JOSEPH HOWE
ANTI-CONFEDERATE

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THE CANADIAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

HISTORICAL BOOKLET No. 17
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Second Printing, 1968, by
Leclerc Printers Limited
Hull, Quebec
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The story of Joseph Howe and Confederation has considerable fascination for the light it throws upon historical writing as an art. Typical accounts of this episode show how historians have, in effect, remade history to fit their own ideas. They have judged Howe in a context of their own making, and not in the context in which he operated. This booklet will develop this point of view by exploring three questions: Was it inconsistent with Howe's previous position for him to become an anti-Confederate? Was he primarily responsible for rousing Nova Scotia against the Quebec Resolutions? What really made him an anti-Confederate?

No student of today is quite as vigorous as some of yester-year in preferring charges of inconsistency against Howe. In 1913 Archibald MacMechan accepted them as proved and simply asked, "Why, after a lifetime of consistent advocacy of an idea, did he turn against it?" Two years later William Lawson Grant expressed astonishment that anyone who had spoken so many eloquent words about the magnificent future of British North America would be found among the opponents of federation. But the facts surely do not support Grant's statement that Howe "at his best always regarded Canadian federation as a necessary preparation" for Imperial federation.

A fellow historian, R. G. Trotter, wrote in 1924 that Howe's attitude, "in view of his earlier advocacy of colonial union, is the most difficult phase of his whole political career satisfactorily to explain." Professor Trotter saw the difficulty "in the fact that friends of the federation cause believed him already committed to it; in their eyes his opposition seemed an irrational volte-face." In 1946 Professor A. R. M. Lower went along with Trotter; had Howe not "placed himself on record at various times as in favour of a union, sometimes in emphatic terms? And now he was rousing the province against it, expounding rather thin arguments..." But six years later Professor Donald Creighton was content to say that Howe did not believe in Confederation, even though "in his facile — too facile way, he had spoken rhetorically of a British North American dominion stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean."

These doubts about Howe's consistency arose as an aftermath of the partisanship of the Confederation era. Ideas which then gained wide acceptance were perpetuated in both the oral and written traditions. Once instilled they have stoutly resisted any attempts to correct them. For giving currency in the first place to the idea that Howe had
long been an advocate of union Jonathan McCully is primarily responsible. A Liberal, a former colleague of Howe in the Executive Council, and in 1864 the editor of William Annand's *Morning Chronicle*, he had been a delegate to both the Charlottetown and Quebec Conferences. On November 21, 1864, only two days after he wrote his first editorial in favour of the Quebec scheme, he began to use Howe's name and utterances to bolster his case. Three days later he somehow managed to convert Howe's speech on the organization of the Empire in 1854 into a plea for the union of British North America, and on December 8 he traced "the action of the Quebec Conference... to its true origin," the completely neutral statements and actions of Howe on union in 1861 and 1862. Given a little more time, he might have made Howe an honorary Father of Confederation.

But from mid-January, 1865 onwards he was forced to operate from a different vantage point. For Annand, unable to stomach his pro-Confederation views, removed him from the *Chronicle*. Henceforth, as editor of the *Unionist and Halifax Journal*, he showed even less intention than before to be fair to an old colleague and friend. Bursting with indignation against his dismissal and ever more fearful of the rejection of the Quebec Resolutions, he thoroughly distorted the Howe record in his editorials of January 25 and 30, and February 6.

In them he delighted in quoting the favourable comments on union from Howe's *Novascotian* of May 24, 1838. But he omitted to say that Howe had been absent in England at the time and could not possibly have made them, or that a month earlier Howe had suggested that "a confederation, instead of leaving the Province with its present evils in connection with the Colonial Office, would establish an Office in the backwoods of Canada, more difficult of access than that in London." For some reason or other McCully was also silent on the doubts which Howe expressed about union in 1839; he had then told the Canadian politician Christopher Dunkin that it would involve almost insular Nova Scotia in the protection of a vast extent of indefensible frontier. Finally McCully disregarded the objection which Howe raised in 1840 after Lord Durham had made his suggestions for union. This was the French Canadian fact, the existence of "a large body of population lying between Nova Scotia and the British part of Canada, which population, from peculiar circumstances, and its natural character, could not, in any confederation, offer advantages to the lower Colonies."

But on this occasion, at least, McCully realized the futility of using the events of 1854 to support his case. For in that year Howe had proposed the organization of the Empire in place of the union of
British North America which J. W. Johnston was advocating. As usual, Howe insisted that an intercolonial railway was essential before the proposals for union could assume a form and shape which would lead to a tangible solution.

