


SIR JOHN A. MACDONALD

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 **RIGHT HON. SIR JOHN ALEXANDER MACDONALD, K. C. B.**, distinguished Canadian statesman and chief promoter of Confederation, was born at Glasgow, Scotland, Jan. 11, 1815, and died at Ottawa, Canada, June 6, 1891. Removing with his parents to British America in 1820, the family settled near Kingston, Upper Canada, where the future statesman received his education at the Royal Grammar School. He afterwards studied law and was admitted to the Upper Canada Bar. The era succeeding the rebellion is the turning-point in the political history of the Canadas. It is the era in which reform was to see its work crowned in the overthrow of the oligarchical "Family Compact," in the application of the elective principle to the irresponsible legislative council, and the full attainment of responsible government. It was at this period (1844) that Sir John Macdonald entered political life, and by his abilities and readiness in debate gained that commanding position in Canadian politics, at the head of the Conservative party, which secured him in later years a long lease of power. Macdonald attained office, first as Receiver-General and afterwards as Commissioner of Crown Lands. After an experience in opposition, Mr. Macdonald became Attorney-General in the coalition government of 1854, and two years later assumed the Premiership. His political fortunes varied considerably down to the period of Confederation, which was brought about by a deadlock of parties, the contest being one of race and religion, as well as of faction strife. When the Union was consummated, in 1867, he became Premier, and acted as Attorney-General and Minister of Justice, while the seat of government was permanently located at Ottawa. With the acquisition of the Northwest and the entrance of British Columbia into the Confederation, there came the need of railway construction to connect the Pacific colony with the provinces in the east. At first, political difficulties brought a crisis upon the country, in which Sir John Macdonald's administration fell, in 1873, owing to its being implicated in corrupt dealings with the proposed contractors for the railroad. In 1878, however, he regained power, and continued until his death at the head of a Liberal-Conservative administration. In 1871, he acted as one of the high commissioners in the settlement of the "Alabama" Claims and the initiation of the Washington Treaty of that year, and he visited London in 1880 to arrange with the Imperial authorities the terms for the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railroad. Sir John possessed in a remarkable degree the art of governing, and though his political methods were often open to criticism, he has left an indelible impress upon his country.

SPEECH ON CANADIAN CONFEDERATION

DELIVERED IN THE CANADIAN PARLIAMENT, FEBRUARY, 1865

[The Dominion of Canada was born July 1, 1867. In February, 1865, the proposed union was discussed in the Parliament of Canada. Sir E. P. Taché moved a series of resolutions in the Legislative Council, while Attorney-General Macdonald

(afterward Sir John) moved a resolution in the Legislative Assembly to the effect that the colonies of Canada, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, and Prince Edward Island should be united in one government, with provisions based on certain resolutions which were adopted at a conference of delegates from the said colonies, held at the city of Quebec on the 10th of October, 1864. In moving this resolution Mr. Macdonald made what is possibly his most famous speech.]

MR. SPEAKER,—In fulfilment of the promise made by the government to Parliament at its last session, I have moved this resolution. I have had the honor of being charged, on behalf of the government, to submit a scheme for the confederation of all the British North American Provinces,— a scheme which has been received, I am glad to say, with general if not universal approbation in Canada. The scheme, as propounded through the press, has received almost no opposition. While there may be occasionally, here and there, expressions of dissent from some of the details, yet the scheme as a whole has met with almost universal approval, and the government has the greatest satisfaction in presenting it to this House.

This subject, which now absorbs the attention of the people of Canada and of the whole of British North America, is not a new one. For years it has more or less attracted the attention of every statesman and politician in these provinces, and has been looked upon by many far-seeing politicians as being eventually the means of deciding and settling very many of the vexed questions which have retarded the prosperity of the colonies as a whole, and particularly the prosperity of Canada. The subject was pressed upon the public attention by a great many writers and politicians; but I believe the attention of the legislature was first formally called to it by my honorable friend the Minister of Finance. Some years ago, in an elaborate speech, my honorable friend, while an independent member of Parliament, before being con-

nected with any government, pressed his views on the legislature at great length and with his usual force. But the subject was not taken up by any party as a branch of their policy until the formation of the Cartier-Macdonald administration in 1858, when the confederation of the colonies was announced as one of the measures which they pledged themselves to attempt, if possible, to bring to a satisfactory conclusion. In pursuance of that promise the letter or despatch which has been so much and so freely commented upon in the press and in this House was addressed by three of the members of that administration to the Colonial Office.

