

The Man
Who Made Canada

1865-1867

By GEORGE F. G. STANLEY

FOUNDATION FOR
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ABOUT THE LECTURER

This fourth Foundation Lecture was presented as an address by Dr. George F. G. Stanley at the National Conference of the Public Relations Society of America in Montreal, Canada, on November 9, 1964.

Dr. Stanley, a former Rhodes Scholar and Guggenheim Fellow, is one of Canada's leading historians. A native of Calgary, Alberta, he was educated at the University of Alberta (B.A., 1929) and Oxford University, where, during the years 1929-1936, he received his M.A., B. Litt., and D. Phil.

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Dr. Stanley, who has been a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada since 1953, has written extensively on historical subjects. Among his books are *The Birth of Western Canada* (London, 1936; republished, Toronto, 1960, 1963); *Canada's Soldiers* (revised edition, 1960); *In the Face of Danger* (Port Arthur, 1960); *For Want of a Horse* (Sackville, 1961); and *Louis Riel* (Toronto, 1963).

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AN ADDRESS before the Conference of
the Public Relations Society of America by
GEORGE F. G. STANLEY

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I

ONE HUNDRED years ago, on August 31st, 1864, two steam vessels put into the harbour of Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. The first, the *Heather Belle*, arrived late in the afternoon from Brule, Nova Scotia; the second, the *Prince of Wales*, arrived shortly before midnight from Shediac, New Brunswick. A third, the *Queen Victoria*, entered the harbour on the morning of September 1st. The three vessels carried delegates from the three British North American colonies, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and the United Province of Canada, who were to meet in conference in the capital of Prince Edward Island. They were to discuss the possibility of an intercolonial union. The three Maritime provinces had originally intended to explore the problems of a Maritime union; the Canadians had come along, as the Governor-General of Canada wrote, "to ascertain whether the proposed Union might not be made to embrace the whole of the British North American provinces."

The colonial delegates were not given a very promising reception, either by the people of Charlottetown or the government of Prince Edward Island. Only the provincial Secretary, W. H. Pope, was on hand to meet them, and, sitting in a flat-bottomed boat "with a barrel of flour on the bow, and two jars of molasses in the stern, and with a lusty fisherman as his only companion" he was taken for a bum-boat man by the Canadians. The fact was that Charlottetown was full of visitors from all parts of the Island. When the reporter for the *Saint John Morning Telegraph* asked the reason why, he was told, "The

circus, sir, the circus." It was the first circus to visit the Island in twenty-one years, and the strange animals and clowns were a far more exciting spectacle to the members of the legislature and the general public than the strange politicians under the large stovepipe hats who came to talk politics behind closed doors.

The conference opened officially on the afternoon of September 1st. The sittings were held in a small upstairs room in the Province Building and lasted a week. On the 8th, the meetings terminated with an excursion to the northern part of the Island and a formal ball in the evening. There had been arguments and disagreements among the delegates; but they had, at least, agreed upon one thing, namely a federal union of all the British North American colonies. George Brown, editor of the *Toronto Globe*, one of the Canadians who attended the Charlottetown Conference, observed with satisfaction, "Cartier and I made eloquent speeches — of course — and whether as a result of our eloquence or the goodness of our champagne, the ice became completely broken, the tongues of the delegates wagged merrily, and the banns of matrimony between all the provinces of British North America having been formally proclaimed and all manner of persons duly warned then and there to speak or forever after to hold their tongues — no man appeared to forbid the banns and the union was thereupon formally completed and proclaimed."

But there still remained the task of drawing up the terms of the marriage contract. Accordingly, the conference re-assembled at Quebec, in Canada, a month later. Here the tone of the debate was sharper than it had been at Charlottetown. Here the colonial delegates discussed details, not principles; specifics, not generalities: would the delegates vote individually or by provinces? How many seats would each province receive in the federal parliament? How would the legislative powers be apportioned between the central and provincial legislatures? What would be the nature of the financial arrangements? For eighteen days, from October 10th to October 27th, the arguments went on. In the end there was a majority agreement embodied in a series of seventy-two resolutions, known subsequently as the Quebec Resolutions, or in the Maritimes as the Quebec Scheme.

It was a real achievement. In little over a fortnight, thirty-three men from Canada, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland, had put together a political framework which, most of them believed and hoped, would provide the five British North American colonies with a federal constitution.

