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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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LIBERAL NATIONALISM IN THE EIGHTEEN-SEVENTIES

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ON the first of July next some of us will celebrate Dominion Day and some of us will celebrate Canada Day, depending on whether we are abject colonials hanging tightly to the apron strings of Great Britain or dangerous nationalists inspired by an insidious ambition to rend the imperial tie asunder. By whatever name we celebrate the day, we shall be marking, in our modest, restrained fashion, the anniversary of what has justly been called "a great political achievement."¹ Nowadays many Canadians are disposed to look upon their country with a somewhat jaundiced eye. Canada has not fulfilled its high promise and we are never without lugubrious lamentations over that unhappy fact. The twentieth century is almost half over and there are few indications that historians will say that it belonged to Canada. But to the generation of men who witnessed the political changes of the eighteen-sixties, Confederation was a great achievement full of profound importance for every inhabitant of British North America.

At the same time the political transformation of 1867 was somewhat abrupt and it confronted the various provinces with a set of entirely new mutual relationships for which they were not wholly prepared. Thus Confederation set in motion a long process of readjustment, a process which involved the formulation of new concepts and policies predicated on the possession of dominion from sea to sea and suiting the realities of an entirely new political structure.

Confederation, then, posed a multitude of questions for Canadians, questions that were on everyone's lips, questions like these: What should be the relative strength of Dominion and provinces in the framework of federalism? In the sphere of external relations, would the expansion of British North America alter its status within the Empire and if so, in what way? Or was independence, as the Manchester School had so forthrightly preached, the natural destiny of Canada as of all colonies? Would or would not independence have as its inescapable corollary, annexation to the United States? Meanwhile, how could the enormous task of material development best be performed? What was the most advantageous way of linking British Columbia with the East and of filling up the vast empty spaces in between? Were tariffs for revenue or protection best designed to promote the true interests of the country? And, when all was said and done, what were those interests?

These questions were debated eagerly and with enthusiasm by Canadians of the Confederation period. Most could agree that the future of their country was assured, that on the northern half of North America one of the great nations of the future was in the making. No such general agreement existed, however, with respect to the policies best suited to the promotion of Canada's growth and development. Naturally enough, the two Canadian political parties became the vehicles by which these differences of opinion were translated into

¹*Canada, Report of the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations* (Ottawa, 1940), I, 19.

intelligible programmes of policy. In time, definite national policies emerged and ultimately were accepted by both parties as integral links in the chain of Canadian tradition, as assumptions on which future action by Canadian governments would be based. In the eighteen-seventies such policies were only in the formative stage and the two parties found themselves opposed on every fundamental issue which arose at that time. It was, of course, possible to say with the Canada First party that "The ins and outs cannot be segregated under the old names of Reformer and Conservative. Tory and Grit are merely synonymous with cat and dog and convey no notion save that of difference in momentum."² This oft-repeated accusation, however, is far truer seventy years later than it was when it was written and is one of many examples of the prophetic powers possessed by the men of Canada First. But in the seventies political warfare and public debate seem to have been particularly acrimonious as the country groped its way in search of a basic pattern of philosophy and action.

I

None of the many contentious issues which arose immediately after Confederation more agitated the public mind (to use a favourite expression of the period) than the question of Canada's national status. What would be Canada's position in the Empire and among the nations of the world? While there were relatively few souls hardy enough to entertain the thought that Canada was ready to stand on its own feet as an independent nation, or who thought that such a consummation was in any way to be wished, it was widely felt that somehow the old subservient colonial status was not in keeping with the new prominence of the united provinces. To be sure, the British North America Act recognized no alteration in the imperial relationship but the nascent national consciousness of Canadians gave rise to a good deal of questioning about the validity of that relationship as it existed.

Not only in Canada was there earnest searching of the soul on this subject. A number of factors conspired to mark the year 1870 as a watershed in the evolution of British imperial philosophy.³ The majority of Englishmen had long been disposed to view their colonies as liabilities rather than assets, and this was particularly true of the North American ones. The ascendancy of free trade, to the great chagrin of Canadian merchants, had brought to an inglorious end the old integrated imperial system. Colonies were no longer regarded as the handmaidens of commercial prosperity but as encumbrances, apt to involve the Mother Country in profitless financial expense and fruitless wars.

This attitude prevailed in the Old Country when the Canadian delegates visited it in 1865 and 1867 and there is ample testimony to the monumental indifference which greeted the passage through Parliament of the bill to unite the British North American provinces.⁴ Englishmen seemed to take it for granted that the colonies were about to separate from Great Britain. Not sadness but a feeling of relief that they had come of age and were ready

²W. A. Foster, *Canada First: A Memorial* (Toronto, 1890), 54-5.

³See C. A. Bodelsen, *Studies in Mid-Victorian Imperialism* (London, 1924), chap. II.

⁴John A. Macdonald's complaint that it seemed to be regarded with about as much animation as was bestowed on "a private bill uniting two or three English parishes." Sir J. Pope, *Correspondence of Sir J. Macdonald* (Toronto, 1895), 451.

at last to assume their own responsibilities was Mother England's reaction to the impending departure of her most troublesome children.

This attitude must have severely disillusioned the Canadian delegates, fervent as was the devotion of most of them to the Crown, but only one, A. T. Galt, concluded that the thing for the new Dominion to do was to accept its destiny as an independent nation. "... I believe," declared Galt during a debate on the subject in Parliament in 1870, "that the day for independence will come, and unless we were prepared for it, unless our legislation be framed with that view, we will be found then in the same position as now, and being unprepared for a separate political existence, we will have no choice with regard to our future."⁵

There was small support for this point of view in Canada. Leaders of both political parties and both ethnic groups dissociated themselves entirely from the idea. Professions of loyalty to the Crown were never more devout than at the time of Confederation. The spectre of the new colossus to the south was too close at hand to permit irresponsible utterances in favour of separation from the Mother Country. Confederation itself was conceived very largely as an anti-American expedient and executed in that spirit. Independence, far from assuring protection against annexation, as Galt suggested it would, seemed sure to lead down an "inclined plane" quickly and inevitably to that very fate. The *Toronto Globe* was not ashamed to state the unvarnished truth: "... we have not yet strength to stand alone."⁶ *LIB*

There were, then, few adherents in Canada of the prevailing English view that separation was both desirable and in the nature of things. After 1870, however, British imperial philosophy itself began to change. Numerous factors conspired to make Englishmen ponder the wisdom of their anti-imperial point of view. They somehow sensed that the era of unchallenged British supremacy, of the swaggering Palmerstonianism of the middle decades of the nineteenth century, was drawing to its close. The incredible expansion of the United States during and after the Civil War constituted a threat to Great Britain's industrial and commercial pre-eminence, while the rise of Bismarck's German Empire disturbed the continental balance of power and forced England to turn her attention once more to Europe. Perhaps, after all, colonies might be of some value, might prove bulwarks to British power in the face of rising assertive nationalisms. Vague talk of imperial consolidation began to be heard where the voices of disintegration had reigned supreme.