As for the events of 1861 and 1862, McCully recalled them with a vengeance. But only those which suited his purpose. He pointed out correctly that Howe had initiated the steps which empowered the delegates attending an intercolonial railway conference in Quebec City to discuss intercolonial union as well. Yet to suggest that Howe went there to promote union is a travesty of the facts. McCully, himself a member of the delegation, knew better than that. Because John Tobin commanded the votes of eight or nine Catholic Assemblymen, Howe had asked his support for the conference on the railroad. Tobin, a friend both of D’Arcy McGee and union, proposed that the latter topic also be placed on the agenda. Howe acquiesced, and the Assembly went along with the suggestion, but without expressing any pro-union sentiment, in fact, without debating it at all.

Finally McCully turned in triumph to that intemperate, late Saturday-night gathering of August, 1864, which marked the visit of many leading Canadians to Halifax. At a time of great conviviality Howe had, in fact, expressed pleasure that the day of interprovincial union was rapidly approaching. Later he tried to excuse himself: “Who,” he asked, “ever heard of a public man being bound by a speech delivered on such an occasion as that?” For his purpose McCully might have added a number of similar statements interspersed throughout Howe’s speeches and letters in which the great tribune had spoken — perhaps, as Professor Creighton suggests, in too facile a way — of the day “when these splendid Provinces, with the population, the resources, and the intelligence of a nation, will assume a national character.” But on the few occasions in which Howe got around to examining union in specific terms he had always discovered insuperable barriers to its immediate adoption; certainly he had always insisted that an intercolonial railroad had to precede political union. In fact, “after 1864, Howe might have argued that, even if he had shown some support for union in the past, he was at liberty to oppose the specific proposals contained in the Quebec Resolutions. But he had no need to go that far, because the contention that he had been a strong and consistent advocate of union is so much myth.”

Unfortunately for Howe his name and opinions carried such weight that he could not be left alone, even though as Imperial Fishery Commissioner he was largely silent. The other Confederate newspapers were quick to take up the McCully line of argument. So long
as they were not absolutely certain where Howe stood they could say that anyone who “ventures... to pretend, much less to prove, that Mr. Howe has not spent a lifetime advocating Union of the Colonies, he, and he only, is his traducer” (Unionist, February 6, 1865). But when his views became definitely known, they quoted excerpts from his past speeches and remarked scornfully: “This is the man who challenges comparison with other men upon the score of consistency” (British Colonist, March 2, 1865).

The anti-Confederate papers maintained that in all Howe’s treatment of intercolonial questions “there has been an amount of caution and consistency which other politicians would act wisely to imitate” (Morning Chronicle, February 28, 1865), and that in all his writings “not a line or a sentence can be found, favorable to such a scheme as that propounded ten months ago at Quebec” (Citizen, August 8, 1865). But although the defenders were far closer to the truth than the detractors, they were powerless to repair the damage. In large measure the accusations stuck and were perpetuated. But to have had any validity at all they should have been put on quite a different basis. Here was Howe, always an advocate of imaginative, far-reaching undertakings which would elevate his countrymen’s minds “from the little pedling muddy pool of politics beneath their feet,” standing in opposition to a project seemingly made to order for him. Why did it fail to win his enthusiastic approval and call forth his usual herculean efforts in its behalf? In opposing it, was he being inconsistent with his very nature? To these questions we shall turn later.

Who or what was responsible for rousing Nova Scotia against Charles Tupper’s Conservative administration? This question the Confederates answered as it suited them. Sometimes they attributed it to the forward-looking policies other than union which Tupper had been implementing; mostly they blamed it upon that “pestilential fellow” Howe, who was supposedly the real leader of the anti-union forces. Neither contention had more than a faint glimmer of the truth.

The characteristic feature of Nova Scotia politics after 1848 was the close division of the electorate along party lines. In the Assembly which implemented responsible government the Liberals had a majority of only seven, and in none of the three elections which followed was it any larger. But in 1863 a disorganized and somewhat discredited Liberal party suffered a decisive defeat. Once in office, Tupper threw caution to the winds, as his large majority permitted him to do. In 1864 he revamped the educational system and the following year he made sure the unpopular principle of compulsory assessment for the support of schools would be universally applied at a time when the first measure was still causing perturbation. Still not satisfied, he had also
ventured upon an aggressive, but by no means popular policy of railway expansion. Perhaps somewhat harshly, Professor Kenneth Pryke suggests that "a prudent man would probably have engaged in only one fight at a time. However, the confident arrogant Tupper sat in the midst of the chaos he had helped to produce." Yet the opposition to his other policies at least gave him an excuse for not submitting the Quebec scheme to the electorate. As he himself put it on December 28, 1864:

Is there an intelligent man in this assembly, or in any part of Nova Scotia, who does not know, if you are to dissolve the Legislature to-morrow ... that ... as large a number of people would deliver their opinion at the polls in reference to the School Bill ... as in respect to this question of Confederation ... I believe that with the means which the intelligent people of this country have of instructing their representatives, there will be no difficulty in the Legislature in coming to such a decision as will reflect the views of the great body of the people.

