

SIR CHARLES TUPPER – NOVA SCOTIA'S FATHER OF CONFEDERATION

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The tale of the life of Sir Charles Tupper will humble you both with the moment and the multitude of his achievements: Premier of Nova Scotia; member of the federal cabinet successively in the positions of President of the Council, Minister of Customs, Minister of Transport, Minister of Public Works, and Minister of Finance; Canadian High Commissioner to London; twice President of the Canadian Medical Association; and Prime Minister of Canada. An insight into the man is captured by a childhood recollection of the Duke of Marlborough, honouring Sir Charles in 1913:

I was told when I entered the room that I should meet one of the greatest, if not the greatest, of Canadians, and someone whispered, "Please remember, the gentleman you will see was born the very year that the great Napoleon died." I confess, sir, that when I, a little boy, saw you, I was deeply impressed by your kindness, I was somewhat awed by your presence, and I marvelled at your versatility.

Little boys readily seem able to sense the true nature of sophisticated adults, and indeed, these words express an impression of Sir Charles Tupper felt by all who met him.

Charles Tupper was born on July 2, 1821, in Amherst, Nova Scotia, the son of a Baptist minister. His father was a very scholarly man, capable of reading thirteen languages. Towards these ends he apparently encouraged his son, for by the time Charles was seven, he had read aloud to his father the whole Bible. He did not show an aptitude for mathematics, however, and students finding themselves in a similar plight can take heart from his answer to a virtually insoluble algebra problem:

I . . . threw the books into my desk and did not look at it again while at the (Horton)

academy, concluding that it was unnecessary for me to know more of simple arithmetic than the principal.

In 1838, Tupper went to the medical school at the University of Edinburgh, after spending a year with one Doctor Harding of Windsor, Nova Scotia, from whom he received medical instructions. In his years at the University he began to display some of the characteristics which later distinguished him. His capacity for work was incredible, as evidenced by his own words:

I had studied assiduously (throughout the year), but knowing the importance of not failing to pass the examination, for three weeks before the first of May I went to bed at two o'clock a.m. and rose at five to continue my work.

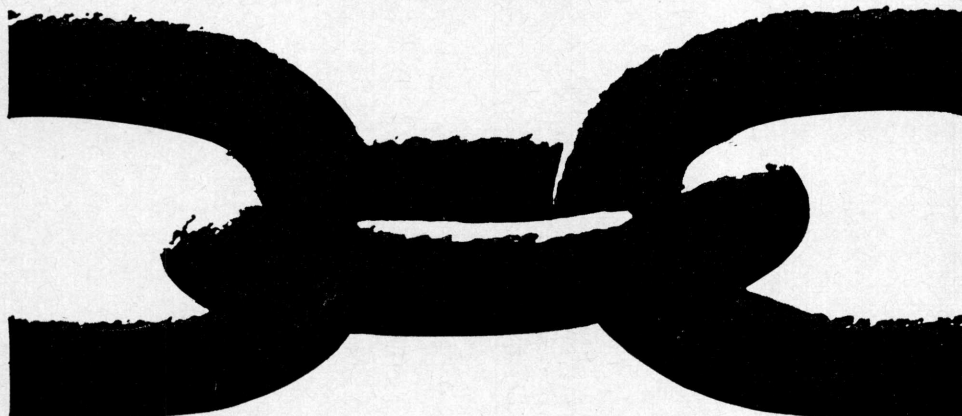
On August 1, 1843, Charles Tupper was awarded the degree of M.D. from Edinburgh, at the age of twenty-two. He returned to Amherst to become a country doctor, and married Miss Frances Morse of Amherst in 1846. The marriage lasted sixty-six years until the death of Lady Tupper in 1912. Doctor Tupper spent twelve years practicing in Cumberland county, in a day when the complications surrounding the practice of the art were sometimes surpassed by the endeavour to reach the patient. During this period, however, Doctor Tupper built his reputation as a man who was firm-minded, sanguine, and greatly devoted to his people. He writes:

"Enjoying the professional confidence of my county, I was called to almost all important cases of illness from Wallace, forty miles east, to Cape Chignecto sixty miles west of Amherst, where we lived. My life was spent in riding or driving from one part of the country to the other. I can hardly understand how I endured the fatigue. . . (Often the) struggle to keep awake in driving was most painful".