It was some years before the gradual eclipse of British supremacy developed hard and fast schemes of imperial federation and produced the jingoistic racialism of the Chamberlain era. But even in the seventies it had its effects on British policy. Confronted with the disappearance of European stability, Great Britain made a determined effort to extricate herself from the disputes in which she had become involved with the United States over matters arising out of the Civil War, and appeared willing in the process to sacrifice, not only her own interests, but those of Canada as well. Canadians felt, with considerable justice, that the Gladstone Government, in negotiating the Washington Treaty in 1871, had neglected Canadian interests

⁵O. D. Skelton, *The Life and Times of Sir Alexander Tilloch Galt* (Toronto, 1920), 451.

⁶The *Toronto Globe*, Oct. 17, 1874.

rather shamefully in their eagerness to appease the United States. Even Macdonald, whom no one could accuse of lukewarmness to the imperial connexion, judging by his own account emerged as a fighting Canadian nationalist during the negotiations.⁷ The announcement of the terms of the treaty elicited a howl of disapproval, particularly from the Liberal stronghold of Ontario, which dearly wanted what Sir John had vainly tried to obtain—a reciprocity treaty with the United States.

The Liberal leaders in the Canadian House of Commons took a strongly nationalist stand during the debate on the Treaty and placed on the journals of the House a series of resolutions expressing their dissatisfaction with its terms and with the surrender of Canadian interests. On May 6, 1872, Richard Cartwright introduced three resolutions, the definitive one of which voiced regret "that Her Majesty's Advisers have seen fit to assume the responsibility of withdrawing the claims of the Dominion of Canada, against the United States for compensation on account of injuries arising from the Fenian raids."⁸ This was successfully amended by the Conservatives to the effect that "an expression of opinion on the subject" was in the interests neither of Canada nor of good relations between the Dominion and the Mother Country.⁹ Two days later, on the motion for second reading of the bill to carry the provisions of the Washington Treaty into effect, Edward Blake moved the following amendment:

That before proceeding further upon the said Bill, this House feels bound to declare that while Her Majesty's loyal subjects, the people of Canada, will at all times cheerfully make any reasonable sacrifice in the interests of the Empire, we have just ground for the great dissatisfaction prevailing throughout the country at the mode in which our rights have been dealt with in the negotiations resulting in the Treaty of Washington, and at the subsequent proposal of our Government that England should endorse a Canadian loan as a price for our adoption of the Treaty and for our abandonment of the claims in respect of the Fenian raids, which affect, not merely our purse, but also our honour and our peace.¹⁰

After an extremely lengthy debate this motion was finally negatived by a substantial majority and the bill went through its remaining stages without serious opposition.

II

The Washington Treaty focused attention on the subject of the imperial relationship and gave a healthy fillip to Canadian nationalism. It was in Ontario that a developing national spirit was most in evidence. The most enthusiastic exponents of this spirit were the group of young men who adopted as their motto the arresting words, "Canada First." Drawing their inspiration largely from the vision and eloquence of D'Arcy McGee, they were a small but articulate knot of crusaders preaching the gospel of the "new nationality." Their leader, after his arrival in Toronto in 1871, was Goldwin Smith under whose influence the group developed from a rather adolescent and sentimentalized exaltation of Canada's romantic history to a more practical participation in public discussion of current political issues. In general the aims of the

⁷Sir J. Pope, *Memoirs of Sir John A. Macdonald* (Ottawa, 1894), II, chaps. xx, xxxi.

⁸*Canada, Journals of the House of Commons*, 1872, May 6, 84.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰*Ibid.*, May 8, 98.

Canada First group were, in the words of Goldwin Smith, "to cultivate Canadian patriotism, to raise Canada above the rank of a mere dependency, and to give her the first place in Canadian hearts."¹¹ In 1874 Canada First entered the political arena with a new party, dubbed the Canadian National Association, whose aim it was to cultivate these sentiments and achieve these objectives. The first article of the Association's platform declared for "British connection, Consolidation of the Empire—and in the meantime a voice in treaties affecting Canada."¹²

The last ten words of the clause, clearly the important ones, were obviously inspired by the Washington Treaty and designed to exploit the dissatisfaction with its terms widely current at that time. In itself, however, the clause was quite innocuous and no one took it very seriously until Blake preached from the same text in his famous speech at Aurora in October, 1874. Blake, who wandered in and out of the Cabinet almost at will during Alexander Mackenzie's prime ministership from 1873 to 1878, had renounced his hesitant allegiance to the Liberal leader immediately after the election of 1874 and resigned from the Ministry in which he had reluctantly accepted the position of Minister without Portfolio. Now at Aurora he took up the platform of Canada First, with regard to other matters as well as the imperial relationship, and made it his own. Referring to Canada's position in the Empire he declared:

Matters cannot drift much longer as they have drifted hitherto. The Treaty of Washington created a very profound impression throughout this country. It produced a feeling that at no distant date the people of Canada would desire that they should have some greater share of control than they now have in the management of foreign affairs; that our Government should not present the anomaly which it now presents—a Government the freest, perhaps the most democratic in the world with reference to local and domestic matters, in which you rule yourselves as fully as any people in the world, while in your foreign affairs . . . you may have no more voice than the people of Japan. . . . But how long is this talk in the newspapers and elsewhere, this talk which I find in very high places, of the desirability, aye, of the necessity of fostering a national spirit among the people of Canada to be mere talk? . . . the time will come when that national spirit . . . will be truly felt among us, when we shall realise that we are four millions of Britons who are not free, when we shall be ready to take up that freedom, and to ask what the late Prime Minister of England assured us we should not be denied—our share of national rights.¹³ E B.

Blake went on to say that Canadians could not complain of this regrettable state of affairs as long as they refused to shoulder the responsibilities, as well as seek the rights, of free-born Britons and concluded that imperial federation offered the best solution to the difficulty.

Blake admitted that his speech would probably prove to be a "disturbing" one and so it did. Nothing in it was more disturbing to Canadian orthodoxy

¹¹Foster, *Canada First*, 3.

¹²*Ibid.*, 8.

