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SIR JOHN A. MACDONALD: THE MAN

TUESDAY, JULY 13, 1886. The scene, the CPR station at Winnipeg with a lusty crowd: many Tories, some Liberals, and not a few curious bystanders. Tumults of cheering as a man of 70, still tall, began to address them. During the lull in the enthusiasm a young man near the front audibly observed to a friend beside him, "Seedy-looking old beggar, isn't he?"*

The seedy-looking old beggar was Sir John A. Macdonald. He was Premier of the Province of Canada only from 1857 to 58 — despite what might appear to the contrary—but he played a considerable role in Canadian politics before Confederation, and afterward he was Prime Minister from 1867 until 1891 except for the five years between 1873 and 1878. John A. Macdonald was born in 1815—the year of Waterloo—and was brought up in and around Kingston from about 1820 on. He had his share of hard knocks, and this was no bad introduction to the world of politics then as now. A lawyer by the time he was 21, he was elected to the Assembly of the Province of Canada at 29, was a Minister of the Crown at 32. He had talent, persuasiveness, and what, for want of a better term, one might call address.

He was tall—rangy one could call him—with an easy, negligent air, and in 1867 with black-gray curly hair, and no particular penchant for beard or whiskers. One suspects either that he might not have looked so well—he was certainly no beauty anyway—or that he could not grow them satisfactorily. In any case he always eschewed them. He had a prominent nose, which seemed to become more so as he got older and as it acquired ripeness from years of whisky—perhaps that is just an impression one takes from J. W. Bengough's cartoons in *Grip*—in short he was an unusual, droll, agreeable man, who seemed to have a certain innate sure-footedness amid the

*There are no footnotes for this article. All quotations are accurate and taken mainly from the Macdonald Papers, the Pope Papers, and the Thompson Papers in the Public Archives of Canada, and from the Alexander Campbell Papers and the T. C. Patteson Papers in the Archives of Ontario.

vicissitudes of the world around him, and who seemed to possess a strong unwillingness to be more, or other, than he appeared to be.

He had one trait familiar enough to those with experience of Celts—a temper, which when loosed could be damaging to all concerned, including himself. But as the years went on he became better and better at keeping it in hand, or perhaps, at disciplining it to be used in short flashes as needed. Basically he was a patient man; only when the nerve of his Celtic pride was touched did he flare up, and time sometimes desensitizes that nerve. In 1881, Alexander Campbell, who had by then known him for forty years, told him, “You have a patience which I never saw equalled.” This was not new: on the contrary, it was old and familiar.

Patience. The world was not made in a day, or in two days. And the world is not changed overnight. Macdonald could never have been a true Reformer: he felt that changes do not really change things as they really are. One may reform this, or reform that, but human nature will always find holes in a system: work around it, through it, under it, somehow. No human device could block the basic iniquities of human nature. Not that human nature was good or bad. You had to take men as they were. Don’t expect anything from them; don’t count on love, or loyalty, or honesty. Be grateful when you encounter love, loyalty, or honesty, but don’t be surprised or mortified if you don’t find them. This was no cynicism, although some alleged it to be; it was a strong-grained realism. “There is no gratitude to be expected from the public”, Macdonald wrote Stephen in 1888, “I have found that out years ago.” And there was no reason to be bitter about it. It was the way the world was. “A good carpenter,” he told T. C. Patteson in 1874, “can work with indifferent tools.” So, he went on, stop attacking Cumberland (the Managing Director of the Northern Railway); at least don’t attack him more than you can help. “We may want to use him hereafter.”

That sounds unscrupulous. Perhaps it was. But it is part of something else about Macdonald: he was always willing to forgive and forget. Unlike some of his celebrated Highland forebears, he did not nurse grudges. Life was too short. Oh, no doubt it was hard to work with Brown in June, 1864, in the Great Coalition, after all the bitternesses that had passed between them in the 1850s: but work Macdonald did. “A public man”, he told Chapleau in 1885, “can have no resentments.” Chapleau would have been a better man if he had listened; but then, no doubt, he would not have been Chapleau. One of Macdonald’s favourite sayings, when something unfortunate but irreparable had

happened, was: "It's done. There's no use crying over spilt milk." Forget, and go on.

