

*P.B. Waite*

### **Annie and the Bishop: John S.D. Thompson Goes to Ottawa, 1885**

In his *Government of Nova Scotia* Murray Beck has suggested that the movement of provincial political leaders to Ottawa has deprived provincial politics of vitality and talent; that it was a form of haemorrhage, leaving provincial political life undernourished and anaemic.<sup>1</sup> Whether or not it did, it was inevitable. The instinct was there. It was not confined to the years after Confederation nor, for that matter, limited to North America. T.C. Haliburton and Samuel Cunard migrated to Great Britain for literary and business reasons. Politicians would find that more difficult, but they would try. Francis Hincks of the Province of Canada became Governor of Barbados. Joseph Howe wanted very much to do the same thing. Charles Tupper complained in 1860 in a speech in Saint John that it was going to be difficult to find an outlet for *his* ambition within Nova Scotia. "Small countries make small men," said his lieutenant, Jonathan McCully, in 1865. Even Ottawa was to hold Tupper for only seventeen years. In short, Dominion politics was a natural outlet for the restless, the ambitious and the avaricious.

It was the same in business, and that too started before Confederation. W.C. Macdonald (1831-1917) came to Montreal from Prince Edward Island in 1854 and made his fortune in the tobacco business. The Dawsons came to Montreal from Halifax and set up their publishing firm in 1847. J.W. Dawson of Pictou and Halifax became Principal of McGill University in 1855. Confederation simply speeded up a process already in existence.

The first and most prominent institution to attract ambitious Maritimers was the federal cabinet. Until Robert Borden ended the practice in September, 1911, Nova Scotia had two representatives in every Dominion Cabinet. Then Nova Scotia had one. The same thing happened to New Brunswick under Laurier in July, 1896. Prince Edward Island was like poker with deuces wild, J.C. Pope appearing for a time in Sir John Macdonald's 1878 Cabinet, and Louis Davies in Laurier's of 1896.

Some Nova Scotian cabinet ministers were not particularly gifted or striking. Edward Kenny, in Macdonald's first cabinet from 1867 to 1870, was pleasant and had some agreeable business and diplomatic skills, but that was all. Tupper, who replaced him in 1870, and Howe, who replaced A.G. Archibald, were certainly famous enough; though perhaps it ought to be remembered, more often that it is, that Howe was 18 years older than Tupper, and in January, 1869, when he joined Macdonald's government, he was showing all his 64 years and more. Tupper, bold as brass and twice as loud, was soon to become the Government's bodyguard and strongman, ready to defend it, on any subject, on five minutes' notice. Tupper was not a fool, though at times he acted like one. In any case he was impossible to ignore, then or later.

Alexander Mackenzie's Nova Scotian ministers were much worse. At least Mackenzie found them so. Thomas Coffin, MP Shelburne, appeared bereft of talent or sense. W.B. Vail of Digby was not much better. A.G. Jones of Halifax had quality, but he came very late on the scene.

Macdonald's 1878 cabinet had Tupper, and also James McDonald MP Pictou, as Minister of Justice. McDonald appears to have had minimal political talents and headed to the Bench as soon as he could decently arrange it. He was replaced by A.W. McLelan, MP Colchester, able, judicious, and hardworking in his own department, but not of great general use in the House and not to be relied on in difficulties there.

Thus, when Sir Charles Tupper left the Macdonald cabinet in 1884 to go to England as Canadian High Commissioner, he was soon very much missed. Macdonald found in 1885 that he could hardly be absent from the House for an hour without some awful blunder happening. The only ministers of much general use were three Quebec ones, J.H. Pope, Adolphe Caron, and Hector Langevin. The rest were nearly useless outside their own departments, and not all were valuable within. The whole Cabinet in 1885 was old, tired, sick, and, one must admit, dispirited. Macdonald badly needed solid, younger men, who would be powerful departmental administrators, as well as lions in the Commons, unafraid of Opposition bluster, and ready to defend the Government as well as their own departments. (It ought to be added that Macdonald felt this need well before the events at Duck Lake in late March, 1885.) The surprising thing is that Macdonald found not one but three able new ministers by the late summer and fall of 1885: Thomas White of Montreal, who was soon to win golden opinions as Minister of the Interior;

George Foster of New Brunswick who became Minister of Marine, later of Finance; and John S. D. Thompson of Nova Scotia, the most powerful work-horse of them all.

