

JOHN ROBSON CAMERON.

W. C. NICHOL, OF THE HAMILTON HERALD.

TAKE a pair of keen but kindly blue eyes set in a round, fat, good natured and heavily mustached face, and beneath a brow so lofty that it almost reaches over to the back of the neck; take a figure that is slightly inclined to embonpoint and is apt to tip the scales anywhere between two and three hundred pounds; attire this figure in plain, unostentatious garb, crown it with a wide brimmed, soft felt hat, creased down the middle and set a bit rakishly on one side of the head, and you have a fairly accurate idea of John Robson Cameron, editor of The Hamilton Spectator, and author of more clever skits than perhaps any writer who has ever contributed to the Canadian press. Mr. Cameron is an accomplished and capable all round newspaper man, but he has one talent in which he is unique in Canada—the construction of satirical newspaper paragraphs. We have, and have had, other paragraphers on the Canadian press whose work shows a fine development of the humorous faculty, but in these skits that have made Mr. Cameron famous among newspaper workers, there is a quality of satire that gives them an absolute individuality. This satirical strain is, indeed, so strongly developed that those who do not know the man might gather from it that it came from a sour and embittered nature, but, like Thackeray, who was always misunderstood, save by those who knew him best, he has a kind and generous heart, and a disposition that is sweet and gentle to a fault.

Mr. Cameron was born in Perth, Ont., on the 19th of April, 1845, and, as a consequence, he is at this writing within a stone's throw of his fiftieth birthday. He began life in earnest without any more education than the law allows by sweeping floors and washing rollers in a printing office. It was no joke to be boss devil in a country printing office fifty years ago, but Cameron grew fat and healthy on the kicks and cuffs with which his arduous services and his love of mischief were rewarded. The boy had an alert, enquiring mind, the ability to see things, and the further ability to tell other people what he had seen and what he thought about it, and these are qualities without which no man can be a successful journalist. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that after an extended experience as a practical printer his fingers began to itch for a pencil and a pad of paper. It was while he was employed upon The Sarnia Canadian some time in 1865 that he got his first opportunity to show what he really could do.

He had written many odds and ends for The Canadian before then, but on this occasion the editor of the paper was called suddenly away on some important business and young Cameron was left in charge. For three weeks the editor was absent, and those three weeks were perhaps the liveliest newspaper weeks that Sarnia has ever known. Left to himself, Cameron kicked about with all the abandon and delight of a three year old colt turned out to pasture. He stirred up the dry bones of the municipality with the eagerness of a boy and a pencil that ran riot in brightness. Staid old Sarnia wondered what was up. Such a journalistic cyclone had never struck the town before. So great was the demand for the paper that the presses could hardly print it fast enough. When the editor returned three weeks later Cameron owned the town, and had taken to parting his hair in the middle, but he had a

less exalted opinion of himself when he found what a hard time the editor was having to get back in the good graces of his Tory friends, many of whom had been mortally offended by the free and easy manner in which the young man had trampled over their pet corns.

But his three weeks' experience as an editor had given Cameron the newspaper fever, which licks up the blood, and is only cured with death. For a while he broke away from journalism to go with Wolseley on the Red River rebellion expedition, where he covered himself with mud and glory. But he soon grew tired of soldiering, and went to Winnipeg, and assisted at the birth of The Free Press, with which he was connected for many years. The Free Press was a success from the start, and so was Cameron. He ran for alderman, was elected, and



THE EDITOR OF THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR.

it is related of him that while he sat in the Council Chamber, he would busy himself writing editorials for his paper when not engaged in making speeches. As he made it a point of speaking on every subject that came up, it will be seen that his time was fairly well occupied.

Before coming to Hamilton to work upon The Spectator, Mr. Cameron was employed for some time upon The Guelph Herald. To such an extent did he impress his individuality upon the Guelph people that his name is a household word there to this day. In conjunction with E. F. B. Johnston, the well-known Toronto lawyer, he started a weekly paper in Guelph, called, if I mistake not, "The Critic." It was a model of brightness. Unfortunately for their dreams of fortune, however, the treasurer collected all the advertising accounts on the day the