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CANADIAN POLITICAL ORATORY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY: II

III. *The Order of Competence*

Sir John A. Macdonald

AMONG CANADIAN POLITICAL ORATORS of the nineteenth century were a few—very few—who on the whole were free from the faults of McGee and Blake, and who in addition were often brilliant in one or more aspects. Of these Sir John A. Macdonald was most noted, and for us is most important, chiefly for his homey personality and his brilliant tactics.

Sir John A. was remarkably adaptable, and in a manner peculiarly his own. He did not try to change either himself or even his style to suit various occasions and audiences; he was not conciliatory like most of the others: instead, he seemed in some magnetic manner, to impress his own peculiar character on any situation and on any audience. It is true that there was a slight difference between his public addresses and his speeches in the legislature: he talked, not at, or to, but with his audience at banquets and on the hustings, while in the legislature he often adopted a slightly superior tone when talking to his opponents. But this was the only difference, and it was really a difference in degree rather than in kind, for Sir John A. was always superior to his opponents, whether they were present or absent.

He usually opened his public addresses by getting his audience to laugh. He would poke fun at them, at his opponent, or at himself; no matter which course he took, the result was always the same—his character was established and each man in the audience would chuckle to himself, "He's the same old John A." From then on he would hold his audience by his personality: he was one of them but at the same time he was their leader—in short, he was *primus inter pares*. He established this position in at least three ways. The simple fact that he was the one doing the talking helped him. So did the fact that he obviously knew more about the question at hand than anyone in the audience. And most important for holding the audience

was the fact that he was entertaining them, simply by being that fabulous character, Sir John A.

In diction and the use of figures Sir John A. could be as trite as any of the other orators, as will appear in later quotations and as can be seen in this blissfully careless series of metaphors with their damp spark and fluid foundation:

It was here on this platform that the first spark was lighted. (Applause.) It was here that the wave of enthusiasm which spread over the whole Dominion originated. (Cheers.) It was here that the foundations of the National Policy were laid. (Cheers.)⁶

But his was a plain style; his lack of pomposity or egotistical rhetoric made him one with his audience and allowed for such carefree ease. In addition he had a homely power of expression. He could call his opponents "a parcel of political hacks"; and he could make familiar allusions in a humorous way: "It is one thing to lead a man by kindness and courtesy, and another to shake a halter and say 'come along.'"⁷ Better still, he could tell anecdotes in an effective, rambling way. Speaking about Mackenzie, he said:

Well, gentlemen, his course puts me very much in mind of the western man in the United States. He was a leading member of the Democratic party, and was seeking the suffrages of some constituency in the far west; so, addressing them somewhat in Mr. Mackenzie's style, he said to them: "Gentlemen, I have laid before you the platform of the Democratic Party—these, gentlemen, are the principles of the Democratic Party; I am a Democrat, a dyed-in-the-wool Democrat; these are the principles fastened on my banner; by these I will stand or fall; but, gentlemen, if they do not suit they can be changed." (Prolonged applause and uproarious laughter.)⁸

However engaging Sir John A. may have been, however, one should not overlook the fact that he was unscrupulous—in fact, doubly unscrupulous, for he undoubtedly traded on the goodwill he had established in his audience. In one speech he protested that neither he nor his party ever made personal attacks:

Our views may be wrong, but I say this, if you read those speeches, you will not find one word without its warrant. We attacked no private character; we made no fling at private conduct; we never struck below the belt. (Enthusiastic cheers.) ("White Banquet," p. 5.)

Yet even in the same speech he made all sorts of personal attacks: he called Mackenzie a renegade and a hypocrite, he said Brown was unpatriotic and practically disloyal, and he made a "fling at private conduct" by remarking that a cabinet minister might at that moment be about the country looking for a new wife (p. 22 and *passim*). He could sneer at an opponent in a sarcastic tone readily imagined:

It is said, gentlemen, for rumours will get abroad too, that even that great and good man, Lucius Seth Huntington (great laughter), will soon be provided for; and that he is going to deprive the Dominion of Canada of his wondrous ability, of his active zeal, of his industry (laughter), of his legal knowledge (laughter), and of his commercial probity (applause); he, too, it is said, is going to deprive the country, and Parliament and Government of his services, and what his future is to be, the future alone can tell. ("White Banquet," p. 17.)