So he had little stomach for recriminations. The Conservatives who left the fold on the Equal Rights issue after the Jesuits' Estates crisis of 1888 were to be cheerfully accepted back if they would come back or if he could get them back. "Leave the whole question of Equal Rights alone," he wrote W. B. Scarth in 1890. "There were a great many good Conservatives entrapped by that cry who will be all right at election time. There is no use reminding them of their mistake. It might, such is the perversity of human nature, have the effect of making them stick to their cry." Don't be hard on people. Macdonald would have agreed with Lincoln's advice to his generals on the treatment of the local population upon the surrender of Richmond in 1865: "I'd let 'em down easy. Let 'em down easy." John Thompson sailed into McCarthy in a speech in the Commons in 1889 over the Equal Rights agitation that McCarthy was spreading, and attacked him all the more bitterly since McCarthy had been a favourite political son of the old man's, and had turned renegade. Thompson made a brilliant, savage speech. Macdonald wrote to a friend, "Thompson was too good, and walked into McCarthy too hard. 'Ginger', as Queen Elizabeth said to Raleigh, 'makes men witty but it keeps them poor.'" Macdonald had an increasing dislike of bad tempers and petulance. About Van Horne, who was full of snap and ginger, Macdonald said, "The world will continue to go round despite these little displays."

The world went on. And it would continue to do so after the Van Hornes, the George Browns, *and* the John A. Macdonalds, and all the rest, had gone from the stage. And doubtless the world would be none the worse for it. Macdonald's own feelings on the death of a colleague were not the loss to the country, or the things that might have been done had the colleague lived. It was all less public and more personal than that. He liked Norquay of Manitoba despite the trouble Norquay had got him into, and despite his frank recognition that any Norquay government was a bad government; he loved J. H. Pope, whose rough exterior concealed so warm and vital a human being; he would miss Thomas White, whom he loved like a son: death was sad not only because it changed one's world and the world of one's friends, but because it took away something glowing from one's own life. Friends were cultivated by Macdonald because he liked them, not because he used them or he needed them. Of course he *did* use them, *and* use friendship, *and* use his popularity; he never forgot that popularity was power: but his liking for human beings was genuine. And

it is not too much to say that he often liked men as much for their bad qualities as for their good.

He had respect for, and the respect of, some of the Governors-General he worked with, none more than for Lord Lansdowne (1883-1888), whom he used to regale with amusing accounts of Canadian politics long after Lansdowne had gone to India. From Simla, June 23, 1889, Lansdowne wrote in frank appreciation, "[Reading your letter] I fancied myself back in my study at Ottawa, listening to your confidences as to House of Commons prospects, and difficulties, unsuspected by the outside world, within the Cabinet."

As to Cabinets, Macdonald was famous, or notorious. Surely few Canadian politicians could have kept such a congeries of personalities and powers together, and it was widely recognized in the later years of Macdonald's life that when he went the Conservative party would not be long in following. Arthur Lower described it once as "Driving a six-horse team". There were more horses than that, but the difficulties are obvious.

How Macdonald actually managed his Cabinet meetings must now be nearly a closed book, but there are hints here and there. One suspects that he listened much, perhaps not giving the impression that he was, and that he stepped in either to sum up, or to make plain what was the sense of the meeting, or occasionally, as in the case of Charles Tupper, or his son Charles Hibbert Tupper, to make quite clear where final responsibilities and power lay. Macdonald's general role is well put by a bluff old Nova Scotian, A. W. McLelan, who wrote him: "Often when Council was perplexed . . . you had made things smooth and plain. I thought of the expression of an old farmer about my father, 'There are wheels in that man that have never been moved yet.'" This was certainly a feeling that John A. Macdonald gave to many people: the immense richness and variety of his inner resources. Perhaps an epigram of Talleyrand's is apposite here: "The stability of complicated natures comes from their infinite flexibility." There is a wonderful little note in the Patteson Papers about this. T. C. Patteson, former editor of the *Toronto Mail* and at the time Postmaster of Toronto, had got into a literary squabble with some friends, and promptly scribbled a note to the Prime Minister of Canada: "What is the next line to, 'Ye gentlemen of England who sit at home at ease'? Please endorse answer." And on the back of this note is written, in Macdonald's clear flowing hand, "Ah, little do you think upon the dangers of the seas." This in January, 1890. There the letter lies, in the Patteson Papers in the Archives of Ontario, a curious reflection of Macdonald's eclectic knowledge of literature and history. He would lay himself up for days with sherry and Dickens, in the days

when he was living a quasi-bachelor life. And he remembered what he read, as he remembered names and faces. He always seemed to have a story from Sheridan, or Trollope, or Dickens at hand, to say nothing of innumerable stories from less respectable sources.

