

painful struggle to bring it about. They preferred to save their energies for debates on the relative merits of federal and legislative unions in achieving truly responsible government, a topic on which they proved themselves indefatigable.

The absence of serious discussion about aboriginal peoples and the Supreme Court in 1865 provides examples of differences between “then and now” based on factors that were not important “then,” but are important “now.” Let us reverse field and consider two questions that were of great significance in 1865 but are no longer so today: monarchy and religion.

One of the most curious aspects of contemporary Canadian culture is the almost obsessive concern (outside Quebec) with national identity. It is curious because all the hand-wringing over what it means to be Canadian goes on while studies and polls consistently reveal a solid consensus both within Canada and elsewhere that it is a fine place to live, perhaps the best in the entire world. The Confederation fathers had no such problem. The overwhelming majority of them frequently went out of their way to celebrate their pride in being loyal subjects of the Queen, gratefully basking in the shared glory of the British Empire. A few examples will capture the spirit of their commitment to monarchy and empire. Richard Cartwright affirmed his delight in being “the subject of an hereditary monarch, who dare not enter the hut of the poorest peasant without leave had and obtained.”<sup>12</sup> Not to be outdone, Antoine Harwood pitied the poor Americans whose executive “is no more than the fortunate chief of a party” and therefore “he can never be regarded as the father of his people.” For the happy Canadians, however, “as the sovereign is permanent (‘the King is dead, God save the King,’) we have at all times in him a father, whose interests and whose inclination it is to extend his protection over the cottage of the poor and over the palace of the rich, and to dispense equal justice to both.” The editor of the debates notes that this statement was followed with “Cheers.”<sup>13</sup> Voicing more sober sentiments, George-Etienne Cartier credited the British monarchy with delivering Canadians from the “absence of some respectable executive element,” which