J. S. D. Thompson then was 39 years old.<sup>2</sup> His parents had been Methodists in religion and radical in spirit. His mother came from the Orkneys, his father from Waterford, Ireland. There was a character of other-worldliness about them both. They were teetotallers, and uncompromising ones, the father especially. People admired John Sparrow Thompson; he was vigorous, intelligent, apt to call spades spades, and saved from being impossibly abrasive by a broad streak of common humanity. Even sinners were human. Even the rich were. From his father John S. D. Thompson acquired a lifelong dislike of great wealth. "I never want to be filthy rich," he once said. He meant it. He was only slightly less poor when he died than when he started.

Thompson, like his father, had not many obviously comfortable failings. People like agreeable weaknesses; they unbend in the presence of them. Thompson had, ostensibly, very few. He had little knack for dispensing casual hypocrisy. Like Robert Borden, he was apt, if pressed too hard, to say what he really thought. There was also ginger in him; his usually controlled utterance belied the man within. No one in the Commons was soon to forget his explosion at Sir Richard Cartwright in June, 1892. Perhaps Thompson had been teased too much. Thompson was, said Cartwright, like the lady immortalized by Alexander Pope, who was

a sad, good christian at the heart  
(but) a very heathen in the carnal part.

That sally was too close for comfort. Cartwright went on to compare Thompson with Robert Louis Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Even so, Thompson might not have replied as he did had Cartwright not followed all that with one of his "kiln-dried" speeches of gloom and doom. Said Thompson:

I am much obliged to the hon. gentleman, further, for not allowing Parliament to separate, after a session of nearly five months, without his giving us another of those war, famine and pestilence speeches which have so often carried constituencies for the Government. . . Sir, I decline the hon. gentleman's brief.

Sir RICHARD CARTWRIGHT. You must have the fee first.

Sir JOHN THOMPSON. I have some experience, both in defending criminals and in prosecuting them; I have never shrunk in my calling as a

member of the bar, from taking any man's case. . . but I have sometimes spurned the fee of a blatant (*sic*) scoundrel who denounced everybody else in the world, and was himself the truculent savage of them all. . . Why, Sir, the hon. gentleman would rather abuse his country and defame it, than eat his breakfast any day.<sup>3</sup>

Thompson must not be thought of as a cold fish. He was anything but. He was passionate, intense, a volcano of a man; he had iron control over himself that, in public, was rarely allowed to give way. In private it was different. That is why his domestic correspondence is important. Like Mackenzie King's diary perhaps, it offers a third dimension to an otherwise two-dimensional appearance. At home Thompson was a man of tears and laughter, an uxorious husband, a charming father. Outside he was a powerful adversary, not to be crossed lightly. He *was* a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Few Ministers of Justice were harder toward men who beat children, or toward women who deserted them. He hated cruelty with, rightly, an unreasoning hatred. He also had brains, application, and integrity. He was to take hold of his new office almost at once. Macdonald had never much doubted the wisdom of trying to get Thompson, and he certainly never regretted having done it. Within a couple of years he was saying, "My greatest discovery was Thompson."

This paper goes in a circle. It begins with Thompson in Ottawa, in November, 1885, retreats backward over his career, and ends up in September, 1885 again. It is a circle mainly of domesticity.