He could rouse the rabble, by appealing, for instance, to lower-class prejudice against "theorizers and philosophers" (*Dominion Campaign*, p. 7). And he got across embarrassing topics in the most barefaced manner. Whenever such a topic had two or more aspects—like the Pacific Scandal, or the Double Shuffle—he would ignore all but the one aspect that he could explain away with an air of injured innocence. He would appear to be guiltless in that one aspect and therefore, since he neither mentioned nor even hinted at any other aspect, he appeared innocent of the entire charge.

When making a prepared address—for example, at a banquet or when interrupted by questions in the legislature—Sir John A. saw to it that his structural organization was fairly good. Usually he had a lot of material in his speech, but rarely did it prove so much that it prevented the proper treatment of individual topics. One of his major speeches, moreover—the one at the White Banquet—fell, perhaps accidentally, into the pattern of a classical forensic oration. After appropriate preliminaries, in his *confutation* he defended his former administration from certain Liberal charges, and in his *confirmation* made several charges in turn against the Liberals. Since these were only charges and not carefully reasoned arguments, he was able to develop and amplify each sufficiently. Whether this fitting into the pattern of the classical oration was accidental or not, the organization shows Sir John A.'s considerable care for structural form.

Within this careful organization of the larger divisions of his speeches, however, Sir John A. was content to ramble haphazardly. There was usually no necessary sequence in the order of the smaller blocks of thought. His paragraphs likewise left something to be desired. Though not marked typographically, it is clear that they generally began with an abrupt transition from the preceding paragraph, led into a topic sentence which announced the theme, and then proceeded in a straightforward development to a conclusion that was often striking. This structure was much better than McGee's, of course, but still it left the paragraph a closed unit, with no preparation for the one to follow. His sentence structure was also characteristic for it was frequently dictated by his desire to win applause: he would fling out m-

phatic statements one after another, each aimed at drawing applause and each getting it:

During the whole of [our administration] we were assailed, hindered, and harassed by a most unpatriotic Opposition. (Hear, hear.) I am a strong party man; I will go as far in favour of my party, and in upholding my party, and in securing the success of my party as any other man—as far as a British statesman can or ought to do (hear, hear, and applause); but I will not do it, and I have never done it, if there was a question of the interests of my country. (Cheers.) Our maxim has always been—by a party, with a party, but *for* the country. (Hear, hear, and applause.) But Mr. Brown's and Mr. Mackenzie's maxim has been—by a party, with a party, and *for* a party (hisses and groans); and Mr. Mackenzie very naively in his speech the other day, admits it. I had said in the gaiety of my heart—inspired by the victory of my friend Mr. Robinson—(Hear, hear)—I had said that when the Grits came in about thirteen years ago, the weevil came in with them, and that two years ago they brought in the Colorado bug. (Laughter.) Mr. Mackenzie replied in his speech: "Well, I have got to say this: if I have to choose between John A's Government and the Colorado bug, I would choose the Colorado bug." (Laughter.) That is just the spirit of the man and his party. (Lead applause, and voices, "That's correct.") He would rather have plague, pestilence and famine; he would rather have Colorado bugs (laughter), locusts and caterpillars, (laughter), war and ruin (hear, hear), distress and panic, anything, everything, no matter what it might cost the country, no matter how the interests of the country would be prejudiced by it; he would rather have this country afflicted with them all, one after another, than see John A. go in and Mr. Mackenzie go out. (Hear, hear.) I say, gentlemen, from 1854 until we resigned, we had to meet an Opposition of that kind. ("White Banquet," p. 9.)

On the hustings Sir John A. frequently followed a course different from that in his prepared addresses. He welcomed questions and interruptions, and indeed seemed to seek them, moulding his speech around them and proceeding from one to the other until he had covered every topic he originally had intended to. The principal advantage of this hustings method was that, by encouraging questions, he made his address appear to be a debate, in which the audience never knew what questions were likely to come from whom at what moment. Thus he was able to hold their interest and attention far better than another speaker would have been able to in an ordinary speech, in which one person on a platform would speak to—or rather at—the silent mass of the audience, who were being steadily driven into tiredness and thoughts about the distance back to the farm and the growing lateness of the hour.⁹

This hustings method was part of Sir John A's oratorical tactics, another part of which was his habit of pushing his opponents' arguments—or the parts of them

he chose—to the absurd extreme of which they were capable in his interpretation. The best illustration of this tactical ability grows out of a quotation Mackenzie used against him. However, for this passage to be appreciated to the full, it must first be set against a somewhat similar passage in one of Edward Blake's speeches.