The arguments at Quebec were followed by a round of social engagements, sight-seeing and speech-making, eating and drinking. That the delegates were able to stand up to the almost continuous receptions speaks volumes for their physical stamina and the healthy state of their livers. The sight-seeing and the speech-making had begun early in August, even prior to the conference at Charlottetown, when a number of Canadian parliamentarians travelled to the Maritimes on an excursion arranged by D'Arcy McGee, the Canadian Minister of Agriculture, and James Ferrier, the chairman of the Grand Trunk Railway. The French Canadian members of the party, in particular, seem to have enjoyed themselves. Charles Belford wrote in the *Toronto Leader*, "Their good humour, jollity and continuous interest in all that went on gained for us Upper as well as Lower Canadians a reputation for bonhomie, which was productive of the best results. However, I am very much afraid that many of the inhabitants of the Maritime Provinces will labour under the impression for some time that French is the universal language in Canada and that French songs are as familiar to all Canadians as *John Brown's Body* and like refrains are among the Yankees." The Charlottetown Conference had likewise been followed by social sessions at Halifax and Saint John. And now the delegates were off again on the same pursuit. Even the Prince Edward Islanders, who had been most obstructive during the political sessions, were mellowed by the champagne and cheers that greeted the visitors everywhere they went; Montreal, Ottawa, Kingston, Belleville, Toronto and Hamilton. Small wonder that the Canadian leader, John A. Macdonald, left the triumphal tour at Kingston to recuperate his strength in his home town before taking up the task of implementing the resolutions adopted at Quebec.

II

The plan for a British North American union had been drafted. To implement it successfully was something else again. In spite of the

fact that the leaders of the union movement, Canadians and Maritimers alike, were anxious to bring the proposed union into being in 1865, over two years were to elapse before the imperial parliament in Great Britain passed the necessary legislation.

That this long delay ensued was owing, in part at least, to the failure of the proponents of the Quebec Scheme to explain to the voters in each colony just what they were proposing and what advantages would accrue from union. The two conferences at Charlottetown and Quebec had been held behind closed doors and the public had remained in ignorance of what was to be the fate or future of the several colonies concerned. Because of the absence of good public relations, the image of union from September onwards, took on a more and more sinister appearance. Not until November 8th were the Quebec Resolutions released to the press. And this was the first official statement to appear in print. Meanwhile, every newspaper, large and small in Canada and in the Maritimes, was filled with editorials, letters to the editor, with arguments and speculations. Snippets of news, obtained directly from the delegates or culled from their public speeches, gave only a partial, and sometimes distorted, picture of what was going on behind the doors of the grey stone post office, high on the cliff in Upper Town in Quebec. Thus, the anti-Confederates began their offensive before the supporters of Confederation could be sure of what it was they had to defend. Moreover, the Quebec Resolutions, when they were published, were enigmatic. They contained no clear-cut definition of the nature of the proposed federation; they contained no ordered theory of government. The Confederates had found no Alexander Hamilton to give literary advocacy to the idea of a British North American union. Based upon no theoretical principles, the Quebec Scheme was entirely an empirical solution, a working outline, a practical answer to a to be a confederacy, a federation, or what Goldwin Smith, a waspish professor of history at the University of Toronto, called a "kingdom" designed "practically to extinguish the independent existence of the several provinces."

Can it be surprising that nothing worked out quite as planned? In Prince Edward Island and in New Brunswick, Confederation met with a definite political reverse; in Nova Scotia and in Newfoundland,

the Quebec Resolutions were never put to a vote; only in Canada were they discussed and approved by the legislature. And even here they obtained only a narrow majority from the French Canadians of Lower Canada.

The selling of the idea of intercolonial union to the politicians and people of British North America was, in all probability, the hardest selling job in our history. Prejudice, ignorance, suspicion, pride, pessimism, colonialism, local loyalties, all these had to be overcome before a united Canada was possible. Confederation was no grass roots movement. The first First of July in 1867 was greeted with more restraint than exuberance. There were parades, music and military salutes; but there was no spontaneous outburst of enthusiasm, no fanatical demonstrations of patriotic fervour. In Montreal, the city in which we are meeting, soldiers, both Canadian Militia and British Regulars, headed by the Commander of the Forces, Sir John Michel, assembled to hear the Mayor and Recorder read the Royal Proclamation announcing the new federal union. The bands played *God Save the Queen*; the troops cheered; the volunteer gunners fired a salute; and the people watched. Some waved flags. How very Canadian it all was! Quiet, unassertive, conservative, prosaic. It was with a mild thrill of achievement that Canadians celebrated the miracle that had turned three scattered British colonies into the new political entity, Canada. There were, indeed, very few of them who were ready to call themselves Canadians. In Quebec the French Canadians spoke of "les Anglais;" and in Ontario, the English Canadians talked about "the French." In Nova Scotia the people of that province preferred to call themselves Nova Scotians; while in New Brunswick the man on the street in Saint John called the man on the street in Toronto an "Upper Canadian," harking back to the old terminology which has never quite been forgotten.