Both Macdonald and Howe drew widely from literature, but in other respects Macdonald's mind differed from Howe's. Howe may have been no administrator, but he had an unusually fecund and even prescient mind. It was typical of Macdonald that he recognized Howe's qualities, whatever he may have felt about Howe the Nova Scotian, or Howe the administrator. Macdonald remarked to Pope, years after Howe's death, that Howe had "the most seminal mind of any man I have ever met." The tragedy of Howe is partly subsumed within this comment. It also says something of Macdonald, and of Macdonald's way of thinking. Macdonald was not a visionary like Howe, nor a poet like McGee, nor a man to support hard causes like Blake, nor a doctrinaire like Dalton McCarthy; Macdonald was always an empiricist, that is, he always preferred to work in and through experience. He never strayed very far away from the practical world of men and affairs in which he had grown up. He himself made out of this a virtue; but he would have been blind not to recognize the weaknesses that are implicit in it: a tendency to prefer the immediate to the long-term solution, the concrete to the abstract rule of thumb, *ad hoc* decisions to those requiring long and careful analysis. Macdonald defended this attitude in a characteristically teasing reply to Luther Holton in the Confederation debates of 1865. It is also a good example of Macdonald's debating style:

MONDAY, MARCH 13, 1865.

The thing which so utterly destroys the hon. gentleman's utility is his extreme modesty. (Laughter.) Why, when he had to rush to the rescue of the disordered finances of this country, at great personal sacrifice, for the sake of saving the country from the ruin that hung over it through the lavish extravagance of my hon. friend the present Hon. Finance Minister, he looked, with the exercise of his great financial ability, down into the recesses of the public chest and speedily discovered the source of all the evils that had fallen upon the country, and yet the modesty of the hon. gentleman prevented him from making known the remedy. (Laughter.) . . .

The hon. gentleman has somehow or other become the guardian of my political reputation. He has, on two or three occasions, warned me that although the course I took was, perhaps, that of a practical man—that of one who desired merely to keep office and become famous for political acuteness—yet it would never secure for me the fame of being a great statesman. Well, Sir, I am satisfied

to confine myself to practical things — to the securing of such practical measures as the country really wants. I am satisfied not to have a reputation for indulging in imaginary schemes and harboring visionary ideas that may end sometimes in an annexation movement, sometimes in Federation and sometimes in a legislative union, but always utopian and never practical. I am satisfied to leave the imaginary, the poetic and the impossible to the hon. member for Chateauguay.

Confederation is, in fact, a case in point. Macdonald took up Confederation when the real prophets had been talking about it for ten years, and when he finally felt it to be a working possibility, that is, immediately necessary for the well-being of the country and of the Conservative party. And if George Brown was willing, as apparently he was, to risk Coalition on it, why not?

Though Macdonald was good at banter — indeed he could positively infuriate Brown — he did not scruple to praise a member of government or opposition when he felt there was reason for it. Praise and flattery he served up with a good deal of abandon, partly because he liked pleasing people, and partly because he believed you always got further with sugar than with vinegar. Sugar was marvellous for smoothing balky and recalcitrant natures. Even Governors-General needed sweetening, especially Irish ones, like Lord Dufferin, who could dish out the blarney himself. Dufferin delivered an address in Greek before the Convocation of McGill in 1873, and Macdonald and Langevin were present. One of the reporters wrote in his report, "His Lordship spoke the purest ancient Greek without mispronouncing a word or making the slightest grammatical solecism."

"Great Heavens," said Langevin to Sir John in the train, "How did the reporter know that?"

"I told him," replied Sir John.

"But you don't know Greek."

"True," answered Sir John, "but I know a little about politics."

Some natures, Macdonald recognized, need treatment of a different kind. Among these were the Tupper, both father and son. Macdonald needed Tupper, but Tupper, like many Maritime politicians of the time, had a rather more blatantly parochial view of politics, and did not hesitate to insist on things for himself (or his family) that others would have been less obvious about. Sometime in 1879, Tupper insisted that the Winnipeg law firm of Tupper and Macdonald (the sons of the two men) should be given substantial Government business to handle in Winnipeg. Macdonald thought such a proceeding would be improper; Tupper insisted and talked about resigning; Macdonald said

sharply that he would not have a pistol pointed at him by Tupper or anyone else. The result of this was that for two years Macdonald and Tupper did not speak to each other privately, and in public only on official business. With Charles Hibbert Tupper, who was a chip off the same Cumberland County block, Macdonald had to be just plain heavyhanded, though never entirely losing his jocular touch. This he had, and used, to soften up the rigours of personalities. One day, after the business of the Cabinet was over, he looked long and seriously at John Carling, his Postmaster General, from London, Ontario. At last he asked, "Carling, I wonder if God Almighty ever created a man as honest as you look?"