Temporarily Tupper's own test worked against him. For in 1865 an Assembly which was willing to back his proposals on education and railways would not accept the Quebec Resolutions. The majority of its members reflected all too well the viewpoint of their constituents on union. This Tupper knew beyond doubt; he also knew he was lucky to escape an adverse vote on the Quebec scheme in 1865. When a crucial number of Assemblymen reversed their positions in 1866, they were not responding to a change of heart on the part of their constituents. Other influences were responsible, including an appeal to baser motives, which clever politicians manipulated to the full. In no sense did the Assembly's acceptance of union in principle bear the stamp of popular approval.

It is true that, even if the question of union had not come along, the Tupper government had already made itself so unpopular as to jeopardize its chances of success at the polls. Nevertheless, in the months preceding the elections of September, 1867, Confederation so dwarfed every other question as to make it the only issue which mattered. It would take only a casual examination of the newspapers to convince even the most skeptical on that score. The utterly one-sided results of the election in a normally evenly-divided province is additional evidence that the voters had before them an issue which transcended everything else.

Yet in the beginning the Confederates had almost everything on their side, "the writing and printing and speaking power — and an immense deal of executive energy." Only two of the Halifax newspapers, the Citizen and the inconsequential Bullfrog, opposed them.
Two leading Reformers, Adams Archibald and Jonathan McCully, espoused their cause. Bishop Binney, Archbishop Connolly, and three judges of the Supreme Court graced the platform during their public meetings in Halifax. And Tupper thought he had just the weapon to confound the opposing forces; the day before their first public meeting in late December he published a *Royal Gazette Extraordinary* which contained a confidential despatch from the Colonial Secretary strongly endorsing the Quebec scheme. No wonder that the *Evening Express* asked in mock puzzlement concerning the opponents of union: “Who are they?”

It was to find out all too soon. Opposition to the Quebec Resolutions began in the western counties late in the autumn of 1864. Seven county newspapers, including the most influential, opposed them from the start. Yet, as Howe always insisted, it was the mercantile and commercial elements which provided the real backbone of the opposition. Which way the wind was blowing in these quarters became clear on December 9, when the *Sun*, which reflected their viewpoint, denounced union. At public meetings later in the month their most respected members, men like A. G. Jones, W. J. Stairs, and A. M. Uniacke, appeared as anti-Confederates. Even in November, 1864, the Governor had discovered so many leaders of the community opposed to the Quebec scheme that he doubted if it could be carried; by February, 1865, he was describing its opponents as “gentlemen of the highest social standing here and in fact . . . most of the leading bankers and merchants, the wealthiest farmers, and the most independent Gentlemen in the Province.”

Other facts were equally revealing about the state of public opinion. In January, 1865, the Conservatives lost a by-election in the Tory constituency of Annapolis. The government’s policies on education undoubtedly had much to do with the defeat, but the *Chronicle* had some grounds for calling it “a triumph of that new organization which is rapidly taking shape and form . . . to retain our time-hallowed institutions.” Then there were the public meetings throughout the province, especially in January and February. So long as Tupper and the Confederates had the platform to themselves, these gatherings meekly approved resolutions supporting the Quebec scheme. But soon the anti-Confederates were contesting their every argument from every platform. While the *British Colonist* and the *Chronicle* sometimes contradicted each other on the outcome of the meetings, the Confederates were evidently delighted to escape with a non-committal resolution so as to avoid one which condemned the proposed union.

Even before these meetings began Tupper realized he had a battle on his hands. There had to be a villain, and he had got it into his
head that Howe was the source of all his trouble. So early in January he was trying to have Howe’s employer, Lord Russell, “choke him off.” Yet up to this time Howe had neither spoken nor written a word publicly on union.

He had first seen the Quebec Resolutions early in November after his return from the coast of Newfoundland. He had endured in silence the editorials of McCully and others which made him out to be a strong supporter of union. He had sat on the platform during the public meetings in December without saying a word. That is, until December 23. He had then made a single interjection during the speech of Benjamin Wier. It had had nothing to do with Confederation; nevertheless, Howe’s friend, Dr. George Johnson, attributed far-reaching consequences to it in his manuscript biography of Howe. “Every man in that meeting,” he said, “knew from that moment that Mr. Howe was against Confederation.” He continued: “The Anti-confederate Party at that moment sprang into existence, like Minerva from the brain of Jupiter… It had a firm conviction that it had a head, a leader of the absence of which it had been painfully conscious during the few months of the agitation.” Yet no newspaper of the day attributed any importance to the interjection, and no other writer has regarded it as particularly significant. Likely the knowledgeable in the audience inferred from its tone and context that Howe did not like the Quebec scheme. Perhaps the anti-Confederates among them were morally encouraged to learn that Howe felt as they did. But that is the most that can be said for it.

