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ABSTRACT

JOHN BERNARD INGHAM: THE ROLE OF BRITISH NORTH AMERICA IN ANGLO-AMERICAN RELATIONS, 1848-1854.

This study analyses the impact on mid-nineteenth-century Anglo-American relations of British North America. It argues that successive British governments worked to retain the strategically-important colonies, despite the often exaggerated influence of Little Englandism. It also stresses the overwhelming loyalty of the colonists, despite aberrations like Canada's 1849 Annexation Crisis.

It points to two annexation crises - in 1848 and 1849. During the former, Anglo-American relations suffered as the colonists braced themselves for a popular American invasion. In the 1849 crisis, unknown to the British, the American government briefly considered annexing Canada. When this opportunity vanished, Washington willingly prolonged the crisis in order to weaken Britain during negotiations over Central America.

The Fishery Dispute of 1852-1854 found Britain practising pressure politics. London used years of tension between American and colonial fishermen as a pretext for a show of naval strength off North America during negotiations with the United States over Cuba and Central America.

The Fishery Dispute also succeeded in forcing the Americans to take Reciprocity seriously. This study rejects traditional interpretations which claim that Lord Elgin's success in 1854 stemmed from his own brilliance and his ability to tell America's feuding sections different stories about the likely effect of Reciprocity. Instead it argues that Elgin succeeded in 1854 because of the work over several years by other diplomats. He also succeeded in 1854 because of a mutual desire for transatlantic calm due to America's domestic problems and Britain's involvement in the Crimean War. Though Elgin's ability oiled the wheels of success, he was also fortunate to arrive just as the ruling party in Washington put down its guard and celebrated the Kansas-Nebraska Compromise.

The ratification of Reciprocity in British North America confirms that, despite granting self-government to the three main colonies, Britain put wider imperial interests before purely colonial interests.

The thesis concludes that British North America, though nominally powerless and dependent on Britain, had a significant role in Anglo-American relations. The colonies pressured London and Washington by various tactics, while Mother Country and territorially rapacious republic frequently used the colonies as a weapon in their dealings with each other. This produced a diplomatic North Atlantic Triangle with each polity cynically trying to use the other two for its own ends.

THE ROLE OF BRITISH NORTH AMERICA IN
ANGLO-AMERICAN RELATIONS, 1848-1854

John Bernard Ingham

Submitted for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy in History at the University
of Durham.

1990

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DECLARATION

The contents of this thesis have not been submitted for a degree at Durham University or any other university.

Some material has previously been published in John B Ingham, "Power to the Powerless: British North America and the Pursuit of Reciprocity, 1846-1854" in Bulletin of Canadian Studies, VIII, 2, Autumn 1984. This was awarded the British Association for Canadian Studies' inaugural Philip Wigl y Memorial Prize in 1984.

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INTRODUCTION

PAWNS IN A GAME

In the middle of the nineteenth century July 4th was, as now, a day of celebration in the United States. From New Orleans to Maine, Americans launched into an orgy of patriotism as they remembered their declaration of independence from Great Britain. But at Niagara and Detroit, and on the borders of Maine and Vermont, the festivities did not ring true. The flag waving and fireworks were genuine; but they took place within sight of Redcoats. Though an independent, republican nation, the United States had not expelled her old colonial master from the New World. By retaining British North America, Britain retained her place as a North American power. Inevitably, therefore, British North America had a role in Anglo-American relations.

Nor was this role merely passive, arising solely from the existence of British colonies along the northern border of the United States. The colonies played a positive role themselves in shaping relations between Mother Country and rebellious offspring, sometimes by becoming rebellious themselves. Equally, both Britain and the United States cynically used the colonies as pawns in their own wider diplomatic games. Indeed, Britain's very retention of the colonies reflected the diplomatic and strategic value she placed on them.

Underlying this diplomatic activity was a strong sense of political uncertainty. British North America was particularly unstable between 1848 and 1854. Made up of the scattered colonies

of Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Canada - nowadays Ontario and Quebec - British North America was rocked in these years by fundamental changes in her relationship with Britain. For decades the five squabbling colonies had lived under an economic, administrative and military umbrella held aloft by London. They enjoyed a protected imperial market, their costs of government and defence were borne by Britain, and their defence was the responsibility of the British Army and the Royal Navy. Politically immature and with fledgling economies, the colonies had little power, but they also had little responsibility. By the middle of the nineteenth century, all this was changing. Britain first dismantled her closed commercial empire by opting for free trade, normally symbolised by the 1846 Repeal of the Corn Laws. Equally profound was the decision of the British government to introduce responsible self-government to Canada, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. Though Britain retained responsibility for defence and foreign policy, the colonies now had to govern themselves. Even the role of each colony's Governor or Lieutenant Governor changed. In the past the Queen's representative had tended to favour one faction which, with his support, ignored democratic opinion. Now, he acted more like a constitutional monarch, formally approving whatever legislation the colonial parliament passed, even at the risk, in Canada, of appearing to be a Francophile.