"That is Mama's fault however—that I am here." So wrote Thompson to his 11-year old son, Joseph, from Ottawa, November 27, 1885.<sup>4</sup> It was a lonesome Friday evening. Thompson missed his family and his fireside in the old house at Willow Park out on Windsor Street, Halifax.<sup>5</sup> He positively craved his mail. Every day at 1:30 P.M. or so, the messenger would arrive at the East Block office of the Justice Minister with the mail from Nova Scotia. Thompson would scan anxiously the bundle for letters from home. He was already tired of Ottawa after two months. "I know all about it (Ottawa)," he wrote to Joe, "because I walk a good deal in the evenings to keep off the lonesomeness. I suppose I feel a good deal like you will when you go away to school.<sup>6</sup> I miss very much the pretty views of the harbour,—the (Bedford) Basin and the (Northwest) Arm which we get about Halifax. Up here you see nothing but houses in town and nothing but bleak fields and rough roads out of town."<sup>7</sup> Ottawa and its countryside was a desert of streets and farms. Thompson would not be the last Nova Scotian to feel this way on being translated to Ontario from the south shore of Nova Scotia. But it was his family most of all that he felt lost for. "Transplanting a man like me." he wrote to his wife, Annie, a few weeks later, "is very hard work. He withers all the time."<sup>8</sup> Annie wrote him back a marvellous letter:

Oh my Pet my Pet

Cant you bully things out when I am trying to do so. . . Baby you break my heart, if you dont try to be more of a boss, and look this thing in the face and make the best of it for a little while until I can be with you; I think even at the long distance that we are from each other, a sympathy still makes us feel alike. On Sunday too, as it rained and stormed I thought if only I could be with you long enough just to kiss and hug you and run my hands through your hair, that I would be satisfied; and tonight at Truro, as we met the Quebec Express going through I wanted so much to get on board and run up to see you, that I looked quite wistfully after the train as it passed out of sight. . . Now once for all you must not talk in that disconsolate way about yourself(.) I wont have it, I am each day bullying through, trying to get our bills paid, and having in view the object that we spoke of(.) of trying to get some (of) our Mortgages paid off(f), in fact if we only had them all cleared away with our house free from rent, we if all came to the worst could live on not a great deal, and there you are crying like a child that had been stood in a corner with its apron over its head for punishment. You know dear that for myself I have no ambition for any thing in this world but your love, having that I have everything that I want but you know I am so proud of you that, even if I am doing wrong, I cannot help pushing you on, and please God it will turn out all right. . . .

Now dear they (the children) are all asleep, the old clock is ticking away, and it is nearly 1 o'clock so good morning to the biggest baby and the best pet that ever a woman in this world had.

Annie<sup>10</sup>

Thompson's motives in going to Ottawa in 1885, in accepting Macdonald's offer of a cabinet post, were tangled; but behind all the tangle of motives was Annie. As the letter above suggests, she had at least two powerful reasons driving her. One was to push her talented husband as far, indeed further, than he was prepared to go. She wanted to get him out of the scholarly, but vegetative life of a Justice of the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia, into a world that felt the beat of life a bit harder, that would exploit, perhaps develop, talents she believed her husband possessed. The second reason was more obviously domestic: to help clear the family debt.

Almost the whole weight of supporting two families, his wife's and his own, was on Thompson's shoulders. His father-in-law, Captain James Affleck, had been lost at sea in 1870, and left a widow and six children, the eldest of whom was Annie, aged 25, the youngest Frances, aged 3. Two Affleck sons died in the 1870's, and a third, Peter, was a ne'er-do-well, to whom Thompson sent money as long as Thompson lived. He had also to support his own mother, his father having died in 1867. Martin Griffin, Parliamentary Librarian from 1885 to 1921, who grew up in

Halifax with Thompson, remarked to Sir Charles Tupper in 1888, "He (Thompson) and I started with desperately heavy weights to carry, and we have an almost insane desire for certainties in life."<sup>11</sup> This explains Thompson's exigencies in 1885.

Thompson had entered politics in 1877, and when he became Attorney General of Nova Scotia, in 1878, he gave up a good part of a remunerative practice that he had built up over a decade.<sup>12</sup> His salary as Attorney General was \$1600 per annum, and his political career began before he had really established any substantial savings. His political life was to help to keep him poor, and because of subsequent decisions and difficulties, he was to be in modest circumstances the rest of his life. Thompson was also an easy mark for anyone who wanted a loan, temporary or permanent. Not a few people in Halifax and in Antigonish county owed him money. Annie was to beg him, more than once, not to listen to, especially not to act upon, frequent importunities of this kind.