As with Carling, so with Chapleau. Chapleau in 1889 wanted J. H. Pope's former post as Minister of Railways, and aroused strong pressure from Quebec province, and the Montreal district in particular, to get the job. Macdonald said no—in a variety of ways, but still no—since it would have given Chapleau, as Macdonald well knew, unlimited opportunities to make jobs for his friends, as in fact Hector Langevin, partly unknown to Macdonald, was already doing.

Despite Macdonald's easy-going nature he was not to be pushed, and he had a dignity that was dangerous to cross. He was conservative in the old-fashioned sense of believing that society had evolved certain ways of doing things that ought to be observed; he believed that in the forms and prescriptions of society there was a proper way. Edgar Dewdney, the Indian Commissioner of the North West Territories, was told by Sir John that on any official matter he should address himself through the Deputy Minister concerned. "Forms," said Macdonald firmly in a PS, "are *things*." Forms were real, and probably indispensable in a society that still retained something of the stamp of an aristocracy. Yet, if Macdonald had to choose, he invariably went for the man, and not the manners. "External polish," he once wrote to Patteson at the *Toronto Mail* (it was to be a text for an anti-Goldwin Smith editorial), "not infrequently conceals littleness of mind and vulgarity of thought." John Henry Pope had no manners, and was as rough-textured as they come, but he had tremendous capacity, a strong shrewd mind, and a great fund of common sense, and Macdonald loved him. Macdonald retained to the end of his days this happy and easy command of the way things were done, yet without ever losing his grip on, and his recognition of, the essentials of people themselves. For example, Macdonald's secretary, Joseph Pope, once remarked of J. J. C. Abbott that he had an agreeable nature and a sweet smile. "Yes, a sweet smile," replied Macdonald, "all from the teeth outwards."

Lady Macdonald remained firmly at home, and was rarely allowed in-

fluence in political decisions. Macdonald on his own hearth was extremely gracious and kind to his wife; but let Lady Macdonald tell: "My lord and master who in his private capacity simply lives to please and gratify me . . . is absolutely tyrannical in his public life as far as I am concerned. When I pressed him on an appointment Sir John looked very benign, very gracious, very pleasant — but — *answered not one word!* He never does!!" Perhaps one reason was that Macdonald seems never to have been especially attracted to, or influenced by, women. His first marriage was a long and harrowing experience, for Isabella was never really well and died in 1858, leaving him a son to look after — Hugh John. His second marriage, in 1867 when he was 52, was certainly not a triumph of heart over head. Macdonald was a man's man. He enjoyed a lusty sense of humour, and he was invariably amused at others who could not leave women alone, old Sir Charles Tupper being the most notorious example. What amused him still more was George Foster, a bachelor and former classics professor from King's College, Fredericton, who at 42 decided to marry a woman who, by Canadian law, was still married. It was all the more surprising since Foster, Macdonald's Minister of Finance, was a stern teetotalter, and had hitherto lived a life of the greatest probity. Ottawa society was shocked by this escapade. Macdonald was not shocked, but he felt that society's retribution would be swift. He wrote to Lansdowne in India:

She [Mrs. Foster] is ignored by society here and will not be received at Government House—He [Foster] has returned to this office, attends Cabinet meetings, and things go on as if he were a Batchelor. But I don't think he can go on—he will be stung to death next session by the opposition who are accustomed you may remember, to call a spade a spade. He will be forced to leave public life. I am sorry for Foster who has ruined a prosperous career — But as Sir Matthew Hale long ago said, "There is no wisdom below the belt".

A sage and cynical remark. But it is a comment perhaps on both sagacity and cynicism that Foster finally faced down his difficulties and outlived both them *and* his new wife. In 1920 he married again at the age of 73!