These controversial developments reflected changing attitudes towards the Empire in Britain. In Parliament the twin influences of free trade and 'The Economisers' led many to question the wisdom of spending large sums to retain uneconomic colonies which most

assumed would soon become independent. To judge by some of the parliamentary speeches reprinted in Canada, the ties that bound Britain to British North America were being loosened daily. At the same time, the ties between the Provinces and the United States were growing, despite the former's hostility to republicanism and the latter's ignorance about the Colonies. Further, the shock caused by the introduction of imperial free trade and the subsequent recession gave rise to pressure from within British North America for even closer transcontinental links. Forced out of one protected market, many colonists naturally looked for another - and turned immediately to the huge market on their doorstep, in the United States. This led to agitation for Reciprocity - or reciprocal free trade in agricultural products with the United States. Others, possibly also as a result of political disappointment under responsible self government, took a more drastic step, forming the Annexation movement and petitioning for their Province or the whole of British North America to be annexed peacefully by the United States. But if British North America was edging ever closer to either economic or political union with the United States, it was also moving in another direction. The effort to secure Reciprocity - widely seen as the only antidote to Annexation - paved the way for Confederation of the Provinces in 1867 by forcing the rival colonies into an unprecedented level of cooperation. All through this period, then, there was no certainty as to where the political destiny of British North America lay - within the Empire, as a series of independent colonies, as a new united nation or as a part of the United States.

In the desperate days of 1849, when the colonial Annexation

Movement was at its peak, union with the United States looked the safest bet. For the past few decades, the United States had been expanding rapidly across the continent. Before the 1840s, the republic had acquired new territory peacefully, through diplomatic agreements like the Louisiana Purchase. But in the 1840s, the United States showed a steelier determination, largely because it found in Mexico an enemy it thought it could beat comfortably. Having first annexed Texas, the White House launched in 1846 into a war with Mexico and turned victory two years later into one of the biggest land acquisitions of the century. With its southern neighbour subdued and the race to the Pacific Coast won, the obvious next step for the increasingly confident republic was to turn ever northwards. There, strung out along the American border, remote and vulnerable, lay Britain's last North American possessions.

That many Americans hoped eventually to expel Britain from the New World and to see British North America as the northern constellation of the Stars and Stripes is not in doubt; less certain is whether this vague desire affected the actions of American governments. Though the territorial and economic expansion of the United States gave it an outward air of robust health, the republic was decaying from within. In this period, the agitation over the slavery issue repeatedly reached fever pitch and then subsided; at no point did the warring politicians reach a lasting solution, possibly because none was available. As a result, the future of the United States was also in doubt, with contemporaries predicting the ultimate separation of North and South. This made defining the limits of continental expansion

particularly critical: though continued growth could bring political and economic gain, it could equally spell political and economic ruin. As British North America was a vast area of free soil, with a strongly abolitionist population, advocates of its admission to the Union knew they were playing with fire.

These years, then, produced a cocktail of emotions, which could easily have been fatal for any one of the parties involved. The United States was torn between further expansion and the problems caused by its latest acquisitions; the British were torn between keeping the colonies and facing up to the uncertain consequences of losing them; and the politically inexperienced colonists were trying to establish new relationships with Britain and the United States in the wake of losing their privileged economic and political positions in the Empire. This situation begs several questions. Were the colonies in any danger from the American government or its citizens? How far did the colonists take their efforts to build new links with the republic? What value, if any, did Britain place on her North American colonies, and how did she respond to American-inspired threats against them? Did these problems have a direct influence on Anglo-American relations and what roles did the colonies play in transatlantic diplomacy?

Historians, though, have consistently failed to answer these questions. In the standard historical works of this period, British North America is largely forgotten. Indeed, a newcomer to world geography could be forgiven if, after leafing through these books, he assumed that British North America had never existed. In

most texts, the British colonies rate dismissive treatment; and in those works on transatlantic diplomacy which refer at greater length to British North America, there is no attempt to establish what its actual role was. There have been books on Anglo-American Relations, American Foreign Policy in Canadian Relations, Canadian-American Relations, The American Problem in British Diplomacy and even on Britain and the Balance of Power in North America. All cover their subjects thoroughly, and all touch on the influence of British North America; but all minimise the significance of the colonies in Anglo-American relations and miss key developments which point to the need for a review.

Most of the studies are old - twenty years and more. This in itself does not justify revision; but their content does. The seminal study is Donald C Masters' work, The Reciprocity Treaty of 1854¹ which is invaluable in its detailed account of the eight-year pursuit of greater economic cooperation in North America. Nevertheless, Masters produces a range of explanations for the success of the negotiations which depends on evidence drawn from 1848-50, when Reciprocity failed, rather than from 1853-54 when it succeeded. To explain the final success, Masters has to emphasise the role of British North America's Governor General, Lord Elgin. Attractive in that it personalises the episode, this view underestimates the hard work by others which made Elgin's triumph possible. It also undervalues the peculiar circumstances which made the Americans better disposed towards cooperating with the British. More serious, Masters spawns the myth that Elgin secured the Treaty in 1854 by playing the anti-slavery North off against the Southern slavocracy. Such a view assumes that the political

life of the United States was dominated at this time by sectional conflict, and so ignores the continuing importance of national political parties with distinctive views on nearly every issue, including Anglo-American relations.

