

Sir John Thompson and Bishop Cameron

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The name of Sir John Thompson should stand high on any list of forgotten Canadians. His contemporary – that indefatigable chronicler of late nineteenth century politics, J. Castell Hopkins – prophesied that he would be judged by history as perhaps the outstanding political figure of his day. Certainly Thompson has some claim to a permanent niche in the gallery of great men who helped to shape the character of our nation in its formative years. For his work as Minister of Justice during the agitated years from Riel's uprising to the controversy over Manitoba's separate schools made a real contribution towards establishing the rule of law, over racial passion and religious prejudice, as the basis for orderly government. And Thompson was, after all, our fourth Prime Minister; almost the youngest to hold the office and, I think, the only one who refused to accept the appointment when it was formally offered him by the Governor General.

He was, too, the first Catholic Prime Minister, and the first Catholic Premier of his native Nova Scotia; and he achieved these distinctions without the support of a popular base from which he could claim a permanently loyal following. The fact that he was a convert from Methodism made him suspect to the Protestant majority, while his Irish-Scottish origins gave him no ethnic foothold among the French-speaking Catholics.

Thompson rose to power on the basis of sheer ability. This was perhaps his weakness, for he lacked the spontaneous charm of John A. Macdonald or the gracious eloquence of Wilfrid Laurier; and he did not hold office long enough to give rise to those anecdotal myths which so frequently provide the substance out of which great personalities are made. Yet Thompson did exercise very extensive powers, in Nova Scotia and in the Dominion; and as the trusted confidant of Sir John A. Macdonald's later years, his judgement was sought on delicate and explosive issues. But his handling of public affairs was so marked by a sense of judicious detachment, and his personal life so obviously blameless, that he must have had a salutary effect on his colleagues and subordinates at a time when Canadian politics was too easily linked with graft and abuse.

Yet, Thompson's career was stormy and controversial. Protestants suspected that he lingered too near the Catholic hierarchy while, at the same time, leading members of the Church feared that he was seeking to undermine her claims in the interests of the Conservative Party.

Two factors gave rise to the suspicion that Thompson was too closely linked with the Catholic Church to permit a disinterested approach to public questions. First, he had embraced the Catholic faith after his marriage and had been on friendly terms with Archbishop Connolly of Halifax. And second, he entered into a close and lasting liaison with another leading member of the hierarchy, the able and outspoken Bishop John Cameron of Antigonish. It is the second of these that will be examined in this paper, for Thompson's friendship with Archbishop Connolly was personal and did not encroach upon affairs of state. But his ties with Bishop Cameron originated in politics and persisted throughout the years when he was called upon to handle complex problems to which the Catholic Church was herself a party.

II*

Bishop Cameron and Thompson first met at Archbishop Connolly's house around 1874.¹ The Bishop was then co-adjutor to the Bishop of Arichat. He had already achieved distinction in the service of the Church: as a student in Rome he had been placed in charge of Propaganda College during a period of political difficulty; he had served for a time in the Vatican Secretariat before returning to Antigonish and, afterwards, became first rector of St. Francis Xavier College. More recently he had been named Papal delegate to settle some difficulties in the diocese of Harbour Grace; and, because of the illness of Bishop MacKinnon, was in practical charge of the Arichat diocese.

The circumstances of Bishop Cameron's political interest in Thompson are briefly these: Thompson was a promising young lawyer with Conservative leanings, but his change of religion made it difficult for him to seek office in other than a Catholic riding. Antigonish was the most Catholic county in the province, and when a bye-election was pending there, in 1877, Thompson was suggested as a candidate. Bishop Cameron was asked to support him and he agreed. Thompson won the bye-election and was returned the following year, when a Conservative government was elected to office.²

Bishop Cameron had three reasons for endorsing him. The fact that Thompson had but recently entered the Church aroused his sympathetic

* References to the Thompson Papers are as catalogued in the Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa. Bishop Cameron's extant papers are held privately at Antigonish.