The wonder is, not that Confederation came so slowly after the Charlottetown and Quebec Conferences, but that it ever came at all. The miracle is that the concept of Confederation ever became the reality of the Dominion of Canada. It was the achievement of the few, not of the many; of the head rather than of the heart. But if the heads were few, there was one among them that stood out above the others.

There was one man who, at the inter-provincial conferences, was foremost in cajoling and convincing; one man who, in the dark days of 1865 and 1866, guided and persuaded; one man, more than any other, who made the first First of July possible. That man? John Alexander Macdonald, the Highlander from Glasgow, the chief architect of the Canadian Confederation and the first Prime Minister of Canada.

Macdonald was not a deep or profound thinker. He was neither handsome nor impressive in appearance. He was, on the contrary, the delight of the political cartoonists whose pictorial satires appeared regularly in *Grip* and in the *Canadian Illustrated News*. Macdonald's financial means were limited, and his family life was marked more often by sorrow than joy. He indulged freely, oftentimes too freely in alcohol. His oratory lacked the form and dignity of that of his contemporaries. And yet this man, John Alexander Macdonald, became the personification of Confederation; the personification of the hopes and aspirations of those who saw in Confederation the vision of a new and grander land. In an age before men were fully conscious of public relations, he had an intuitive understanding of public relations. Better than any other man, he understood the people of Canada, their strengths and weaknesses, their likes and dislikes; he understood his environment and his constituency; and because he had this understanding, he enlisted a loyalty and personal affection on the part of his supporters stronger than that enjoyed by any other Canadian political figure, before or since. The nameless supporter who cried out at one of Macdonald's political meetings, "You'll never die, Sir John!" was voicing, unconsciously, the verdict of history upon the man who made Canada.

III

John Alexander Macdonald was born in Scotland in 1815. His father, Hugh Macdonald, was an amiable and ineffective man who never succeeded in anything he undertook. Migrating to Canada in 1820, when John A. was five years of age, the Macdonalds settled first in Kingston, where their kinsman, Lt. Col. Donald Macpherson, was a prominent and successful figure; then at Hay Bay; then at Glenora; and finally again in Kingston, where Hugh obtained a minor clerkship in the Commercial Bank of the Midland District. John A.'s

mother, Helen Shaw, provided the brains of the Macdonald family. She was the daughter of a Jacobite soldier who had been "out" in 1745 and had fought for Bonnie Prince Charlie at Culloden. Prudence and pertinacity were the marks of her personality. It was she, the idol of her son John, who gave the family the direction and purpose her whisky-loving husband could never provide. John Alexander was Helen Shaw's son, not Hugh Macdonald's.

In spite of Hugh's aimless wanderings around Kingston and the Bay of Quinte, John A. managed to obtain a schooling and to enter as a student-at-law with a Scottish lawyer in Kingston, George MacKenzie. The Macphersons, his relatives, forwarded his career when he toiled in a law office in Napanee and in Picton, two towns not far distant from Kingston. Finally, in 1836, he was admitted to the Bar of Upper Canada. He defended the American filibusters who invaded Canada in November 1838 and who, after three days' fighting, were compelled to surrender at Prescott.

It was natural that Macdonald should enter public life. Both his interest and his personal inclination demanded it. He was young, popular, with a capacity for argument and debate and an affection for humanity and for conviviality. One day Macdonald met John Shaw, a prominent Orangeman in Kingston. "Mr. Shaw," he asked, "what shall I do to become popular?" "Join our lodge and run for alderman," was the reply. Inside a month Macdonald was both an Orangeman and an alderman. He enjoyed the support of his kinsmen, the Macphersons and all their relatives, the St. Andrew's and Celtic Societies, the Orange Lodge, and the local newspaper. His election as alderman in 1843, at the age of twenty-eight, was thus a foregone conclusion. One year later, he offered himself as a candidate in the Tory interest for election to the legislature. Why he, a poor Scottish Presbyterian, should have allied himself with the Tories rather than with the Grits (or Liberals) may be hard to understand. Perhaps it was because of his mother's Jacobite background; perhaps it was because he felt the Tories were the stronger party; perhaps it was simply, as he told his secretary, Joseph Pope, many years later, "there seemed to be no one else available, so I was pitched upon."