Macdonald would never have allowed himself to be in Foster's position, for he had far too much respect for the forms of social observance. At times, and in other shapes, this attitude became a kind of political timidity. Macdonald was as susceptible in this respect as other Canadian prime ministers, Mackenzie King being the most obvious example. In Macdonald's later years political timidity — that is, political timidity where there was no immediate party advantage involved — became a positive weakness. It was owing in part to

the difficulty of recruiting and keeping able new men, which was itself partly due to Macdonald's instinct for tried and true friends; it was also owing in part to the sheer difficulty of governing Canada. As every Canadian prime minister has had to learn, Canada is a hard country to govern. In 1885 the Cabinet was a mess; Macdonald admitted that himself. He got his old friend Alexander Campbell to stay on, but in agreeing to do so, Campbell wrote: ". . . let me say how much I hope we may get on without this eternal yielding to everyone, who has, or thinks he has, control of a few votes . . . The constant giving way to truculent demands and our delays and the irritation and mischief which they produce are in everybody's mouth . . ." Of course this was easy counsel from a Senator. Still, it was a real and palpable problem, and Campbell said a lot more in a letter written about the same time to T. C. Patteson:

Things have been going badly in the Ministry for a year or more. Macdonald has lost his grasp and does nothing he can help. Putting off, his old sin, has increased upon him until it has become an irritation to have relations with him . . . he retains his old power of dealing with his followers and his keen insight into motives of action — but for the work of government and of legislation he is gone I think . . . he wasted months before bringing it [the Franchise bill] in at all; simply, I believe, from feeling that he only had a very hazy view of the subject, and a desire for more time, with his usual reliance on the hurry of the House at last . . . tell me what you think and tear up this letter.

Patteson agreed. "He was always timid and yielding," he said, "and if he has ever taken a bold stand I think it was because he had a bold man at his elbow at the time."

Undoubtedly, part of the trouble lay in the fact that Macdonald, like most men, became less willing and less able to change as he grew older. And while timid in the face of real votes and real pressures, he had come, by the mid-1880s to dominate and sometimes to tyrannize the Cabinet. John S. Thompson, the newly-arrived Justice Minister from Nova Scotia, was not one to accept the old man's views without question. "I showed fight," he wrote to his wife in 1867, "and refused to agree to an opinion of his on a legal question. Of course the poor old fellow is worried to death but I do not care for him and I am so determined to let him see it that I could insult him at every turn while he keeps it (his gruffness and bad temper) up. This is unheard of heresy here because the practice is to worship him from afar even when he is ugly."

Troubles, troubles. Macdonald had by this time — Thompson was writing in 1887 — gone through many, and if he tried to avoid them it was not because

he did not expect them. On the contrary, Macdonald was realist enough rarely to expect things to run smoothly. No government this side of heaven would run smoothly. Trouble was as natural as joy. Patteson once was complaining of debts and manifold difficulties. "Why, man," replied Macdonald, "do you expect to go through this world without trials and worries? You have been deceived — and this wounds the proud spirit of Man. . . . As for your present debts treat them as Fakredden in Tancred treated his — He played with his debts, caressed them, toyed with them. 'My lovely debts,' said he, 'what would I do without them?' Debts and troubles come to us as 'the sparks fly upward'. *Vide Job passim* — but they disappear like summer flies and new ones come. Take things pleasantly but when fortune empties her chamberpot on your head — smile and say, 'we are going to have a summer shower'. . . ."

Macdonald's whole administration from about 1882 onward reflects increasingly his willingness to believe that all troubles are temporary and that, in a little while, like sparks, they will pass. "Time and I are a match for any two men," he used to say. A good example of this technique is the story about a man whose name is unknown but whom we can call Dobson. It dates from 1879:

. . . one fine morning Dobson appeared at the office of Sir John in Ottawa. "Why, I know your face," began Sir John. "Stop now, don't tell me, you are Dobson, and I stopped all night at your house in the campaign of 1878, and I told you on leaving, if ever you wanted anything, to come right to me. Take a seat. I'm glad to see you. How's your wife? Good. And what can I do for you?" Feeling at home and flattered at his reception, Dobson opened out in a confidential drawl: "Well, yes, Sir John, that's the p'int. You see I kind o' failed in business here a month or two ago, and my friends thought as there was no Ass-ign-ee ap'inted for our country, I ought to git the place: so I tuck a notion I'd come down and see you about it." "What!" replied Sir John, perking himself up and looking at the top of his interviewer's head, "a man with a head like yours, and with ability such as you have, to take the paltry position of assignee! Why your talents would be simply thrown away in a place like that. No, no! You just wait a while, and we'll give you something better than that." Carried away with this high estimate of his abilities by the Premier of Canada, Dobson agreed that it would be better to wait until a more suitable vacancy occurred, and departed a proud and self-satisfied man, content to wait for the high honor of the future. Meantime the office was given to a presumably better man, and the day never came when a sufficiently dignified position was open for Dobson.