In comparison with today's scientific medicine, the conditions under which he was

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required to work seem incredible. In one instance in 1846, for example, he found it necessary to amputate the leg of a woman suffering from a tremendous osteosarcoma of the femur. The assistants in the surgery were a sailor, whom Doctor Tupper taught to ligature an artery, and a young doctor from Pugwash, who had never before assisted with an operation. These were the days before anaesthesia or antiseptics, and the assisting doctor, quite understandably, grew faint during the procedure. Despite all hazards, however, the operation was successful and the woman died four months later of apoplexy.

Although he had always maintained an active interest in political affairs, Doctor Tupper's first offer for office did not come until 1855. In the provincial election, he succeeded in defeating Mr. Howe, the already famous leader of the Liberal party in Nova Scotia. This greatly surprised everyone but Mr. Howe, who returned the jests of his friends by saying that: "You will soon discover that I have been defeated by the leader of the Conservative party". And in fact, in the Legislature, Doctor Tupper quickly impressed both parties with his mental agility and his liberal use of cold logic in making a point. His biographer, E. M. Saunders, recalls that:

No words were wasted in his business transactions, and there was with him in that day of leisure, a marked economy of time.

Doctor Tupper's early speeches, although not considered amongst his greatest, serve to illustrate very clearly his true nature, uncluttered as yet by the complexities of national politics. In one oration to the legislature in 1856, he stated the principles to which he stood true throughout his life, the usually unrealized ambitions of the courageous politician:

I did not come here to play the game of follow my leader. I did not come here the representative of any particular party, bound to vote contrary to my own convictions, but to perform honestly and fearlessly to the best of my ability, my duty to my country. In the past I have seen measures, which lie at the root of our prosperity and freedom, burked because they emanated from the leader of the Opposition; nor have the measures of the Government always received a dispassionate hearing from the Opposition. Whenever the measures of the Government commend themselves to my judg-

ment, I shall not hesitate to support them. After only one month under his leadership, the strength of the Conservative Opposition climbed from fifteen to twenty-two seats, following a series of bye-elections and Liberal resignations.

In his early days in politics, Doctor Tupper did not forget the lures of his first love, medicine. Consequently, with the Liberal defeat late in 1856, he felt his job had been accomplished in overseeing the return of the Conservatives to power. Both he and his wife longed for their previous life in Cumberland. Party pressure was brought to bear on him, however, and he resolved at least for the moment, to let the world of politics be his field of service. Little did he suspect that in forty years he would be Prime Minister of a nation with the third largest land area on earth. Despite his political involvement, he continued to be recognized as a man with admirable qualifications for many tasks. With the Conservatives out of power in 1859, he was asked by the Premier, Mr. Howe, to help in the reorganization of Dalhousie College, of which Doctor Tupper became a governor on August 19, 1862. Moreover, in 1869, he was invited to take a chair in the Faculty of Medicine at Dalhousie, the Dean, Doctor Reid feeling Doctor Tupper's presence would "give the institution additional character and status". In 1860, the Medical Society of Halifax elected Doctor Tupper as its President. The annually increasing commitment required of him in national politics, however, subtly drowned the last vestiges of doctor remaining in him, except for one period (1872 - 1874), when the federal P.C.'s were not in power, and he practiced in Ottawa. It seems evident, therefore, that his election as the first President of the Canadian Medical Association in 1867, (and again in 1888), was more of a tribute to his administrative ability and his enviable reputation than to his role as a functioning physician.