At Welland in 1887 Blake gave as his interpretation of the duty of the opposition this: to criticize the government's actions and policies without factiousness but with firmness; possibly also to suggest alternatives; but not on any account to try to introduce legislation (*Campaign of 1887*, pp. 148-149). This view was, though Blake did not say so at the time, based on one of Sir John A.'s own speeches in which he had presented his own views. Ignorant of this, Sir John A. at Wingham said, referring to Blake's Welland speech, and continuing the Tory election charge that the Liberals had no policy, "Mr. Blake has himself announced that the Opposition ought not to have a policy—that it is simply their duty to carp and find fault" (*Campaign of 1887*, p. 152). Thereupon at Oakwood Blake read the passage from Sir John A.'s original speech, on which he had based his own, and from which indeed he had drawn most of the expressions verbatim, and then revealed that Sir John A. was his high authority.

It is his own authority he has despised and ridiculed; it is his own language he has eaten; mine enemy hath written a book, and out of his own lips have I condemned him! (Cheers and laughter.) (*Campaign*, p. 153.)

Sir John A. was much more skilful in his handling of the somewhat similar situation. He did not declare to the world what he was doing; nor did he crow. Instead he first introduced his opponent's words with a simple, quiet background sketch and a homely simile:

The Hon. Alex. Mackenzie is a countryman of my own; he is a hard-headed Scotchman. He makes clear, well reasoned, logical speeches, but the gods have not made him poetical. He wants imagination, and though his speeches are sound and sensible, and able, they are, I must say, upon the whole as dry as a limeburner's shoe. (Laughter and cheers.) The other day he assumed a new character; he broke out in a new place (loud laughter), and for the first time in his life he favoured his audience with a poetical quotation.

Next he established two amusing contrasts and quoted his opponent's words:

Now, it rather surprised me when he, the Puritan Premier, had the whole range of British poetry to quote from, that he had preferred to quote that rakehell old cavalier Sam Butler. (Laughter.) Poetry is called a "garden of sweets," a "garland of roses," either raising the imagination by the sublimity of the ideas, or charming the fancy by the beauty of the sentiments of the poet. Now, let us call to our memory the quotation

made by the Hon. Alexander Mackenzie, which, mind you, he especially applies to the Opposition. It is this:

"The Prince of Cambay's daily food
Is asp and basilisk and toad,
Which gives to him so strong a breath,
He nightly stinks a queen to death."

(Laughter.)

Sir John A. then took his opponent's words and, exaggerating them just a little, hit him with them, jab after jab:

You may judge, gentlemen, from this poetical outburst of the Premier of Canada, of the kind of answers we get in the House. We tell him, "Your Pacific policy is wrong." He answers, "You are an asp." (Loud laughter.) We tell him "that the Tariff is a mistake".—"You are a basilisk." (Renewed laughter.)—We say to him, "How about the steel rails?" "You are a toad." (Laughter.)—I have seen him again and again in the House of Commons give answers not more consequent and quite as polite as the answers I have been supposing at this moment. But I suppose the honourable gentleman considers that this was a specimen of what we call in Scotland "wut." (Loud laughter.)

With a final flourish Sir John A. then polished off the whole performance with a second quotation from his opponent's author:

I might say, gentlemen, as I am in the poetical vein as well as himself, that looking at his Free Trade speeches in Scotland and his Protection speeches in Montreal, he might remember four lines of the poet from whom he quoted:

What makes all doctrines plain and clear,
'Tis just two thousand pounds a year.
And prove that false was true before,
The answer plain, two thousand more.

(Laughter and cheers.) ("White Banquet," pp. 5-6.)¹⁰

Christopher Dunkin

There are two Canadian orators who, because of their general competence, deserve to be ranked in the same order as Sir John A. They are Sir Charles Tupper and Christopher Dunkin. On the whole they were both usually free from the faults of McGee and Blake, and were also vigorous in style. Since, however, Tupper's speeches had nothing brilliant or sparkling about them, I shall concentrate on Christopher Dunkin and let him represent the oratory of them both.¹¹

Occasionally Dunkin used a truism or a trite phrase, but usually his style was clear and well ordered, with obviously much more attention being paid to the matter

than to the manner of expression. In short, his style represented the present-day ideal of not intruding between the subject and the audience. The difference between McGee and Dunkin in this regard can readily be seen in the following exchange. Dunkin, who was opposed to the scheme for Confederation, referred to the proposed act of union:

Mr. DUNKIN—We have yet to see, in the first place, whether the thing is done, and then, if it is done, whether it succeeds.