This interpretation of the settlement of 1854 is repeated in John Bartlett Brebner's influential 1945 book, North Atlantic Triangle: The Interplay of Canada, the United States and Great Britain.² Similar failings may be found in the other key studies, ranging from Lester Burrell Shippee's Canadian-American Relations, 1849-1874 and Donald Warner's The Idea of Continental Union: Agitation for the Annexation of Canada to the United States, 1849-1893 through Kenneth Bourne's impressive Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815-1908 to Reginald Stuart's recent United States Expansionism and British North America, 1775-1871.³ By covering very wide periods, all of these works miss many of the details which could have changed their conclusions. They give the 1852-4 Fishery Dispute even briefer treatment than the 1854 Reciprocity Treaty, and, most importantly, they underestimate the significance of the 1848 and 1849 Annexation crises.

Despite the influential precedent established in 1837 and 1838 when American adventurers invaded Canada in support of minority rebellions, most historians ignore the 1848 Annexation Crisis. At that time Montreal lived in fear of a popular invasion by American citizens as a result of Irish-American scheming, the return to the border area of unemployed Mexican War veterans and the political manoeuvrings of the presidential election. Equally, all fail to

appreciate the extent of White House interest in Canada's 1849 Annexation Movement. Crucial in understanding this are the papers of Israel de Wolf Andrews, appointed by successive governments as America's first Special Agent to British North America. Though some of the studies refer to the letters of the extravagant and excitable spy, not one analyses the nature of his relationship with the State Department. A more detailed study yields interesting information. It is clear that President Zachary Taylor and Secretary of State John M Clayton considered annexing Canada at the same time as they were studying the possibility of buying Cuba. At the very least they were happy to prolong Britain's embarrassment in British North America to gain the upper hand in negotiations over Central America.

Seduced by the build-up to the Civil War, historians have tended to ignore these issues, focussing their attention on positive rather than negative developments. Thus, the cause, course and consequences of the 1846 Oregon Crisis have been exhaustively covered, as have the Compromise Debates and irresistible slide of the United States into its own internecine conflict. With such glamorous problems to research, historians have understandably skimmed over the significance of British North America. After all, it was so often the 'Nearly Man' of North American history. It was nearly attacked in 1848 by American citizens, it nearly rebelled during the 1849 Annexation Crisis, and it nearly led to war between 1852 and 1854 over the Fisheries. Moreover, when Britain managed to stave off a repeat of these problems in 1854, she did so with an economic agreement which, superficially at least, is hardly likely to set the pulses of

historians racing. But contemporaries took an interest - and rightly so. They did not know that British North America would not be annexed or that a third war with Britain was certain to be avoided. It is worthwhile asking why this tension existed, why it did not have more serious consequences - and what this reveals about Anglo-American relations in this uncertain period?

INTRODUCTION: PAWNS IN A GAME

1. Donald C Masters, The Reciprocity Treaty of 1854, (London, Longman's Green and Co., 1936).
2. John Bartlett Brebner, North Atlantic Triangle: The Interplay of Canada, the United States and Great Britain, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1945).
3. Lester Burrell Shippee, Canadian-American Relations, 1849-1874, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1939); Donald F Warner, The Idea of Continental Union: Agitation for the Annexation of Canada to the United States, 1849-1893, (Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 1960); Kenneth Bourne, Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815-1908, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1967); Reginald C Stuart, United States Expansionism and British North America, 1775-1871, (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1988). See also: James Morton Callaghan, American Foreign Policy in Canadian Relations, (New York, Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1967) and Wilbur Devereux Jones, The American Problem in British Diplomacy, 1841-1861, (London, MacMillan, 1974).

CHAPTER ONE
NORTH ATLANTIC TRIANGLE

"If the Americans make war for Canada, we must meet them with war."

Prime Minister Lord John Russell to Colonial Secretary Grey,

January 1 1849.¹

For successive British Governments, the possession of British North America had been a liability in their relations with the United States. Since the American Declaration of Independence, Britain had frequently been forced to defend the colonies against the possibility of attack from their southern neighbour. The war of 1812 had seen bloody battles on Canadian soil, the Canadian rebellions of 1837 and 1838 had sparked off supportive invasions by American citizens, and the Aroostook Dispute, the MacLeod affair and the Oregon crisis had all threatened war up to 1846. During the later 1840s and early 1850s, the Provinces remained a thorn in the side of Anglo-American relations. 1848 and 1849 both produced tension over the prospect of annexation - that is, the admission of the colonies to the United States - and between 1852 and 1854 the Fishing Grounds off the Maritimes became the centre of another potentially explosive Anglo-American dispute. Accompanying all these episodes was the long-drawn out and frequently amateurish attempt by the British and Colonists to secure Reciprocity. An unlikely pot of gold for anyone to chase with such persistence over an eight year period, Reciprocity was widely seen in Britain and British North America as an economic and political cure-all. But

it also became a time-consuming distraction for the Foreign and Colonial Offices - and left Britain vulnerable to American pressure politics.