The subject, however, though looked upon with favor by the country, and though there were no distinct expressions of opposition to it from any party, did not begin to assume its present proportions until last session. Then men of all parties and all shades of politics became alarmed at the aspect of affairs. They found that such was the opposition between the two sections of the Province, such was the danger of impending anarchy in consequence of the irreconcilable differences of opinion with respect to representation by population between Upper and Lower Canada, that unless some solution of the difficulty was arrived at we would suffer under a succession of weak governments,— weak in numerical support, weak in force, and weak in power of doing good. All were alarmed at this state of affairs. We had election after election, we had ministry after ministry, with the same result. Parties were so equally balanced that the vote of one member might decide the fate of the administration and the course of legislation for a year or a series of years.

This condition of things was well calculated to arouse the earnest consideration of every lover of his country, and I am happy to say it had that effect. None were more impressed

by this momentous state of affairs, and the grave apprehensions that existed of a state of anarchy destroying our credit, destroying our prosperity, destroying our progress, than were the members of this present House; and the leading statesmen on both sides seemed to have come to the common conclusion that some step must be taken to relieve the country from the deadlock and impending anarchy that hung over us. With that view my colleague, the President of the Council, made a motion founded on the despatch addressed to the Colonial Minister, to which I have referred, and a committee was struck, composed of gentlemen of both sides of the House, of all shades of political opinion, without any reference to whether they were supporters of the Administration of the day or belonged to the Opposition, for the purpose of taking into calm and full deliberation the evils which threatened the future of Canada.

That motion of my honorable friend resulted most happily. The committee, by a wise provision — and in order that each member of the committee might have an opportunity of expressing his opinions without being in any way compromised before the public or with his party in regard either to his political friends or to his political foes — agreed that the discussion should be freely entered upon without reference to the political antecedents of any of them, and that they should sit with closed doors, so that they might be able to approach the subject frankly and in a spirit of compromise. The committee included most of the leading members of the House, — I had the honor myself to be one of the number; and the result was that there was found an ardent desire — a creditable desire I must say — displayed by all the members of the committee to approach the subject honestly, and to attempt to work out some solution which might relieve Canada from

the evils under which she labored. The report of that committee was laid before the House, and then came the political action of the leading men of the two parties in this House, which ended in the formation of the present government. The principle upon which that government was formed has been announced and is known to all. It was formed for the very purpose of carrying out the object which has now received to a certain degree its completion, by the resolutions I have had the honor to place in your hands.

As has been stated, it was not without a great deal of difficulty and reluctance that that government was formed. The gentlemen who compose this government had for many years been engaged in political hostilities to such an extent that it affected even their social relations. But the crisis was great, the danger was imminent, and the gentlemen who now form the present administration found it to be their duty to lay aside all personal feelings, to sacrifice in some degree their position, and even to run the risk of having their motives impugned, for the sake of arriving at some conclusion that would be satisfactory to the country in general. The present resolutions were the result. And, as I said before, I am proud to believe that the country has sanctioned, as I trust that the representatives of the people in this House will sanction, the scheme which is now submitted for the future government of British North America.

Everything seemed to favor the project, and everything seemed to show that the present was the time, if ever, when this great union between all her Majesty's subjects dwelling in British North America should be carried out. When the government was formed it was felt that the difficulties in the way of effecting a union between all the British North American colonies were great, — so great as almost, in the opinion of

many, to make it hopeless. And with that view it was the policy of the government, if they could not succeed in procuring a union between all the British North American colonies, to attempt to free the country from the deadlock in which we were placed in Upper and Lower Canada, in consequence of the difference of opinion between the two sections, by having a severance, to a certain extent, of the present union between the two Provinces of Upper and Lower Canada, and the substitution of a federal union between them. Most of us, however,—I may say, all of us,—were agreed,—and I believe every thinking man will agree,—as to the expediency of effecting a union between all the Provinces, and the superiority of such a design, if it were only practicable, over the smaller scheme of having a federal union between Upper and Lower Canada alone.