McGee, who supported the proposal, heard the phrase "if it is done" and—click!—he opened his mouth without thinking about the significance of what he was saying:

Hon. Mr. McGEE—"If 'twere done, 'twere well 'twere done quickly."

Mr. DUNKIN—The Minister of Agriculture is too good a Shakespearian to need to be reminded that the thing to be done in that case was a something very bad.¹⁴

Another passage conveniently illustrates the virtues of Dunkin's style, and also its principal vice. Preparing to comment on the difficulties of double and sextuple majorities, he set the background thus:

With us, at home [i.e., in England], the Constitution makes the whole Ministry, collectively, responsible for all the acts it performs; but it is well known that here, for all practical purposes, we have for years had our Ministry acting by two sections—each section with a chief of its own, to a large extent a policy of its own, and the responsibility of leading and governing a section of this House of its own. (Hear, hear.) We have been federalising our Constitution [which originally was for a legislative union] after a very new and anomalous fashion ever since 1848, and by that, more than by anything else, have been getting ourselves into that sort of difficulty in which we have latterly found ourselves. (Hear, hear.)

This style is clear and free from stunts of any kind. Dunkin has taken care to include the appropriate qualifications of "for all practical purposes" and "to a large extent." And in "federalising" he used a word that in its historical context fresh and vividly summed up the situation. With the background thus established, he then drew the comparison:

And now, Mr. Speaker, I just want to know how this proposed scheme is going to work in this respect? As we have seen, it starts with a principle, as to the election of the House of Commons, which must involve the arraying on the floor of that House not of a set of members of Parliament coming there to judge and to act each for the whole of British North America, but a certain fixed number of Upper Canadians, a certain fixed number of Lower Canadians, a certain fixed number of Nova Scotians, of New Brunswickers, of Prince Edward Islanders, of Newfoundlanders, of Red River

men, of men from Vancouver's Island, of British Columbia men, of Saskatchewan men—each to act there for his own province. (Hear, hear.)

It will be agreed, I think, that this is an effective piling up of all the ten areas, each one of which would demand its own majority. But Dunkin then weakened his effect by reminding his audience that this was a supposition which he had made, and further weakened it by a repetitive explanation of the list he had given:

If we ever get all these territories laid out into provinces, we are to have just so many sections, numerically more unequal, upon the floor of this House, and the only abiding distinctions between members will be those represented by territorial lines between their provinces.

Shortly after, Dunkin extended his argument to the Executive Council, but in doing so reduced his number of sections to six, with a consequent shrinking in the forcefulness of his argument:

In the Executive Council these sections will have to reproduce this. Apart from the provinces or vast territory to the west of us, we shall have thus our six such sections on the floor of the Commons House, with their six corresponding sections in the Executive Council, and six parliamentary majorities to work together, if possible, while hitherto we have found our two sections and two majorities one too many. Our constitutional difficulties, I repeat, are referable to that very practice, and so it is proposed that we should try a system three times—and more than three times—more complex still. (Hear, Hear.) (*Speech*, p. 19.)

By now Dunkin's weakness is apparent—organization. After establishing the background of current difficulties with *two* sections, he should have pointed out that it was proposed to put three times that number on the floor, each demanding its separate majority. He should then have extended his argument to the Executive Council, and then, as the grand culmination, reminded the Assembly that the Confederation proposals included incorporating the whole of British North America, with the result that eventually there would be present in the House and represented in the Council not only Upper Canadians and the other five groups but also Red River men, and so on. In this way, the most persuasive part of his passage would have been placed in the most persuasive position—the end.

George Brown

Somewhat superior, I believe, to the others in the order of competence was George Brown, a man who could be either a fiery, hard-hitting partisan or an eloquent statesman.