On the face of it, it may well seem strange that so weak and divided a group as the British North American Provinces could exert any sort of influence on Anglo-American relations in the middle of the nineteenth century. Britain was then near her peak as an imperial power. Her industrial and commercial might extended her economic and political influence all round the globe, and, while her European rivals tottered on the brink of a revolutionary abyss, the Royal Navy made Britain the world's most formidable military force. The place of British North America in this powerful global jigsaw was small - rather like a bit part in an epic. Moreover, despite the introduction of responsible government to some of the Provinces, the colonies were still heavily dependent on the Mother Country, who handled their defence and their relations with foreign countries. Yet, the 1840s were a period of massive territorial expansion by the United States, which was beginning to loom as a rival to Great Britain. Not only did the Americans pose a growing threat to Britain's privileged position in world trade, but their apparently insatiable appetite for land was a threat to British territory in North America. After annexing Texas from Mexico in 1848 - a development the British had worked hard to prevent - the United States gave notice of their increasing self confidence by trouncing Mexico in war, and swallowing up the modern states of America's south-west as their price for peace. With a dual tradition of hostility to Britain and of acts of aggression towards

British rule in British North America, there was no guarantee that the Republic would not make the British Provinces its next target for territorial expansion. And just as millionaires rarely get rich by giving their money away, so Britain believed that she would not stay powerful by surrendering her territory, least of all to her precocious rival.

Even so, there were contradictions in the British attitude towards British North America. Undeniably, the ties between Mother Country and the five British Provinces were fraying at the British end of the connection. For Governor-General Elgin, who was to pilot British North America through the rockiest phase of its imperial marriage, the British attitude was depressing in the extreme. "I feel myself," he told Colonial Secretary Grey in 1848,

in the position in which the master of one of those ricketty vessels which are sent to this quarter in quest of timber occasionally finds himself. By dint of much labour and watching he succeeds in conveying ship and cargo safely through the tempests and icebergs which assail him on the voyage out and home, and he is not a little disappointed, poor simple minded man! when on reporting his arrival, he hears the owners mutter to one another 'It would have been better for us if the whole concern had gone to the bottom, as we should then have realized the Insurance'. Much in the same light are exertions made to maintain and perpetuate the connexion between this Province and the Mother Country, likely, I fear, to be viewed: - for Canada is beginning to be reckoned, I shrewdly suspect, by most English politicians, a bad bargain at any price.²

Besieged by criticism in the House of Commons and the press, Colonial Secretary Grey agreed. Indeed he was profoundly alarmed by the growth "of a formidable party in favor of a dissolution of the connexion between this Country & its Colonies." However, this body did not in reality want to destroy the Empire; instead it

wanted to reform it.³

What these colonial reformers objected to most strongly in the present system was the cost of maintaining the Empire. Men like Richard Cobden and Sir William Molesworth argued over and over again that the cost of administering and defending the empire was far greater than the value of colonial trade.⁴ Such views were given a boost by the abandonment of imperial protectionism. In 1848 Molesworth argued in the Commons that under the old system Britain had kept up vast military and naval establishments to protect their colonial commercial monopoly. The logic of this policy lay in the belief that "the expense thus incurred was repaid by the benefits derived from the monopoly of the colonial trade." He added:

It is evident, however, that with the abandonment of colonial monopoly, the arguments in favour of colonial dominion, which were derived from that monopoly, must likewise be abandoned... As far as trade is concerned, the colonies are becoming virtually independent States...⁵

As the British North American Colonies gradually gained responsible government, the Reformers found a further justification for reduced expenditure from Britain, arguing that the self-governing should at least contribute to the cost of defending themselves.⁶ Nor were the Reformers the only ones to resent the financial drain of the Colonies. As Chancellor of the Exchequer, Grey's Cabinet colleague Charles Wood had to manage the purse strings of the Government at a time when the pressure for economising was great. He frequently complained to Grey of colonial expenses, explaining that any money spent on increasing the military force in the colonies would be portrayed as "providing the means of supporting misgovernment."⁷ At one point he was so exasperated that he wrote to Grey: "May the —

(sic) I won't say who, run away with some of your colonies."⁸ And soon after the Montreal Parliament was burned to the ground in 1849 in a riot at least partly inspired by the Canadian Annexationists, he wrote: "for one I am most decidedly against the amount of expense now incurred for our colonies."⁹