It is true that many difficulties like this will pass, and in such a way. But the impression remains that as time went on Macdonald became less and less

willing (or less able) to distinguish those troubles that would pass from those that would not. He was probably right in his view that in administration 90 per cent of the things that come on one's desk could be postponed or put in the wastebasket. Not that he always did this; it is surprising sometimes how conscientiously he did deal with little things. Just seven weeks before his death Macdonald received a letter from George Foster (then Minister of Railways—Macdonald couldn't and wouldn't give that portfolio to Chapleau) on the momentous question of the pay of the baggage master at the station at Hampton, that well-known metropolis of central New Brunswick. Should it be increased from \$1.20 to \$1.50 a day? Would Sir John kindly look into the matter? Macdonald did. (The answer was no.) But notwithstanding minor solutions of minor problems, there remained a limbo of real, large, and unanswered problems. The most notorious example of Macdonald's putting-off habits was the Saskatchewan rebellion of 1885, which, it would appear, ought never to have occurred at all but for Macdonald's inveterate habit of putting off, putting off in the hope that if a thing was put off long enough it would go away. So often they did, but sometimes they did not. In 1868, it was Tilley who had to warn him that Nova Scotia could not be allowed to drift on as she was; as Tilley fairly put it, "there is no use crying peace, when there is no peace." It is a pity that there was not a Tilley in Saskatchewan in 1884. Langevin had been there, but Langevin was not Tilley. By 1885, it was too late.

"Old Tomorrow", in short, did not get his nickname for nothing. The truth is that it is a serious and difficult matter to decide when, or how, or—still more important—if, a particular problem is to be redressed. There is no use mounting a charger and hitting issues head on; usually you do not need to. You can often work your way around issues and outflank them. Macdonald on the Jesuit Estates is a good example. The Jesuits' Estates Act was an Act of the Quebec legislature, perfectly within its competence and broadly agreed to in advance by both Protestants and Catholics within the province of Quebec. But the language of the preamble to the Act was admittedly provocative, and in any case it took very little to provoke Ontario Protestants, at least those of that day, into demanding disallowance of the Act. A mighty tempest arose, with the "drum ecclesiastic", as Macdonald put it, beating across Ontario. The Government at Ottawa held its peace. Mercier, the Premier of Quebec, in Ottawa on other business, had an opportunity in the intervals of a formal occasion to whisper to Macdonald, "Are you really going to disallow our Estates Bill?" Macdonald whispered back, "Do you take me for a damn fool?" And the Jesuits' Estates Act never was disallowed. That was sensible, and it

serves to introduce a footnote on Macdonald's relations with French Canadians. "The French will always be French", Macdonald used to say.

He had few prejudices. He genuinely liked the French Canadians, and his long political success was based heavily on their support. Not even Laurier could dent that — not until after 1885 and really not until after Macdonald's death in 1891. Macdonald's realism comes through very well in a letter he wrote to the editor of the *Montreal Gazette* in 1856:

The truth is that you British Lower Canadians never can forget that you were once supreme — that Jean Baptiste was your hewer of wood and drawer of water. You struggle, like the Protestant Irish in Ireland, like the Norman invaders in England, not for equality, but *ascendancy* — the difference between you and those interesting and amiable people being that you have not the honesty to admit it. You can't and won't admit the principle that the majority must govern. The Gallicans may fairly be reckoned as two thirds against one third of all the other races who are lumped together as Anglo-Saxons — Heaven save the mark! . . . The only remedies are immigration and copulation and these will work wonders. The laws are equally administered to the British as the French, at least if we may judge by the names of your judges it ought to be so. Lumping your judges of the Queen's Bench, Supreme and Circuit courts, you have full one half British. More than one half of the Revenue Officers, indeed of all offices of emolument, are held by men not of French origin. It would surprise you to go over the names of officials in a Lower Canada almanac and reckon the *ascendancy* you yet hold of official positions. Take care the French don't find it out and make a counter-cry. True, you suffer occasionally from a Gavazzi riot or so, but in the first place you Anglo-Saxons are not bad hands at a riot yourselves, and, in the second place, the rioters are not Franco-Canadians, nor Canadians of any kind. No man in his senses can suppose that this country can for a century to come be governed by a totally unfrenchified government. If a lower Canada British desires to conquer he must 'stoop to conquer'. He must make friends with the French, without sacrificing the status of his race or language, he must respect their nationality. Treat them as a nation and they will act as a free people generally do — generously. Call them a faction and they become factious. . . . I doubt very much if the French will lose their numerical majority in L.C. in a hurry . . . and I am inclined to think they will hold their own for many a day yet.