In his first term in the legislature, Macdonald left no deep impression upon his fellow-members. His portraits show him at this time as a man of moderate stature, accustomed to wear a long-tailed coat and baggy trousers, with a loose necktie somewhat after the fashion of Lord Byron. He was clean-shaven — he remained so all his life in a period when beards and mutton chops were the style — and he wore his hair curled and rather long. In many ways he had the appearance of an actor. He attempted no crusades but was disposed to regard the wrangles of the House of Assembly with a half contemptuous air. Much of his time he spent in the library — all his life he was fond of books — and here he laid the foundation of that vast knowledge of men and what moved them that was always a surprise to those who knew how limited had been his formal schooling at Adolphustown and Kingston. In the legislature he spoke seldom and with brevity. Although from the outset he attracted attention when he did speak. His maiden effort was greeted with "hear, hears" and the Montreal *Gazette* reporter wrote, "Mr. Macdonald . . . is evidently not used to parliamentary debate, but he as evidently has the stuff in him. He gathered up the scattered strands of argument with great dexterity and knitted them up like a man used to the work of reply."

Macdonald did not long remain in political obscurity on the back benches of the legislature. These were the twilight days of the old Toryism of the Family Compact. Young and more elastic minds were taking over the control and direction of the Tory party. The Montreal *Gazette* saw Macdonald as one of these, and looked forward to his early appointment to the Cabinet. Henry Draper, the moderate Tory who led the party with skill and urbanity if not with distinction, saw Macdonald in the same light. After only three years in the legislature, the member for Kingston became a Minister of the Crown, Receiver-General of the United Province of Canada. The Opposition newspaper, the *Globe* in Toronto, which could see no good in any person bearing the Tory label, modified its usual vituperative tone to describe Macdonald as "a man of perfect respectability — industrious and successful in his profession — but far from possessing such talent as would warrant his being made a Queen's Counsel. He is, however, a Presbyterian Tory; or that species of loose fish . . . who are guided more by personal feeling than by principle, and are prepared to take

office under any administration, at the shortest notice." After all allowances are made for the bias of the *Globe*, this comment was not unfair. Macdonald preferred to be looked upon by the general public as a moderate, as a Presbyterian Tory, rather than as a rightwinger of the old Tory Establishment, denominational and political. Thus began a political career which was to be without parallel in the history of our country, Canada.

This is no place to give, in detail, the political history of the United Province. It is sufficient to observe that, once launched upon a political career, Macdonald never looked back. He continued to steer the course which he had set for himself, to support moderate views moderately. He played only a minor part in the tumultuous controversies of 1847 and 1848; he threw no eggs at the Governor-General, Lord Elgin, although he never liked the man. When he did lose his temper, it was because of a personal affront rather than because of a difference of political principle. More and more Macdonald's became the hands that manipulated the moderate Tory group and his the head that determined party strategy. Finally, in 1854, he achieved his purpose, the coalition of the French Canadian *Bleus* of Canada East, and the English Canadian Tories of Canada West in what became known as the Liberal-Conservative party. It was a political triumph. Even the name was a political triumph. Contradictory as it might appear, it embodied the working agreement between the moderates of both historic races under the banner of political Conservatism.

At this time, in 1858, Macdonald took a step, the significance of which could hardly have been apparent at that moment. He invited Alexander Galt to become a member of his government. Galt had been a Reformer. He was a prickly individual. But he was a man of strong character, a man of strong views which he held strongly. He had to be handled carefully. And here is an example of how Macdonald worked. Writing to Galt he said, "You call yourself a *Rouge*. There may have been at one time a reddish tinge about you, but I could observe it becoming by degrees fainter. In fact you are like Lord Byron's Dying Dolphin, exhibiting a series of colours — 'the last still loveliest' — and that is 'true blue,' being the colour I affect. Seriously, you would make a decent Conservative, if you gave your judgement a fair chance and cut loose from Holton and Dorion and those other beggars. So

pray do become a true blue at once. It is a good standing colour and bears washing." Galt did not yield at once to Macdonald's blandishments. For a while he affected political independency. But it was a friendless position and finally he swung to the right and joined Macdonald.

The adhesion of Galt to the Liberal-Conservative party is of special importance. Galt had taken up the idea of federal union and made the acceptance of this proposal the price of his political support. Thus, without really having thought the question through, Macdonald, Cartier and the Liberal-Conservatives found themselves committed to the advocacy of federal union.