Putting further strains on imperial ties was the widespread belief in the Ripe Apple theory of Empire: that there would come a time when each colony would reach such a state of political and economic maturity that it would naturally seek - and obtain - independence. The most mature of Britain's colonies were thought to be in British North America, and consequently talk of the imminent independence of the provinces was fairly commonplace. In 1849 one commentator boldly stated: "No one disputes at this time the assertion, that our provinces in North America must soon be independent."¹⁰ Even Prime Minister Lord John Russell told Parliament in February 1850 that the time would come when the colonies would ask for their independence and once sought it would be granted.¹¹

Faced with colonies which might very soon be leaving the empire, many men were reluctant to spend a penny more on them than they had to. Under attack from both within the Administration and from the opposition benches, Grey found himself financially hamstrung. Aware of the need to show the Canadians that Britain was still committed to them, Grey spoke of his wish to get the construction of the Halifax to Quebec railway under way. But, he wrote despairingly,

there begins to prevail in the H. of Commons &
I am sorry to say in the highest quarters, an

opinion (wh. I believe to be utterly erroneous) that we have no interest in preserving our Colonies & ought therefore to Make no sacrifice for the purpose, Peel, Graham, & Gladstone if they do not avow this opinion as openly as Cobden & his friends, yet betray very clearly that they entertain it, nor do I find some Members of the Cabinet free from it, so that I am powerless to do anything wh. involves expense - It is the existence of this feeling here wh. is to me by far the most serious cause of apprehension for the future.¹²

Indeed Grey felt as though he was walking a tightrope. He was convinced that the biggest British threat to the Empire "arises from the expense the maintenance of our Colonial Empire entails upon this country." Consequently, he felt his job was to get the right balance between leaving imperial defences too weak and making them so strong that their expense drove the British public into the arms of the anti-Empire groups. Thus, he told the hawkish Duke of Wellington "that in determining what amount of Military Force is to be kept up in the Colonies the effect of the expenditure this occasioned on public opinion must not be lost sight of."¹³

The importance of keeping British public opinion in favour of retaining the Colonies was two-fold. Most obviously, if the British increasingly grew disenchanted with the expense of Empire, they would in time start pressing Parliament for it to be dismantled. But the views and statements of the British could work in more subtle ways, largely because of the interest they generated overseas. British North American and American newspapers all eagerly awaited the arrival of ships from Europe with the latest news from the Old World. And in the Provinces - especially when the imperial relationship was under strain - the statements of British politicians and newspapers respecting the Empire received

very close attention. In such an atmosphere, newspapers often gave rumours the same status as fact. Hence, with Canada eagerly awaiting the response of the British Government to the 1849 Annexation Manifesto, one newspaper carried the following 'news' from London, brought over by The Canada, just docked at Halifax. Quoting the Morning Advertiser, the article ran:

we speak advisedly when we say that the country will be no loser by the secession of the Canadas. That is certainly the conclusion at which the Ministry have arrived, after the most able and careful deliberation. On that conclusion they have resolved to act.¹⁴

Elgin saw this as scaremongering by an annexationist press. However, rumours like this had credibility because colonial newspapers repeatedly carried attacks on the Imperial connection made by British statesmen. For this reason, Elgin thought the future of British North America was, to say the least, precarious if British politicians continued to make such speeches. In March 1849 he warned:

if ... the organs ... of the Gov^t and of the Peel Party are always writing as if it were an admitted fact that the Colonies, and more especially Canada, are a burden to be endured only because they cannot be got rid of; the end may be nearer at hand than we wot of.¹⁵

As he battled manfully to stem the tide of annexationism in 1849, he repeatedly warned Grey that "The assertion that England is indifferent to the maintenance of the colonial connexion is by far the most powerful argument which the annexationists employ, and the most difficult to confute."¹⁶

Yet, for all the trouble British North America caused at home and abroad, British governments consistently worked to retain the provinces. For at least eight humiliating years they pressed the

Americans to grant Reciprocity, hoping this would cure the economic ills at the root of Annexationism. This, moreover, was simply the most noticeable of their Empire-preserving acts. They also strove to keep the peace within the Imperial family in much less spectacular ways. Thus, British Governments trod carefully when trying to persuade the colonists to pay more towards their own defence; they awarded honours and titles to distinguished colonists in a bid to strengthen ties with Britain; and they resisted disloyal acts by Canadians and threats on the Provinces by Americans.¹⁷ Despite all the rumblings against the Empire in Britain, no government was willing to abandon British North America. Quite clearly, the colonies had a value which could not be measured in the monetary terms so popular with the would-be reformers of Westminster.

Surveying the Empire from his London home, the Duke of Wellington gave one indication of the importance of Britain's global possessions. Though in his eightieth year and, to judge by his handwriting, clearly feeling his age, the Iron Duke was still the Commander in Chief of the British Army and alert to all its needs. As the Christmas of 1848 approached, he had at least one reason to be in good cheer: the state of the British Empire.

