
CHAPTER XXVI

SIR JOHN ALEXANDER MACDONALD

*Out-worn without assoil,
From a great life's lengthened toil,
Laurelled with half a century's fame;—
From the care and adulation
To the heart-throb of the nation
He hath passed to be a memory and a name.*

*Him of the wider vision,
Who had one hope, Elysian,
To mould a mighty Empire toward the West;
Who through the hostile years,
'Mid the wrangling words, like spears,
Still bore this Titan vision in his breast.*

“The Dead Leader.”

IN treating of Canadian political life of the period before and during the quarter-century following Confederation, one figure stands out pre-eminently as the dominating personality—namely, that of the great Scottish-born statesman, the Right Hon. Sir John Alexander Macdonald. Though many distinguished and remarkable leaders throng the period, among them all with common consent, irrespective of party or other

Sir John Alexander Macdonald

considerations, he stands out and makes the time particularly his own. So much is this so, that, as in the case of Lincoln, the great American, the history of the forty or fifty years of Canadian struggle and development of the last half of the nineteenth century might reasonably be called "The History of Sir John A. Macdonald and his Times." Few men in the annals of the Empire have so dominated a whole period, and made it so much their own, as is represented in the career of this remarkable man.

The only other parallel cases are those of Disraeli and Gladstone in Britain. But even in those cases each had a rival in the other, whereas Macdonald had none to challenge his long political sway over the hearts, minds, and imaginations of a whole people. It is not denied that he had many contemporaries, such as Howe, Mackenzie, Brown, Blake, and Tupper, who might have challenged his supremacy in some respects, and others who were his superiors as orators, jurists, and scholars; but in some subtle way, by the very genius of an innate personality, he stood out and was acknowledged as the great political leader, who was so strong in the people's hearts and so held their imaginations that they allowed him to accomplish much, and forgave him more than they have ever any other public man before or since. It would be absurd to say that Macdonald had no faults. Indeed, he was a man, like Burns, all compounded of faults. But, as in Burns's case, they were the large, human faults of genius. So

