

According to the analogy of English law, a court would probably hold that the union was irrevocable, and that the Canadian Government was bound either to comply with the terms of the contract or to make full compensation for failure; but English colonies are almost equally independent with sovereign States of coercive jurisdiction. Lord Dufferin's task is rather diplomatic than judicial, inasmuch as it is necessary that both parties should concur in any valid settlement. British Columbia cannot compel Canada to do justice; and, on the other hand, the Government of the Dominion has no means of enforcing the maintenance of the federal relation. It is alleged, perhaps on insufficient grounds that the settlers of Upper Canada are not anxious to facilitate by the construction of roads or railways the passage of European immigrants to the rich lands of the Pacific coast; but their experience of the competition of the Western States ought to have shown the impossibility of stopping immigrants on their way to a chosen place of settlement. The French of Lower Canada are supposed to dislike an increase of the English and Protestant population; but as long as the Eastern Provinces are only sprinkled with settlers, it seems unreasonable to cultivate a jealousy of the remote districts on the Pacific. It must be obvious to intelligent colonists that in proportion to its economical advantages, British Columbia will increase in prosperity and population with the aid either of Canada or the United States. Patriotism would suggest the expediency of cultivating the connexion which is one of the conditions of the future national greatness of Canada; but it is not sufficiently active to prevail over petty motives and calculations.

It is for the English Cabinet to determine, if the case unfortunately arises, whether the consent of the Crown shall be given to the withdrawal of British Columbia from the union with Canada; but the decision of a difficult and dangerous question ought, if possible, to be evaded. Even if the Canadians were previously indifferent to the maintenance of the present connection, they would find a grievance in the infringement of the integrity of the Dominion. On the other hand, neither England or Canada nor both together could prevent the secession of British Columbia, either from the Dominion or from the Empire. According to the well established policy of England, the colonies are only retained as long as the connection is voluntary. It would be absurd, if it were not impossible, to employ for the maintenance of the unity of the Canadian Dominion means which have been by anticipation renounced as inapplicable to the assertion of the integrity of the Empire. The independence of British Columbia would be followed after no long interval by annexation to the American Union; nor would there be any ground for resenting an arrangement between two foreign communities. If Lord Dufferin fails to satisfy the inhabitants of the Province, he may probably be able to secure a reasonable delay before the adoption of any irrevocable measure. On his return to Ottawa he will have to conduct a negotiation with his own advisers, who still command the Parliamentary majority by which they have been kept in power three years. It may be a question whether their popularity would not be endangered by any display of indifference to the risk of mutilating the Dominion. Sir John Macdonald was supported by the Parliament of his day when he engaged to pay a high price for the adhesion of British Columbia to the Union. The same reasons which