Cameron was born in Beaucaire, Languedoc, France, in 1817, where his father, Angus Cameron, quartermaster of the 79th Cameron Highlanders, was stationed during the post-Waterloo occupation which ended in 1818. His mother was the daughter of Samuel Hillyard of Saint Ives, Huntingdonshire, apparently a gentleman of substance. Later, Angus Cameron became paymaster of the Royal Canadian Rifles, raised by the Imperial government for services in Canada.¹

After leaving France, the Camerons went to Ireland where John Hillyard attended Kilkenny College until 1825 when his father was posted to Kingston in Upper Canada. Here young Cameron went to Kingston Grammar School, which was run by the Reverend John Cruikshank. Among his schoolmates were John A. Macdonald, Oliver Mowat, the future premier of Ontario, and Henry Scadding, the future historian of Toronto.² At school Cameron shone among his contemporaries, being diligent, and acquiring with relative ease the kind of intellectual polish which wins early recognition from teachers, while the less attentive Macdonald give no hint of his latent talent for political combinations.

In 1831, when his father was transferred to York, John Hillyard was able to display his abilities at Upper Canada College where they soon attracted the notice of leading families of the capital, and of Archdeacon John Strachan, who was a connoisseur of talent. On leaving school, he studied law under the guidance of John Henry Boulton, whose third daughter, Elizabeth, he married in 1847. During the troubles of 1837-38, he served in Toronto and on the Niagara frontier as a captain in the Queen’s Rangers.

Admitted to the bar in 1838, Cameron played a leading role on the Commission appointed to revise the statutes of Upper Canada in 1840, edited the Upper Canadian Law Reports in 1841, and became Queen’s Counsel in 1846.³

During these years Cameron demonstrated mastery of precise and dignified prose, which demands skill and patience rather than creative imagination. Apart from this talent, much prized among legislators, Cameron demonstrated outstanding ability by his performance at the bar. Here his capacity for close reasoning and precise language was supported by a theatrical talent which excited ridicule at times, but undoubtedly made him the best lawyer in the province.

In the early forties, while Macdonald was displaying his less spectacular gifts on the smaller stage of Kingston, his former
classmate had demonstrated remarkable ability and acquired excellent connections. Cameron's political future seemed assured, as his demonstrated ability at the bar would make him a commanding figure in the Assembly.

The Toronto Compact families were anxious to acquire the services of talented young men whom they considered to be socially and politically respectable. John Beverly Robinson was himself a protegé of Archdeacon Strachan's, and in turn had recognized the ability of William Henry Draper, who by the mid-1840's had become the recognized leader of Upper Canadian Conservatism.

After the Lafontaine-Baldwin ministry had been dismissed, Draper, at the request of the governor, Sir Charles Metcalfe, had formed a government and had gone to the country. He won the election of 1844 by a Loyalist coalition which included Compact Tories like Sir Allan Mac Nab, the Orange Grand Master Ogle Gowan, the Methodist Egerton Ryerson, and independent Conservatives like John A. Macdonald.

Although the coalition had a majority, it failed to secure French-Canadian support and was weakened by internal divisions. By 1846 Draper, as a moderate Conservative, sought to strengthen his position within the government by dismissing Solicitor-General Henry Sherwood, a Compact Tory, and offered the post to John Hillyard Cameron. The offer was accepted and Draper acquired the services of a more able and manageable young man, who was nevertheless linked to Compact Tories.

Although Cameron's appointment strengthened Draper's influence, it was seen by Ogle Gowan, the Orange leader, who was an occasional ally of Henry Sherwood, as a victory for Compact interests. Gowan insisted that Draper and his moderate colleagues, William Morris and John A. Macdonald, who had also accepted office, would become a facade for Compact government. In his view, the Cabinet would be managed by "Henry John Bolton, the father-in-law, William L. Robinson, the brother-in-law, John Hillyard Cameron, the son-in-law, William Cayley, another Bolton son-in-law, with Sir Allan MacNab, whose wife is Mr. Bolton's niece, to direct the family." This view is interesting only as a reflection of Gowan's reaction to the appearance of the future Orange Grand Master in provincial politics, for Cameron, whatever his connections, was prepared to support Draper.

As there was no general election at the time of Cameron's appointment, a seat had to be found for him in a Cornwall by-

election, where he was returned by party influence, although the name Cameron was an advantage in an area which had been settled by Scots. Draper seems to have regarded Cameron as his successor, but there was no time for an adequate apprenticeship. In May, 1847, a year after Cameron had accepted office, Draper retired from politics, accepting an appointment as judge. He invited Cameron to take over his post as attorney-general which, in effect, meant accepting the leadership of the ministry. It was an offer to take command of a sinking ship.