¹³R. G. Perry (ed), *'A National Sentiment!' Speech of the Hon. Edward Blake at Aurora with the Comments of Some of the Canadian Press Thereon* (Ottawa, 1874), 9-10.

than his pronouncements on the subject of imperial relations. The Toronto Church Herald, organ of the Church of England, warned that "although . . . Mr. Blake faintly spoke of a 'Federal basis,' it is quite evident he had in his mind the dissolution of our connection with England." The *Herald* found it impossible to "share his dissatisfaction with our present constitutional position."¹⁴ The *Ottawa Citizen* was less restrained in its language. "Radicalism," it cried, "is reckless and aggressive in the Mother Country as well as in Canada. The colonial tie is attacked at both ends, and nothing but a united effort on the part of all loyal subjects of Her Majesty can avert the danger which threatens its continuance."¹⁵ The *Peterborough Review* declared that now that the Canada First platform had been "taken up and advocated by a man in the position of Mr. Edward Blake . . . it becomes the loyal citizens of Canada to give no uncertain sound with regard to doctrines which, if they lead to anything, must lead to independence or—perhaps we would not be far wrong if we said—and annexation . . . we can heartily join hands with . . . most of our confreres in denouncing the cultivation of a 'national sentiment,' which we presume means a *Canadian* national sentiment, as distinct from that of the Empire. . . ."¹⁶

Such expressions of Tory loyalism were mixed with shouts of exultation over the rupture in the Liberal ranks, for the Conservative journals were all but unanimous in the view that Blake's oration was his valedictory as a Liberal and his inaugural address as chieftain of the Canada First party. Goldwin Smith himself later referred to Blake as the "man to whom it looked as its leader" and described Blake's re-entry into the Liberal Cabinet in 1875 as "a heavy blow."¹⁷

The glee of the Conservative newspapers seemed to be justified by the reaction of the *Toronto Globe*, the organ of Canadian liberalism, to the Aurora speech. The *Globe's* manner of handling the speech was itself open to suspicion. Blake spoke on a Saturday. On the following Monday the *Globe* contained not a word about the North York meeting but the leading editorial was devoted to a virulent attack on Goldwin Smith and Canada First. On Tuesday the first half of Blake's speech was printed; the following day the remainder appeared along with editorial comment, the first that George Brown had seen fit to make. The *Globe* had been pouring scorn on the Canada First organization ever since the latter had first appeared over the political horizon but had refused to take it seriously. Instead it had ridiculed it as a political absurdity, poked fun at its programme, and patronized its leaders as idle visionaries and hopelessly inept novices. "Let these sucking politicians," it sneered on one occasion, ". . . go to school and study the alphabet of politics in the meantime, while they 'tarry at Jericho till their beards are grown'."¹⁸ Suddenly, however, after October 3, 1874—the date of Blake's speech—Canada First had assumed, judging by the editorial columns of the *Globe*, a sinister and dangerous aspect. ". . . what is the meaning of 'Canada First'?" asked the Liberal journal. "Unless all reports are impudent fabrications, there is an esoteric and exoteric philosophy; the outside profession, the bundle of incongruous planks of the piebald programme; the inner creed of the high

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 84-5.

¹⁷Foster, *Canada First*, 11.

¹⁸*Globe*, Jan. 9, 1874.

priests of the party, separation from England, and a distinction, recognized either by law or by the force of a tacit compact, in favour of citizens born in Canada."¹⁹ In the weeks that followed the *Globe* attacked this insidious "inner creed" and its "high priests" with a brand of belligerent loyalism which even the Tory journals were unable to surpass.

Brown's strategy in dealing with the Aurora speech was quite obvious. The sentiments voiced by Blake were clearly those of the Canada First group in all important respects and there was considerable truth in the assertion of the Conservative *Toronto Mail* that the *Globe* was attempting, by concentrating its attack on Goldwin Smith and his followers, "to discredit the utterances of the member for South Bruce [Blake] before they appeared in print."²⁰

When finally it did get around to commenting on Blake's address, the *Globe* damned the notion of imperial federation with faint praise, choosing to regard it, for the time being at any rate, as a dream:

The question about the future relationship between Canada and the Empire [it declared] may well be regarded as an open one, and while at present interesting as a speculation, it is not to be looked upon as much more, as far as it contemplates a change in our present condition. A great Federal Parliament for the British Empire is not, by any means, a novelty, and is an idea which has many attractions for a certain class of minds. Much in the abstract may be said in its favour, but its practicability is a very different affair. . . . Still, the subject affords material for interesting and harmless speculation, which in the course of time may issue in some arrangement which will fuse the whole Empire more thoroughly into one united whole, and make the inhabitants of all its different parts so entirely one in sentiment and feeling and aspiration, that the only country they will recognize as theirs will be the British Empire, and the only national sentiment they will deem worthy of cherishing will be the one that thinks not of "Canada First" or of "Australia first," or of "heligoland [*sic*] first," or "Norfolk island first," but of the grand old British race first, and of all who love their Sovereign, and all who swear by the "Old Flag" as first and last and midst as well.²¹

On the day following the appearance of this outburst, Goldwin Smith delivered an address at the National Club of Toronto in which he expressed his well-known conviction that Canada's position as a colony of a European nation was anomalous and that she should assert her independence. In view of the fact that Smith's effort followed so closely on the heels of Blake's, it is hardly to be wondered at that the two should have been examined together and judged as being cut from the same piece of cloth. The two men were, after all, dealing with the same subject and Blake's assertion that Canadians were "four millions of Britons who are not free" and his talk of developing a "national sentiment" seemed not far removed from Smith's outright advocacy of independence. COMS

More than ever after the National Club address the *Globe* levelled the full force of its fury against Smith but Blake came in for his due share of strictures, softened down though they were in the hope that the sensitive member for South Bruce would not desert the party in favour of Canada

¹⁹*Ibid.*, Oct. 5, 1874.

²⁰Perry (ed.), 'A National Sentiment,' 23.

²¹*Globe*, Oct. 7, 1874.

First. "Mr. Blake's utterances on this point are to be regretted," declared the Toronto paper, "because coming from so high an authority they tend to create popular dissatisfaction with existing institutions, which may find vent in the direction that Mr. Goldwin Smith is so eager to foreshadow."²² The *Globe* was at a loss to account for this dissatisfaction, this restless preoccupation with constitutional status, this disquieting introduction of disturbing themes into the realm of public discussion. Things were well enough as they were, it thought; there was neither necessity nor demand for change. "... to justify radical changes," argued Brown, "it is necessary to show the existence of a grievance. What have Mr. Goldwin Smith or his followers of the Canada First persuasion to show as against Great Britain in the way of any grievance that, without disturbing our present political arrangements, cannot be easily remedied?"²³ "We are suffering from no injustice, and we are conscious of no hampering, degrading influence exerted upon us by virtue of our colonial position."²⁴ "That we are a nation with an individuality and a type of our own is now seen on both sides of the Atlantic."²⁵ What was this notion of imperial federation, then? A dream, albeit an attractive one. Independence? A nightmare! "Britain's presence once effectively withdrawn from the continent," warned the *Globe*, "how long would it be before our busy brothers on the other side would raise international complications which could only be solved by submission or war? ... we have not yet strength to stand alone."²⁶ Let there be an end to this idle speculation; let the theorists devote their talents to more productive purposes; let well enough alone. Such was the conservative doctrine with which the Liberal organ regaled its readers.