Macdonald was not, like Galt, a man of ideas. His approach to politics was pragmatic, practical. If he had any political philosophy at all it was simply a firm belief in the virtues of moderation, of law and order, of the parliamentary system and an equally firm distaste for American republicanism and American democracy. To the electors of Kingston, he said in 1861, "the fratricidal conflict now unhappily raging in the United States [referring to the War between the States] shows us the superiority of our institutions and of the principle on which they are based. Long may that principle — the monarchical principle — prevail in this land. Let there be no 'looking to Washington' as was threatened by a leading member of the Opposition last session; but let the cry with the moderate party be 'Canada united as one province, and under one sovereign.'" This was a sincere statement of his credo. It was not a sentiment manufactured for election purposes.

Once Macdonald had fully grasped the idea of federal union, his role in the Confederation movement became the decisive one. At Charlottetown he let his French Canadian colleague, George Cartier, give the first statement of the case for a British North American union. It was a clever move. It appealed to the pride of the French Canadian leader; and it helped to allay the fears of the Maritimers, for Cartier was known to be a firm believer in provincial autonomy. If Cartier presented the case for union, there would be no question of a single, dominating, Canadian monolith in British North America. Macdonald's speech on the second day was well prepared. It was one of his best efforts. He was

persuasive, earnest without being stodgy, humorous in a serious way. He made no effort to monopolize the discussion. His warm-hearted personality as well as his equally warm hospitality disarmed all opposition and won the hearts of the Maritimers, if not always their heads.

Macdonald's greatest contribution was, however, made at Quebec. Over the second Conference held in 1864, he exercised the directing control from the outset. In spite of the frustrating inadequacy of the historical evidence that survived the discussions at Quebec, Macdonald's domination of the Conference is apparent to all students. Even the valuable Cartier was silent. When the rebellious Prince Edward Islanders introduced embarrassing demands, it was Macdonald who came up with the saving formula, *face-saving* for the Islanders and *life-saving* for the Conference. Again and again his timely suggestions relaxed tensions. Then, when he himself took the floor, he drove home his points with sincerity and conviction; the need to maintain the parliamentary system, and the need for a strong central government. He never hid his preference for a legislative rather than a federal union, but he accepted federalism and urged its cause because he believed it to be the only feasible way to bring French Canada and the Maritimes into a broad political union. In the end he gained, if not all, almost all his demands. He was the author of fifty of the seventy-two Quebec Resolutions. The federal structure embodied in the Quebec Scheme was largely his. He, more than anyone else, deserves to be called the architect of the Canada that was to be.

That Confederation did not come in 1865, as he had planned, was a source of great disappointment to Macdonald. He had urged the provincial delegates to present the Quebec Resolutions to their respective legislatures as soon as possible, to explain the nature and purpose of the union scheme and to secure the adoption of Confederation without exposing it to the bitterness and misrepresentation that a general election would inevitably bring forth. However, Macdonald miscalculated the speed with which the anti-Confederates would muster their forces against intercolonial union.

Disappointed but undaunted, Macdonald continued to do battle for men's minds and for their approval. The Canadians, at least,

might be persuaded that union was possible, desirable, even necessary. In the Legislative Assembly he gave a brilliant word picture of the cause he had made so much his own. It was not a new image he painted. He had used the same form and the same colours at Charlottetown and at Quebec. But now he was displaying them to a different constituency. At the Conferences he had spoken to the provincial delegates; now he was speaking to the members of his own party, those of his temporary colleague, Brown, and those of his opponent, Antoine Dorion. Never did he speak better; never did he embellish his speech with more illustrative details. But the main themes were never obscured: British institutions, responsible government, a united British North America under the aegis of Great Britain.

He won a good majority in Upper Canada (Ontario); but only a narrow one in the lower province, (Quebec). But in the latter, he had the backing of the Roman Catholic Church; and that was a sure method of reaching and influencing the people of that province. But what of the other provinces? That was the rub.

Time was of the essence. Macdonald had the support of the opposition leader from Upper Canada, George Brown, only on condition that Confederation be achieved promptly. Without the help of Brown's Grits the whole union scheme would have to be dropped in favour of some kind of accommodation between the two Canadian provinces only. British North American union could not survive in Canada as a purely party measure. Dorion and Brown would see to that. Using all the accepted methods open to him to influence opinion, Macdonald set out to secure the adhesion of the Maritime Provinces to the scheme discussed at Quebec. Clearly he could not interfere in the internal politics of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick — Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland he was prepared to ignore. He would have to work, quietly not blatantly. He could assure the New Brunswickers in the most emphatic terms, when asked, that an Inter-colonial Railway would most certainly be built; he could insinuate that the anti-Confederates were pro-Yankee and were drawing comfort and cash from the United States; he could write private letters to the Confederate leaders and advise them on timing and tactics; he could help replenish the war chests of the pro-

Confederate parties with Canadian dollars. Elections, as Macdonald knew, were not won by prayers in the Maritimes any more than they were in Canada.