As Premier of Nova Scotia from 1864 - 67, his most significant contribution was the passage of a Bill for General Education. Refractory to heavy opposition, based largely on concern over the concomitant taxation required for such a proposition, Tupper succeeded by convincing the Legislature that investment in the education of Nova Scotians was a guarantee of the future development of the province. The trend he foresaw continues so ubiquitously today.

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Founded in 1954 and incorporated in 1861, the Medical Society has 12 Branch Societies throughout the Province. There are 13 sections within the Society representing groups with particular interests in various areas of Medicine.

Thirty-five committees and eight representatives to other organizations are responsible for projecting the policies of the Society. The governing body is a Council of approximately 120 members which reports to the Annual Meeting. The Executive Committee is responsible for the business of the Society between Annual Meetings.

Group Disability Insurance, Overhead Office Expense Insurance, and Life Insurance are available to members in good standing. The Society publishes The Nova Scotia Medical Bulletin monthly. Membership in the Canadian Medical Association provides the Canadian Medical Association Journal weekly and eligibility for participation in the Canadian Medical Retirement Savings Plan and the Canadian Medical Equity Fund.

Conjoint membership in The Medical Society of Nova Scotia and the Canadian Medical Association is available to any physician licensed to practice in Nova Scotia.

Further information may be obtained from:

C. J. W. BECKWITH, M.D., D.P.H.
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Tupper's involvement in the Confederation movement began early in his career. In 1861, Mr. Howe, then Premier, introduced a resolution suggesting that the possibility of a union of the three Maritime colonies be studied. Doctor Tupper, leader of the Opposition, seconded the motion. When the Conservatives gained office in 1864, he continued, as Premier, to nurture the union interests. Accordingly, with the blessing of Britain, delegations from the three Maritime colonies met at Charlottetown on September 1, 1864. John A. MacDonald was the leader of the Upper Canadian observers, and as a sequel to the enthusiasm generated at Charlottetown, a conference of the five British North American colonies, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Upper and Lower Canada, was held at Quebec on October 10, 1864. In a period of seventeen days, the ideas forming the roots of present day Canada were drafted, with Tupper and MacDonald guiding the debate.

Partly due to their common interest in Confederation, and possibly because each recognized in the other a very able fellow, Charles Tupper and John A. MacDonald became life-long friends at these conferences. It would be a slander of historical fact to deny that their friendship often facilitated Canada's national development in its first thirty years. The tone of the relationship is captured in Tupper's words on hearing of Sir John A.'s death in 1891:

It is a source of great satisfaction to me in this sad hour to feel that through good and evil report I have stood at his side and . . . done all in my power to sustain. . . him in the great work to which he has, since we first met, devoted so successfully all his great powers.

Following the Quebec Conference, the Premier returned to Nova Scotia to find the former unionist, Joseph Howe, riding a popular wave of anti-union sentiment. Backed by businessmen who felt Confederation would promote only a funneling of Nova Scotia taxes into an Upper Canadian bureaucracy, Howe was unsuccessful in blocking a motion passed in the provincial legislature in April, 1866, approving the Quebec resolutions. Now with his back to the wall, Howe went to London to appeal the anti-unionist case before the British Parliament. Hot on his heels came Doctor Tupper, challenging and countering each point Howe made in a

long series of debates. So convincing was Doctor Tupper in presenting Confederation's case, that he quickly commanded the admiration of both sides of the British House. Needless to say, Howe returned to Nova Scotia defeated, whereas Tupper paved his way into many close ties with British authorities, which years later greatly aided him in the position of Canadian High Commissioner to London. Joined in London by delegations from the four other colonies, Doctor Tupper saw the British Parliament pass the British North America Act on March 29, 1867. Confederation had become a reality.