Editorial opinion in Canada was all but unanimous that imperial federation was utterly visionary, something which would be achieved only in the distant future, if ever. But the *Globe's* feeling of blissful content with the conditions of Canada's colonial status was not shared by all the Liberal press. "The relations of the Dominion to the Empire, must ... be considered," affirmed the *Orangeville Advertiser*. "There is no use in saying that we are well enough as we are. ... It is absurd to say that our present relations will be permitted to continue as they are; that a self-governing people, with the large territory and population that we have, shall remain in the position of colonists."²⁷ *Le Bien Public* of Montreal welcomed Blake's national stand. "As for us," it declared, "we applaud heartily that part of the program of Mr. Blake and the national party of Upper Canada, the aim of which is to develop in the hearts of the Canadian people that national spirit and those sentiments of independence which must some day permit Canada to take its place among the great nations."²⁸ The *Galt Reformer*, no doubt for Brown's benefit, asked tartly, "Are Reformers forsooth not to think or speak of any new subject? Verily that would be Toryism with a vengeance."²⁹

²²*Ibid.*, Oct. 23, 1874.

²³*Ibid.*, Oct. 19, 1874.

²⁴*Ibid.*, Oct. 17, 1874.

²⁵*Ibid.*, Oct. 12, 1874.

²⁶*Ibid.*, Oct 17, 1874.

²⁷Perry (ed.), 'A National Sentiment,' 27-8.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 76.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 77.

Thus the animadversions of the *Globe* did not truly represent Liberal opinion as a whole. Despite the protestations of the Liberal journals to the contrary, the Aurora speech and the comments thereon did reveal a deep cleavage within the ranks, a fundamental difference of opinion between opposite temperaments—the inertia of satisfied conservatism, represented by Brown and the *Globe*, and the reforming urge to move onwards represented by the younger, less complacent members of the party led by Blake.

III

Edward Blake was a man of stubborn convictions and tenacious will and his desire for the development of Canadian autonomy was not reduced one whit by the philippics of the *Globe*. Although he awakened by and by from the dream of imperial federation,³⁰ he remained firmly persuaded that Canada must free herself as far as possible from control by the Colonial and Foreign Offices in London, that she must not rest in securing, as he said, "that fuller measure of self-government which becomes our station amongst the peoples of the world."³¹ One is forced to wonder why he put forth the notion of imperial federation at all for he must have realized, along with his critics, the inconsistency of that idea with his urgent plea for the development of a national spirit. "... we are four millions of Britons who are not free." That, when all is said and done, was the very heart and kernel of his utterances on Canada's external status, rather than his vague suggestion about reorganizing the Empire on a "Federal basis." It was his ardent wish that Canada should "take up that freedom," not by casting loose from the Empire, but by asserting her right to a larger say in the determination of her external policy and the management of her own affairs without interference from London. Hence Liberal nationalism, as exemplified by Blake, was nationalism directed against the imperial powers of Great Britain, preoccupied as it was with enhancing the constitutional autonomy of the Dominion. It thus contrasts with the nationalism of the Conservative party, which was essentially anti-American in character. True, Conservative leaders could, and did when the occasion demanded, adopt a strongly nationalistic point of view on constitutional issues but they do not seem to have developed, as completely as some Liberal leaders, and in particular Blake, a real philosophy of Canadian autonomy. It is true, too that the Liberal party during the seventies was itself split on the question of imperial relations; the attitude of the *Globe* testifies to that. Nevertheless, it was Blake's viewpoint that prevailed in the formulation of official policy.

In the summer of 1875, after prolonged negotiations, Blake re-entered Mackenzie's Cabinet as Minister of Justice, a position for which his legal attainments admirably suited him. He did so only after a great deal of argument, exasperating hesitation, and on certain well-defined conditions. During the session of 1875 Blake had led a small but influential rump of Liberal members of the Commons in opposition to the policy of the Government by which Mackenzie sought to fulfil the so-called Carnarvon Terms with respect to the Pacific Railway and British Columbia. A discussion of Liberal railway policy during the eighteen-seventies is beyond the scope of

³⁰O. D. Skelton, *Life and Letters of Sir Wilfrid Laurier* (London, 1922), II, 345.

³¹A. Mackenzie, *et al. Reform Government in the Dominion* (Toronto, 1878), Blake at Teeswater, Sept. 24, 1877, 146.

this paper. What is relevant here is Blake's reaction to the fact of the Carnarvon Terms, rather than to their nature.

Shortly after his accession to office, Mackenzie had become embroiled in a dispute with British Columbia by his announcement that he intended to seek a relaxation of the terms of union between that province and Canada which related to the construction of the Pacific Railway. Irritated by this action on Mackenzie's part, the government of British Columbia, in June, 1874, appealed to the imperial government to intervene. This request was anticipated, however, by the Colonial Secretary in the Disraeli Ministry, Lord Carnarvon. Before he had received the British Columbian petition, Carnarvon, an ardent imperialist, tendered his good offices as arbitrator of the dispute. "...If both Governments," he wrote to the Governor-General, Lord Dufferin, "should unite in desiring to refer to my arbitration all matters in controversy, binding themselves to accept such decision as I think fair and just, I would not decline to undertake this service."³² The offer was unwelcome to Mackenzie, who regarded the controversy as a purely Canadian matter and entirely beyond the sphere of the imperial authorities. The Prime Minister despatched a telegram to Carnarvon which, his lordship complained, "was of the curtest description and indicated a disposition to treat the whole question as one of insignificant character."³³ "It bore on its face," Carnarvon added, "clear evidence of those 'stone chippings of the workshop'... which attest an early stage of literary culture."³⁴ In reviewing the matter in a conversation with Lord Dufferin in November, 1876, Mackenzie took occasion to inform the Governor-General that in his opinion "Lord Carnarvon should not have pressed his interference upon us, that in a great country like this it was not well for the Colonial Secretary to be too ready in interfering in questions having no bearing on imperial interests."³⁵ But despite his repugnance to Carnarvon's offer, the Prime Minister felt compelled to accept, for, as he pointed out to a political friend who had apparently ventured to criticize his action, "We as a government were responsible for the peace of the country."³⁶

No such responsibility bound Blake, then a private member. He not only objected to the terms themselves as being "imprudently liberal,"³⁷ but criticized the Government for having submitted to Carnarvon's offer of arbitration in the first place. He told the House of Commons:

... for my own part I regret that the Government has felt it necessary to yield to the extent to which they did yield to the request of Lord Carnarvon. I desire to speak with every respect of that nobleman in his personal and in his political position. But I must say that I believe that the people, the Parliament, and the Government of this country are

³²*Canada, Sessional Papers*, 1875, no. 19, 12-13, Carnarvon to Dufferin, June 18, 1874. Cf. Carnarvon to Dufferin, private, June 17, 1874. Carnarvon was not sanguine about the success of his arbitration. I am indebted to Professor F. H. Underhill for allowing me to use his copy of the private correspondence of Lord Dufferin and Lord Carnarvon which is taken from a microfilm in the possession of Professor C. W. de Kiewiet of Cornell University. All quotations from the correspondence of these two men are from this source unless otherwise acknowledged in the foot-notes.