In his partisan speeches, and especially in the heat of debate, he could rap out his sentences, machine-gun-like, short and sharp. Speaking on his favourite topic of representation by population, he said, for instance:

I believe it is only now, before the disproportion is very great, that we can hope to carry out this measure with any degree of harmony. But every hon. member must see that the change is going on so rapidly that it is high time the difficulty were faced. Every day you put it off you increase the evil. Hon. gentlemen from Lower Canada cannot expect that the people of Upper Canada will always be content to remain in this position. Were they in this position, having 350,000 of a population greater than ours, would they consent to having only the same number of representatives? And if they paid three-fourths of the whole taxation, while Upper Canada contributed only one-fourth, would they not feel the grievance to be still more intolerable? How can they expect that our people, placed in those circumstances, can submit to have only the same amount of representation? It is clear that the people of Upper Canada cannot allow the matter to rest in its present position. The demand is one of such obvious justice that it is astonishing that any one can refuse it.¹²

In this passage, as in many of Brown's, his peculiar idiosyncrasy is especially evident—his fondness for rhetorical questions. In the way he used them, these questions added variety to his speeches and helped to keep up the interest of his audience—which should not be surprising, for will not a hearer's mind respond automatically to a question, while it might ignore a simple statement?

When he was explaining past events to his constituents, Brown used a flowing narrative style. Rapid here and detailed there, it was always animated, and often even had a sense of urgency, as he deftly unfolded particular details. It was frequently vivid, and to make it so Brown often used, among other things, direct quotation, as in a speech he once put into Sir John A.'s mouth—a speech that was thoroughly in Brown's own un-Macdonaldlike style, complete with his mannerism of abundant rhetorical questions. In his narrative style the units of thought were short—whether they were whole sentences or individual clauses within a sentence—but they were logically dovetailed, with each one flowing out of the preceding and into the next, and with the transition often reinforced syntactically. There was no attempt at embellishment: it was a clean, clear-cut style aimed solely at presenting and explaining what had happened. In the following sample it is true that there is an overtone of outraged righteousness; but the way Brown tells the story makes it seem justified. And throughout there is a rapid, onward flow:

I need not tell you that we had not taken possession of the council chamber so long when the war commenced against us. The late ministers had telegraphed all over the country for their friends; a special train was run on Sunday over the Grand Trunk

bring them up in time; and the Governor-General's name was freely used in assuring certain members that if the new government were voted down from the start there would be no dissolution of parliament, but let them get over the session, and that dread alarm of such a House, a dissolution, was inevitable. With the ten ministers absent from the House, and many of our friends away unsuspecting of so unprecedented a proceeding, a vote of want of confidence in the new government was immediately moved at the instigation of the late ministers, and sustained, I need hardly remind you, by these gallant gentlemen with dastardly assaults, false and fierce, against absent men. No doubt we will live to repay them, but I trust in more manly fashion. The following morning the cabinet advised a dissolution. His Excellency demanded reasons in writing. They were furnished; our advice was refused, and we instantly resigned. Not in a hundred and fifty years of English history, nor in the whole history of Canada, can a single case be found in which men in our position were refused a dissolution. (*Speeches*, p. 284.)

In his speech on the Confederation resolutions George Brown achieved what none of our other Victorian orators was able to achieve—the grand style, a grand style chastened and adapted to the audience, it is true, but still very much the grand style. Here, in a well developed and rounded paragraph is a sample of it—in a paragraph which, among other things, illustrates his profound feeling for dramatic antithesis, and contains, in the words "I speak in no boastful spirit," even an echo of the epic hero:

The scene presented by this chamber at this moment, I venture to affirm, has few parallels in history. One hundred years have passed away since these provinces became by conquest part of the British Empire. I speak in no boastful spirit—I desire not for a moment to excite a painful thought—what was then the fortune of war of the brave French nation, might have been ours on that well-fought field. I recall those olden times merely to mark the fact that here sit today the descendants of the victors and the vanquished in the fight of 1759, with all the differences of language, religion, civil law and social habit, nearly as distinctly marked as they were a century ago. Here we sit today seeking amicably to find a remedy for constitutional evils and injustice complained of—by the vanquished? No, but complained of by the conquerors! Here sit the representatives of the British population claiming justice—only justice; and here sit the representatives of the French population, discussing in the French tongue whether we shall have it. One hundred years have passed away since the conquest of Quebec, but here sit the children of the victor and the vanquished, all avowing hearty attachment to the British crown—all earnestly deliberating how we shall best extend the blessings of British institutions—how a great people may be established on this continent in close and hearty connection with Great Britain. Where, in the page of history, shall we find a parallel to this? Will it not stand as an imperishable monument to the generosity of British rule? (*Speeches*, pp. 301-302.)