It is essential to say something of his marriage. Thompson was unusual in several respects, but he was an exceptionally private man—as much so as Borden—a man who loved his home and his fireside. His emotions were incandescent, but he had that tremendous fire banked and under control, or nearly always. Sunday, November 22, 1885, from Ottawa:

My own darling-

I have to try very hard—especially on Sundays, to think that I am not lonesome and to try not to be but sometimes it comes like an acute pain and I can hardly help flying home. Oh my darling you need not ask me to tell you how I love you! I laid awake most of last night regretting all the time I have been ugly and cross to you. . . .

May 31, 1886:

I had a wretched day yesterday, feeling as if I could get no rest unless I could get my head on your shoulder. So am I not a great fool and very childish(?) Your nice long letter was a great comfort this morning. . . .<sup>13</sup>

Of course one can say, on evidence like this, it is just another case of a husband too long away from home. But Thompson was almost the same when he was away from Annie a week, on judicial circuit in Nova Scotia. Annie was just as bad as he was. She had to go to Sydney for a week in August, 1882, and wrote back:

Well I can tell you one week with nothing to do but sleep and eat is quite enough for me and if ever you do get me moving(?) again without you just consider yourself divorced (*sic*). . . Good by my own pet and this is the last time in my life that I'll go 200 miles just to be homesick.<sup>14</sup>

When Thompson went to Ottawa in the autumn of 1885, they wrote each other once a day, sometimes oftener. Annie said truly, when she went to her newly acquired postbox downtown to get his letter of December 10th, "I think more about my letter every day than about my dinner."<sup>15</sup> Frances Affleck, now 18 years old, contemplated her 40-year old sister immersed in pen and ink with some amusement, writing to her brother-in-law:

Annie has just turned into an immense sheet of paper, bottle of ink and bad pen since you left—at the slightest provocation she takes up arms, and I suppose pours her woes, real or imaginary into your sympathetic ears. She is at it now and will be until the wee sma' hours. . . .<sup>16</sup>

Young John Thompson probably met Annie Affleck for the first time in 1866, when they were both 21 years of age. Both seem to have had other flames (she certainly), but once their courtship started it seemed exclusive, determined, and long. Thompson was an ardent courtier. Annie left a diary for half of 1867, and from that it is obvious that Thompson was at Annie's house about six evenings a week. In fair weather, and sometimes in foul (for Annie loved a storm), they walked all over Halifax. Indoors he taught her French, and, perhaps unfortunately, he taught her his shorthand. Thompson was a skilled shorthand writer and in that year, 1867, was the official reporter of the Assembly debates. (Unfortunately, I have not been able to crack Thompson's shorthand.)<sup>17</sup> Annie was not always well, in 1867, at any rate; one has an impression of an attractive, high-spirited but high-strung girl, who seems to have had a number of bouts of illness or of hypochondria. This courtship went on—I presume so in the absence of evidence to the contrary—at the same heady level for another three years. Sometimes so many letters came to Annie Affleck's place on Starr Street (not more than 1/4 mile away from where Thompson was living on Gottingen Street), that at times his letters were even smuggled into her.

Twenty years later, one cold Sunday evening in January, 1886, when her sister and the maid were both out, when the children were all asleep in bed, Annie got out her box of these old letters from Thompson, to read beside the fire. Then she wrote him a deliciously cosy letter, almost, as she admitted a few nights later, throwing herself at his head:

. . . I do so want to see my poor old Grunty to night. I think I must have grown very worldly and hardened my heart very much when I sent you away as I did,(.) Perhaps in old times I was not worldly enough and cared too little for anything outside of you and the children and the house, but now that the children are growing up I feel as if a stand should be made

for their sakes and yours, and then my own (,) I know (,) felt as if the mildew of the grave was on him without his being buried. So I think if my darling only keeps his health,<sup>18</sup> that for a time at least he will like his new life when he gets a little more used to it, and by and bye when we get old we'll settle down into our old way of living for one another first. I hope tomorrow's letter will bring me some good news that my pet is feeling well, and that he is just as fond of me as in the times long ago when I used to get smuggled notes from him. Now pet I am going to settle up my accounts for the week (,) put away my letters, and then as long as the fire burns brightly, I'll sit by it and think of you, Good night Tiney, Grunty Tory Pet.