³³Same to same, private, June 25, 1874.

³⁴Same to same, private, July 23, 1874.

³⁵Public Archives of Canada, Alexander Mackenzie Letter Books, I, memorandum of an interview with Lord Dufferin, n.d.

³⁶*Ibid.*, II, Mackenzie to D. Thompson, confidential, April 29, 1875.

³⁷*Canada, House of Commons Debates*, 1875, March 5, 548.

better able to appreciate the obligations which my hon. friend [Mackenzie] proposes us to enter into. I say that at this time of day we are unfit for our position here if we are not prepared temperately and respectfully, yet firmly to assert that proposition. . . . It is not the Colonial Secretary, it is not the Imperial Government that has to raise the money to build this work. It is upon Canadian credit, by Canadian enterprise, and at Canadian cost, and Canadian risk that this work is to be accomplished; and it is therefore by the free voice and decision of the people of Canada that the terms, in my judgment, upon which that work shall be constructed are to be fixed . . . if we accept the arrangement which the Government propose to us, we accept it because we believe it best in the interest of this country to do so—not because Lord Carnarvon said so.”³⁸

Among the conditions which Blake decreed must be fulfilled before he would re-enter the Cabinet in 1875 was his insistence that Canadian freedom of action in affairs concerning Canada alone be maintained at all times.³⁹ From the day that he became Minister of Justice to his resignation in January, 1878, most of his energies were devoted to asserting Canadian rights and attempting to reduce the power of the British government over Canadian affairs. In this purpose he had the full support of Mackenzie, who was quite as anxious as Blake that Canadian freedom of action should be achieved and preserved. But it is with the name of Edward Blake, more than any other, that the development of Canadian autonomy during this period must be associated.

One of the first matters to confront Blake as Minister of Justice was the question of the appeal to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council from the decisions of Canadian courts. During the session of 1875 the Government had put through an act establishing a Supreme Court for Canada. The bill, as introduced by the then Minister of Justice, Telesphore Fournier, contained no reference to the right of appeal to the Privy Council, although in introducing the measure Fournier declared “that while he did not desire to put any unnecessary obstacle in the way of exercising the right of petition, he wished to see the practice put an end to altogether. . . . He would like very well to see a clause introduced declaring that this right of appeal to the Privy Council existed no longer. . . . However . . . he had made no mention of the matter in the bill now before the House, but left it to be disposed [of] at some future time.”⁴⁰

Almost, it would seem, in answer to Fournier’s invitation, a private member, Irving of Hamilton, moved, during the third reading of the bill, that a provision be inserted to the effect that “The judgment of the Supreme Court shall in all cases be final and conclusive, and no error or appeal shall be brought from any judgment or order of the Supreme Court to any Court of Appeal established by the Parliament of Great Britain and Ireland, to which

³⁸*Ibid.*, 547

³⁹In box no. 92 of the Blake Papers in the University of Toronto Library there is a pencilled memorandum in Blake’s handwriting which lists a number of topics which Blake wished to discuss with Mackenzie, presumably before he would rejoin the Cabinet. Item 6 in this list reads “The *submission* to Ld. Carnarvon.” Item 7 reads “The agreement to his terms.” Blake’s ultimatum which lists the conditions for his re-entry, also in box no. 92, is interesting. The following stipulation heads the list: “1. Non interference of England in Canadian concerns. No reference to Colonial Minister.” The second item is significant: “2. *Do Brown*.”

⁴⁰*Canada, House of Commons Debates*, 1875, Feb. 23, 286.

appeals or petitions to Her Majesty in Council may be ordered to be heard, saving any right which Her Majesty may be graciously pleased to exercise as her royal prerogative."⁴¹

Fournier accepted Irving's amendment with alacrity but Sir John A. Macdonald, who had supported the bill up to that point, rose to his feet in high dudgeon. Indignantly he proclaimed that this amendment was the first step towards the severance of the Dominion from the Mother Country and predicted that "it almost, if not quite, insured the disallowance of the bill in England."⁴² Later on in the debate, the Conservative leader protested again "against the incorporation of such an unhappy and essentially unfortunate principle in this Bill" and affirmed his belief that: "it would be hailed as a great triumph by the enemies of the Colonial connection . . . he believed it would be held in England as one of the evidences which were alleged to exist of a growing impatience in this country of the connection with the Mother Country. . . . Those who disliked the colonial connection spoke of it as a chain, but it was a golden chain, and he, for one, was glad to wear the fetters."⁴³

To this argument, Mackenzie replied with vitriolic irony. Reminding the House that all appeals in cases involving less than \$4,000 were already prohibited by Ontario statute and that a similar restriction existed in Quebec law, the Prime Minister asked sarcastically: "Did loyalty depend upon whether a man's case was above or below \$4,000? . . . It was quite consistent with our loyalty to prevent all cases under \$4,000 from going to England, but it was quite inconsistent with our loyalty to prevent those above \$4,000 being appealed! Such was the illogical position of the hon. gentleman. . . . It was not unreasonable to expect that we had men here equally as capable of administering our laws as the Judges in England. . . ." ⁴⁴ Mackenzie solemnly assured the members that the Government had no desire whatever to destroy the connexion, that the question at issue was not one of loyalty but simply of convenience. Even the *Globe* thought Macdonald was carrying his loyalism a little too far. ". . . it is hard to see how it could lead to independence," it declared. "For Sir John Macdonald . . . to talk about the amendment sowing the seeds of disloyalty broadcast was mere bunkum."⁴⁵ Finally, the Opposition having been silenced, Irving's amendment was passed by a majority of seventy-two and incorporated into the Supreme Court Act as Clause 47.

This was not the end of the matter, however. During the summer of 1875 Mackenzie was in England and he learned in conversations with Lord Carnarvon that the imperial government was considering, as Macdonald had warned it would, the advisability of disallowing the Supreme Court Act because of the much-debated Clause 47.⁴⁶ Mackenzie thought he had arrived at a *modus operandi* with the Colonial Secretary whereby the Act would be allowed to come into force at once, the right of the law officers of the Crown to decide on its legality being reserved for the future. However, on his re-

⁴¹*Ibid.*, March 30, 1876.

