

Catholic Canadian Celebrities.

SIR ALLAN MACNAB.

PERHAPS the above name, coming under the heading of "Catholic Canadian Celebrities," will strike the public mind as being somewhat incongruously inconsistent with the previous subjects under this head, subjects who, by their life long devotion to Mother Church, are entitled to be thus classed.

But we must not dare to question the Master's judgment, when in the parable He gave to the laborer that came in at the eleventh hour equal hire with the one who bore the fatigue and heat of the entire day, by failing to allot to Sir Allan Napier MacNab his rightful place within Christ's vineyard of the Catholic Church.

He was born on the 19th of February, 1798, in the sleepy little town of Niagara, or Newark as it was then called. He was of Scotch descent, and of a warlike race, his grandfather having served in the Black Watch, and his father under Colonel Simcoe.

Sir Allan first comes under our notice when as a boy of fourteen he stood by his father's side and fired a telling volley into the enemy's ranks in the raid of 1812. He served as a midshipman on the "Wolfe" in charge of Sir James Yeo, when it went on the expedition to Sacketts Harbor. It was upon this expedition, if we mistake not, that young MacNab in his indignation at the action of General Prevost in ordering a "retreat" when "advance" should have been the command, drew his sword and snapping it in two, declared "he would never wield another under such a leader."

The prospect of hotter fighting and quicker promotion caused Sir Allan to forsake the navy and enter the army, casting his lot with the 100th regiment under Colonel Murray; for his courageous conduct in the storming and taking of Fort Niagara, he received an ensign's commission in the 49th regiment. He also accompanied General Riall when he crossed to Buffalo and burnt it and Black Rock in retribution for the American's destructive work at Niagara. At the termination of this campaign, Sir Allan joined his regiment at Montreal and marched with it to the attack of Plattsburgh, commanding the advance guard at the Sarine Bridge.

In 1817, upon the disbandment of the forces, Sir Allan being reduced to half-pay, returned to Toronto, or Little York, as our city was then called, where his family resided, the MacNab homestead standing on King street close to the Don river.

The financial state of the MacNab purse being at rather a low ebb, Sir Allan, by way of betterment, commenced the study of law in the office of Mr. D'Arcy Boulton. He also served as clerk in the House of Assembly for some length of time; his inherent manliness of character giving a dignity to the subordinate, that afterwards changed into the genial grace of the confident ruler.

He was called to the bar in 1825, and began his successful legal practice in Hamilton, where he built for himself under the shadow of the mountain the beautiful castle of Dundurn, named after his grandfather's estate in Scotland.

In consequence of "keeping a quiet tongue in his head" with the purpose of screening a friend, at the trial of the "Hamilton Outrage," when Sir John Colborne was burned in effigy, at the instigation of William Lyon Mackenzie, Sir Allan was charged with contempt of court and committed to jail. The effect of this committal, like the imprisonment of Irish suspects in Ireland, but placed Sir Allan upon the top-most rung of public popularity, and he was returned at the next election as a member of parliament for Wentworth county.

Sir Allan, sometime afterwards, got "quits" with Mackenzie by seconding the motion for that gentleman's expulsion from parliament the mover being Mr. Sampson. But later on, we learn, that our generous soldier-statesman, when future days brought cooler judgment and keener insight into what was a wise agitation, was the first to cast his vote, in 1835, for the erasure of that unjust statute from the parliamentary journals, though by so doing he had to cross the stiff lines of Tory principles.

He was chosen speaker of the Lower House in 1837, but scarcely had he stepped into office when the long, smouldering discontent of the Upper Canadian people, begotten by the arrogance and monopoly of the "Family Compact" regime, burst into the fire of open rebellion in 1837-38. The Governor, Sir Francis Head, was at his wit's ends how to smother it before it would gather strength and devastate the country, his own unpopularity standing between him and the sympathy of those who could have helped him. But Sir Allan and his "Men of Gore" came to the rescue, and driving the insurgents from their headquarters in Montgomery's hotel, followed them up and completely routed them at Kingston. Leaving there he hastened west and gave the finishing blow to the rebellion by dealing summarily with the American regiments, under Van Rensselaer, who were helping to swell the ranks of the "patriotic army" on Navy Island, by cutting off the "Caroline" when towing supplies to the soldiers.

Sir Allan had displayed so much skill and dispatch in stamping out the rebellion and withal so much admirable humanity in giving quarter to the rebels, that England knighted him, Canada's parliament eulogized him, and his soldiers honored him with a sword.