Annie<sup>19</sup>

Their correspondence always had this sense of vibration. When Thompson's party was defeated—or was about to be—in the 1882 campaign, Annie wrote him.

My poor old tired Tory

. . . except that we never gave up a fight yet I wouldn't mind if you put on your hat and left them to-morrow it is better to fight as long as you are started and be beaten than not to fight at all. So keep up your courage and I'll go part of the way to meet you coming home win or lose they cant keep you from me much longer. John (aged 10) is very much exercised to know they should want another man instead of pa. . . So now my old baby you must not be such an awful awful baby until you can get home again and then I'll see how far you can be indulged.<sup>20</sup>

Thompson had always wanted to be a judge. Ever since he was a young man going on walks around Halifax with Martin Griffin, or later on with Annie, this rather academic bent seemed to show itself. Perhaps it was part of his quest for certainty, perhaps part of the same search that took him to the Roman Catholic church. After three years as Attorney General of Nova Scotia, he had had all the politics he wanted. In October, 1881, he confessed himself quite unattracted even by federal politics. He was in Ottawa for the first case at the Supreme Court of Canada, that autumn term of 1881. He wrote to Annie:

I have Jim McDonald's room here (McDonald, MP Pictou, Minister of Justice 1878-1881) and can judge pretty well what kind of life a (federal) minister leads here under such circumstances and under all circumstances and—please make a note of it—I would not live it for \$15,000 a year so that is settled. I can practice law and support the house at that but I *will* have (a) home whether I make much or little.<sup>21</sup>

It was just at this time when the negotiations began about Thompson becoming a judge of the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia. It was in fact



virtually settled; but there was a condition attached by Sir Charles Tupper, that Thompson take the provincial Conservatives through the provincial election, due in 1882, first.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, the speed with which Thompson disappeared from politics in July, 1882, after the defeat of his government in June, rather shook his followers. The Liberals crowed that the seat on the Bench had been kept warm for him all the time. And that was true. He had been promised the reversion of J. W. Ritchie's place, *coûte que coûte*.<sup>23</sup> The injudicious celerity with which he accepted the appointment made Thompson uncomfortable. He had a feeling that he had not done all he might have done, a feeling, as he told C. H. Tupper, of "having left friends and leaders in the fight when I might have done service by staying. The latter impression was very vivid when I thought of your father—of his heroism in every fight and of his evident ill-health and weariness."<sup>24</sup>

Thompson's bad conscience over the way he had left politics in 1882 is *à propos*, he reveals it when Charles Hibbert Tupper is inviting him to enter federal politics in mid-March, 1885. Thompson found young Tupper's proposition "most gratifying to ambition and giving greater scope to an active disposition than the work of the Courts can ever do. But there seem to be several strong reasons why I should adhere to my present duties and position."<sup>25</sup> It is not perfectly clear what Hibbert Tupper's proposal was, but it probably meant a Cabinet post in Ottawa, to replace Sir Charles Tupper who had gone to London nine months before. Old Sir Charles Tupper himself wrote from London to his son, sceptical that Thompson would be much use in Parliament. Thompson, said Tupper, had not been a conspicuous success in Nova Scotia. Moreover, Sir Charles thought judges once appointed to the Bench, should stay there. They should not re-enter political life.<sup>26</sup> And, for the time being, that was that.

As the long difficult session of 1885 dragged on in Ottawa, Sir John A. Macdonald felt more and more the need of a strong man. J. F. Stairs, MP Halifax, sat near Sir John, and persuaded him the man he needed was Thompson. Approaches were made again, in June, 1885, this time by A. W. McLelan, who was too blunt and was as bluntly refused.<sup>27</sup> Charles Hibbert Tupper appeared in Halifax in July, when Thompson appeared to bend a little; but at that time Thompson insisted that if he did go to Ottawa, he would go only as Minister of Justice. He would not go otherwise.<sup>28</sup> This stipulation was probably not Annie's doing. It emanated from the Bishop of Antigonish, a mighty Scottish warrior named John Cameron.