The organization of the speech from which this passage was taken illustrates well both the advantages of the classical forensic oration and Brown's wisdom in adopting such a form. After the *exordium* in which Brown expressed his thankfulness that the present coalition government had been formed to undertake the negotiations for Confederation, he moved into the *narration*, where he quietly referred to events in the near past which had been connected with the present deliberation, and gradually worked up to the statement that Canada could not stand still—the members had either to adopt the present scheme or find a better one, and a better one was most unlikely to be found. Having thus prepared his audience, he stated his *proposition*—that the resolutions for Confederation should be approved. After next announcing his *partition*—that he would discuss first the existing evils which the proposed scheme would remedy and then the new advantages it would secure—he proceeded to the first set of topics. These numbered four, and each he discussed succinctly and cogently. The next set of topics—the new advantages—numbered seven, and these he dealt with in the same manner, though more briefly. Having thus completed his *confirmation*, he then returned to the *confutation* and disposed of the objections to the proposals. Without digression, he moved immediately to his *peroration* and there urged the members to approach the scheme, not as partisans, but as statesmen, in order to have a part in the building of a great and powerful nation. (*Speeches*, pp. 299-347). It may be remembered that Thomas D'Arcy McGee likewise discussed *all* the reasons for accepting the Confederation proposals. But whereas McGee was not justified in doing this, Brown was, for having come over from the Opposition in order to promote Confederation, he had practically to defend himself and his position before his former colleagues. It should also be noted that whereas McGee was unable, in his digressive and erratic manner, to cope with his plethora of material, Brown, by adopting the structure of the classical oration, was able, through its order, clarity, and consequent strength, to exploit the richness of his material.

Brown had equally competent command of structure in his paragraphs, for these were usually well rounded and closely knit, as has been seen in the paragraph quoted to illustrate his use of the grand style. First would come the topic sentence, then a development of its implications, often with one aspect (of, say, two or three, or even four) expressed in a short series of rhetorical questions, and finally the summing-up conclusion, which frequently took the form of a short, clinching sentence that nonetheless allowed for transition to the next paragraph. Pervading that paragraph was usually a certain rhythm, which arose, I believe, not from any conscious

placing of rhythmic elements, but rather as an overtone of the well rounded, logical construction of the paragraph as a whole.

Brown's individual sentences were often complex, but unlike Blake's and McGee's, they were rightfully complex. There is, after all, a complexity that irritates, and this was Blake's; there is a complexity that obscures, and this was McGee's; but there is also a complexity that clarifies, and this was Brown's. When there are several aspects of one thought that should be expressed, and when all these aspects differ in importance and relation to one another, a series of short, simple sentences will not express the thought adequately; a complex sentence—even a highly complex sentence—is needed to show the proper subordination and relation of the various aspects, one to the other, and to express the whole thought as in itself it really is. It was this kind of complexity that formed the basis of Brown's longer sentences, and that may be seen in the following examples:

If there is one evil in the American system which in my mind stands out as pre-eminently its greatest defect, except universal suffrage, it is that under that constitution the representatives of the people must reside in the constituencies for which they sit. The result is that a public man, no matter what his talent or what his position, no matter how necessary it may be for the interest of the country that he should be in public life, unless he happens to belong to the political party popular for the time being in the constituency where he resides, cannot possibly find a seat in congress. And over and over again have we seen the very best men of the republic, the most illustrious names recorded in its political annals, driven out of the legislature of their country, simply because the majority in the electoral division in which they lived was of a different political party from them. I do think the British system infinitely better than that, securing as it does that public men may be trained to public life, with the assured conviction that if they prove themselves worthy of public confidence, and gain a position in the country, constituencies will always be found to avail themselves of their services, whatever be the political party to which they may adhere. You may make politicians by the other, but assuredly this is the way that statesmen are produced. (*Speeches*, p. 308.)

In diction Brown could, at times, be as trite and commonplace as any of the others. When he tried to make expansive flourishes and play the philosopher remarking on the present scene, he often said things like these:

We are seeking by calm discussion to settle questions that Austria and Hungary, that Denmark and Germany, that Russia and Poland, could only crush by the iron heel of armed force. We are seeking to do without foreign intervention that which deluged in blood the sunny plains of Italy. We are striving to settle forever issues hardly less momentous than those that have rent the neighboring republic and are now exposing it to all the horrors of civil war. (*Speeches*, p. 301.)