⁴²*Ibid.*

⁴³*Ibid.*, 980-1.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 981-2.

⁴⁵*Globe*, April 1, 1875.

⁴⁶F. H. Underhill, "Edward Blake, the Supreme Court Act, and the appeal to the Privy Council, 1875-6" (*Canadian Historical Review*, XIX, Sept., 1938, 250). Professor Underhill's article is a detailed narrative of the negotiations over the Supreme Court Act. I have attempted merely to sketch the major developments.

turn to Canada the Prime Minister found that the imperial authorities showed a disinclination to allow the machinery of the Supreme Court to be set in motion until the law officers had given their opinion on Clause 47. Meanwhile Blake, now the Minister of Justice, added to Mackenzie's worries over the matter by threatening to resign unless permission was given to establish the Court at once or if the Act should be afterwards disallowed.

A potential clash between Mother Country and Dominion was avoided when Blake, on a visit to England in the summer of 1876, was forced to conclude with Lord Chancellor Cairns, after discussions with him and other British legal authorities, that the clause was, after all, rendered inoperative by the words "saving any right which Her Majesty may be graciously pleased to exercise as her royal prerogative." But while admitting the legal ineffectiveness of Clause 47, Blake was by no means disposed to surrender the principle it embodied and made an earnest effort to secure the promise of the British authorities that, if a measure could be framed which would eliminate the appeal, they would give it their sanction. He was able, however, to elicit nothing but vague expressions of sympathy with his general point of view and he reported to Mackenzie that "they will not commit themselves to abolition and probably would kick against it."⁴⁷

In the end the Act was allowed to go into force unaltered because of the ineffectiveness of the abolition clause. What would have been a tremendous loss of prestige for the Mackenzie Government was thus averted. But the net effect of the Act on the appeal to the Privy Council was nil. The matter was dropped by the Government in Ottawa. Blake retired from the Cabinet early in 1878, this time not to return, and Mackenzie, with the country in the throes of a commercial depression, was forced to devote his entire energies to matters of greater immediate importance.

IV

Although the main object of Blake's trip to London in 1876 was to settle the matter of the appeal to the Privy Council, he took advantage of the opportunity to discuss with members of the British Cabinet other aspects of Canada's national status. Undoubtedly the most important of these in Blake's mind was the nature of the functions and the extent of the powers of the Governor-General. Mackenzie's administration was marked by a very noticeable amount of friction between the Cabinet and the representative of the Crown. In large part this friction was the outcome of the clash of personalities and temperaments of the men who between them performed the executive functions of the Canadian Government at that time. For the Marquis of Dufferin and Ava had a far more exalted conception of his office than had either Alexander Mackenzie or Edward Blake.

The imperial government would have found it difficult, perhaps, to find in the British aristocracy a man better suited in some respects to the office of Governor-General of Canada than Lord Dufferin. A man of exceptional ability, he possessed the necessary social graces and was particularly fortunate in his ability to converse in French as readily as in English. Above all, it must be said that the interests of Canada found a place in his heart. He believed in the future of this country and eagerly watched its growth and

⁴⁷F. H. Underhill, "Edward Blake's Interview with Lord Cairns on the Supreme Court Act, July 5, 1876" (*Canadian Historical Review*, XIX, Sept., 1938, 294).

development. But Dufferin did not quite understand or admit the absolutism of responsible government promulgated by Blake and other Canadian constitutional nationalists. He could not see himself as a symbol, merely the figurehead of the Canadian government. As early as 1874 he admitted his restiveness to Carnarvon. "... I shall be glad when my term is over," he wrote. "The Governorship of a colony with Constitutional advisers does not admit of much real control over its affairs, and I miss the stimulus of responsibility."⁴⁸ He was as anxious to give advice as to receive it, perhaps more so. He found it possible, without a trace of humour, to refer to the Queen's representative as "master of the Ministers,"⁴⁹ and spoke of a colonial Cabinet as a "team to drive."⁵⁰ He obviously was eager to take a part in affairs and willing, when necessary, to exert his influence in the country and with the home authorities.

To say all this is not to suggest that Dufferin came to Canada with any intention of frustrating the functioning of responsible government or that he was antagonistic to the development of Canadian nationalist sentiment. Indeed he expressed pleasure over the fact that he could discern the growth of such a spirit. Nevertheless, as an intelligent man with clear and well defined ideas on certain subjects, Dufferin believed that his opinions were worthy of consideration and potentially of considerable practical value. Total abstinence on his part from participation in Canadian affairs would have seemed to him a gratuitous waste of talent. But to Edward Blake, such participation was unconstitutional and contrary to the fixed and immutable principle of responsible government.

It is clear from the private correspondence of Dufferin and Carnarvon that the two Englishmen had a far less advanced, or at least a very different, view of responsible government than Blake and Mackenzie had and that Dufferin came to Canada with a definite programme in mind. His task, as Carnarvon saw it, was to "hold things together in Canada and consolidate the Dominion." If Dufferin could do this the Colonial Secretary was of the opinion that "we shall have a reasonable chance of preserving it from absorption in its large neighbour."⁵¹ "You may depend upon my doing my very best," Dufferin replied, "both to weld this Dominion into an Imperium solid enough to defy all attraction from across the line, and to perpetuate its innate loyalty to the Mother Country. It was only upon the understanding that this should be a principal part of our programme, that I consented to come here. . . ."⁵² Part of this policy, in Dufferin's words, was to "minimize as much as possible the prestige of the Local Legislatures and their Governments."⁵³ This in itself would have been enough to bring the Governor-General into conflict with the Liberals, the champions of provincial rights. At any rate, Dufferin clearly thought of himself as having powers beyond the signing of orders-in-council and the reading to the assembled members of Parliament a speech composed by and embodying the views of others. This conception of his position resulted in the rise of a serious antagonism between him and his ministers.

⁴⁸Dufferin to Carnarvon, private, March 18, 1874.

⁴⁹Same to same, private, Nov. 22, 1877.

⁵⁰Same to same, private, Dec. 21, 1874.

⁵¹Carnarvon to Dufferin, private, April 8, 1874.

⁵²Dufferin to Carnarvon, private, April 25, 1874.

⁵³Same to same, private, Dec. 21, 1874.