Howe’s direct participation in the debate did not occur until January, 1865. The students of the period are all agreed that he had nothing to do with the dismissal of McCully as editor of the Chronicle on January 9. But he had more than a little to do with “The Botheration Letters,” a series of twelve anonymous editorials denouncing union which appeared in the Chronicle between January 11 and March 2. The Evening Express had a shrewd suspicion who their author was as early as January 20. But it was not until February 22 that the Chronicle practically admitted it was Howe. Whether or not its explanation for his intervention came from his own pen makes little difference, for it was certainly written with his knowledge and consent.

Howe, it pointed out, had devoted himself to the Fishery Commissionership without taking part in provincial politics. Surely, therefore, he was entitled to have his neutrality respected both by friend and foe. But no sooner had the delegates returned from Canada than his name and past actions were continually used as evidence that he
approved fundamental changes which he had not even considered. For a time many of his close friends and supporters actually believed that he favoured the Quebec scheme. Still he held his peace. And he would have continued to remain silent if the Confederates had been content to leave their proposals to the calm judgment of the country. But when they made it clear that the people were to have no chance to pronounce on them, "Mr. Howe no longer held his peace, and expressed his opinion of that design without reserve or circumlocution."

The tendency to attribute great influence to "The Botheration Letters" is wrong. Professor Peter Waite has said that "they rallied opinion everywhere." If they did, it was not because of their author, for few knew his identity until the end of February. There is no doubt that they irritated the Confederate press just as much as they delighted the majority of the Chronicle's readers. Among the latter, however, their function was to reinforce opinions already held, not to convert to another point of view. For the consensus of evidence indicates that the Nova Scotia public had already made up its mind before Howe chose to participate directly or indirectly. As early as January 19 he told Lord Russell that he doubted if the people of any county would support the proposals for union. As usual, he gauged the public mood correctly, although this time he had done little to create it. If a dozen editorials whose authorship was generally unknown swept Nova Scotia into the anti-Confederate camp, they would be about the most influential of all anonymous productions. Actually Howe's part in the emergence of anti-Confederation sentiment was a modest one, and the oft-repeated statement that he roused his countrymen against the Quebec scheme is based largely on myth.

Between March, 1865 and April, 1866, Howe did nothing to influence the Nova Scotian electorate, even anonymously. He had no need to. For Tupper realized that despite his lopsided majority he could not get the Quebec scheme through the Legislature in 1865. He was also aware that Howe stood as an ever-present threat whenever he did choose to press it. So at his urging Howe was called to London in July, 1865, allegedly on business connected with the Reciprocity Treaty, but actually in anticipation that "he might easily be converted into a supporter of Confederation." Vain hope! Instead of falling into line, Howe produced two long papers, one repeating his objections to Confederation and another advocating organization of the Empire. It did not even occur to him that the Imperial appointment to which he was still aspiring might be more readily forthcoming if he relented in his opposition. Knowing the man, no one in England suggested it. In contrast, Annand and other anti-Confederates wavered more than once during these months. Fully aware that the British government
was determined upon union, they were fearful that if it were effected without their co-operation they might lose out in the distribution of the spoils under the new dispensation. But Howe never gave it a thought.

Late in March, 1866 he hurriedly returned to Halifax from the United States. Annand, again coquetting with the enemy, was quickly put in his place. "There was," said Howe, "an end to intrigues" on union. But not among the Assemblymen, for Tupper got the resolutions he wanted through the Legislature. This brought Howe into the open for the first time. In this instance, however, his function was not to mould public opinion but to make it fully vocal. And fully vocal he did make it, both from the public platform in Nova Scotia and as leader of two delegations to England. For a time some public men in Britain wondered if he just might succeed.

Why did Howe turn against the Quebec scheme? The analysis of human behaviour—never easy—presents special difficulties in issues which are as complex as Confederation was in Nova Scotia. The leading public men may actually believe they are acting under one set of motives when another is the real determinant of their conduct; whether this is true or not, their opponents are likely to ascribe the worst possible motives to their actions.