¹ J. Castell Hopkins, *Life and Work of Rt. Hon. Sir John Thompson* (Toronto, 1895). 47

² For a more complete account see D. Hugh Gillis "The Elections of Sir John Thompson," *Canadian Historical Review* (March, 1956). 23-45

regard, for he too was the son of a convert and understood the difficulties that a change of religion must imply. Furthermore, the Bishop was profoundly aware that Nova Scotia lacked qualified Catholics who could take a reasonable share in public life; and the emergence of a young lawyer who combined superior talents with a zeal for public service quickened his interest. The fact that Thompson was appointed attorney general in the new Conservative Administration, in 1878, at least justified his hopes. The Bishop, moreover, was a Conservative, and his letters to Thompson during this early period are not lacking in party enthusiasm. "I very much rejoice to find you occupying the most honored position in the new Government," he wrote when Thompson was named Attorney General, "— a position which, although not at present pecuniarily advantageous will, with the blessing of God eventually lead to fitting remuneration as well as distinction, and he in the meantime a boon to the country."³ Indeed, as the correspondence developed, the partizan spirit increased: Thompson's critics soon became enemies, the Liberal opposition the subject of scornful asides, and some of the local politicians who did not share the Bishop's admiration for the young Attorney General were referred to in language that one would not readily associate with a holy and distinguished prelate.

During the next several years Bishop Cameron's links with Thompson were noticeably strengthened. First of all, they were drawn together by a controversy which had been brewing between the new Archbishop of Halifax, Michael Hannan, and the local community of the Sisters of Charity. I shall not attempt to trace in detail the prolonged disagreement that developed between Archbishop Hannan and the Sisters. In effect, it involved a question of ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and the Sisters took the precaution of seeking Thompson's aid in preparing their case for presentation to the authorities in Rome. The matter was delicate and could have placed Thompson, still attorney general of the province, in an awkward position. But he was strengthened by the support of Bishop Cameron, who had been named Papal delegate to resolve the conflict and given charge of the community pending a decision. As counsel to the Sisters, Thompson saw much of Bishop Cameron and corresponded with him regularly; the Bishop became a frequent guest at the Thompson home; and several of the Thompson children spent part of their summer holidays on a farm near Antigonish, where the Bishop was then living. This intimate association led inevitably to a firmer friendship; and Thompson became, to a remarkable extent, a confidant to the inner tensions of Church politics.

The relationship between Bishop Cameron and Thompson was not restricted, however, to high-level ecclesiastical problems. Shortly after Thompson's first election, it became involved in a much more mundane

³ *Thompson Papers*, 357; Bishop Cameron to Thompson, Oct. 23, 1878.

topic, that of political patronage.

Early in 1879 the office of prothonotary and clerk of the county courts fell vacant in Antigonish and Thompson was asked to recommend a successor. Three local aspirants emerged, each of them supported by a political faction and by one or two of the parish clergy; and Thompson was faced with the task of choosing between them. He wrote the Bishop, asking advice, and was informed of the prelate's choice. Unhappily, the man so named, a young doctor, was the Bishop's nephew. A cry of nepotism was at once raised, and Thompson was warned that to make the appointment would ruin his political future in the county. He then appealed to some of the more influential clergy but got little support. Fr. Ronald MacDonald, later Bishop of Harbour Grace, was indignant. "His Lordship of Arichat," he wrote, "has too clear a sense of propriety to ask for an appointment which cannot fail to be distasteful to yourself, to the party and to the County..."⁴ Others suggested differently, and Thompson's anxiety was finally relieved by a firm note from the Bishop himself. He denied that he was seeking favours for anyone. "While I would like to reserve always the right of asking favours from a Government whose leaders I hold in such high esteem as I do Mr. Holmes and yourself, I now ask you both to grant me the greatest personal favor I shall ever ask of you, namely, *never to grant me any favor that would embarrass your Government*. I have no axe to grind, and no personal friend or relation whom I [am] over-anxious to provide for; and hence it is no heroic disinterestedness which prompts me to ask you again this novel favor."⁵ The Bishop's nephew got the disputed appointment and another sinecure was found for the second aspirant; but the third, to the annoyance of his supporters, was allowed to continue working his farm without having to assume the burden of a public office.

This incident had the effect of deepening Thompson's political experience. His own handling of the affair had lacked adroitness, and he had permitted Bishop Cameron's name to be dragged into the fray unnecessarily. From then on his dealings with the county were guided by a greater sense of realism: Church and State were not clearly separated in Antigonish and to seek to act without first having prudent recourse to their several spokesmen was to court political failure.

A second and more fundamental problem with which Bishop Cameron and Thompson were concerned was education. The provision of schools and teachers was largely inadequate in the eastern counties and the Bishop was particularly insistent that the Acadians should be taught their own French language in their schools. Without this provision, he argued, they could not but be handicapped by comparison with pupils in English-speaking

⁴ *Thompson Papers*, 804; R. MacDonald to Thompson, April 14, 1879.