Dufferin's desire to participate, rather than merely to officiate arose, no doubt, partly from the fact that he shared with a good many of his fellow Englishmen the conviction that they, being English, knew a great deal more about politics and government generally than any mere colonist could possibly know. This conviction was deepened in Dufferin's case by the fact that his first minister was an untitled and untutored stonemason. Must a peer, then, a cultured man of the world, accept the principles and the policies, must he, in all cases and without question or argument, heed the advice of an immigrant artisan? The idea must have seemed too absurd to Dufferin for him to accept it wholeheartedly. As a contemporary expressed it, "Just at first there is not much doubt that Lord Dufferin . . . was disposed to question Mr. Mackenzie's fitness for his office."⁵⁴

Undoubtedly the Governor-General found it impossible to refrain from adopting a superior attitude, not only with regard to the men with whom he had to work, but also with respect to life in the Dominion capital. ". . . altogether," he reported to Carnarvon, "there seems to me a lamentable lack both of political capacity, and of political instruction in the country."⁵⁵ He complained of "a terrible want of society" and lamented that "one's life at times is dull and lonely."⁵⁶

If the relations between Governor-General and Prime Minister were at times rather strained, Dufferin's association with Blake was characterized by almost continual friction. On every major issue, the two men were on opposite sides. Whereas Blake deplored what he regarded as Dufferin's interference in matters which were rightfully the sole concern of Canadians, Dufferin on his part deprecated Blake's lukewarmness to Canadian expansion and development, an attitude which was in utter contrast to his own. Blake, himself a well educated, cultured man with a brilliant intellect, was vexed by Dufferin's unintentional yet unmistakable attitude of superiority. Dufferin, on the other hand, regarded Blake as a spoiled child and impossibly temperamental. A further cause of Blake's displeasure with the Governor-General, according to Sir Richard Cartwright, was that he would have liked to become Prime Minister in 1873 and thought that Dufferin should have sent for him instead of Mackenzie,⁵⁷ though how Dufferin could have pursued any other course, Mackenzie having been formally elected leader of the party is hard to imagine.

Blake's successful attempt in 1876 to pare the powers of the Governor-General, then, arose partly from personal antipathies and divergent points of view. It arose more specifically from certain incidents which focused the issue as no amount of philosophical difference of opinion could have done. The first of these incidents grew out of the case of Ambroise Lepine, a colleague of Louis Riel, who had been convicted of complicity in the murder of Thomas Scott during the uprising in Manitoba and sentenced to death at Winnipeg. This action by the Manitoba court placed the Government at Ottawa squarely on the horns of a dilemma. If they allowed Lepine's sentence to be carried out, Catholic Quebec would be in an uproar over an alleged miscarriage of justice. Yet, were the sentence commuted, the Govern-

⁵⁴Sir Richard Cartwright, *Reminiscences* (Toronto, 1912), 124.

⁵⁵Dufferin to Carnarvon, private, April 16, 1874.

⁵⁶Same to same, private, March 18, 1874.

⁵⁷Cartwright, *Reminiscences*, 148.

ment would be accused by Protestant Ontario of condoning murder in cold blood.

Dufferin telegraphed the news of the sentence to Carnarvon: "Lepine found guilty of murder by a mixed jury. Considerable excitement amongst French population. My French Ministers say they must resign unless the death sentence is commuted to some minor penalty such as banishment with loss of civil rights. . . . If asked to do so by my Government, would you relieve them of the odium of dealing with the case, and allow me to decide in your name as to what is to be done with Lepine."⁵⁸ ". . . the most intelligent of my French ministers, . . ." Dufferin wrote to the Colonial Secretary, "said that it would be a great relief to them all if the Imperial Government would undertake to deal with the matter."⁵⁹ ". . . our principal object is to deter my ministers from the odium of a decision which cannot fail to appear abominable to one or other of the two nationalities, and probably to both. . . ."⁶⁰ Carnarvon agreed to sanction such a policy but carefully stipulated that "there must be a distinct request from your Ministers. They must initiate the matter or else when things go wrong and party feeling runs high I shall be accused of interference and the blame will be very conveniently laid on my shoulders."⁶¹ This request from the Canadian Government was forthcoming⁶² and in due course Dufferin, "according to his independent judgment and on his own personal responsibility,"⁶³ as he informed Blake, commuted Lepine's sentence to two years' imprisonment and permanent deprivation of all political rights. This step by the Governor-General extricated the Government from an unpleasant predicament but it raised in acute form the question of ministerial responsibility and the powers of the representative of the Crown. Although, according to Dufferin, Blake's own journal, the *Liberal*, supported the Governor-General's action in the Lepine case,⁶⁴ Blake himself seems to have been annoyed by it, as one of his chief objects during his visit to London in 1876 was to secure recognition of the convention that the prerogative of pardon in Canadian cases must be exercised only upon the advice of responsible ministers.

There was another incident which occurred in 1875, during Blake's absence from the Government, which illustrates better than any other, perhaps, the nature of his national philosophy and his desire to secure formal recognition of Canada's autonomous powers. This concerned the power of the Governor-General to disallow enactments of the provincial legislatures contrary to, or without the advice of his ministers.

In June, 1873, Lord Kimberley, Colonial Secretary in the Gladstone Government, had advised Lord Lisgar, the then Governor-General of Canada, that the disallowance of the New Brunswick School Act of 1871 "is a matter in which you must act in your own individual discretion and on which you cannot be guided by the advice of your responsible Ministers of the Dominion."⁶⁵ Blake was highly incensed when he discovered this and in 1875

⁵⁸Dufferin to Carnarvon, private, n.d.

⁵⁹Same to same, private, Nov. 12, 1874.

⁶⁰Same to same, private, Dec. 8, 1874.

⁶¹Carnarvon to Dufferin, confidential, Nov. 12, 1874.

⁶²Dufferin to Carnarvon, private, Dec. 8, 1874.

⁶³*Canada, Sessional Papers*, 1875, no. 11; W. P. M. Kennedy, *The Constitution of Canada* (London, 1938), 348.

⁶⁴Dufferin to Carnarvon, private, March 8, 1875.

⁶⁵*Canada, House of Commons Debates*, 1875, March 31, 1,006.

gave notice of a motion respecting ministerial responsibility for the exercise of the power of disallowance.

Dufferin apparently was anxious to forestall any action by the House on the subject and persuaded Mackenzie to try to get Blake to withdraw his motion, pointing out to the Prime Minister "how undesirable it was that any delicate constitutional question of this nature should be hastily dealt with by the House of Commons,—and probably an unnecessary and certainly, a premature collision superinduced between the Dominion and the Home Government. . . ." ⁶⁶ Mackenzie agreed to do this but remarked that "it would be impossible to resist the motion in the House of Commons." ⁶⁷ Blake, however, at first refused to withdraw his motion. Finally Dufferin had an interview with him in the presence of Mackenzie. Blake still insisted that he would introduce his motion and make a statement thereon, but agreed that he would then withdraw it upon being informed by Mackenzie that the matter was the subject of correspondence between the Canadian and British governments.