But when he was content to be persuasive by being lucidly logical, he escaped most of what was false, weak, and trite, and his expression took on precision, force, and power. In the following quotation, which was the concluding part of the peroration to his Confederation speech, he began with a comparison that was at once apt, precise, and suggestive:

Let not honourable gentlemen approach this measure as a sharp critic deals with an abstract question, striving to point out blemishes and display his ingenuity; but let us approach it as men having but one consideration before us—the establishment of the future peace and prosperity of our country.

He continued, ending the last clause of his next sentence with extraordinary power in phrasing—in choosing exactly the right meaning, the right sounds, the right order, and the right rhythm:

Let us look at it in the light of a few months back—in the light of the evils and injustice to which it applies a remedy—in the light of the years of discord and strife we have spent in seeking for that remedy—in the light with which the people of Canada would regard this measure were it to be lost, and all the evils of past years to be brought back upon us again.

Here certainly is McGee's favourite device of anaphora, but compare the use to which the two orators put the device. Brown's content genuinely called for it, because there actually were those "lights" in which the proposals should have been considered. And further, Brown neatly combined anaphora and climax for a most effective ending to his sentence. There then followed several unfortunate clichés:

Let honourable gentlemen look at the question in this view, and what one of them will take the responsibility of casting his vote against the measure? The future destiny of these great provinces may be affected by the decision we are about to give to an event which at this moment we may be unable to estimate, but assuredly the welfare in many years of four millions of people hangs on our decision. Shall we then rise equal to the occasion?—shall we approach this discussion without partisanship, and free from every personal feeling but the earnest resolution to discharge conscientiously the duty which an overruling Providence has placed upon us?

But Brown ended with a rhetorical turn, sufficiently graceful yet strong, to make the whole conclusion a fitting peroration to a remarkably competent speech:

It may be that some among us will live to see the day when, as the result of the measure, a great and powerful people may have grown up on these lands—when the boundless forests all around us shall have given way to smiling fields and thriving towns—and when one united government, under the British flag, shall extend its

shore to shore; but who would desire to see that day, if he could not recall with satisfaction the part he took in this discussion? (*Speeches*, pp. 346-347.)

George Brown had energy of style: he had force, vigour, and strength of expression. He had soberness with dignity. And he also had rhythm, a dry sort of rhythm like that emanating from cold cut glass, a rhythm that came from the beauty of the logical ordering rather than from any music in the ordering itself. With all these, and given an inspiring topic and a statesman's point of view, he was often able to rise above mere oratory and achieve eloquence.

NOTES

6. *The Dominion Campaign! Sir John Macdonald on the Questions at Issue Before the People. The Premier's Great Speech before the Workingmen of Toronto* (No place: no pub., n.d. [1882?]), p. 4.
7. *Address of The Hon. John A. Macdonald to the Electors of the City of Kingston with Extracts from Mr. Macdonald's Speeches Delivered on different occasions in the years 1860 and 1861, & & &*. (No place: no pub., n.d.), pp. 108 & 34.
8. Sir John A. Macdonald, "Speech Delivered at the White Banquet," in *Grits in Office: Profession and Practice Contrasted*, ed. C. H. Mackintosh (Published under the Auspices of the Conservative Association of the Dominion, 1876), pp. 18-19.
9. For illustration of this hustings method, see, *passim*, the *Address and Dominion Campaign* referred to in notes 6 and 7.
10. The reader interested in reading more of Sir John A.'s oratory should see also *Speech of Sir John Macdonald to the Workingmen's Liberal Conservative Association of Ottawa and Le Cercle Lafontaine, Delivered in Ottawa on the 8th of October, 1886* (No place: no pub., n.d. [1886?]).
11. For examples of Tupper's oratorical style see his *Letter to The Right Honourable The Earl of Carnarvon, Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies* (No place [London?]: no pub., n.d. [1866?]) and his "Speech at Halifax," in *Grits in Office: Profession and Practice Contrasted*, ed. C. H. Mackintosh (Published under the Auspices of the Conservative Association of the Dominion, 1876), pp. 27-48.
12. Christopher Dunkin, *Speech delivered in the Legislative Assembly . . . on the subject of the Confederation of the British North American Provinces* (Quebec: Hunter, Rose, 1865), p. 7. (*Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Session, 8th Parliament, Canada.)
13. Alex. Mackenzie, *The Life and Speeches of Hon. George Brown* (Toronto: Globe, 1882), p. 266.