In the case of Howe and Confederation the style was set by Tupper's personal organ, the British Colonist, as early as February 28, 1865. Only six days earlier the Chronicle had revealed who wrote "The Botheration Letters." It did not take the Colonist long to mount its attack on Howe. It found the motive force of his conduct in his "insatiable pride" and his "relentless feelings of revenge." Until Tupper came along he had long been master of the political situation. Then the Cumberland doctor taught him he was not supreme with the people. In 1855 Tupper had beaten him in Cumberland; in 1863 he had forced him out of Nova Scotian political life altogether; and subsequently he had wrought changes in the educational system which Howe had long favoured but had lacked the courage to implement.

Mr. Howe, whose life has been spent in an ignoble struggle to obtain and retain office, had the mortification to see boldly brought forward and successfully carried through, great measures which he admitted his own inability to deal with, and the public business of the country carried forward with a success such as the country has never before witnessed. All this was bad enough, but to remain in obscurity unnoticed while the great work of consolidating the interests and uniting the fortunes of all British North America was being accomplished under a Conservative administration, was too much for Mr. Howe's vain and selfish nature to endure.
Ten years later exactly the same line was taken by George Monro Grant, the pastor of St. Matthew's Presbyterian Church in Halifax, and shortly afterwards the Principal of Queen's University. Although his series of articles was generally eulogistic, he found one over-riding weakness in Howe, a serious lack of self-discipline. It had led him to cast himself "as a strong swimmer into the boiling currents of life, little caring whither they bore him, ... proudly confident that he could hold his own, or at any rate, regain the shore whenever he liked;" it had made him "partly the creature of impulse and partly the servant of principle." But surely even Grant ought to have conceded that Howe's conduct on Confederation was not impulsive. After all, he had been deliberating upon it for eighteen months and contemplating active participation for weeks before he finally took the plunge.

Grant also examined the motives which Howe said governed his conduct on Confederation. While he admitted they had some weight, he found them to be largely illusory. It was so easy, he contended, to "put the telescope to our blind eye and then say that we cannot see. We seldom acknowledge, even to ourselves, much less in print, the real motives that actuate us." And what motivated Howe in this instance? Nothing else than his egotism.

The ship had been launched, without the presence of the designer... What was he to do?... Stern principles called on him to take one course, a hundred pleasant voices called on the other side. Was he to help, to be the lieutenant of Dr. Tupper, the man who had taken the popular breeze out of his sails, who had politically annihilated him for a time...; or was he to put himself at the head of old friends and old foes, regain his proper place, and steer the ship in his own fashion? In the circumstances, only a hero would have done his duty... And Howe was an egotist... [possessed of an] egotism which long feeding on popular applause had developed into a vanity almost incomprehensible in a man so strong.

If anything, Grant had gone the British Colonist one better. But one might expect him to adduce some factual material to support his ascribing of motives. None would deny that Howe was an egotist, although his critics exaggerated this infirmity more than a little. Also, it is no more than barely true that Tupper had "politically annihilated Howe for a time." Archibald and McCully had led the Liberals in the election of 1863, and Howe, who had recently become Imperial Fishery Commissioner, had been induced to contest a seat only out of party loyalty. But surely the connection between facts such as these and Howe's opposition to Confederation is extremely tenuous, to say the least. The fact is that Grant produces not a tittle of evidence to show that self-hypnosis induced Howe to oppose Confederation for reasons which he did not realize or admit. Undoubtedly Grant had
special advantages as an actual observer of the Confederation scene in Halifax. Yet even the most disinterested person would have had trouble in disentangling motives in the welter of charges and countercharges. And Grant was no neutral. For he had taken to the stump himself to support the proposed union.

On grounds no better than these "the jealousy of Tupper" motive was built up and perpetuated. It was too much to expect G. M. Grant's son, William Lawson, to provide anything different in his contribution to the "Chronicles of Canada" series in 1915. Almost verbatim he repeated his father's account of Howe's motives. But to them he added a statement, apparently used first by Reverend E. M. Saunders in 1909, which was to become deeply embedded in the folklore of Howe and Confederation.

Saunders' *Three Premiers of Nova Scotia* must be one of the most unreliable works ever to have been taken seriously by first-rate historians. "Without apparent malice it depicts a spoiler Howe who does his best to thwart the good intentions of men clearly ordained for the times, the selfless and virtuous J. W. Johnston and Charles Tupper." More specifically, it sees "Confederation as an issue in which 'the small and great Howe fought desperately,' the result being a losing battle in the bottomless pit of an unconquerable egoism." This is Principal Grant all over again, but Saunders attempted to cinch the argument by quoting a remark attributed to Howe that he would not "play second fiddle to that d-d Tupper." In years to come that statement was to be accepted by many as convincing proof or, at least, as strong supporting evidence of what actuated Howe.

