

(From *The Globe*, Toronto, June 19th, 1883.)

* * * Mr. Collins has succeeded in producing a very interesting book—one much superior in some respects to the general run of Canadian biographies. His efforts have been well seconded by the publishers, who have spared no expense to produce a really handsome volume. * * * The details of his (Sir John's) early life are here given to the public for the first time with any degree of minuteness.

Mr. G. Mercer Adam in the *Canada Educational Monthly* :

The publication of this cleverly written work by a Lower Province man, now a resident of Toronto, is a gratifying indication that there are writers coming to the front who essay to stir the present generation of Canadians with new mental impulses. So much of our literature has been written by men grubbing in old newspapers and quarrying in uninviting archives, that any enthusiasm in the writer has been dissipated long before the publisher could serve the dish up to the reader. * * * The publishers, in the present instance, have had the advantages of a lively, piquant writer, an interesting regime, and all the enthusiasm that not only party allegiance but great personal popularity, have brought to the subject of the biography. The jauntiness of the author's style and the occasional *brusquerie* of his criticisms, moreover, impart no little charm to the book, and contribute, with the pervading blitheness of the narrative, to one's interest and frequent amusement. Mr. Collins' spontaneity, his springy, marrowy sentences, his impassioned love of country, of nature, and of everything fresh, breezy and wholesome, are each of them elements of attraction which are all but irresistible in their influence on the reader. But these qualities in the writer, though they impart a flavour to the book, seldom cloud his power of discrimination. True, the author here and there describes events and sneaks of his hero in the fervour of partisanship, but he as often takes the bit in his mouth and careers over the paddock of party history with the freedom of an untamed colt. * * * His sketch of Sir John Macdonald and his times is sympathetic and friendly, the portraiture is nowhere overdrawn, nor has he excluded from his canvas the names of those whose share in the history deserves recognition. In this latter respect, the work before us ceases now and then to be a biography of the chief actor on the scene. A glance at the index will show how full is Mr. Collins' canvas, and how extensive is the scope of the work. At times, indeed, we are apt to forget the central figure in the many admirable studies the author has given us of the leading men of the Dominion. Occasionally, in the case of men politically opposed to Sir John, the author's brush is wielded with vigour, and dipped in the darkest pigments. But the sketches are effective, and they present the men not as stuffed lay-figures, but as actors on the scene, who have entered the arena of conflict, and either make their own exits or are helped off the scene. Mr. Collins has not only told his story without reserve, and touched the leading characteristics of his subject with decision, but at times the narrative fairly glows with the concentrated flame of conviction. The career of Sir John is followed for over sixty years with enthusiasm and ever-increasing admiration. The more prominent events of his time are described with minuteness, and with an eye to the main bearings of the history, which preserves the proper sense of proportion and prevents the narrative from ever becoming wearisome. In the early part of the book a strain of radicalism crops out in the story, which enlists the sympathy of Liberalism where Liberalism is beneficent. In the closing pages, the sentiment presents itself in a pronounced Nationalism, which, likely enough, both political parties will sneer at, though the feeling is obviously dictated by patriotism. Here Conservatism will no doubt charge the author with rolling in a tub, though his words have a curious convincing force, and the swaying influence of patriotic ardour.

The literary chapter appended to the work rather divides the interest in the subject of the biography. But here the author is no less at home, and writes of Canadian literature *con amore*. He has given us a discriminating resumé of our literary forces, though here and there, as in the political narrative, Mr. Collins' own predilections sometimes unfeelingly come into view. His literary judgments, however, are not often at fault; and in the case of verse, he has the true poetic instinct, combined with much imaginative and analytic power. The book on the whole is exceedingly creditable to this young author; and his dedication to Prof. Goldwin Smith is a fitting tribute to that gentleman's interest in Canadian literature, and the impetus he has given to literary activity in the Dominion.

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