Upon the formation of the Baldwin-Lafontaine ministry, he was

elected speaker of the Lower House, and upon the union of the two legislatures he was also chosen speaker.

In 1844 Sir Allan led the coalition ministry, and in 1850 we find him again the leader of the conservative party.

He was made Premier in 1854 with the MacNab-Morin administration known as the first Liberal-Conservative party. During his term of office the Clergy Reserves were settled, the Reciprocity Act and Militia Bill were passed, and a handsome allowance granted to the patriotic fund.

Upon his retirement from the premiership, owing to ill health, in 1856, he was created a baronet, and together with Sir Etienne Tache was made honorary Colonel in the British army and aide-de-camp to the Queen.

We quote the closing words of Sir Allan's address to the Free and independent electors of Hamilton, written at this time.

"Most sincerely do I thank you, gentlemen, for the kind and cordial support you have accorded me during nine successive parliaments, in which I have had the honor of representing either the country or city. The best portion of my life has been spent amongst you, and I can say with truth that during this long period my best energies have been devoted to the interests of my constituents and the honour of my country. One word before we part, and that is, if, in times of trial and great excitement, I have erred, I trust you will kindly ascribe it to an error of the head and not the heart."

Sir Allan went in quest of health to England, and whilst there was asked to run as a member for Brighton, and though naturally he was unsuccessful, being a stranger, his defeat was an honourable one. His health being somewhat restored, he returned to Canada, and once more, at the earnest solicitation of his constituents, took his seat in the old familiar place within parliamentary walls.

The character of this fine old Canadian knight, whose portrait shows us a portly figure with handsome lined face, and eyes that look with frank kindness into ours, is not the least disappointing to the hero-worshipper; and Sir Allan is justly entitled to the often rather far-fetched term "hero."

In youth he had all the infectious good humor and vim of the rollicking soldier boy who had smelt powder and therefore could illy bear the tediousness of pouring over the dry, musty books, the want of which his opponents take such peculiar pleasure in drawing attention to; yet when the occasion demanded he did so, and was appointed the first Queen's Counsel of Upper Canada.

His warm, genial nature made him the idol of his soldiers and the friend of his electors. It was this same happy temperament that made him so careless in money matters, being so ready to harken to the cry of the needy, be the story never so extravagant, at the expense of many a justly owed luckless debtor. And it was often a standing joke against Sir Allan in his early days in Muddy York, that his evening stroll was bounded by the debtor's ominous blue posts as he had only "bail to the limits."

He was a loyalist of the extreme kind, and sent proofs of it into history when he risked a sound body at the firing of the parliament buildings in 1849 over the Rebellion Losses Bill, by rescuing, with his Highland chivalry, the picture of our Most Gracious Majesty. And he probably never drew up his splendid military figure to better advantage than when receiving the commission of being escort to H. R. H. through Canada in 1860.

His success in his parliamentary work was chiefly owing to his Scotch determination of succeeding against all odds. Many severe criticisms are passed upon his poor abilities as leader of the House, but if those same brilliant statesmen that are lauded so highly for their *finesse* in dealing with the intricate workings of opposing minds, were given the command of a regiment, would they win equal laurels with Sir Allan both in the army and in the House of Assembly.

For thirty years he was not absent for one single week from the sessions, and though by no means laying any claims to be called an orator, Sir Allan spoke forcibly and to the point, his speeches rarely exceeding more than fifteen minutes in length.

Sir Allan MacNab stands a figure in Canadian history that may be justly pointed to with pride by a country that his active life helped to build upon a basis worthy of great men's minds. But peculiarly so is he an object of interest to the Catholic Canadian, as one whom Heaven vouchsafed a special grace upon his death-bed.

Upon the 8th of August, 1862, having embraced the Catholic faith some days previous, Sir Allan Napier MacNab, strengthened by the sacraments of our holy religion, breathed his last in Dundurn Castle, Hamilton.

L. A. HENRY.

If all the prayers of loving hearts from the beginning of the world, and all the seraphic worship of the thrones and principalities in heaven, and the burning devotion and love of the Virgin Mother of God and the million voices of the universe, of all creatures in Heaven and earth, and sea, were offered up in one universal and harmonious act of praise and adoration, they would not equal or even approach in value and efficacy the infinite worth of a single Mass.—His Grace, Archbishop Walsh, Toronto.