In truth excepting two or three points we occupy every position and Station throughout the World which any Individual can think interesting whether for the protection of Interests of Commerce, for defence or for strategical purposes in War... I really know of nothing else that could be desired that we do not already occupy!

I don't think that any Minister could propose to abandon any territory or portion which we at present occupy! and I really do not know of any one that could be occupied by a force

materially diminished.¹⁸

Wellington believed that the Empire was essential to Britain's power and that every colony, from Labuan in the East Indies to New Brunswick in the Maritimes, had a role to play. Of course, Wellington was old and had long been generally resistant to change. But these views, though rosy, were in keeping with those of his Prime Minister, Lord John Russell, and Colonial Secretary Grey. In 1852 the latter publicly analysed the value of Empire in a two-volume defence of his tenure of the Colonial Office¹⁹, but it was Russell who provided the most succinct commentary. In a jaunty letter to Grey in the summer of 1849, he proclaimed that he favoured colonial reform, "but not Cobden's reform - which would be a dissolution of the Connexion." He then went on to consider "what are the benefits which remain to us from the Colonial connexion, free trade being taken for granted." These benefits fell into two main categories; economic and military. On the economic side, the advantages of Empire were clear:

generally as to our Colonies we may secure the admission of our Manufactured Goods on the payment of moderate duties... We are sure of the admission of British vessels & goods to our Colonies in time of War with foreign Nations, & can shut their ports to our enemies... Our Merchants can Maintain a connexion with firms in the Colonies without fear of being partially or unjustly treated as foreigners. These connexions spread far & wide in London, Liverpool, Glasgow &

Even with free trade, then, a global network of colonies was a major asset to an island trading nation like Britain, especially as much of the country's commerce was already based on these imperial foundations. In military terms, the colonies were just as important. Some, like the Cape, Ceylon and Bermuda, were strategically valuable. They allowed Britain to control the sea

lanes; equally, if controlled by an enemy, they would "be serious injury to us in time of war." Others, said Russell, were important military ports, like Gibraltar and Malta. But in the case of the overseas colonies settled by British emigrants, there was a vaguer and longer term value.

There is a general advantage in the possession of Canada & Australia, which is hard to define, but not difficult to perceive - The British race in these Colonies form in time of War one Nation with us, nearly as much as Aberdeen or Cork, tho' divided by a larger span of the world - But in point of communication Halifax is now almost as near as Inverness was a century ago-

To Russell the Empire was a source of strength for both the present and the future, and, moreover, it was a powerhouse that had to be jealously guarded.

The loss of any great portion of our Colonies would diminish our importance in the world, & the vultures would soon gather together to despoil us of other parts of our Empire, or to offer insults to us which we could not bear.²⁰

In other words, thanks to her overseas possessions, Britain was truly a world power, and accepted as such by her rivals. But without her Empire, she would be worse than the weakest nation of Europe: she would be a fallen power, as daunting as a champion prizefighter in his dotage. It was something of a vicious circle. Through her colonies, Britain was a global trading nation, a world power. But to retain that position, she had to keep her colonies and, occasionally, acquire new ones. And the only way these could be protected was by using the colonies she already possessed.

Thus, in Russell's eyes the Empire was vital to Britain's power and had to be kept intact. While he could grant independence to a colony which had become mature enough to ask for it, he could

not allow another country to steal any territory from Britain. Moreover, some colonies had special roles, with specific rivals of Great Britain as their targets. British North America was one such possession. Her importance stemmed from her strategic position right next door to the United States. Negatively, the loss of the Provinces would have at once weakened Britain and strengthened the United States because the Republic would have gained control of Britain's crucial naval base at Halifax and the Maritimes' shipbuilding industry. Were the latter added to the American fleet, the United States would have been able to challenge Britain's prized world mercantile supremacy and thereby threaten her economy. Moreover, the loss of the Provinces to the United States could threaten Britain militarily. Wrote Lord Elgin in 1848 in one of his regular letters to Grey:

Let the Yankees get possession of British North America with the prestige of superior Generalship - who can say how soon they may dispute with you the Empire of India and the Seas? Imagine 100,000,000 of confederated men inhabiting this vast continent and the proceeds of their duties on Imports invested in a Navy!21

This nightmare vision of the future was enough to keep any British politician on his toes in the middle of the nineteenth century. But the North American Provinces had a more immediate importance. Though a significant trading partner, the United States' growing power and territory made the Republic loom not just as a future rival but as one to be considered for the present. Something was needed to keep American expansion in check and to prevent the spread of dangerous republican ideas. British North America was the weapon most readily to hand. Writing in September 1848, Grey confessed that he viewed the future with

apprehension "when I see the United States rising so rapidly in power & population" but without any moral restraint.²² A month later he wrote more passionately:

the more I see & hear of the state of affairs in the United States the more convinced I am of the extreme importance of consolidating in B^{sh} America a system of Gov^c really popular & at the same time not so ultra democratic in principle as that of the great republic. - As the effect of the instit^{ns} of the United States becomes more and more developed the more dangerous I think them to the peace of the world, & though otherwise perhaps I sh^d not attach so much value to our possess^{ns} in America I do think it of the utmost importance that we sh^d at least retain them long enough to raise them to a constitutⁿ in which they might maintain their own independence instead of being absorbed in the Union.²³