Later that year, Sir John A. MacDonald summoned the provincial delegates to Ottawa to form the first federal cabinet. The Quebec Conference and the B.N.A. Act had set the number of seats in the cabinet at a maximum of fourteen. Due to the mosaic composition of the new nation, however, various ethnic and religious factions (and provinces) demanded right representation in the cabinet, to the extent that fifteen men were vying for the fourteen posts. After a week of hopeless debate, each cabal refused to relinquish its position, and early in its youth, Confederation seemed ready to fold. The day after the discussions came to a standstill, however, the Hon. D'Arcy McGee, an Irish Catholic, and Doctor Tupper, the Nova Scotian, jointly proposed that both the Irish Catholics and Nova Scotia be represented in the Cabinet by one man, Edward Kenney. And so it happened that Charles Tupper, one of the prime movers of Confederation, by this singular act of self-effacement, was not to be found as a member of Canada's first cabinet.

Nevertheless, in 1869, MacDonald was able to offer Doctor Tupper the Presidency of the Council, which the latter gladly accepted. This was the first in a string of five cabinet posts which Tupper occupied in periods between 1869 to 1896. In this office, Doctor Tupper formulated Canada's first National Policy (purporting a system of protective tariffs) which, despite heavy Liberal opposition, came to form the basis of a stable Canadian economy. Also, while in this office, Doctor Tupper was credited with single-handedly repressing the first Riel Rebellion in Manitoba, in 1869. At Sir John A.'s request, Tupper ventured to Fort Garry, now Winnipeg, to try and reason with

the rebels. Reaching that Hudson's Bay outpost in those days was a perilous challenge in itself, the nearest train going only to St. Cloud, Minnesota, miles to the south. Dr. Tupper later recalled that one day during the long over-land journey, having been separated momentarily from his party, he was, "as if by magic", surrounded by a dozen Indians:

My predicament was no easy one, as I had left my revolver in the sleigh. They could not speak English or French, their vocabulary being restricted to the words "Red Lake" as they pointed in the direction whence they had come. The adventure proved to be a bloodless one. After feeling my raccoon coat and jabbering away for a while, they started off in the direction of Georgetown. Finally arriving at Fort Garry, Doctor Tupper succeeded in penetrating the misconceptions of Louis Riel concerning Canada's acquisition of Manitoba, thus stimulating him to send a delegation from the rebels to Ottawa.

Since the idea of a Confederation had first grasped his imagination, Sir John A. MacDonalld had cast a longing eye to the country spreading hundreds of miles west from Manitoba towards the Pacific. Both he and Tupper realized, however, that a country of the enormity of Canada would need more than an act of Parliament to give it unity. Such a country would require a railroad to strengthen the backbone of its political union and to facilitate its economic development. The Liberals, in power since 1874, had not the vision nor the inspiration required to finish this labour. The job was left to the Conservatives re-elected in 1878, and to Charles Tupper, who became the Minister of Public Works. Early difficulties in finances were magnified by the almost universal skepticism that a country of only four million people could support a project of such prohibitive expense, the estimated cost, including land, being more than one hundred million dollars. The United States, for example, had a population of forty millions when its first trans-continental railway was completed. Tupper and MacDonalld kept their faith, however, confident that temporary fiscal hardships were a small price to pay for the solidification of Confederation promised by this final decisive link. Construction by government contracts early became a

taxation burden to the nation, as the skeptics had predicted, so Tupper persuaded Parliament to give the job to a private company. In 1884, his appeal to Parliament for a \$30,000,000 loan saved the company from bankruptcy, and a year later, Doctor Tupper was instrumental in promoting the flotation of the first issue of \$25,000,000 of C.P.R. bonds in London. The railway quickly began to realize its financial potential, and the company repaid its debt to the country before the last spike was driven in 1886, five years ahead of schedule. The consummation of the C.P.R., moreover, firmly ended all indications that the wealth of the west coast might be lost by the annexation of British Columbia to the U.S.A. It is appropriate at this point to note that Doctor Tupper, in 1879, had the title of K.C.M.G. conferred on him by Queen Victoria, in recognition of his contributions to the Canadian nation.

Sir Charles, though still holding a seat in Parliament, and in the Cabinet as Minister of Railways and Canals, accepted the appointment of Canadian High Commissioner to London in 1883. During his tenure at that post, the British government and Europe quickly became aware of the importance of Canada as an independent nation. Sir Charles was ever forceful in his declaration of Canadian policy, and the respect accorded him was transferred in the minds of his contacts to become a respect for the new nation and her people.