⁵ *Thompson Papers*, 866; Bishop Cameron to Thompson, May 7, 1879.

communities and he urged Thompson to support a petition seeking minimum provisions for French language instruction. He sought Thompson's help, too, to have the Sisters of the Congrégation de Notre-Dame, whose teachers' qualifications were recognized by Quebec and Ontario, exempted from further examinations when they were sent to teach in the Arichat convent. He wanted to open more convent schools, staffed by these religious, but warned that "...the time is fast approaching in which this diocese will have either to lose their invaluable services or to support their schools independently of State and County aid."⁶ But he was determined this should not happen; and he asked that at least a small concession be granted by the provincial education authorities:

Seeing that the Sisters of the Congregation devote their whole lives to teaching and that they have charge of many of the best and most renowned female Academies in the Dominion and the U. States; and seeing that their services are so much in demand wherever they are known; could not the Government grant a License to such Sisters as may have taught school for, say, four years in some other province of the Dominion, and to any Sisters that may have received Licenses prior to their entrance into the Order? This favor would not, I think, be at variance with the spirit of the School Act, whilst it certainly would be in the interest of education.⁷

Thompson was sympathetic and worked to achieve these ends.

St. Francis Xavier College was then in its infancy and its problems were of passionate concern to Bishop Cameron. He was anxious to place the college on an equal footing with the established Maritime Protestant institutions, but the resources of his people were limited and its successful operation depended, to a large extent, on the small grant provided by the provincial Government. In the creation of the University of Halifax as an examining body supported by the province, he sensed a threat to the independence of the church-endowed institutions. When the charter of the provincial university was being reviewed by the legislature in 1881, therefore, together with the problem of continuing grants to the church-endowed colleges, he took a resolute stand. The *Halifax Morning Chronicle* was suggesting editorially that the University of Halifax should be strengthened and given the sole degree-conferring powers, thus depriving the independent colleges of their basic prerogative. Thompson himself had no firm views on the subject and pointed to the fact that the University of Toronto was functioning in a similar way, with Catholic support. The Bishop assured him at once, however, that Archbishop Lynch and the hierarchy of Ontario had entered into no agreement and that the University of Toronto

⁶ *Thompson Papers*, 2435; Bishop Cameron to Thompson, Feb. 13, 1882.

⁷ *Idem*.

was, in fact, strictly a Protestant institution. He urged Thompson to read Newman's *Idea of a University* and be guided by its principles in coming to a right decision. As the debate progressed, Thompson leaned more heavily on Bishop Cameron's advice; but the better established Protestant colleges were equally opposed to giving up their powers and no action could be taken in the face of their united stand. In the end, both the grants and the University of Halifax were abolished; and Bishop Cameron, while grieved at the additional burden that would be placed on his people, rejoiced at what he conceived to be a victory for the voluntary system in higher education.

It would be misleading to give the impression that the contacts between Bishop Cameron and Thompson, during this period, were confined to weighty matters of state. On the contrary, their correspondence frequently dealt with matters of lesser significance. For example, in a curious note, the Bishop asked Thompson to find out why his copy of the *Halifax Morning Herald* was not reaching him regularly:

I cannot understand why the M. Herald officers should persist in acting towards me as they do. In the first place, although again and again notified, they never send the paper to my address but to "Rev. Dr. Cameron" and sometimes to "Rev. Dr. Cameron, D.D." Again, I may safely say that not a week in the year passes without one or more irregularities occurring in forwarding the paper. Now it comes printed only on one side; now torn or so badly printed as to be illegible; frequently it does not come at all, and most frequently it comes one or more days after the proper time. I can no longer believe that their conduct is the result of their stupidity and incompetence. Have the goodness to tell them to treat me less scurvily, or to refund me my subscription, or else to keep both paper and money...⁸

This was a peculiar chore to ask of a Minister of the Crown but Thompson undertook it cheerfully and assured the Bishop the matter was in hand.

After three years in office, Thompson found his work unsatisfactory. He was not by nature a politician; the government was not well led; and his personal finances were deteriorating. When the opportunity presented itself, therefore, in the spring of 1881, to seek an appointment to the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia, he accepted it gladly. He was gratified to find that Bishop Cameron agreed with him, and he made his wishes known to Sir Charles Tupper. As the summer wore on, and no word came from the Justice Department, he became anxious and asked the Bishop to intervene on his behalf. The Bishop did better: he made a special trip to Ottawa to consult with Tupper personally and to seek the support of Sir Hector Langevin. He returned with the satisfying promise that the second vacancy would be Thompson's.

