

(Chas. G. D. Roberts, M. A., in the Daily Telegraph, St. John, N.B., March 19th 1883.)

"Through the courtesy of the publishers, Rose Publishing Co., have come to hand the early chapters of a work which must prove of deep interest to the Canadian public. It is entitled the "Life and Times of the Right Hon. Sir John A. Macdonald," etc., and is by Mr. J. E. Collins, of Toronto; it will be looked upon probably as a counterblast to the Hon. Alexander Mackenzie's "Life of the Hon. George Brown." The table of contents indicates that the volume will contain in the neighborhood of forty-five chapters, and will cover everything of direct importance to Canada that has occurred within the last forty years. It is printed in large type, on heavy tinted paper; and with its liberal margin and careful presswork presents a handsome appearance. We should congratulate ourselves that the art of book-making in Canada has made such rapid strides of late. Our books of a few years back show but meanly alongside of those now issued from our presses. In the first seven chapters of his work, Mr. Collins tells the story of our Premier's life, from his coming to Canada with his parents in 1820, a boy of five years old, to the time of his obstinate struggle in opposition to the Rebellion Losses Bill in 1849, the year of the Montreal riot and the burning of the Parliament buildings. Thus far in the record Sir John appears as a genuine and uncompromising Tory, though always rather contemptuous of the violence and mismanagement which were driving his party to destruction. His Toryism, however, was mitigated by common sense; and with this fact his biographer, who seems by an indifferent Tory, consoles himself and his readers, abiding the time when the narrative shall come to tell of the infusion of the leaven of Liberalism. But there is no suggestion of apology for the intensity of Sir John's early prejudices; these were inevitable, and are displayed as the healthy raw material, out of which was later to be evolved the more acceptable product of Liberal-Conservatism. Even thus early, however, in Sir John's career, and while party strife was relentlessly bitter and he in the foremost of it always, we see him making personal admirers in the ranks of his most strenuous opponents. While candour and fairness rule these pages, and nothing is distorted or conceded for purposes of effect, it will, we think, be acknowledged by readers of both shades of political opinions, that this is a very attractive picture Mr. Collins presents us of the well equipped, courteous, ready, self-possessed young statesman, imparting dignity to the decline of a not very glorious cause. With regard to the style and the structure of the work, if what is to follow fulfils the promise of these chapters, we shall have a production that will step at once into the front rank of our young literature. In the department of history and biography, more than in any other, we can already boast works of dignity and importance. Only one or two of these, however apart from the value of their

matter, can take rank as literary products. But the dullest matter would become readable under the spell of Mr. Collins' vivid and picturesque rendering. Here the attention is held from the first sentence. Every page is delightfully readable. A strong and sympathetic imagination has so grasped and mastered the whole subject, that the narrative proceeds with the unobstructed swiftness of good fiction, while dry but needful details are so skilfully woven in as apparently to heighten the interest. This is indeed a chief triumph of the biographer's art. If the author can throughout maintain the unflinching freshness and *verve* of these one hundred and twenty-eight pages, then his work will have an audience far beyond the borders of Canada, as one of the most brilliant biographies of the day. This is a consummation we may well all hope for, as our literature cannot be said to have made, as yet, any tremendous impression on the reading classes of the world. In language and style these chapters are terse, simple, and eminently Saxon. No energy is wasted in resounding syllables; each sentence is compact and telling, with perhaps an occasional tendency to unnecessary ellipses, arising from the rapid movement of the thought. The tone is temperate, and opposing parties are depicted with even-handed justice. None are painted wholly black or white, but Tory and Reformer appear in probable and natural colors. Perhaps the best abused man in their pages is Sir Charles Metcalfe, that most subtle and dangerous adversary of the cause of Responsible Government. Yet even of him it is shown that "in private life he was kind and courteous;" that he was "good to the poor;" and many tears were shed to his memory. A piece of sympathetic eloquence is devoted to the case, too generally misunderstood, of the unfortunate Pole, Von Shultz, to whose memory is here done a portion of tardy justice. Mr. Collins refutes the common accounts of this General, whose execution we are won't to hear mentioned as the well-deserved punishment of a mercenary and lawless adventurer. But we would fain have seen even a fuller definition of this noble but misguided man, whose heart burned hotly against all tyranny for the sake of his down-trodden Poland, and who so ardently embraced the cause of a country which had misrepresented to him as groaning under almost Russian despotism. It is his glory that he longed to deliver us; it was his misfortune that we happened to stand in no great need of his deliverance. Some of Mr. Collins' powers, perhaps, are displayed to best advantage in chapter vi., which describes "The lights of '44." These pen portraits are admirably done. Here is keen insight, dramatic presentation, most racy and piquant handling. Here also is what never fails to capture the reviewer—a crisp decision of outline and a potent but unobtrusive humor."

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