Macdonald's role as the campaign manager of the Maritime Confederates, even if largely backstage, was not an insignificant one. Early in 1866, the Confederates were back in power in New Brunswick, and in Nova Scotia plans were made to reopen discussions. It should not be imagined that for these successes Macdonald alone was responsible. Credit must be given both to Tupper and Tilley, the Confederate leaders in the Maritime provinces, to the pressure exerted by the Imperial government, and to the unexpected intervention of the Fenians, whose military posturing on the frontiers gave colour to the charges that the United States was an unreliable and threatening neighbour. But the main credit must go to Macdonald, the tactical expert, the moulder of opinion, the master of public relations.

In December 1866, the delegates of the three colonies, six Canadians, five Nova Scotians and five New Brunswickers, met in London, England. There were no representatives from either of the two island colonies present. As he had been at Quebec, Macdonald was once again the chairman of the conference and the dominating figure. In theory the delegates were starting from scratch, since the Quebec Resolutions had been accepted only by the Canadians. But in reality very few changes were made. With disarming inconsistency Macdonald announced, "We are quite free to discuss points as if they were open, although we may be bound to adhere to the Quebec Scheme." By Christmas Day the labours of the conference were over. Macdonald sent the new set of resolutions — they were the Quebec Resolutions polished up a bit — to the Colonial Secretary. For several weeks he worked with the Colonial Office to transform the resolutions into the legal terminology of a parliamentary Bill. One of his English colleagues wrote, "Macdonald was the ruling genius and spokesman, and I was greatly struck by his power of management and adroitness. The French delegates were keenly on the watch for anything which weakened their securities; on the contrary, the Nova Scotia and New Brunswick delegates were very jealous of concession to the *arrière* province . . . Macdonald had to argue the question with the Home

Government on a point on which the slightest divergence from the narrow line already agreed on in Canada was watched for — here by the French, and there by the English — as eager dogs watch a rat hole; a snap on one side might have provoked a snap on the other, and put an end to the concord. He stated and argued the case with cool, ready fluency, while at the same time you saw that every word was measured, and that while he was making for a point ahead, he was never for a moment unconscious of any of the rocks among which he had to steer."

In March, he watched his Bill move through the various readings in the British Parliament. By the 8th of that month the deed was done. The Bill was law.

IV

On one occasion when he was in the United States as a member of the British delegation negotiating the Treaty of Washington, Macdonald was invited to join a boating party on the Potomac. While awaiting the arrival of the remainder of the party, the wife of an American senator remarked to the jaunty, suave, rather Disraeli-like character in front of her, "I guess you are from Canada?" "Yes, ma'am." "You've got a very smart man over there, the Honourable John A. Macdonald." "Yes, ma'am, he is." "But they say he's a regular rascal." "Yes, ma'am, he is a perfect rascal." "But why do they keep such a man in power?" "Well, you see, they cannot get along without him."

Why could Canadians not get along without him? Why was he "the old chieftain" to so many people? Why were his public relations so good?

According to contemporary accounts Sir John was not an outstanding orator. The nineteenth century was the era of the pompous public speaker, when flowery eloquence was looked upon the highest form of public communication. But Sir John knew that, however impressive the long-winded, erudite, fact-laden speeches of men like Edward Blake and others might be, the voters, the men on the farms in the back constituencies wanted something simpler, something more

direct, something more within the limits of their understanding. In an age of oratorical windbags, Macdonald was not a windbag. His style of speaking was modern. By contrast with those of his opponents Macdonald's speeches were short and conversational. He squandered no superlatives. He was quick with a retort; but his retorts were seldom bitter, although they often had a bite in them. Macdonald always relished a clean hit, even when it was against himself. He maintained that a twenty-minute speech was quite enough for any practical man in parliament, although he did not always follow his own precept. "We in Canada," he remarked, "have got into the habit of delivering lectures and essays in parliament. Well, these essays we can all find in books, and it is merely lecture and water that we get, as a rule, in long speeches." Some of our modern parliamentarians would do well to take a leaf from Macdonald's book, and ward off the heavy-handed attacks of their opponents with a smile and a pun.