Even if Cameron had been able to put together a ministry, the absence of French-Canadian support, and the impossibility of getting it, ensured defeat in the next election. By making an effort to form a ministry, Cameron would have established his position as the leading representative of moderate Conservatism. However, he preferred to let Henry Sherwood make the effort, while he himself remained aboard the sinking ship, accepting a position on the Executive Council. Sherwood's ministry was swept away in the winter election of 1847-48, although Cameron was able to retain his seat. His refusal to accept office as attorney-general had left moderate Conservatism without a recognized leader, though Cameron might still assert his claim by playing a leading role in the opposition.

Cameron understood that a future Conservative success depended on winning French-Canadian support and he sought to accomplish this by an alliance of Catholics and Anglicans on the question of separate schools. Had he succeeded, he would have occupied a more central position in politics, which was the key to the effective exercise of power. Cameron made a beginning but Francis Hincks, who had already pre-empted the middle of the road, was able to dissolve the emerging alliance between Anglicans and Catholics by giving concessions to Catholics, but none to Anglicans.

If Cameron had remained in provincial politics and accepted the necessary but tedious task of bringing fragments and factions into temporary alliances, he might still have become the great Conservative leader of the century. It was not to his taste and in what he probably regarded as a strategic retreat, he decided not to contest his Cornwall seat in 1851. Instead he devoted his energies to municipal politics in Toronto, and to building up a financial empire.

In so doing, he became one of the leading figures in Toronto, but Toronto was not a good political base because it was tied to regional interests, and because of the diversity of its politics, it could never become a safe seat. Cornwall was not a safe seat, either, but Cameron
might have secured his position there over the years, as the town had the advantage of being in that eastern section of Upper Canada which profited by the union of provinces and was consequently less susceptible to the pull of regional interests.

In 1851 Cameron, a Torontonian with many talents, yielded to the temptation of Toronto, and without realizing it, placed himself in a position where he could only remain in politics as the champion of regional causes. Kingston, which offered less social and financial opportunities than Toronto, provided Macdonald with a safe seat. As representative of his smaller and less demanding community, Macdonald was free to play the part of mediator between the French-Canadian Bleus and Upper Canadian Tories, which after 1851 was no longer open to Cameron.

The return of Cameron to provincial politics in 1854 as representative of Toronto coincided with the formation of the Conservative MacNab-Morin coalition. As a representative of Toronto and a Conservative of demonstrated ability, he had an obvious claim to a place in the government, but it was easy to find reasons for leaving him out. The coalition was committed to securalization of clergy reserves, a measure Cameron was committed to oppose. He would be acceptable to French-Canadians, but not to Hincksite Liberals in the coalition. These were sufficient reasons for leaving him out of the ministry as long as clergy reserves remained an issue.

As a consistent defender of Anglican interests, Cameron was, by 1854, the most representative of that line of Tories that began with Strachan's pupils and was continued by their sons. He consequently had little choice but to fight a rearguard action in defence of a lost cause that had been abandoned even by Sir Allan MacNab. Cameron did the best he could, arguing that secularization of clergy reserves would undermine the special position of the Catholic Church in Lower Canada. Although he aroused the anxieties of French-Canadian members of the government, the measure went through. Yet by his stand Cameron secured the best possible terms for the Anglican community.

Cameron was a moderate by temperament, more so than Macdonald who frequently became involved in sterile personal quarrels. When the reserves ceased to be an issue, there were no serious political differences between the two men. Yet Macdonald could not join a partnership with Cameron without the risk of becoming a junior partner. Cameron was thus left to employ his talents as an independent back bencher. Under these circumstances, he could hardly avoid becoming the champion of popular causes which in turn would lead to association with popular movements.

Protestantism was the great popular cause in Toronto, championed both by Liberal George Brown and the largely Conservative Orange Lodges. Cameron had not yet become an Orangeman by 1854 and, as noted above, was regarded by Ogle Gowan as an agent of the Family Compact. Gowan was an Irish gentleman of precarious means and insecure social status, but a gifted demagogue and a tireless organizer. Cameron, who had entered politics from the top, could hardly appreciate his value. Macdonald, on the other hand, had to make his own way in politics. He therefore had bonds of sympathy with Gowan and carefully cultivated his friendship. On his return to politics, Cameron affronted Gowan by acquiring control of the British Colonist and providing it with a subsidy of $5,000 a year, thus supporting a Conservative journal critical of the ministry and in competition with Gowan's Patriot.