Bishop Cameron's role in Sir John Thompson's life is not, even now, easy to assess. They first met in the later 1870's probably through Archbishop Connolly of Halifax. Their friendship cemented rapidly and it was permanent. After Archbishop Connolly died in 1876, Bishop Cameron became Thompson's ecclesiastical mentor. Thompson admired the Bishop: the Bishop respected Thompson's ability and integrity.

Cameron was born in Antigonish county in 1827. Educated locally, he was sent to Rome at the age of 17, where he was ordained in 1853, taking a D.D. in 1854. He was already Sub-Secretary at the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda in the Piazza di Spagna, and knew his way around the labyrinthine diplomacy of ecclesiastical Rome. He was sent out as Rector of St. Ninian's and Professor of Classics at St. Francis Xavier in 1854, became Rector of Assumption Cathedral at Arichat in 1863, and was Vicar-General to Bishop C. F. Mackinnon by 1865. He was sent to the Vatican Council of 1870, and while in Rome was consecrated Bishop of Titopolis, *in partibus infidelium*. He became the 3rd Bishop of Arichat in 1877. Three years later he succeeded in moving the seat of the diocese to Antigonish. Indeed, he knew his way in Rome! He was a man of considerable prestige, and he never seems to have hesitated about using it. Discretion he had; he had not been educated in Rome for nothing; his letters to Rome are in as smooth an Italian as that of a Roman cardinal.<sup>29</sup> But he was a Scot, the son of a convert from Presbyterianism, and he had his loyalties. Thompson was one of his loyalties.

The stipulation of Thompson's that he go straight into the Justice portfolio put Macdonald fairly up against it. He did not like to ask Sir Alexander Campbell, an old and trusted friend, to resign as Minister of Justice, for a new and rather untried Nova Scotian. Eventually, as the pressure increased, Macdonald felt more and more he might have to give way.

Thompson was not at all sure he wanted to come to Ottawa at all, and, if he did come, there were other things he felt necessary. He did not, apparently, want to run in Antigonish County again. He had not much enjoyed being MLA Antigonish, 1877-1882; he did not, so the Halifax gossip ran, "enjoy seeking the suffrages of 'village ruffians.'"<sup>30</sup> And he much preferred a constituency that was at least partly, even half, Protestant. What could be done about this problem remained to be seen. Macdonald for his part suggested to Thompson that there was no prospect of honour or riches, that he would be fearfully abused, and

would certainly die a poor man. Macdonald was candid. Thompson was equally so, and made no definite answer.

By the end of August some answer was becoming necessary. The Bishop had talked to Sir Charles Tupper and one or two conditions were made there, enough for the Bishop to offer a *nihil obstat* to Thompson if he wanted it.<sup>31</sup> It seems to have been J. J. Stewart,<sup>32</sup> editor of the Halifax *Herald*, an old confidant of Thompson's, who finally turned the scale. He went out to Thompson's house on Windsor Street early on the morning of Monday, August 31, 1885 to get a decision. Thompson now left this, at last, to Annie. He himself had no real ambitions beyond his legal life, beyond the Bench. But Annie was different. As Hector McInnes put it, ten years later, "he was not ambitious, but she was. She decided it."<sup>33</sup> Thus was Thompson persuaded to join the Macdonald government.

Sir Alexander Campbell had in the meantime been making noises about wanting out of the Government altogether. Macdonald did not want that, and persuaded him to stay on. Campbell reluctantly agreed (making a few choice comments as he did<sup>34</sup>); but he did not yet know that he was going to have to switch portfolios, and be shunted into the Post Office. With infinite patience Macdonald finally put it to him, appealing to his sense of loyalty, on September 12th.

If we don't get Thompson I don't know what to do. There are great jealousies among the Nova Scotians as they stand on an equality of unfitness, but they would all yield to the superior abilities of Thompson.