Macdonald never really deviated from this. His notes for a speech against Dalton McCarthy show the same policy at work thirty-three years later. Dalton McCarthy had been trying to get the French language abolished in

the North West Territories. Now, said Macdonald, what is the point of doing that? There's not much expense in the arrangement as it stands. In any case you can only irritate, since you can't eradicate French that way. Or for that matter, any other way. You might as well say "pills are good for earthquakes." Leave the French alone; remember a rule of human nature that if you antagonize people you will only make them more refractory.

It was this kind of philosophy, too, that made Macdonald a good party man. He believed that a political party was worked by loyalty and love and money and jobs, all mixed up together. To him it was a kind of treason not to stick to the party. Take the problem of the Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario in 1887. John Beverly Robinson had been Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario since 1879, and was very anxious to stay on, but was already two years and eight months over his five-year term. There was to be an election in 1887, in June, and it was certain that if the Liberals (Macdonald called them Grits) won, they would immediately install one of their friends as Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario. It was too big a plum to lose this way. Macdonald wrote that, much as he would like to leave Robinson in his office, he could not; there was that election, and if the Conservative party were to lose it, "it would have been treason to my party if I had left your important office to the chance of being filled by the Grits."

Equally, he expected his appointees to behave as Conservatives. George Kirkpatrick in 1888 wanted a cabinet post. Macdonald said no: "You are not strong enough in the House; when you were Speaker of the Commons you were afraid of Blake, and decided Parliamentary questions against your Conservative friends." This would not do. It was the same with CPR. No doubt there were Grits employed on the CPR, but the Government did not expect them to have important jobs, or to last long if they did. This was made so completely clear to Stephen and Van Horne that by 1884 Macdonald was able to assert that the CPR had no one working on the line who was not — he used Van Horne's pithy phrase — a "fully circumcized Conservative."

The gerrymander of 1882, "hiving the Grits", was only a more notorious example of the same thing. It was unscrupulous; it was politics at its worst: Macdonald thoroughly enjoyed it. It was within the power of the Government, but it was certainly unethical by modern assessments, and to some degree it had come to be so regarded by the 1880s. Certainly the Liberal party thought it was unethical, the logical result, as they said, of the Canadian electorate being so wilfully wrong-headed as to return Macdonald and the Conservatives in the election of 1878. Macdonald was never very scrupulous

when it came to making the most of party advantage; and far from weakening him with his own followers, this made him the more admired and liked. In some things it is a tragedy for Canadian politics that Macdonald was often admired and liked for the wrong reasons.

Macdonald was quite cheerfully hypocritical about making sure that a suitable front was always preserved. H. H. Smith, the Conservative organizer for Ontario, wrote him in 1882 that a prominent man was willing to make a substantial contribution to party funds in return for a fat timber licence. No doubt this might be done quietly for well-established Conservatives, but the decent appearances had to be preserved. Besides, it might be a Liberal trick. Macdonald wrote back: "It won't do that the slightest suspicion get abroad that timber licenses on Government lands could be got in return for political support of election subscriptions. The offer to subscribe for the next elections if a timber limit were granted should be pooh-poohed by you as impossible."

A concomitant of his party feeling was loyalty, even blindness, toward old friends, some of whom ought to have been chastised instead. Langevin is one example. And Macdonald had a strong vein of sympathy for those of them who had fallen on bad times. There is a letter from Tilley a month before Macdonald's death, in April, 1891, saying how hard up he is, and that after he steps down as Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick he will have to live on his capital, not having sufficient income. And this, though Tilley did not say so, after twenty-four years of service to the country, and another earlier dozen to his native New Brunswick. Macdonald sent the letter on to Foster, writing on the back: "My dear Foster, This is a sad letter. We must leave him in Government House as long as possible."

Perhaps best of all about Macdonald was his *bonhomie* and good humour. He used to enjoy teasing Blake and Cartwright about their perennial predictions of doom and gloom. Replying to Blake's speech on the Address in 1883, he remarked:

My hon. friend puts me in mind of the captain of an old Newcastle collier who had been boxing the compass for many years, and had been in almost every foreign country. After seven years in the West Indies he came back to England, and when his ship was approaching land and he felt the familiar sleet and storm, and saw the familiar clouds, he put on his sou-wester and peajacket, and said, 'This is something like weather! None of your infernal blue skies for me!'