It was against this background that Cameron became a champion of Protestant rights by making a political issue out of the Corrigan affair. Robert Corrigan was an Irish Protestant who had been beaten by a group of Irish Roman Catholics at a cattle show in the small village of St. Sylvestre on 18 October 1855 and died the following day. The men accused of his murder were acquitted with the apparent approval of Judge Jean-Francois-Joseph Duval who presided at the trial. There was an outburst of indignation in the press and Cameron, assuming the role of public-spirited legal expert, introduced and carried a motion asking that Duval's charges to the jury be made available to the Provincial Assembly. This move was an obvious threat to the unity of a Cabinet composed of Upper Canadian Conservatives and French-Canadians. The government met the challenge by asking for and receiving a vote of confidence which was given by Cameron along with the others. It then persuaded Conservatives, including Cameron, to rescind the motion. Cameron emerged from this issue as the concerned but responsible defender of the Protestant minority in Lower Canada, exposing the devices of opportunist politicians. In so doing, he laid the foundation of his career as Orange Grand Master. At the same time, by alienating the French-Canadian ministers, he made it easier for Macdonald to keep him out of the government.

Shortly after this incident, Cameron was presented with what appeared to be an opportunity to challenge Macdonald's leadership of the Upper Canadian Conservatives. Sir Allan MacNab was considered
to be a political handicap by many of the ministry. To force his resignation, Macdonald and the Upper Canadian ministers resigned on the pretext that they did not have a majority in Upper Canada. Left virtually alone, MacNab resigned, whereupon Macdonald and his colleagues resumed office.

This dubious manoeuvre won wide-spread sympathy for MacNab, and there had already been considerable speculation in the press about a new ministry which would include Cameron. It has been assumed by most recent historians that Cameron was prepared to challenge Macdonald's leadership at this time because it was the obvious thing to do. Yet Foster Griezic, after investigating the matter in detail, could find no evidence to support this assumption. Cameron apparently did not even interrupt his plans for a trip to England.12

It is unlikely that an effort to challenge Macdonald's leadership would have succeeded, but it was in Cameron's nature to make the attempt. He had been brought into politics by adoption and was not inclined to fight for power. He remained an influential and able man, but the following year his financial empire, which was one of the pillars of his influence, became a casualty of the financial collapse of 1857. Faced with heavy debts, he scorned bankruptcy and sought through his remaining property and law practice to meet the claims of his creditors.

He could no longer support the Colonist and could not contest his Toronto seat in the general election of 1857. When he announced his withdrawal from politics, an article in the Leader, which was associated with Gowan's Patriot, referred to Cameron as "the last rose of the past summer of Toryism - the solitary member of a once powerful party."13 Gowan, who probably wrote these lines, was referring to a brother Orangeman, as Cameron appears to have joined a Toronto Lodge in 1856.14

This was not an unusual step for a Conservative to take. Some, like George Strange Boulton, had taken it as early as 1832,15 and John A. Macdonald became an Orangeman in 1844 at the time he became a candidate for the Provincial Assembly. At the outset of his career Cameron probably took the Orange vote for granted and assumed membership in the Lodge would be a handicap when seeking Catholic support. At the time of the Corrigan affair, which apparently was the occasion for his joining the Lodge in 1856, the Orange Order was divided. The schism began in 1853 when Ogle Gowan, the founder of the movement, deposed his successor, George Benjamin, by packing the Grand Lodge which was meeting in Kingston. Benjamin in turn founded a rival Grand Lodge which by 1855 was recognized by 180 out of a total of 712 Lodges.16 Benjamin soon renounced leadership of the schismatic Grand Lodge and was replaced briefly by G.W. Whitebend, and then by John Flanagan, a former mayor of Kingston and foe of John A. Macdonald.17

The principal cause of the schism had been Gowan's adherence to Macdonald's policy of alliance with the French-Canadian "Bleus." Many adherents of the schismatic lodges, like John Holland of Toronto, openly supported George Brown, but Benjamin remained an anti-ministerial Conservative. Cameron joined Toronto Number 507 which supported the schismatic Grand Lodge, but used his influence to heal the schism. As a conciliatory gesture he presented a petition to the Legislature, drawn up by Gowan, for the incorporation of the Orange movement, which was opposed by Flanagan, the schismatic leader. The petition was unsuccessful, but the need for incorporation provided an incentive for re-unification.18