Campbell grumbled, but swallowed his pride. It was not the first sacrifice he had made for Sir John Macdonald, and it was getting near the last. (He was appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario, in June, 1887.) Campbell was, however, like Sir Charles Tupper, uneasy about Thompson:

Thompson is probably an able man from what they all say—He has the air of man educated for the priesthood with a nervous look and subdued manner(.) I should think it extremely doubtful how far he will be of real value in the Commons.<sup>35</sup>

There were some other obstacles, not all of them minor. It was soon clear that Thompson, whether he liked it or not, would have to stand for Antigonish. The political lay of the land there was peculiar. The present MP was a Liberal, Angus McIsaac, who wanted to be a County Court Judge. It was "his soul's desire".<sup>36</sup> McIsaac was, however, intensely

disliked by the local Conservatives, and they resented even more allowing a patronage plum like that going to be a *Liberal*. There were threats that if McIsaac resigned, that seat would be contested. And would he resign even if he promised to do so? Here Thompson got his way. He wanted McIsaac's resignation as MP before he would move. Given the treachery of Antigonish politics it was a wise precaution. Sir John Macdonald accepted it without demur. A telegram on September 21st announced to Thompson that the way was clear. "Your county vacated—send resignation (as Judge) to Secretary of State—wire despatch of letter—will act on telegram and issue writ (for bye-election). . ."<sup>37</sup>

There was one last quibble. Thompson wanted to be sworn in as Minister of Justice before going for election. Macdonald agreed to that too. Thompson arrived in Ottawa, Friday, September 25, 1885 at noon. Martin Griffin and George Johnson<sup>38</sup> met him at the train, cossetted him a bit, cheered him up over lunch at the Russell House; but, added Thompson in his inevitable letter to Annie, "I could not stand the depression so long as this but for feeling all the time that you wished me to do what I have done." A. W. McLelan brought him to the Privy Council room, introduced him to Sir John. Macdonald sat down, "light as a bird . . . and wrote my resignation which I signed—then took me into the Council. . ." Thompson was sworn in at noon the next day. Ottawa was looking beautiful, as often it can in September; all the Cabinet were cordial and pleasant, and by the time he left for Halifax again, Monday, September 28, 1885, Thompson was feeling rather better about his Ottawa prospects.<sup>39</sup>

His prospects in Antigonish continued to darken. He returned to face the hard, bitter, indeed "desperate", bye-election that was to develop there.<sup>40</sup>

But he was at last Minister of Justice. And Minister of Justice he would remain, across nine eventful years, including two years as Prime Minister, until Wednesday, December 12, 1894. That was the day when all things stopped together. Thompson was just 49 years old.

#### NOTES

1. J.M. Beck, *The government of Nova Scotia* (Toronto, 1957), p. 159.
2. Thompson himself said he was born November 10, 1844; and this is the date everywhere given. The records of the Brunswick St. Methodist Church in Halifax give November 10, 1845. I am inclined to believe the church. There may have been family reasons for adhering to the earlier date.

