by the courts after a fair trial. At this time it was felt that there was no man in the House who was quite the equal in debate of the Reform leader, Mr. Edward Blake, who was the ablest man in his party, and the foremost lawyer in the House. In this emergency, Sir Charles Tupper, and other leading men in the party, recommended the services of Judge Thompson, and Sir John Macdonald, who throughout his career rarely made a mistake in a grave crisis, such as this undoubtedly was, acted upon the suggestion, with the result that Mr. Thompson resigned his judgeship, and on the 25th September, 1885, he was sworn of the Privy Council, and appointed Minister of Justice and Attorney-General of Canada. On the 16th October following, he was elected to the House of Commons for his old constituency, Antigonish, for which he has sat continuously since, having been re-elected at the general elections of 1887 and 1891. The new minister took his seat in the session of 1886, and, as had been foreseen, an opportunity was shortly afforded him for the display of those splendid abilities which have since raised him to the position of the first parliamentarian in the Dominion. Riel had paid the penalty of the law, but the struggle inaugurated after his capture was still maintained over his grave. In the House, Mr. Landry (Montmagny) moved the following resolution:

"That this House feels it is its duty to express its deep regret that the sentence of death passed upon Louis Riel, convicted of high treason, was allowed to be carried into execution."

This was virtually a motion of want of confidence in the Administration, and as such it

was treated, and Mr. Blake's arraignment of the Government from his standpoint was a most powerful one. It fell to Mr. Thompson's lot to reply, and the result showed that the task could not have been placed in better hands. In his opening sentences he laid down the proposition that "if a political discussion is to follow the action of the Executive in every case in which clemency is given or refused, one can easily understand what confusion we shall introduce into the administration of criminal justice in this country;" and then, as he proceeded to deal with count after count of the indictment, his wonderful talents as a debater became apparent to all, and probably to none more so than his able opponent on that occasion. He set himself out to show that the trial of Riel had been a fair one, and that justice had been done, and he succeeded. Nor was there any temporizing or apologetic tone as he declared, that "the man who undertakes, in the condition in which the Indians are now, to incite those Indians to rise and to commit war and depredation, either upon the garrisons, or upon the white settlers of the North-West, takes his life in his hand, and when he appeals to me for mercy he shall get justice." With irresistible logic, with an earnestness which proved his faith in his cause, with a keenness of sarcasm which did not detract from his calm and dignified bearing, and with an incontrovertible array of facts, he repelled every attack which had been made upon the government. The effect of his masterly effort was to effectually dispose of the question at issue, and to firmly establish his own reputation as one of the most skilful and accomplished debaters of his time. On another great occasion since that time has Sir John Thompson exhibited his wonderful talents in this line, and that was in 1889, during the debate on the Jesuit Estates Act, when, replying to Mr. D'Alton McCarthy, he successfully defended the Government in a speech which some well informed critics have pronounced the ablest of his life. Since his advent in the arena of Dominion politics his career has been a continued series of successes, and for the services he has rendered in his devotion to public affairs he has earned the gratitude of the whole country. It is worthy of note that the late Sir John Macdonald always reposed the highest confidence in his judgment where matters of policy were involved, and on the death of that lamented statesman in June, 1891, Sir John Thompson was called upon to form a new government. At the time, however, he declined the responsibility, and recommended for the task the Hon. (now Sir) J. J. C. Abbott, in whose administration he continues to act as Minister of Justice and Attorney-General, and is leader of the Government in the House of Commons.