The schism was finally healed in 1856 when George Lyttleton Allen, a Gowan supporter, became Grand Master.19 Mutual suspicion remained and Cameron, as the only eminent Orangeman not involved in the original schism, was a strong candidate for Grand Master. Yet when he was nominated by former supporters of the Benjamine faction, his nomination was rejected on technical grounds. As Gowan's son, Nassau C. Gowan, explained: "... it was soon discovered that he (Cameron) had not advanced to those degrees which constitute eligibility, and that some accident ensued to prevent a dispensation being made in his favour."20 Cameron, it seems, had not yet received the order of the Purple, which would have made him eligible for office. This degree was normally granted to Orangemen within two years of their original initiation. As Cameron had been initiated sometime in 1856, he had yet to receive the Purple.

This move, sponsored by former Benjaminites, to make Cameron Grand Master, explains the hesitant support Cameron received from the Patriot and the Leader during the Toronto by-election of 1858. George Brown, having been Premier for forty-eight hours, had to return to his constituents for re-election. Macdonald and the Cabinet ministers who had been out of office for forty-eight hours took advantage of a new rule which enabled ministers to change portfolios without standing for re-election. By shifting portfolios and shifting them back again in what was called the "Double Shuffle" they were able to resume office without the need for re-election.

This device won sympathy for Brown and he would probably have
been re-elected by acclamation had not Cameron acted as a loyal party man by agreeing to run against him. Cameron deserved administration support but the election began in late August, just six weeks after the Grand Lodge meeting when Cameron’s bid for the Orange leadership had been blocked. Consequently the Patriot and the Leader, by attacking Brown and McGee, and offering Cameron sympathy, moved by way of benevolent neutrality to conditional support.23 Left without the support of his party, Cameron still made a good showing, polling 144 votes short of victory in an election in which over 5,000 voted. This suited Macdonald’s purpose. It forced Brown to fight but left Cameron without a seat.

Cameron’s defeat made him more acceptable as Orange Grand Master, but there was still resistance. He was elected Grand Master by a narrow margin of twelve votes at the Grand Lodge meeting held in Hamilton on 22 June 1859.24 Even Gowan had to accept the fact that he was the candidate who divided Orangemen least. The Patriot announced, “No gentleman in the body could bring a greater amount of influence and sterling ability to bear upon the councils of the Order.”25

The Canadian Lodges needed an eminent Conservative, not too closely associated with ministerial politics, who could provide the kind of dignity and prestige which in Ireland was found by appointing a Peer as Grand Master. Ogle Gowan’s perpetual involvement in political and personal disputes made it impossible for him to supply that need, and his successors, George Benjamin and George Lyttleton Allen, although more conciliatory, were minor political figures who brought no prestige to the office of Grand Master. Cameron regarded the office as yet another position of honour and influence, like becoming chairman of the board of directors of a college or a corporation. He intended to act as a mediator among Orangemen and to use his influence to keep the Lodges from creating tensions in the community.

Although he was identified with Protestant rather than Conservative Party interests, Cameron had no intention of leading a Protestant crusade or making the Lodges a base for opposition to the ministry. He nevertheless felt the need to balance Gowan’s influence in the movement. Yet, having neither the ability nor the inclination to meet Gowan on his own ground of factional politics, he sought to outmanoeuvre him by a re-organization of the Grand Lodges.

In any growing organization there is always a case for creating new sub-divisions, and Cameron merely adopted a plan which had been proposed for some time. Under the existing system there were several Provincial Grand Lodges, but the Upper Canadian Orangemen, who were the most numerous, met under the direct authority of the Grand Lodge of British North America. This had suited Gowan’s needs as most of his influence was in Toronto, in the eastern counties of Upper Canada, and in the Maritimes.26

After assuming office as Grand Master, Cameron, in what seems to have been a coup, adjourned the June meeting of Grand Lodge in Hamilton, and re-opened it in August at Cobourg where Gowan could not be present and many of his supporters would have difficulty in attending.27 Here Cameron introduced the new system, the main feature of which was the creation of two Grand Lodges in Upper Canada: a Western Grand Lodge which included Toronto, and a central Grand Lodge, which would provide for the rest of the province. Lower Canada was placed under an Eastern Grand Lodge. All the provincial Grand Lodges would be under the Grand Lodge of British North America over which Cameron presided. This system forced Gowan, who was in Toronto, to confine most of his efforts to the Western Grand Lodge, and made it difficult for him to make effective use of his influence east of Toronto.