3. Cartwright has Pope's lines in the wrong order, but otherwise it is fairly accurate, from Pope's "Of the Character of Women." See Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, 1892. 4354; 4268-70. (June 28, 1892.)
4. PAC, Sir John Thompson Papers (TP, hereafter), Vol. 297, letters to Joe, November 27, 1885.
5. The property belonged to John Young "Agricola" (1773-1837), who called it "Willow Park." Thompson acquired the property under mortgage in 1872.
6. Joe was to follow his elder brother John to Stonyhurst in Lancashire, in September, 1887.
7. TP, Vol. 297, Thompson to Joe, December 4, 1885.
8. TP, Vol. 289, Thompson to Annie, Sunday, January 17, 1886. His wife was Annie Affleck (1845-1913), whom he married in July, 1870. She was born and raised in Halifax. Her father was a sea-captain.
9. Thompson and his wife had at least 8 children between 1872 and 1883. Three died, the most recent being David Anthony in March, 1885, aged 20 months.
10. TP, Vol. 283, Annie to Thompson, Wednesday, January 21, 1886.
11. PAC, Sir Charles Tupper Papers, Vol. 9, Martin Griffin to Tupper, July 25, 1888.
12. TP, Vol. 6, H. Gerrior to Thompson, October 3, 1878, referring to Thompson to Gerrior, September 28, 1878. Gerrior was the parish priest at Havre Boucher, in Antigonish County.
13. TP, Vol. 289, Thompson to Annie, November 22, 1885; May 31, 1886. There are numerous other examples, such as November 18, 1885, or November 20, 1885.
14. TP, Vol. 283, Annie to Thompson, Tuesday, August 8, 1882, from North Sydney.
15. *Ibid.*, Annie to Thompson, Sunday, December 13, 1885.
16. *Ibid.*, Frances Affleck to Thompson, November 20, 1885.
17. TP, Vol. 293, Annie Affleck's Diary, June-December, 1867. Her occasional shorthand notes, and Thompson's, used what seems to be a variation of Gurney, but they have not so far been susceptible of reduction by standard Gurney texts.
18. This reference is not to any chronic illness of Thompson's, but to the fact that he had a sharp bout with a kidney stone while in Ottawa in November, and produced a lively domestic contretemps in the process.
19. TP, Vol. 283, Annie to Thompson, Sunday, January 24, 1886. It is said, but there is only one letter in the Thompson papers from Thompson to Annie, before they were married in 1870.
20. *Ibid.*, Annie to Thompson, Wednesday, June 14, 1882.
21. TP, Vol. 288, Thompson to Annie, October 25, 1881.
22. *Ibid.*, Thompson to Annie, October 30, 1881. It seems quite clear from this correspondence that the matter was largely settled. D. H. Gillis' article, "Sir John Thompson's elections", excellent and accurate in most respects, leaves it unclear whether Thompson was to stay on for the election. (*CHR.* XXXVII, No. 1, March, 1956, 32-3.)
23. J.W. Ritchie (1808-1890) was so unwell in 1881 that it was known among his close friends that he would resign soon. He did, early in 1882.
24. University of British Columbia, Sir Charles Hibbert Tupper Papers, Thompson to Tupper, March 19, 1885 (private), from Halifax.
25. *Loc. cit.*
26. PAC, Tupper Papers, Vol. 6, Tupper to C.H. Tupper, March 26, 1885.
27. Dalhousie University Archives, Archibald MacMechan Papers, Private Journals, December 30, 1894. MacMechan that day had met Hector McInnes (1860-1937), already an important Halifax Conservative, and who knew much of the inner history of the party.
28. PAC, Macdonald Papers, Vol. 273, C.H. Tupper to Macdonald, July 20, 1885, private, from Halifax.
29. Archives of the Sacred College of the Propaganda, Rome, America Settentrionale, Vol. 11, John Cameron to Cardinal Simeoni, November 1, 1870, announcing his arrival in Arichat from Rome. These archives are open to February, 1878, the end of the pontificate of Pius IX.
30. Archibald MacMechan Papers, Private Journals, December 30, 1894.
31. TP, Vol. 31, Cameron to Thompson, August 29, 1885. The Bishop had also asked—and this is rather surprising—that Sir Charles Tupper should re-enter the Macdonald cabinet before the next general election, presumably on the future retirement of A.W. McLelan. Tupper promised and he did what he promised. He became Minister of Finance, January 27, 1887, four weeks before the 1887 election. McLelan became Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia in 1888.

32. J. J. Stewart (1844-1907), one-time Principal of Amherst Academy became editor of the *Halifax Morning Herald* in 1878, succeeding Martin Griffin.
33. Archibald MacMechan Papers, Private Journals, December 30, 1894.
34. See P.B. Waite, *Canada 1874-1896: Arduous Destiny* (Toronto, 1971), p. 145; also Campbell's even more frank comments to T. C. Patteson at about the same time. *Loc. cit.*
35. Macdonald Papers, Vol. 197, Macdonald to Campbell, September 12, 1885 (private); Campbell to Macdonald, September 13, 1885, and September 14, 1885 (there are two letters on the latter date.)
36. William Miller explains this move in his pamphlet, *Incidents in the public career of the late Sir John Thompson not contained in J. Castell Hopkins' book* (n.d., n.p.), p. 14.
37. Macdonald Papers, Vol. 273, Macdonald to Thompson, September 21, 1885, draft telegram.
38. George Johnson (1837-1911) came from Annapolis Royal, and had been editor of the *Halifax Reporter*. He was currently the Ottawa correspondent of the *Toronto Mail*.
39. Thompson Papers, Vol. 288, Thompson to Annie, September 25, 1885, September 26, 1885.
40. *Ibid.*, Thompson to Annie, October 13, 1885, from Antigonish.

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