The parliamentary records and newspapers are full of examples of Macdonald's skill in reply. On one occasion, when Sir John was out of office, the Prime Minister, Alexander Mackenzie, announced some changes in his Cabinet. "I hope my Hon. friend, the head of the Government, was not disturbed in his devotions on Sunday by the necessity of making these new arrangements," asked Sir John. Suspecting nothing, Mackenzie replied sharply, "I was at church as usual." Quickly, Macdonald took up his cue, "The Hon. gentleman went to church as usual, and I have no doubt he paid great attention to the sermon, especially if the sermon impressed upon him the necessity of *resignation*." During a debate on immigration policy, Mackenzie Bowell criticized some of the government immigration lecturers. "I was told that some lecturers have adopted the mode of announcing a temperance lecture and then dragging in the question of immigration," he said. Without a moment's hesitation, Macdonald replied, "That is certainly throwing cold water on immigration." Mr. Mackenzie, commenting upon a clause in a new Bill said, "if that is considered an improvement, it is certainly one of a Tory character." "A satisfactory character," replied Sir John. On another occasion Macdonald answered the complaint of Edward Blake about the paucity of government legislation on the order books by saying, "The Hon. gentleman says there is only one Government bill on the paper. You know the old fable of the rabbit

and the lion. The rabbit said to the lion, 'I have twenty children to your one.' 'Oh! but,' says the lion, 'my child is a lion!' " At the Provincial Fair at Kingston in 1888 Macdonald took Senator Kirkpatrick and several others to see a sideshow featuring some female acrobats. Mr. Kirkpatrick turned to the Prime Minister and said, "Is this the kind of introduction you give us to an agricultural fair?" "Why, of course," explained Macdonald, "we always see the calves first." One time at a Cabinet meeting, Sir John was seen to look intently and seriously at Sir John Carling, the famous brewer. At last he asked, "Carling, I wonder if God Almighty ever made a man as honest as you look?"

In his later years Macdonald was taking a trip down the Saint John River in New Brunswick. The steamer was to stop at Gagetown. When asked whether he intended to make a speech to those who, it was expected would be assembled on the wharf, Macdonald replied, "I can't tell till I see the crowd." When the steamer made fast, Macdonald said, "I am going to speak." He then delivered himself of one of his characteristic, short and happy speeches. At the next place, Macdonald was asked the same question, was he going to make a speech. He gave the same answer, "I can't tell till I see the crowd." When the boat was tied up, he said, "I'm going ashore." He went out on the wharf and spoke personally to all within reach, patting a child on the head here and kissing another there, and behaving with gallantry to all the ladies. When the steamer proceeded on its way, Sir John was asked, "Will you tell me, Sir John, why you spoke at Gagetown and not here?" "Why," replied Macdonald, "they were mostly men at Gagetown, and they were nearly all ladies and children here." This answer contained much of the secret of Macdonald's success: he always pitched his appeal to the nature of his audience.

Rarely did he lose his temper; and rarely did he show to disadvantage. However, he did come close, on two occasions, to fighting a duel; and on another he shook his fist in the face of a fellow-member of Parliament, his one-time articled clerk, Oliver Mowat. Once, in extreme anger, he called Donald A. Smith, the man who became Lord Strathcona and later High Commissioner of Canada in London, "the biggest liar I ever met." Such is the report in *Hansard* in 1878. What

Hansard did not mention, was that Sir John strode belligerently towards Smith shouting, "I can lick you quicker than Hell can scorch a feather." He never proved his boast because his colleagues grabbed him before a blow was struck.

Such outbursts, however, came only under extreme provocation. Normally Sir John set out to make friends, not to alienate them. He preferred to placate, not to irritate. He sought to make everyone his friend, even when opposed to him politically.

There are many examples that give emphasis to the warmth of Macdonald's personality and to his knowledge of human nature. At one time a newly-elected Liberal member remarked to a friend, "What a contrast between Brown and Macdonald! I was at the Reform Convention the other day, and there was George Brown dictating to us all, and treating rudely every man who dared to make a suggestion. Next day I was talking to some fellows in the lobby, when a stranger, coming up, slapped me on the shoulder and said in the heartiest way: 'How d'ye do? Shake hands—glad to see you here. I'm John A.'" An anecdote of a similar kind was told by David Thompson, the Liberal member for Haldimand. Thompson was forced, through illness, to miss nearly a whole session of parliament. On returning to Ottawa the first man he met was Blake. "He passed me with a simple nod," said Thompson. "The next man I met was Cartwright, and his greeting was about as cold as that of Blake. Hardly had I passed these men when I met Sir John. He didn't pass me by, but grasped me by the hand, gave me a slap on the shoulder and said, 'Davy, old man, I'm glad to see you back. I hope you'll soon be yourself again and live many a day to vote against me—as you have always done!' Now, I never gave the old man a vote in my life, but hang me if it doesn't go against my grain to follow the men who haven't a word of kind greeting for me, and oppose a man with a heart like Sir John's."