⁸ *Thompson Papers*, 2435; Bishop Cameron to Thompson, Feb. 13, 1882.

In the meantime, however, plans had to be made for a provincial election. Factions had developed within the Government; Premier Holme's incapacity for leadership had become obvious and Thompson was being urged to succeed him. The Bishop joined the chorus when Thompson sought his opinion. 'I feel convinced,' he wrote, "that unless you consent to lead the party in their appeal to the country at the next election, they shall be absolutely demoralized and eventually defeated; whereas both calamities will be prevented by your accepting the leadership, and a strong and honest Government will be the outcome of your triumph at the polls."⁹ But he urged Thompson not to give up his right to a place on the Bench.

Accept the leadership, if necessary, but without binding yourself to retain it for a day after a judgeship comes within your reach; go to the country as if a judgeship were not within four years of you; and do your best to strengthen and prepare your Government to be able to shift for itself when the hour of your bidding it adieu will have come. You will thus do justice to yourself, your Government, and your party. You now have my advice.¹⁰

In the circumstances, it was the sanest advice; and Thompson accepted it. He succeeded Holmes as Premier on the eve of the election, but his government was defeated. Several weeks later he was named to the Supreme Court of the province; and the first phase of his political career was ended, to the regret, neither of himself nor, perhaps, of his friend the Bishop.

III

The second phase of Thompson's intimate relationship with Bishop Cameron coincided with his return to politics. It was, in fact, a dual re-entry, for the Bishop too re-emerged as a political force in Antigonish.

When the question arose of trying to get Thompson to step down from the Bench to accept appointment to Sir John A. Macdonald's cabinet in 1885 two problems had to be disposed of: could he be persuaded and could he be elected. But Thompson made the first dependent on the second, and a scheme was set afoot by which the Liberal member of parliament for Antigonish would accept a judgeship, and Thompson could represent his old riding, but this time in the House of Commons. Thompson then insisted that Bishop Cameron must approve the project and Sir Charles Tupper dutifully went down to see the Bishop, obtained his consent, and carried the glad tidings to Thompson and to Sir John A. Macdonald. Bishop Cameron wrote to confirm Tupper's message. His consent was conditional on two things, he

⁹ *Thompson Papers*, 2572; Bishop Cameron to Thompson, April, 1882.

¹⁰ *Idem*.

said: first, Thompson must be made Minister of Justice and second, Tupper must reenter the cabinet before the next general election. Tupper had agreed “distinctly and unequivocally” to both. The Bishop continued crisply:

I don't believe you should accept any other position – even temporarily – than that of Minister of Justice. A novitiate may suit others, but would damage your prestige ... to have Nova Scotia represented in the Dominion Government by Sir Charles and yourself, would be a matter of pride to every honest man in the Province, and could not fail to help the Lib. Cons. party immensely at the General Election.¹¹

He promised, moreover, that no one would oppose Thompson's election in Antigonish; and that the subsequent general election would raise no obstacles “if God will spare my life and health.”

That the Bishop had gained an important advantage from Tupper was obvious: Thompson would have a commanding position in the government, while Tupper would take over the control of party strategy in Nova Scotia. It was clear that Thompson, after his period on the Bench, could not easily adjust himself to the role of a popular leader but, with Tupper back in harness, the Conservative party in Nova Scotia would have a seasoned practitioner in the craft of politics and Thompson would be left free to nurse his constituents in Antigonish.

Thompson was in due course named to the cabinet and nominated by Antigonish Conservatives to succeed the retiring Liberal member who had accepted the judgeship. It was a neat arrangement, but it did not quite work out. A local physician, supported by a Tory faction, decided to contest the seat and gained wide support from the Liberals. A hard fight followed and Thompson won out with a substantial majority. Bishop Cameron was at once chagrined and elated: annoyed that his protégé had been opposed but delighted that the result had been so favourable.

Bishop Cameron, in fact, was deeply implicated in this campaign. He made public his support of Thompson, and justified his actions in a letter to the press after the election. His reasoning was based on Thompson's stature, the position he would occupy in Parliament and the critical stage through which the country was passing. At the time, the country was divided by the emotional aftermath of the Riel uprising. Religious and racial prejudices were being appealed to on all sides. It was clear that the future of the Dominion depended, in some measure, on a return to reason and moderation. Thompson could bring to the Justice Department unusual gifts: a penetrating intelligence, a varied background in politics and law, and unswerving integrity. And his Catholic religion was expected to counteract the influence

¹¹ *Thompson Papers*, 3086; Bishop Cameron to Thompson, Aug. 29, 1885.

of those within the Church who had taken up the cause of the rebels with the fervour of a religious crusade.