Or his *bonhomie*. When David Thompson was sitting for Haldimand, in the

days when the record of the riding was an unbroken string of Liberal victories, Thompson was laid off for nearly a whole session of Parliament through illness. He got down to Parliament at last, and told the story of his reception as follows:

The first man I met on coming back was Blake. He passed me with a simple nod. 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, said Thompson with genuine pathos, "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 greeting for me, and oppose a man with a heart like Sir John's."

One last quotation comes to mind, from the pen of a man who was no Conservative, but in fact the editor of the *Toronto Globe*, and once the *Globe's* parliamentary correspondent. There is no better first-hand description of Macdonald by a man who had no reason to love him or admire him, John Willison, and from, of all places, the beginning of Volume 2 of Willison's *Sir Wilfrid Laurier and the Liberal Party*.

It was his habit to sit with his legs crossed and his head thrown back, with a jaunty air and an alert look, except now and then when some keen debater across the floor was pressing him hard, dealing square, strong blows at "the old man and the old policy," with perhaps a touch of bitterness in the words, and a keen knowledge of the old man's ways revealed in the method of attack. At such times he would move uneasily as the enemy pressed him close, toss his head, bite his lips, glance angrily back upon his followers, throw some taunt to his opponents, and at last come to his feet and retort upon the adversary. In later years he rarely lost his complete self-control. In his angriest mood he was deliberate, and seemed as he faced his opponents to be coolly and craftily seeking for the weak spots in the indictment. He did not always meet argument with argument. He had little eloquence. He had no loftiness of speech. He never sought to cover the whole ground of an opponent's attack. That elaboration of argument and exhaustive mastery of detail which distinguished the speeches of Mr. Blake is generally lacking in the speeches of Sir John Macdonald. In Parliament he rarely spoke to convince or win the Opposition. His aim there was to touch the party loyalty and rouse the party enthusiasm of his supporters. He would often turn his back upon the Liberals and address himself directly to the Ministerialists. He would strike some happy thought, some sentence full of keen sarcasm or genial ridicule, and

with a shrewd look and smiling face and jaunty air, would drop the sentence with a shrug of the shoulders and a half-contemptuous gesture that always tickled his followers, and often exasperated his opponents. There he would stand with his back to the Speaker, while the Opposition chafed at the cool but skilful exaggeration of their position, and the Conservatives cheered with delight, and wagged their heads and shrugged their shoulders in sympathy with the old man's bantering humour.

He would pass one of Mr. Blake's most powerful arraignments of his policy with a shrug and a story that perhaps had grown old in his service. He would meet one of Sir Richard Cartwright's most scathing exposures of the tendencies and results of his rule and methods with a smile for his followers and a jocular reminder for his opponents that the country had heard these arguments, and he was still in office. . . .

Sir John Macdonald knew, as few men have known, how to use the social influence to political advantage. The man who came to Parliament with unsettled opinions, who wanted social notice, who wanted something for his constituency, was likely soon to find himself at the wheels of the old man's chariot. The young member was always noticed. The waverer was strengthened, and the wounded were healed. His appeals to party loyalty were always effective. His followers never failed to laugh when he joked. They always cheered his appeals. They always warmed into enthusiasm when he pointed to his majority in the House and in the country, and to the record of his achievements. The Conservatives in Parliament and in the constituencies loved Sir John Macdonald, and few men who had ever followed him could withstand his personal appeal. He had won great victories for his party, he had led them to triumph again and again, and they were grateful and loyal to the end, and mourned for him as for one taken out from their very households.

Macdonald we can leave at the point where we began: that first trip to the West by a Canadian prime minister, in 1886. It is in 1886, if at any time, that we can date the real beginning of the Canadian union in a practical and concrete meaning of the word, with the first operation of the transcontinental CPR passenger service. Until 1886, Canada was a political expression, little more. Joseph Pope recalled in his diary how he watched Macdonald addressing the huge crowd at the CPR station at Port Moody, B.C., one fine Saturday, July 24, 1886. "I couldn't help thinking," Pope wrote, "as I stood by that old man standing on the shores of the Pacific, with his grey hair blowing over his forehead, what a triumphal moment it must have been for him."