At the request of Sir John A., Sir Charles returned to Canada in 1887 to give a boost to the Tory election campaign. Saunders, his biographer, writes that: . . . *when Sir Charles came upon the ground. . . the Conservative party seemed to take fire, and to have the most unbounded confidence in any plans or strategic movements he might suggest, and were ready for any self-sacrificing service to carry such purposes into effect.* This was the tremendous personal magnetism of Sir Charles Tupper. The Conservatives were re-elected, and Sir Charles accepted the post of Minister of Finance, in addition to being High Commissioner to London. Amusingly, his election was nullified on the grounds that a supporter had paid a man from Springhill fifty cents to take a train to the polls and cast his vote for Tupper. Immune to such corruptions, Sir Charles was re-elected by a greater majority.

After being made a baronet by the Queen in 1888, for the role he played in negotiating a fishing - rights treaty with the Americans, he turned down a proposal by Sir John A. designating Sir Charles as his successor. Tupper saw that by approving the proposal he would break the promise of the Conservative leadership to Sir Hector Langevin, thus threatening national stability by vexing the French - Canadian element. He returned to England in 1887, his main interest during the next six years being the promotion of the British Empire as an economic unit.

On June 4, 1891, Sir John A. MacDonald died. In the course of the next five years his successors were unable to hold the Conservative Government together, and with this slow decay, there began a movement to have Sir Charles accept the Premiership. Many years before, however, when Sir John once remarked to him: "I wish to God you were in my place", Sir Charles had retorted: "Thank God I am not". One can surmise, therefore, that the circumstances surrounding his acceptance of the position in 1896 must have been exigent. And indeed they were. After a series of political power - plays by members of the Cabinet, in which Sir Charles refused to participate, the Prime Minister, Sir MacKenzie Bowell, offered to step down in Sir Charles' favour. Taking over as party leader in the House, he was sworn in as Prime Minister in April 1896, after parliament had been prorogued for a general election. The seventy - five year old leader conducted the campaign during the next three months with the same enthusiasm he had put into his first. But his efforts were to no avail, seventeen years of Conservative Government and the Liberal leadership of young Wilfred Laurier combining to bring about the defeat.

As opposition leader, Sir Charles continued to hold the esteem of both his colleagues and the Government, but in fact he had passed the age where he could revive the spirit of his party. After campaigning for nearly every Conservative candidate in the Maritimes but himself for the election of 1900, he met defeat at the polls for the first time, or rather, as he put it so typically: "The good people of Sydney have released me". In accordance with their respect, many elected Conservatives offered him their seats in Parliament, but he knew that the end of his public life had come, and rejected them all.

The last fifteen years of his life were spent mostly in England, where he greatly enjoyed the social recognition accorded him there. The death of his wife in 1912 signalled for him the gloaming of his life. He died on October 30, 1915.

The highlights in the life of Sir Charles Tupper illustrate that he was truly one of the great Fathers of Confederation. The story behind these achievements, however, reveal that he was a rare giant in the political game, an optimist who, as his biographer Saunders put it:

... was conscious of his personal power, (But) never rested the success of his undertakings in it. What he did do was to assume the right of the people to judge, and that it was his duty to instruct and guide them.

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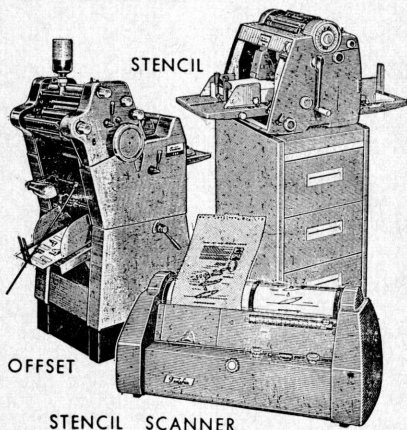
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