Evidence of Gowan’s first reaction to this new order appears in an article in the Omsnmeer Warden, which was quoted with approval in the Patriot. The new system was described as “... a ridiculous, uncalled–for piece of useless and expensive machinery - a death blow to the welfare of the Order.”28 For the next five years Gowan continued to fight the new system, passing resolutions against it in the Western Grand Lodge, but he made no effort to challenge Cameron’s position as Grand Master. Policy might be changed but Cameron was not only Grand Master: at the time of the re-organization of the Lodges, he was also acting as counsel for the ministry, defending them in court against charges that the “Double Shuffle” was unconstitutional. Gowan dedicated his “History and Mystery of Orangeism,” which came out in 1859, to Cameron,29 and when Cameron was named Grand Master a second time in June 1860, the Patriot announced that differences among Orangemen had ceased to exist since Cameron had become Grand Master.30 Nevertheless it expressed the hope that “Mr. Cameron has weighed all possible consequences” and reminded him that because half of the province was Catholic, no Grand Master could become a Cabinet minister.31

In this manner Cameron was warned that although his success as a mediator among Orangemen was recognized, he was not welcome in the Conservative ministry. His value to the ministry was soon
demonstrated in the late summer of 1860 when a crisis involving Orangemen arose out of the visit of the Prince of Wales. The Grand Lodge anticipated trouble. As Orange processions had been banned in Ireland, it was evident that the Duke of Newcastle, who in his capacity as Colonel Secretary accompanied the Prince on his visit, would be embarrassed by contact with the Orangemen.

Cameron, as a lawyer, understood that as a society legal in Canada the Orangemen had a right to display their loyalty and their numbers. As a politician, he felt that it should not be exercised. There was a precedent for such restraint. Irish Orangemen had refrained from any display of insignia during the visit of George IV to Dublin in 1821.32

The first difficulty Cameron faced involved the presentation of a Loyal Address by Orangemen to the royal party. As the Governor-General, Sir Edmund Head, had accepted such an address in 1857, Cameron wrote to him on the subject and was told that the presentation of an Orange address would be embarrassing to Newcastle. The Grand Master informed the county Masters and no Orange addresses were prepared.33 There was no discussion, however, of the display of Orange Insignia, but the Orangemen between Quebec City and Kingston assumed correctly that a display of any kind would be unwelcome.

The Kingston Orangemen, under the influence of the former schismatic Grand Master John Flanagan, decided to make a distinction between presentation of addresses and a display of Orange insignia. Kingston Orangemen were ordered to turn out in full regalia and their example was followed in Belleville and Toronto.34 Cameron, following protocol, made no public effort to restrain this move, but he wrote to Newcastle and received no immediate reply. Nothing was heard from the royal party until Newcastle wrote to the mayor of Toronto on 30 August making it clear that Orange displays would be unacceptable. Cameron then advised Kingston Orangemen to comply with Newcastle's wishes. Meanwhile, Flanagan had assembled the Orangemen in full regalia and emphasized the anti-Catholic aspects of Orangeism by including in their display portraits of Garibaldi who was then invading the Papal States. Although the royal party was already aware of this, it received a delegation of Catholics who explained what the Orangemen were doing. This made it easier for Flanagan to encourage defiance as he could claim that Newcastle was coming under Catholic influence.35

Negotiations broke down and the royal party did not land at Kingston. John A. Macdonald, however, thought it best to conciliate his Orange supporters. He remained behind at Kingston and wisely did not rejoin the royal party until it reached Hamilton. Thus Cameron was left to manage the Orangemen as best he could. Belleville Orangemen were inclined to defer to Newcastle, but the arrival of Flanagan and a party of Kingston Orangemen induced them to assume an attitude of defiance and the Prince moved on without landing.36

There were no difficulties at Cobourg but Toronto was the real test of Cameron's influence as failure to visit the metropolis would endanger the success of the royal tour. A public meeting was called at Clarence Square, attended by a thousand Orangemen, including Flanagan, who had arrived with a party from Kingston. Here Cameron and Gowan asserted the right of Orangemen to greet their Prince in their own way, but the Grand Master declared that he would resign if they prevented the royal party from landing.37 He then led the Orangemen in full regalia under various Orange arches which had been erected, but the procession ended several hours before the landing of the royal party. That evening, Mrs. Cameron was escorted by the Prince to the head table at a banquet organized by the Law Society of Toronto.38

Cameron had had been unable to save Macdonald from personal disaster at Kingston, but he had ensured the success of the royal tour, and left the impression that the Orangemen had acted with admirable restraint in the face of provocation. As the injured party, the Orangemen received a great deal of sympathy and the opposition was prepared to exploit this for the purpose of embarrassing the ministry.