In his treatment of motives R. G. Trotter played down the "second-fiddle" argument; A. R. M. Lower did no more than wonder if Howe, egotist that he was, found the sight of a successful rival too much for him; Donald Creighton seems to combine some of Principal Grant with some of J. A. Roy. Roy, Howe's most recent biographer (1935) and a professor of English, treated Howe as the protagonist of a Shakespearian tragedy whose fortunes proceeded inexorably downwards after reaching their apogee. "Once [responsible government] was achieved his main work was done. Dullness succeeded enthusiasm, cynicism, faith; and from now on, his story is one of fading day and falling night." Creighton appears to accept this thesis at face value. He sees the situation this way:

A few weeks before... Howe had turned sixty. The best of his life was gone. He was entering the last tired and disillusioned decade of a career that had never been quite what he had hoped it might be...
He brooded, his big face, once ennobled by vitality and conviction, now dulled with care and disillusionment and fatigue. In his absence, without his help, without his knowledge, others had dared to rearrange British North America to their liking. Well, they could not. They could not, for he, Joseph Howe, would prevent them.

Yet even Professor Creighton seems to have mellowed just a little with respect to Howe. For although he could not resist quoting the "second-fiddle" remark in The Road to Confederation, he is not sure whether Howe made it or someone said he made it.

In their essence the accounts of Principal Grant, E. M. Saunders, W. L. Grant, and Donald Creighton are all highly questionable. At the outset they accept, with practically no evidence, the contention that an egotistical Howe instinctively rejected union because Tupper rather than himself had helped to devise it; they then gloss over Howe's own arguments, even though they were thoroughly consonant with his past activities and statements. Howe's conduct is understandable and even predictable, apart from any consideration of egotism or jealousy. The possibility of putting Tupper in his place may have appeared attractive to him, but there is no real evidence that it governed his actions.

Howe feared, most of all, that the discussion of union would take the minds of both Britons and colonials away from what he deemed was the most vital question of the time, the organization of the Empire, and that the implementation of union would prevent such an organization from being effected for many years to come, if at all. Thus he was not being inconsistent with his basic nature in opposing the Quebec Resolutions. He already had a far-reaching project to which he had committed himself and he could not be enthusiastic about anything which might stand in its way.

The organization of the Empire was not a new theme for Howe. Even before responsible government had been conceded, he was already arguing that colonials ought to have some say in determining the Empire's policies. British subjects everywhere, he maintained, had "a common right to share in much that our ancestors have bequeathed," including that of helping to make the decisions which affected them. He thought, too, that the leading colonial minds should be able to aspire to colonial governorships and senior positions at the Colonial Office, or, as he put it, "to have a fair field of competition on which to illustrate, side by side, with the other branches of the family the heroic or intellectual qualities which 'run in the blood'". A stout autonomist like Professor Lower might wonder whether Howe, "despite his earlier work for Responsible Government was [any] more than a
colonial who preferred the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table in England to the promise of North American nationhood." But actually Howe's proposals indicated anything but subservience; in his mind they were simply the logical outcome of responsible government.

Professor Creighton calls Howe a liberal imperial federationist born out of his time. "Even Whigs like Russell and Palmerston," he says, "would have thought him comically old-fashioned. Hard-eyed, cost-accounting Liberals like Cardwell and Gladstone would have regarded his imperial dreams as stupid and dangerous. There was not the slightest chance that the Empire for which he hoped could ever come into existence during his lifetime." Creighton seems to imply a much more complex organization of the Empire than Howe had intended. But in any case Howe could not be expected to possess the hindsight of modern historians. Perhaps he was obtuse; certainly he had not yet realized that none of the British statesmen cared nearly as much for the Empire as he did. That disillusioning experience was to come later. In 1865-66 Howe was not the worn-out, lack-lustre, despairing individual whom Roy portrays, but no less energetic and ebullient than before. And with the same enthusiasm for the Empire. "Do we want to be part of a great nationality?," he asked the people of Yarmouth in May, 1866. "We are already a portion of the greatest empire on which the sun has ever shone." A little later he told the people of Barrington:

When the Apostle [Paul] claimed his Roman citizenship, he knew what it embraced — the protection of the eagles, the majesty and power of Rome. I am a British subject, and for me that term includes free trade and a common interest with fifty Provinces and two hundred and fifty millions of people, forming an Empire too grand and too extensive for Paul's imagination to conceive. You go down to the sea in ships, and a flag of old renown floats above them, and the Consuls and Ministers of the Empire are prompt to protect your property and your sons in every part of the world.

