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LETELLIER DE SAINT JUST.*

THE author of this work is well known in Ottawa society, and is a prominent member of the Liberal minority in the House of Commons. He always speaks well and sensibly, and has deservedly attracted attention by his ability and the enlarged views of public policy which he expresses. He has not pressed forward to obtain notice—at the expense of character. He in no way belongs to the school of blatant politicians, who deem it a privilege to be noticed, even to be abused, and whose coarse natures consider an accusation met by some flippant Rabelaisism. M. Casgrain, who is the member for L'Islet, has been contented to bide his time, to make his reputation carefully and cautiously, to prefer a patient and honest career of unpretending attention to the public interest—to the more showy *tour de force* which *pirouettes* into notoriety. He himself is a connection of M. Letellier de Saint Just, and thus the feeling of kin, equally with that of party ties, led him to vindicate his kinsman's memory. Moreover, his theories of parliamentary government have made him peculiarly susceptible to the wound so remorselessly inflicted on the constitution, which the vindictive leaders of the dominant French-Canadian party exacted; an injury which Sir J. Macdonald could not but have thoroughly known and felt, but which he had not the courage to withstand. M. Casgrain has evidently felt that this event should not be allowed to pass away. The remark of a statesman of European celebrity comes to our mind. One who valued this distinguished man's opinion had published a pamphlet in vindication of his own character, and had sent a copy to the statesman. The reply was characteristic: "You are right in permanently placing on record this matter. You have made misrepresentation hereafter impossible, and those who have treated you with injustice will one day be condemned by their own evidence." If not guided by such a doctrine, M. Casgrain has practically acted upon it. He has made a permanent record of the proceedings against M. Letellier. In this course he may claim the consideration of the whole community; and we do not doubt that if his Party ever attain power, M. Casgrain's abilities will be favourably considered by those called upon to form an administration. The work before us is a guarantee both of his ability and his honesty, and, what is more, of his courage. It should be translated into English to be made accessible to those who do not understand French. M. Casgrain, in accordance with a frequently observed system with French writers, has introduced the whole of the official documents, doubtless desirous of firmly establishing the correctness of his conclusions; and there are many documents introduced which, except under this point of consideration, can be excised. This contribution to our political history is so important that it should be made known. To those who know French, M. Casgrain's carefully written work, unexceptionable by its care and grace of style, is all that can be desired.

M. Casgrain gives the career of many of M. Letellier's contemporaries; he has done so in a bold and uncompromising spirit. We can refer to these pages for many a graphic description. It is only this passing

allusion which we can make to them. Our business is with the central figure of the work.

It is a particular habit with many in France and in the Province of Quebec to assume names in no way belonging to them. In France, to wear a false decoration, and to use a name not your own, may bring the offender under the notice of the police. The custom is a constant subject of ridicule on the French stage, and Thackeray in one of his immortal novels makes one of his characters an actor of this character. It is not unknown among us. Thus M. Pierre Badaud, for instance, thinks fit to call himself Pierre Badaud de Saint Sauveur—so the name figures on his card. By degrees it is changed to Badaud de Saint Sauveur, to B. de St. Sauveur, till it emerges into Monsieur de Saint Sauveur. There are some modern instances of this proceeding. M. Letellier's enemies were wont to reproach him as adding Saint Just, without authority, to his name. M. Casgrain publishes a facsimile of the retirement of François Letellier de Saint Just from the Colonial corps in 1740; it is signed by Beauharnois Noequet, Vorier, and De Beaujeu, so the name has been borne by the family for a century and a half.

M. Luc Letellier de Saint Just was born May 12th, 1820, at the River Ouelle, some ninety miles below Quebec, about four miles back from the St. Lawrence; he died the 28th January, 1881, so he was in his sixty-first year at his death. The first years of his youth were passed at the College of Saint Anne. Previously he had attended a village school, whence he went to Kamouraska to a M. Bechard; among his fellow pupils were Sir G. Cartier and Dr. Taché. At college he occupied a respectable if not a distinguished place. Leaving college, he entered the office of a notary at the River Ouelle. M. Letellier came from a family of sportsmen, and he was always an active hunter and fisherman, and was known as an excellent shot. He was subsequently the originator of a game law. He was keenly alive to the necessity of exercise, and the activity of his temperament found him always ready for the saddle, or for long walking excursions. The country in which he lived is marked by much natural beauty, the wharf at River Ouelle being situated on a projecting point of the river which makes it exceedingly picturesque; and the rolling hills to the south give change and variety to the landscape. M. Letellier was thirty years old when he entered political life. He was returned for Kamouraska in the Lower Canada House of Assembly, and ranked himself with the Liberals. The phase of politics which he represented was his matured opinion, which he never ceased to entertain. Totally divested of extravagance and impracticable theories of the perfectibility of men and measures, he never mistook license for liberty. He desired a good and firm government for the country, allowing to all the reasonable and just protection we can personally claim, under the control of good and effective laws. He knew that society must be protected by solid bulwarks, and never in any part of his career can he be charged with the slightest suspicion of being desirous of opening the floodgates to reckless and anarchical folly. In 1851 Mr. Baldwin retired from public life, to be followed, in the same year by Sir Hypolite Lafontaine. The loss of these men to Canadian public life has been irreparably felt. There was a tone of personal honour with both Baldwin and Lafontaine, which in their day penetrated to the lower strata of public life. We ask any one who is capable of giving an opinion, who can form an honest judgment of our political status, if there has not been a decadence in manner—in the tone of debate, in all which makes a legislative body respectable—from the date of this Legislative Assembly to the present Parliament of Canada. We seem every session to reach a lower depth. This in praise of the past. There was in those days a freedom from the gambling and reckless spirit of the present, in which men deliberately play their reputation to gain personal advantage, and there was a high-bred courtesy in the House that we look for to-day in vain.

The Hincks-Taché administration, to use the term of that day, was formed. At least Federation has done this for us: it has given us a Ministry with a Premier. Neither Sir J. Macdonald nor Mr. Mackenzie have tolerated the fatuity of recognising a compound head. It is to be trusted every attempt to establish it will be immediately crushed. No doctrine is so subversive of good government as this division of responsibility. There can now be no excuse for its introduction. M. Letellier was beaten at the dissolution, and he remained unconnected with public life until 1860, when he was elected for the Legislative Council for the Grenville division. M. Letellier

* *Etude Historique. Letellier de Saint Just et son Temps.* Par P. B. Casgrain, C. R., Avocat député aux Communes du Canada. Quebec, 1885.