Against this background, the Lodges, with Cameron's support, were able to collect 100,000 signatures protesting against the treatment the Orangemen had received. These were taken by Cameron to England and presented to the Queen in the presence of the Duke of Newcastle. This personal triumph for Cameron, which enormously increased the prestige of the Lodges, set the stage for his return to provincial politics in the election of 1861. He could have easily been returned for Toronto, but agreed to stand for Peel County, where he faced James Aikins, an Orangeman from an Orange family who was also a local man. Aikins was a strong contender but might be defeated by a popular Grand Master, providing the Grand Master was an unequivocal champion of regional interest.

Cameron had accepted representation by population, or "rep. by pop." in the early 1850's, but was content to let George Brown remain as the leading champion of that dangerous cause. In Peel County in
1861, it was impossible to win the election without taking a strong and clear stand on the question. Cameron did so, yet won by only a narrow margin, 1,633 to 1,145.39

Macdonald by this time was prepared to make "rep. by pop." an open question, permitting Cabinet ministers to vote for it and remain in his government. This policy enabled Conservatives, particularly those west of Toronto, to face their constituents while remaining champions of regional interests. Macdonald still had difficulties in finding Conservatives willing to serve in his Cabinet. Cameron, however, placed his influence at Macdonald’s disposal, which proved useful in negotiations with T.C. Street, a Niagara millionaire who supported “rep. by pop.” Most contemporaries still saw Cameron as a rival of Macdonald for the Conservative leadership, and Macdonald himself shared this view. Cameron may have received an offer to enter the government at this time and probably discussed the question with leading Conservatives.40 Yet Cameron was not the man to press his claims. He might accept, if strongly urged by Macdonald to serve, but Macdonald could not take the risk.

Cameron’s prominence as Orange Grand Master and his continuing ties with the Compact families were more evident than his precarious financial position. Yet whatever his real influence, by his presence in the Cabinet, he would appear to be displacing Macdonald. Moreover, Cameron was still too strong to be managed by Macdonald, and would be dangerous even as a junior partner.

Consequently, Cameron remained a back bencher and at the opening session demonstrated his capacity for embarrassing the government as he had at the time of the Corrigan affair. “Rep. by pop.” was no longer a question of confidence, but the survival of the government depended on the measure being defeated by a combination of French-Canadians, UpperCanadians from the eastern region of the province, and Conservatives with safe seats.

When William McDougall, a radical Grit, raised the question by introducing a “rep. by pop.” motion as an amendment to the address, Cameron introduced a similar but milder amendment. The amendments were defeated by the usual combinations but there was a majority for the measure in Upper Canada. This was damaging to Macdonald’s prestige and Cameron had done most of the damage.41 The Orange Grand Master might protest that he could be satisfied with a mere token change in representation, but “rep. by pop.” had become a symbol of anti-French-Canadian sentiment in Upper Canada and was consequently unacceptable in any form to French-Canadian Conservatives. With the failure of Brown to secure a seat in

the election of 1861, Cameron was by far the most prestigious advocate of “rep. by pop.” and consequently the leading representative of regional interests.

In 1862 he created difficulties for Macdonald during the debate of the Militia Bill which ended in the defeat of the government. Cameron declared he would support the Bill if the Attorney-General West (Macdonald) would “come down boldly for a definite number of men . . . and that the ways and means of meeting the expense should be stated.” If the government “could not carry their point,” Cameron insisted, “they should leave it to the opposition.”42

Cameron was not happy about his role as an independent Conservative, which offered no opportunities for constructive statesmanship, but he had little reason to envy Macdonald whose main preoccupation had to be staying in power. With the fall of the ministry Macdonald, once more in the opposition, no longer saw Cameron as a threat. A formal rapprochement between the two men was announced at a dinner held in February 1863. When Macdonald returned to power Cameron remained a back bencher but found a means of serving the ministry by blunting the edge of the regionalism he represented. This was noticeable in the case of Scott School Bill, which was designed to improve the position of Roman Catholic separate schools. Consistent with his earlier attitude he offered to support the Bill, if rights were extended to Anglican separate schools. When this was refused, he voted against the Bill, which was passed by a government majority. By finally voting against the Bill, Cameron was still able to maintain his influence over the Orangemen.