Howe had no doubts about the direction in which Nova Scotians ought to look, and it was not westward to the backwoods of Canada. None gloried more than he in the Nova Scotian mercantile marine and the doings of his compatriots upon the high seas. Should they not continue, therefore, to work out their own destiny along these lines "without running away, above tide-water, after the will-of-the-wisp at Ottawa, which will land us in a Slough of Despond?" What could Ottawa ever be anyway? It was as close to the North Pole as almost any city in the world, and had no attractions other than a waterfall. "Take a Nova Scotian to Ottawa, away above tidewater, freeze him up for five months, where he cannot view the Atlantic, smell salt water, or see the sail of a ship, and the man will pine and die."

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A union, he admitted, might sometime be practicable. But it had to come by stages, "by Railroads first, social and commercial intercourse afterwards, and then, when we were prepared for it by a natural development of our system on the model we admire at Home." To union in general he put forward the same objections as in 1840,—the defenceless state of the frontier of Canada, the mixed and hostile character of the population, and so on. Had the French Canadians, by sticking together, not controlled the government of Canada since the Act of Union? "They will do the same thing in a larger Union... But should a chance combination thwart them, then they will back their Local Legislature against the United Parliament, and, in less than five years, will as assuredly separate from the Confederacy as Belgium did from Holland."

Of the Quebec scheme in particular Howe was equally critical. The United Kingdom, for its own safety, had repudiated the local legislatures which Scotland and Ireland had once possessed. Yet it would now foist five Parliaments upon four millions of people who had no foreign affairs to manage or colonists to govern. If the Dominion Parliament was to be completely paramount, as it was apparently intended, why have provincial legislatures at all? Would they not be useless, mischievous, perhaps even dangerous? Not only had the Nova Scotian delegates permitted the provincial Assembly to be "shorn of all dignity and authority," but in accepting representation by population they had been "done Brown." As a result, the Canadians would "appoint our governors, judges and senators. They are to 'tax us by any and every mode' and spend the money. They are to regulate our trade, control our Post Office, command the militia, fix the salaries, do what they like with our shipping and navigation, with our sea-coast and river fisheries, regulate the currency and the rate of interest, and seize upon our savings banks." All in all, he concluded, that "where there are no cohesive qualities in the material, no skill in the design, no prudence in the management, unite what you will and there is no strength."

Howe's case suffered somewhat because he resorted to too many arguments, some good, some bad, some mutually inconsistent. The contention that union would put the colonies in an even more indefensible position than before seems way off the mark. So was the assumption that the Nova Scotian members of Parliament could exercise little or no influence in the new House of Commons. But Professor Creighton is unduly severe in suggesting that "The Botheration Letters" seldom rise above their lame title; after all, they were not state papers prepared for Lord John Russell's perusal. Nor were all of his arguments "thin," as Professor Lower would have us believe. Indeed, some
of his insights were unusually prophetic. His prediction that tariffs would be doubled and that Nova Scotian commerce would be seriously burdened as a result came true with a vengeance. In fact, it turned out to be the province’s greatest grievance under the new order: It now appears, too, that Howe was more than right when he prophesied that it would take the wisdom of Solomon and the energy and strategy of Frederick the Great to weld a people with such few cohesive qualities into “a new nationality.”

But it was none of these factors which propelled Howe once more into active politics; what did it was Tupper’s determination to implement union without putting it before the electorate. The man who had fought governors and battled with bigwigs about lesser denials of the people’s rights could not, as George Johnson points out, accept what he regarded as coercion in a matter of such magnitude.

It was reversing all the principles for which he had fought. This firm, fixed, strong passion for the people’s rights was at the bottom of all Mr. Howe’s opposition to the Union of the Provinces under the Quebec scheme and had more to do with settling him into the position of opponent than all the facts his powerful mind, during months of thought, had massed into consecutive arguments and flung with such intensity of feeling at the Imperial Government, the Confederate Party and the Legislatures concerned.

The Grants, Roy, and Creighton present Howe as a middle-aged man who, despite his earlier triumphs, felt he had not realized his full possibilities and who, like a desperate gambler, threw caution to the winds and tried a last desperate fling on the question of union. Perhaps a more accurate picture is that of a man who had got almost everything he wanted, who still hoped for an Imperial office if he could secure one, but who appeared not to be unhappy with the second-best appointment which he had just accepted, the editorship of the New York Albion. Above all, the record is conclusive that it was a man who did not relish the thought of getting back into active politics.