Perhaps Macdonald's greatest political asset was his common touch. Unlike Brown and Blake, who could not unbend, Macdonald was able to speak with the pauper as well as with the prince. It is hardly surprising, is it, that whereas Blake, the politician with such great intellectual promise, died without fulfilling that promise, and Brown was assassi-

nated by a disgruntled *Globe* employee, Macdonald died in his bed, beloved by all. At his funeral, an old white-haired man, bent with years, spoke to E. B. Biggar, who asked him, "Did you know Sir John?" "Know him?" replied the man with astonishment, "Know him? For thirty years I've known no other name." To thousands, Sir John was their "personal" friend. One such was Patrick Buckley, the cab-driver, who, for thirty-eight years drove Sir John in Ottawa, and who, when Sir John was defeated in 1873, continued to drive him while accepting no fee for his services. That he did so was out of pure affection—for at that time it seemed unlikely that Sir John would ever be Prime Minister again. Another such was Mrs. Grimason, the old Irishwoman of Kingston, whose tavern on Princess Street was the headquarters of the Conservative party at each election. To a remark of Sir Henry Smith's, questioning a statement of Sir John's, Mrs. Grimason replied, "If Sir John said it was so and so, I'd take my oath that it was so, whether I knew anything about it or not." This was the kind of loyalty that Macdonald demanded and the kind he usually received. When Senator Dickey of Nova Scotia took a stand against Confederation in spite of his earlier support of union at Quebec, Sir John asked him, "Why did you kick up your heels so on the Confederation question? Have you gone over to the enemy?" "No," replied Dickey, "I am still a Conservative, and I shall support you whenever I think you are right." "That is no satisfaction," retorted Sir John, "Anybody may support me when I am right. What I want is a man who will support me when I am wrong!"

Such was the man who sold intercolonial unity to a reluctant group of British American colonies. By his speeches at Charlottetown and Quebec in 1864 and Ottawa in 1865, by the support accorded him by the newspapers of the political party he commanded, by his skillful alliance of the Orangemen and the Roman Catholic hierarchy, by his close co-operation with French Canada, by his sound political advice to the Confederate leaders, Sir John Macdonald succeeded in building a public image of intercolonial unity as a real necessity if British North America was to survive. Confederation of the colonies was made to appear to British Americans as the best means of defense, military and economic, against the United States, and of acquiring and exploiting the great North-West, still under the control of the Hudson's Bay Company.

But speeches and editorials were only the tools. In the hands of a lesser man, they would never have fashioned the Canadian Confederation. In public relations as in all other arts or crafts, you will find a hundred mediocrities for one man of genius. And Macdonald was a man of genius. What made the tools of public relations successful was Macdonald's skill in handling them, his knowledge of the psychology of Canadians, his understanding of their fears, jealousies, hopes and ambitions. To his practice of public relations Macdonald brought both intelligence and conviction as well as personal warmth. There was none of the casuistry of youth about him or the incoherent reasoning of the idealist in his advocacy of Confederation. His approach was direct. He believed in his own merit and in the merit of the idea he had to purvey.

Macdonald did more than create a favorable public image. He continued successfully to sell the idea of union and himself and his party as the main pillar of that union. Of the seven federal elections between 1867 and Macdonald's death in 1891, he won six of them. For nineteen years Sir John Macdonald served as Prime Minister of the Dominion of Canada. And when we add to these the six years he served as joint Prime Minister of the pre-Confederate province of Canada, these nineteen become twenty-five, a quarter of a century during which he guided the destinies of his country. It is a record unequalled by any other British Prime Minister.

In recent years the bright, shining image of Canadian unity has become somewhat tarnished. The basis of the old union seems to have shifted, and Confederation will have to be renegotiated, not by civil war as in the United States, but by negotiation at the conference table. For the idea of Canadian unity continues to be a valid one, if Canada is to survive. The maintenance of that unity, on an equitable basis, is the greatest challenge facing Canadian political leaders at the present time. In the establishment of that new sense of unity, the practitioners of your craft have a mighty role to play.

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