Cameron’s influence was put to the test when the Scott Bill was discussed in the Grand Lodge, and in Peel County ten Orangemen who opposed his re-election were expelled from the movement. By making full and at times heavy-handed use of his prestige as Grand Master, he secured most of the Orange votes for the Conservatives in the election of 1864 when he himself was returned by a slim majority in Peel County.43

By 1864 Macdonald had concluded that Cameron’s fortunes had declined to a point where he was no longer a rival and he understood the advantage of acquiring the services of a talented and loyal ally. Cameron was offered a place in the Cabinet, but refused on the grounds that the post in which his talents could possibly be employed was attorney-general, a position held by Macdonald, which he could not give up.44

Perhaps it was pride which induced Cameron to refuse a belated
offer of a junior partnership in the Cabinet with Macdonald. Moreover, his financial affairs remained precarious as he fought a losing battle to pay his debts. He had borrowed money from funds under control of the Anglican Church and was charged by the *Globe* with doing so on insufficient security. The charge could not be proven, but his reputation suffered.

Having given up his chances of becoming a Father of Confederation by refusing to enter the Cabinet, Cameron still supported Confederation. Yet he preserved his character as an independent but conscientious back bencher by stating his preference for a legislative union, and expressing the opinion that the people should be given a chance to vote on the question. The last suggestion was not helpful but seems to be designed to divide Confederation supporters at the eleventh hour and create new obstacles for the ministry.

During the excitement created by the Fenians, Cameron adopted a tone of dignified indignation at Fenian audacity, and at the same time expressed doubts about Fenian strength and determination. These efforts may have discouraged the more belligerent Orangemen from using Fenianism as a pretext for provoking quarrels with the Catholic community. Yet Cameron had little understanding of Irish quarrels, and on the one occasion – March 17, 1866 – when there was serious danger of a clash between Orangemen and Fenian sympathizers, the burden of controlling the Orangemen was assumed by Ogle Gowan.

After the raid he agreed to undertake prosecution of captured Fenians. As Orange Grand Master, Cameron was not the obvious person to undertake this task, but the purpose of the trials was to appease Canadian indignation while avoiding future entanglement by convicting as few Fenians as possible. In the end all the convicted Fenians were pardoned and there were no executions. In these show trials Cameron played his part admirably, thus enhancing his status as Orange Grand Master.

After this it was appropriate for Cameron to accept an offer to undertake the defense of Patrick Whelan, the man accused of the assassination of D'Arcy McGee. In what was clearly going to be the most spectacular trial in Canadian history, Cameron played his part well. He demolished the testimony of Crown witnesses who sought to prove direct evidence of Whelan's connection with the crime. Whelan was convicted on circumstantial evidence, but before his execution he admitted that he had been present at the assassination and was thus accessory to the fact.

Cameron may have lost a few votes among Peel County Orangemen as a result of his efforts on behalf of Whelan, but he was able to demonstrate his enthusiasm for Orangemen by attending the meeting of the Imperial Grand Lodge in Belfast in the summer of 1866. His delayed return from this meeting, the first convention of Orangemen throughout the Empire, threw the main burden of his election to the post-Confederation Parliament on John A. Macdonald, who worked loyally in his cause and secured Cameron's return.

By 1868 Cameron was clearly a useful agent of Macdonald's. He could remain in the public eye but the decline in his influence was obvious. He sought but failed to secure the speakership in the first Dominion Parliament. By 1870 he was replaced as Orange Grand Master by Mackenzie Bowell, a lesser but younger man. Bowell was a protegé of George Benjamin whose politics differed little from Cameron's. Cameron had brought prestige to the Order when prestige was needed. He had assumed office as a mediator free of association with past controversies. By 1870 his prestige was failing, and the price he paid for serving Macdonald within the Lodges made him a controversial figure. Yet the Lodges would never again find the Grand Master of Cameron's status. Though Mackenzie Bowell became Prime Minister, he was far from being an impressive personality.

Cameron continued to take an active part in politics during the remaining six years of his life. In 1872 he lost his seat in Peel County but was provided with a safe seat in Cardwell which he held until his death. In 1873 he was accused by Edward Blake of being a tool of the ministry, and there was substance to this accusation. Cameron was appointed chairman of the committee investigating the contribution of Hugh Allan, the railway magnate, to Conservative election funds. Cameron himself had benefitted from these donations, receiving $4,000 from Allan through Macdonald. By delaying the investigation until the end of the Parliamentary session, he aided Macdonald considerably.