By a happy concurrence of events the time came when that proposition could be made with a hope of success. By a fortunate coincidence the desire for union existed in the Lower Provinces, and a feeling of the necessity of strengthening themselves by collecting together the scattered colonies on the seaboard had induced them to form a convention of their own for the purpose of effecting a union of the Maritime Provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island, the legislatures of those colonies having formally authorized their respective governments to send a delegation to Prince Edward Island for the purpose of attempting to form a union of some kind. Whether the union should be federal or legislative was not then indicated, but a union of some kind was sought for the purpose of making of themselves one people instead of three.

We, ascertaining that they were about to take such a step, and knowing that if we allowed the occasion to pass, if they

did indeed break up all their present political organizations and form a new one, it could not be expected that they would again readily destroy the new organization which they had formed,—the union of the three Provinces on the seaboard,—and form another with Canada,—knowing this, we availed ourselves of the opportunity and asked if they would receive a deputation from Canada who would go to meet them at Charlottetown for the purpose of laying before them the advantages of a larger and more extensive union by the junction of all the Provinces in one great government under our common sovereign. They at once kindly consented to receive and hear us. They did receive us cordially and generously and asked us to lay our views before them. We did so at some length, and so satisfactory to them were the reasons we gave; so clearly, in their opinion, did we show the advantages of the greater union over the lesser, that they at once set aside their own project, and joined heart and hand with us in entering into the larger scheme, and trying to form, as far as they and we could, a great nation and a strong government.

Encouraged by this arrangement, which, however, was altogether unofficial and unauthorized, we returned to Quebec, and then the government of Canada invited the several governments of the sister colonies to send a deputation here from each of them for the purpose of considering the question with something like authority from their respective governments.

The result was that when we met here on the tenth of October, on the first day on which we assembled, after the full and free discussions which had taken place at Charlottetown, the first resolution now before this House was passed unanimously, being received with acclamation as, in the opinion of every one who heard it, a proposition which ought to receive

the sanction of each government and each people. The resolution is:

“That the best interests and present and future prosperity of British North America will be promoted by a federal union under the Crown of Great Britain, provided such union can be effected on principles just to the several Provinces.”

It seemed to all the statesmen assembled,— and there are great statesmen in the Lower Provinces, men who would do honor to any government and to any legislature of any free country enjoying representative institutions,— it was clear to them all that the best interest and present and future prosperity of British North America would be promoted by a federal union under the Crown of Great Britain. And it seems to me, as to them, and I think it will so appear to the people of this country, that if we wish to form — using the expression which was sneered at the other evening — a great nationality, commanding the respect of the world, able to hold our own against all opponents, and to defend those institutions we prize; if we wish to have one system of government and to establish a commercial union with unrestricted free trade between people of the five Provinces, belonging, as they do, to the same nation, obeying the same sovereign, owning the same allegiance, and being, for the most part, of the same blood and lineage; if we wish to be able to afford to each other the means of mutual defence and support against aggression and attack, — this can only be obtained by a union of some kind between the scattered and weak boundaries composing the British North American Provinces.

The very mention of the scheme is fitted to bring with it its own approbation. Supposing that in the spring of the year 1865 half a million of people were coming from the United Kingdom to make Canada their home; although they brought

only their strong arms and willing hearts; though they brought neither skill nor experience, nor wealth,— would we not receive them with open arms and hail their presence in Canada as an important addition to our strength? But when, by the proposed union, we not only get nearly a million of people to join us; when they contribute not only their numbers, their physical strength, and their desire to benefit their position; but when we know that they consist of old-established communities, having a large amount of realized wealth — composed of people possessed of skill, education, and experience in the ways of the New World — people who are as much Canadians, I may say, as we are — people who are imbued with the same feelings of loyalty to the queen and the same desire for the continuance of the connection with the mother country as we are, and at the same time having a like feeling of ardent attachment for this our common country, for which they and we would alike fight and shed our blood, if necessary,— when all this is considered, argument is needless to prove the advantage of such a union.

There were only three modes — if I may return for a moment to the difficulties with which Canada was surrounded — only three modes that were at all suggested by which the deadlock in our affairs, the anarchy we dreaded, and the evils which retarded our prosperity, could be met or averted. One was the dissolution of the union between Upper and Lower Canada, leaving them as they were before the union of 1841. I believe that that proposition, by itself, had no supporters. It was felt by everyone that, although it was a course that would do away with the sectional difficulties which existed; though it would remove the pressure on the part of the people of Upper Canada for the representation based upon population, and the jealousy of the people of Lower Canada