Such was the course pursued. On March 31 Blake introduced the resolution, the significant clause of which was as follows: "That this House feels bound in assertion of the constitutional rights of the Canadian people to record its protest against and dissent from the said instruction [contained in Kimberley's despatch to Lisgar] and to declare its determination to hold His Excellency's Ministers responsible for his action in the exercise of the power [to disallow provincial legislation]. . . ." ⁶⁸ The resolution elicited little discussion but all those who commented on it were in agreement with the principle it embodied. Mackenzie stated that the Cabinet had taken action on the matter and thought it "inadvisable and unnecessary to record a truism upon our journals." ⁶⁹ Blake in reply agreed to withdraw his motion but felt that he "must express a moderate measure of dissent from the doctrine that it is not fitting that this resolution should go upon the Journals because it happens to be true. I could only wish that all the entries in our Journals possessed the same admirable quality." ⁷⁰

Blake was not satisfied to let the matter drop here. In December, 1875, as Minister of Justice he composed a formal report on the subject of ministerial responsibility for the disallowance of provincial statutes.

The importance to the people of the advice given by ministers is in precise proportion to its effectiveness. So long as the course pursued is dependent on the advice given, responsibility for the advice is responsibility for the action, and is, therefore, valuable; but it is the action which is really material; and to concede that there may be action contrary to advice would be to destroy the value of responsibility for the advice—to deprive the people of their constitutional security for the administration, according to their wishes, of their own affairs—to yield up the substance, retaining only the shadow of responsible government. ⁷¹

⁶⁶Dufferin to Carnarvon, private, March 8, 1875.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*

⁶⁸*Canada, House of Commons Debates*, 1875, March 31, 1,004.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 1,010.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*

⁷¹*Canada, Correspondence, Reports of the Ministers of Justice and Orders in Council upon the Subject of Dominion and Provincial Legislation 1867-1895* (Ottawa, 1896), 73.

The same issue of the powers of the Governor-General was raised, though in a more general way, during the controversy between Canada and British Columbia over the Pacific Railway. Dufferin was extremely anxious to see the railway pushed forward and impatient with the rather lackadaisical policy of his ministers. Though the Governor-General may not have inspired Carnarvon's offer of mediation in 1874, he certainly did not disapprove of it, and "after the proposal had been made Dufferin adopted it as his own."⁷² When the Carnarvon terms were repudiated by a Canadian minute of council of September, 1875, Carnarvon wrote, deprecating the departure from his terms. In his despatch was the tacit assumption that he was still employed as arbitrator and that the trip which Dufferin was about to make to British Columbia was to furnish the Colonial Secretary with new facts that he might reach a new decision. "The situation thus was, that a member of the British Government in London, advised by an imperial officer in Canada, was to settle a dispute between a province and the federal administration."⁷³

This was a situation that was intolerable to Mackenzie and Blake alike. Blake, Dufferin explained to Carnarvon, "is evidently very jealous at any language which implies a claim on the part of the C.O. to intervene in this dispute in the character of an arbitrator."⁷⁴ Whereas Dufferin and Carnarvon obviously regarded the Carnarvon terms as a tripartite agreement whose fulfilment they had a right to demand, and whereas the former expressed his willingness to co-operate with the latter in bringing "serious pressure to bear upon the Mackenzie Govt., in order to compel them to keep their word,"⁷⁵ the Canadian ministers clearly considered the dispute a private one between Canada and British Columbia in which neither the British government nor the Queen's representative had any business interfering. In the same angry interview with Dufferin in November, 1876, referred to earlier, Mackenzie pointed out to the Governor-General "that we were responsible for the Acts of the government, not him, that he had nothing to do with it except as a constitutional governor, and that we had to be responsible to the people of Canada and to no one else."⁷⁶ Meanwhile Blake in London had been writing letters to Carnarvon defining his conception of Canada's constitutional status and attempting to secure a reduction in the powers of the Governor-General.

Canada is not merely a colony or a province [wrote Blake]: she is a dominion . . . the vastness of her area, the numbers of her population, the character of the representative institutions and of the responsible government which as citizens of the various provinces and of Canada her people have so long enjoyed, all point to the propriety of dealing with the question in hand in a manner very different from that which might be fitly adopted with reference to a single and comparatively small and young colony . . . it may be fairly stated that there is no dependency of the British crown which is entitled to so full an application of the principles of constitutional freedom as the dominion of Canada.⁷⁷

⁷²J. A. Maxwell, "Lord Dufferin and the Difficulties with British Columbia, 1874-7" (*Canadian Historical Review*, XII, Dec., 1931, 370).

⁷³*Ibid.*, 382.

⁷⁴Dufferin to Carnarvon, private, May 26, 1876.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*

⁷⁶P. A. C., Mackenzie Letter Books, I, memorandum of an interview with Lord Dufferin, n.d.

⁷⁷*Canada, Sessional Papers*, 1877, no. 13, 4.

Blake did succeed in obtaining important modifications of the Governor-General's commission and instructions.⁷⁸ Henceforth the pardoning power was to be exercised only with ministerial advice and the enumeration of subjects on which legislation must be reserved was discontinued.⁷⁹ Although his attempt to secure for Canada the right to conclude her own extradition treaties with foreign countries ended in failure, he succeeded in procuring the power of establishing Canadian admiralty courts for jurisdiction on the Great Lakes. His attitude on this matter was similar to his point of view on all other questions affecting Canadian autonomy. ". . . we are ourselves quite competent," he told a public meeting, "to determine what laws should regulate our maritime concerns, and to interpret and administer [*sic*] the laws we make, without resorting to the British Parliament for legislation."⁸⁰

These were not insignificant achievements. But to the more lasting credit of Blake and his fellow Liberal nationalists is the fact that they correctly discerned the course which Canada must follow in acquiring a measure of national freedom consistent with her stature. Whilst rejecting the separationism of Goldwin Smith, these men carried forward the struggle of those who had fought for responsible government, demanding for Canada the widest possible freedom of action consistent with membership in the Empire. Out of this process, the gradual elimination of colonial inferiority and in its place the gradual appearance of equality and complete self-government, has grown a structure unique in the history of the world—the British Commonwealth of Nations. The role of Canada in that development is not one of which Canadians need be ashamed.

⁷⁸See W. P. M. Kennedy, *Statutes, Treaties and Documents of the Canadian Constitution, 1713-1929* (Toronto, 1930) for a comparison of the earlier and later commissions.

⁷⁹Kennedy, *Constitution of Canada*, 342.

⁸⁰A. Mackenzie, *et al.*, *Reform Government in the Dominion*, Blake at Teeswater, Sept. 24, 1877, 145.