Exhausted by the efforts to meet his financial obligations and by the humiliations he had to accept in order to remain in politics, Cameron died 17 November 1876, still $200,000 in debt. It was not a happy ending to what had been a useful and, on the whole, a successful career. Cameron had suffered personal tragedy in 1844 when his first wife had died in childbirth, but his second marriage in 1849 restored balance to his life. His financial disaster in 1857 was a serious, but not fatal, blow to his political career.

The tragedy in Cameron's life was that he possessed potentialities as a statesman which were never realized. One of the reasons for
Cameron's relative failure in politics was that he did not have to fight during the early part of his career and learned to fight too late. He was adopted first by the Compact families, then by Draper, and in a sense, by the Orange Lodges. In each case his self-evident ability and respectability were sufficient recommendations. Macdonald, on the other hand, had had to fight his way up from local politics with little help from those in positions of power and influence.

Macdonald's abilities were more difficult to recognize because they were less conventional. In 1854 Macdonald commented that Cameron lacked general intelligence and was deficient in political reading. What he perhaps sensed in Cameron was a lack of imagination and want of interest in general ideas. Macdonald was not a man to be mastered by dreams, but had an awareness of larger schemes, like Confederation, keeping them in reserve in the hope that they might prove useful.

Cameron was the master of technicalities of the law and of those moral technicalities which Macdonald ignored, but which were useful in acquiring and sustaining a reputation for integrity. Devices such as the "Double Shuffle" aroused distrust, and distrust is a serious handicap in politics. Cameron, on his part, could convincingly assume that attitude of a public-spirited man acting according to conscience, even when he was taking unfair advantage of an adversary or an ally. At the time of the Corrigan affair and the "rep. by pop." debate of 1862, he struck hard with a well-timed blow at the most sensitive point in the ministerial armour, and gained popularity at the government's expense. Moreover, in out-manoeuvring Gowan at the Cobourg meeting of the Grand Lodge in 1859, Cameron demonstrated a dexterity which would have done credit to the author of the "Double Shuffle." It is difficult to see Cameron as a man defeated by his own moral superiority.

If Macdonald had departed from politics anytime between 1854 and 1862, Cameron's gifts for conciliation and the confidence he inspired would probably have given him the Conservative leadership. His want of concern for general ideas would have been a handicap but not a fatal one. Though Cameron was different in personality and background from Macdonald and could not work in the same way, he was, nevertheless, an ambitious and gifted Scot capable of taking Macdonald's place. Macdonald understood this. He also realized that there was no room for two captains on the Conservative quarterdeck. And Macdonald was right.

Bibliographical Note

John Hillyard Cameron, standing as he does on the borderline of history, may never have a full-length biography. Donald Swainton's article in volume ten of the Dictionary of Canadian Biography provides a concise account of his life with details on the financial aspects of his career. Foster Griez's M.A. thesis (Carleton University 1965) and his article "John Hillyard Cameron and the Question of the Conservative Leadership," (Ontario History, December 1974) provide thoroughly researched and well argued accounts of his career, which present a different view of Cameron than Swainton's. Yet Griez's interpretation of Cameron as the gentleman in politics defeated by his virtue is debatable and the account given by both authors of Cameron's role as an Orangeman needs elaboration. W.P. Bull's From Boyne to Brampton (Toronto 1936) presents material on Cameron's role in Peel County. Original material can be found on Cameron in the papers of nearly all contemporary politicians, principally the John A. Macdonald papers in the Public Archives of Canada and the T.C. Street papers in the Ontario Archives. There are also some Cameron papers in the Public Reference Library of Toronto, and there is an abundance of material in contemporary Toronto newspapers. Fragments of his role as an Orangeman can be found in the T.R. Ferguson Papers at the P.A.C. and in Loyal Orange Association Annual Proceedings during the 1860's.

NOTES

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30 *Ibid*.

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35 *Patriot*, 17 October 1860.


38 *Ibid*.

39 Bull, *From Boyne to Brampton*, p. 190.

40 Gowan to Macdonald, 13 December 1861, PAC:MG26A/337.


44 Parts of Cameron's letter of refusal are quoted by Swaienton in *D.C.B.*, X, p. 122.


46 For Cameron's statement to the Grand Lodge on the Fenians, see *LOA Annual Proceedings* (Toronto 1865), p. 16; *ibid.* (Brockville 1866), p. 11; for Gowan's role, see Gowan to Macdonald, 19 March 1866, PAC:MG26A/45.