The Bishop himself had strong views on the Riel rebellion. His long residence in a politically disrupted Rome had taught him an abhorrence of revolution, and for him the Metis uprising was a misguided revolt against legitimately established government. The agitation in Quebec, and the willingness of so many Catholic prelates to condemn the Macdonald government for failing to intervene, filled him with anxiety for the fate of the government itself. If necessary, he urged Thompson, a general election should be called and the matter settled by a popular vote. Supporters of Riel, he said, were “riding the French horse” with a vengeance. “Nor let it be maintained,” he insisted, “that to war against this insane [French] policy means to ride the Protestant horse, or the English, Irish or Scottish ‘horse’: no, it means simply ‘to ride the Dominion horse’ and to save the constitution, the country from sedition and anarchy. In one word, unless the Government will strengthen its hands on this occasion everywhere outside the province of Quebec it will be guilty of a very serious dereliction of duty. Such a unique chance of emancipating itself from the whim of fanatics is far from being of daily occurrence and ought assuredly to be thoroughly utilized.”¹² Sensing the important part Thompson was likely to take in the Commons, he concluded: “The debate on the expected want of confidence vote will afford you an occasion to make your friends feel proud of their representative in the Dominion Parliament.”

When the great debate did take place, early in 1886, Thompson’s reply to Edward Blake made him a national figure overnight. Bishop Cameron was jubilant. Two members of the cabinet had telegraphed him of Thompson’s success; and the Commons’ vote sustaining the government confirmed his hopes. From then on he was to have many evidences of the success of his protégé, and the humble letters which he received from the Minister of Justice served to strengthen his resolution that nothing must stand in the way of Thompson’s re-election in Antigonish – not even the restraints imposed by his own episcopal office.

Thompson’s stature in federal politics developed quickly and he became, increasingly, Sir John A. Macdonald’s most trusted colleague. When, surprisingly, he again sought to get out of politics after the turbulent but successful elections of 1887 the Prime Minister said it was out of the question. A vacancy was opening on the Supreme Court of Canada, however, and Thompson again turned to Bishop Cameron for advice. Sir John A. had promised him the Chief Justiceship later on, he said, if only he would continue in office now. The Bishop urged him to hold out and confessed wistfully that his appointment to the Bench “would have the blessed effect

¹² *Thompson Papers*, 3368; Bishop Cameron to Thompson, Dec. 22, 1885.

of getting me clean out of politics and emancipating me from the enslaving importunities of office hunters and equally unwelcome mendicants.”¹³ For the fact of the matter was that Thompson’s two federal elections – 1885 and 1887 – had so deeply embroiled the Bishop in local politics that his relations with priests and laity of Liberal persuasion had become strained. Thompson had been scrupulously careful in his canvass of the county not to implicate the Bishop in any way, but circumstances had worked against him. Now, the Bishop’s house at Antigonish became a centre of pilgrimage for those who aspired to party patronage. A steady trek of visitors up the Bishop’s hill, seeking for the most part worldly solace, became commonplace. The Bishop would have preferred if they had not come, but, once there, they were sure to be cordially received and carefully sifted out; and those judged deserving were recommended, in the Bishop’s neat handwriting, to the good offices of the Minister of Justice.

Thompson had gained some unpopularity in French-speaking Catholic circles for his attitude to the Riel uprising. But this was swept away, in 1889, by his speech on the Jesuit Estates bill. The somewhat ineptly drafted measure by which Quebec hoped to settle the long-standing grievance of the Society of Jesus had aroused unprecedented controversy outside the province. The decision as to whether the legislation should be disallowed rested with the federal cabinet, and with the Justice Department in particular. On legal grounds, Thompson urged that no action be taken, and he was firmly supported in this view by Sir John A. himself. Popular passions tried to remove the problem from the sanctuary of legal principle to the market-place of emotional prejudice. Conservative henchmen in Ontario tried to compel the government to change its mind but Sir John A. stood his ground. In the Commons, Thompson was forced to deal with the question in the terms posed by Dalton McCarthy, and his performance won the plaudits of moderate men across the country.