The decision not to consult the people led to Howe’s return to Halifax late in March, 1866. Neither Lieutenant-Governor Williams nor Adams Archibald would do anything to accommodate him. It was the refusal of Archibald, says Professor Chester Martin, which “brought Howe into the field, horse, foot and artillery.” Was it not true in England, he asked, that “no important change in the machinery of Government is made without an appeal to the country?” To McCully, who said that Parliament could do anything but change a man into a woman, he replied: “Mr. McCully may have the power to knock out his mother’s brains, but the act, if done, would be murder, nevertheless.”
In Howe's mind the struggle to prevent Confederation and later to secure its repeal did not differ in essence from that for responsible government. George Johnson considered he was more eloquent during this agitation than in any previous one because he felt more indignant. This indignation was directed against the "marauders outside and enemies within" who thought only of themselves and cared little for Nova Scotia. Within were the Assemblymen who had reversed themselves for the sake of preferment and the Confederate leaders who had bought them and who refused to let the people decide. Outside were the Canadians who sought to overthrow the constitution of a free province simply because they chose to make representative government unworkable. Apparently they did not mind drawing Nova Scotia into their own peculiar brand of political turmoil with its ever recurring crises and deadlocks. But surely they should realize that "even French girls who would have no objections to being married don't like to be ravished." Outside, too, were the British financial interests who, through union, hoped to ensure greater security for their present and future investments in British North America, and the British politicians who wanted to reduce their own burden by shifting part of it onto the new federal government, perhaps as a preliminary step to getting rid of the colonies altogether. "But," asked Howe, "who, if anybody, thought of Nova Scotia?"

This booklet is an attempt to understand Howe, not to judge him. But if he is to be judged, it ought to be on proper grounds. Just because Confederation appears to have been successful, or just because historians feel that by its very nature it was ordained to be a good thing, it cannot be assumed— as some historians have done—that anyone who opposed it was guilty of bad judgment or suffered from a deficiency of character. Historians, like everyone else, have the right to make value judgments but not to impute bad motives or attribute faulty judgment to others simply because they adopted different premises.

As to using success for measuring the soundness of political action, there is, in Professor Trotter's words, "no justice in that sort of ex post facto verdict on political opinions." Certainly it would lead to an uncertain, erratic type of history. For if Quebec separatism were now to succeed the historian of the future might regard Howe as the true prophet, Tupper and Macdonald as the false ones. It would also mean that a public man who was anxious to have his activities recorded favourably in the history books would have to make a careful calculation of the probabilities and then pursue a line of conduct in accord with the likely outcome rather than his own principles. But could even a coldly calculating Howe have forecast the probable success of
the union in April, 1866? This kind of criterion for making judgments would "downgrade a person of unimpeachable motives who makes a strong fight against impossible odds and at the same time tend to enthrone Machiavellianism as a cardinal virtue of politics."

Has something like this not actually occurred in the case of Howe? Is it not strange that the same historians who psychoanalyzed him and ferreted out bad motives for which there is little direct evidence passed over in silence the conduct of the Confederate leaders, who were determined to implement the union without consulting the people, no matter what means they had to employ? Surely these historians should have expressed some opinion on the lengths to which political leaders may go in overriding an electorate which is unconvinced of the wisdom of their high policy.

Criticize Howe, if you will, for allowing his Nova Scotian patriotism to exaggerate the evils which might befall his native province under union. Criticize him for failing to recognize the feasibility of a united British North America in the 1860's. Criticize him for being so obtuse that he could not appreciate the complete unacceptability of his proposals for the organization of the Empire. But do not give undue weight to the hoary mythology which has perpetuated the charges of inconsistency, precipitate intervention, and bad motives foisted upon him by the partisanship of the Confederation era.
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

This booklet is, in part, a reorganization and expansion of the ideas contained in J. Murray Beck's article, "Joseph Howe and Confederation: Myth and Fact," published in *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, 1964. Extremely valuable in tracing the mythology surrounding Joseph Howe and Confederation back to its source were the files of the *Morning Chronicle, Unionist and Halifax Journal*, and *British Colonist* for the years 1864, 1865, and 1866, as were the four articles on Howe by G. M. Grant in *The Canadian Monthly and National Review* between May and August, 1875, later republished in book form under the title *Joseph Howe* (Halifax, 1904).


A manuscript biography of Howe which deals sympathetically with his position on Confederation is included in the George Johnson Papers in the Public Archives of Canada. Howe's letters on Confederation form part of the Howe Papers, also in the Public Archives of Canada. A representative selection of Howe's speeches and letters during the Confederation era may be found in volume II of *The Speeches and Public Letters of Joseph Howe*, edited by Joseph Chisholm (Halifax, 1909). A more limited selection with connecting notes is contained in J. Murray Beck's *Joseph Howe — Voice of Nova Scotia* (Toronto, 1964).