Bishop Cameron had no part in this episode. Thompson was too astute to seek advice, and it was not volunteered. He made no reference to the controversy in his letters until after his devastating reply to McCarthy. But then, in reply to the Bishop's congratulatory message, he unburdened himself.

I had a great many compliments paid me – even by opponents – but the approval of your Lordship was what I desired above all other things – and that approval was expressed in terms which outweighed a hundred fold any merits in the effort. There are many features of this agitation which I have longed to discuss with and relate to your Lordship but it is impossible to do so satisfactorily in a letter. I am hoping for a long chat in which to talk

¹³ *Thompson Papers*, 7979; Bishop Cameron to Thompson, June 27, 1888.

over some of the difficulties of the present position and some of the problems which seem likely to arise. I find it impossible to resist a painful sense of disappointment at the condition of the country in this respect. Fanaticism of the most malevolent kind is being stirred up to a shocking extent. People seem to have lost their reason, their common sense, their notions of justice, of law, of politics and of liberty. It seems impossible to resist the conclusion that in intelligence they are at least a hundred years behind what one might have supposed them to be a year ago.¹⁴

Two years later, however, when faced with the decision of accepting the Governor-General's summons to form a ministry, Thompson wrote at once to Bishop Cameron. He had refused the offer for obvious reasons. The agitation against him in traditionally Conservative Orange circles in Ontario would weaken the party; and he could not expect to hold it together. "How I should have liked to have got your Lordship's advice in such a crisis,"¹⁵ he told the Bishop. "The course you have pursued anent the premiership, replied Bishop Cameron, "is worthy of you and a source of delight to your friends. The Conservative party has more need of Sir John Thompson than Sir John Thompson has of the Conservative party. Blessed be God that this is a fact..."¹⁶ This was in June, 1891, just after Macdonald's death. During the summer Bishop Cameron did a cross-country tour to British Columbia and called on Thompson on the way; he spent some time with him later at St. Denis. There the leadership question was again discussed, for it was obvious that Sir John Abbott could not last. But the Bishop was becoming anxious about Thompson's health and urged him seriously to turn down the office of Prime Minister in favour of the Chief Justiceship. For Thompson, however, the situation was a repetition of that which faced him in Nova Scotia in 1882 when he was accused of deserting his party for the Bench. And the problem of Manitoba's separate schools was looming ominously and again threatening to divide the nation and weaken the party. Here Thompson felt he could make a contribution; and he accepted the leadership of the Government in November, 1892. "When the deed is done, praise it," Bishop Cameron wrote. "...I heartily rejoice to see you occupy your high position, and feel the more delighted because you not only are worthy of it, but also honor it more than it can honor you."¹⁷ This was high praise indeed, but Thompson had gone a long way since that day in 1877 when Bishop Cameron had agreed to support his nomination for the bye-election in Antigonish, and the Bishop himself had played no modest part in clearing

¹⁴ *Bishop Cameron Papers*; Thompson to Bishop Cameron, May 29, 1889.

¹⁵ *Bishop Cameron Papers*; Thompson to Bishop Cameron, June 23, 1891.

¹⁶ *Thompson Papers*, 15,868; Bishop Cameron to Thompson, June 23, 1891.

¹⁷ *Thompson Papers*, 20,978; Bishop Cameron to Thompson, Nov. 28, 1892.

the way for his success.

Now, however, their relationship was coming to an end. The burdens of his new office left Thompson little time for more than an occasional note. The Bishop became a stout defender of the government's position on the Manitoba schools, and he reported in detail on the visit made to him by Father Lacombe and Archbishop Tarte of Three Rivers. His heart must have been gladdened, therefore, when he received from the Prime Minister, then resting at Lake Muskoka, a twenty-eight page letter filled with intimate details of the progress of the Manitoba controversy.¹⁸ This was only a brief return to the old days, for Thompson never again came down to Antigonish to fight the party's battle. His sudden death in 1894 grieved Bishop Cameron as if he had lost a son. Within two years, the Conservative party crumbled, in Antigonish and across the country, and a new era was ushered in. The Bishop, watching the dismal scene, could well echo the words of one of Thompson's admirers: "I am sick of politics. Our sun has gone down and won't return."¹⁹

¹⁸ *Bishop Cameron Papers*; Thompson to Bishop Cameron, Aug. 12, 1894.

¹⁹ *Bishop Cameron Papers*; Canon O'Donnell to Bishop Cameron, March 11, 1895.