So great a threat did Grey consider the United States that there was one circumstance under which he could accept the annexation of British North America to the republic. Accepting that Reciprocity between the States and the Provinces could lead to eventual political union, he expressed the hope to Elgin

that this may take place by amicable arrangement instead of by war, & may lead to a division of the Union - British America with some of the Northern States forming one Nation & the Southern States another - This w^d be no such bad result & in the mean time our trade w^d flourish.²⁴

However, such an option was very much the last resort. All Grey was doing in this letter was trying to see what good could possibly come out of a fairly dismal development for Great Britain. In reality, the British were determined to retain British North America. Apart from the emotional, cultural and historic ties the colonies shared with Britain, they were integral parts of the British Empire. And, however troublesome that global grouping might have been, it was a source of much of Britain's power,

whether measured in terms of commerce or world status. Moreover, British North America had an additional value as a strategic block to the relentless rise of the United States - a development that promised nothing but danger for Great Britain. Of course, much can be made of the growing hostility to Empire in economy-conscious Britain. Yet too much should not be made of the activities of the Reformers. Most of that grouping died young and few held government offices while advocates of imperial reform. Equally, many politicians who made great show about the need for cost-cutting in the Empire or for abandoning particular Colonies, were merely jumping on what they thought to be a political bandwagon, seizing a stout stick with which they could beat the Government. Faced with the responsibility of office, these men - like Disraeli - trod more warily. It was one thing to shout in opposition about reforming the Empire; quite another to set about the task once given the power to do so. And in the case of British North America, there was another restraining force. No man wanted to go down in history as the second Lord North; and no man wanted to be remembered as the bungler who set in train the dissolution of the whole Empire. Personal as well as national honour was at stake. So it was that on New Year's Day, 1849, after enduring a year of American threats against Canada, Russell told Grey: "If the Americans make war for Canada, we must meet them with war."²⁵

Russell's defiant statement spoke volumes for his government's commitment to British North America; but it also revealed some degree of ignorance about American attitudes to the five Provinces. Admittedly there were groups within the United States who did covet the colonies, but on the whole mid-nineteenth century Americans

were similar to their twentieth century descendants when it came to Canada. Most ignored and were ignorant of their northern neighbour. For instance, one of the biggest problems facing Reciprocity in the United States was not hostility but indifference. Thus, Reciprocity bills failed in Congress only once because of a negative vote, in January 1849.²⁶ All the other bills failed because Congress was so engrossed in its other, domestic, business that it did not get round to voting on them. Even when the Reciprocity Treaty eventually passed Congress in August 1854, it did so only on the last day of the session. Moreover, its supporters had beaten the deadline only by forcing off the agenda countless private bills designed to boost the reputation of the sponsoring members of Congress in their constituencies. Indeed, a constant theme of the American Government's expert on British North America, Israel de Wolf Andrews, was that the United States paid far too little attention to the affairs of the colonies and the opportunities presented by them.²⁷

Even so, British North America had a place in American politics, though not one that it welcomed. In truth, the vast majority of Americans paid little heed to developments north of the Great Lakes, concentrating instead on local and national issues. Apart from those either living near, or with commercial interests in, the Provinces, the only time Americans took any real notice of them was during elections or in times of Anglo-American tension. In this period there were several sources of friction between the two countries. Acting as a restraint on the hot-heads of both sides were the countries' strong trading links which formed the strongest argument for preserving the peace available to either

Government. Yet this did not stop their rivalry forcing the transatlantic relationship to simmer ominously from time to time. One of the biggest problems lay in the historical relationship between Britain and the United States. The latter had been born out of a bloody struggle with an oppressive Mother Country which, until 1846, remained as the republic's only significant martial foe. Short on history, the new country had looked hard for national heroes - and nearly all of them had made their reputations either by defying or killing the British. Paul Revere, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson all fell into this category, while many members of Congress proudly wore the battle honours and military titles won in the second Anglo-American war, the War of 1812. Similarly, one of the key dates of the national calendar harked back to a major act of defiance against George III, the Declaration of Independence, and, if politicians wished to stir up patriotism, their safest bet was to revive distorted memories of past British outrages against the United States. Atrocities by British-backed Indians in the War of Independence and the War of 1812, the seizure of neutral American ships in the Napoleonic War and the burning of the White House were all calculated to make the blood of every true American boil. In a nation with a growing immigrant population anxious to be accepted as American, there were further advantages to Anglophobic statements. Tirades against Great Britain could be taken as public assertions of loyalty to the Republic while helping to unite an ethnically mixed nation against a common, external, enemy. And in mid-nineteenth century America, such outbursts were always likely to be popular with voters drawn from the Irish population who had fled their homeland because of English misrule and the Famine. Hence, elections were always

likely to inspire self-seeking politicians to public abuse of Great Britain.²⁸

The rivalry, however, did not lie merely in the past. Looking to the future, the United States was convinced that it was itself Britain's natural successor. Empires, ran the theory, rise and fall, to be followed by newer, uncorrupted Empires. This had been the case with ancient Greece, Rome and Venice, and so it would be with the British Empire. This view of world history figured in American art, in Thomas Coles' "Course of Empire", but it also found more forceful expression in Congress. To interjections that England was "old and worn within", Virginia representative Henry Bedinger told the House in 1846:

We are in the vigor of youth, increasing every year in prosperity and power. Great Britain, though she may not have reached that period when we may look for her speedy toppling downfall, yet she has evidently passed her prime. She smacks of age.²⁹

The acquisition of California and San Francisco's Golden Gate to the fabled wealth of the Orient in 1848 merely added to this confidence. It led some, like New York representative Gilbert Dean in 1852, to give the battle for world power status between the two countries a more bellicose image.

We have already had two wars with England, the first upon the land for national existence, the second upon the land and sea for commercial existence, and now we are waging yet another for commercial, industrial, and naval supremacy; and the struggle to attain it is not confined to any class, but it is a contest in which our manufacturers, our artisans, and our producers are engaged for the markets of the world;... this, the third war with England...³⁰

While some hoped for a more peaceful resolution of Anglo-American competition around the world, like America's Minister to London,

the wealthy industrialist Abbott Lawrence³¹, others believed a war was inevitable at some stage.³² All agreed that if this conflict did break out, it would be the biggest the world had ever seen. Said Senator John C. Calhoun of South Carolina in 1846: "It would speedily become a struggle for mastery between the greatest Power in the world, on one side, against the most growing on the other."³³

Despite bold predictions that the end of the British Empire was nigh, Britain showed a frustrating unwillingness to lie down and die. Everywhere that American traders travelled round the globe, they faced competition from British rivals, and in the United States internal improvements depended heavily on capital raised in London. Worse still, rather than submit in awe to the growing power of the United States, Britain still seemed to have designs on the New World. In North America she was widely believed to have resisted American attempts to acquire Texas and California, and in the late 1840s and early 1850s, she took to meddling in Central America. This greatly annoyed American politicians who, firm believers in the hallowed Monroe Doctrine, wanted the United States to be the only power meddling in the Isthmus, or any other part of the Americas. But, more to the point, Britain chose to become active in Honduras and Nicaragua at a time when the need for speedier communications with California had directed the State Department's attention to the possibility of a trans-Isthmian canal. Differences over Central America were to dominate Anglo-American relations in this period, but, even without this problem, relations with Britain would always have been on tenterhooks, thanks to British North America. As long as Queen

Victoria could look across the Atlantic to her possessions in the New World, the United States could not develop precisely as it wished. Instead of being in decline, Great Britain was very much a world power. But, more important, from a parochial point of view, she was a North American power.

There lay the significance of British North America, in American eyes at least. The five Provinces were not an entity in themselves, but a territory which made Britain an American power. Consequently, the Provinces were rarely, if ever, seen or discussed in their own right; rather, they were treated as an extension of Great Britain, the United States' major trading partner and traditional foe in war. Nevertheless, the importance of America's relations with Britain ensured the colonies got some attention, especially as they appeared to be vital limbs of the British Empire. Yet shaping American attitudes to the Provinces were not their qualities or problems, because American orators knew precious little about them. Instead, the dominant factor was the state of Anglo-American relations - and, sometimes, the course each individual orator wanted the American government to take. From this, the colonies were given a dual - and contradictory - image by Americans. They portrayed them as possessions which either bolstered or weakened British power, and, as a result, British North America loomed as both a strategic threat to the United States and as Britain's Achilles Heel.

Undoubtedly the most convincing orators were those who stressed that British North America increased Britain's ability to interfere in the New World. This was most forcibly brought home

during the 1846 Congressional debates on the Oregon Crisis, which forced all members of Congress - and many American citizens - to consider the importance of British North America in Anglo-American relations. One of the most important points was the size of Britain's territorial presence in North America. Said Illinois representative John Alexander McClernand:

Great Britain already owns eight provinces upon this continent, containing 2,800,000 square miles. The area of the United States, including Texas and all Oregon, does not exceed 2,318,000 square miles, 482,000 less than the present British territories upon this continent.³⁴

The statistics were debateable and, though the United States did not take 'all' Oregon, within two years it had swallowed up California and New Mexico. Even so, McClernand's point was valid. Britain was not just another Old World power. She had the strongest navy in the world which meant that she alone was able to breach America's best defence, her geographic isolation from all serious rivals. In addition, as a territorial power in North America, Britain was a force which could not be ignored, especially when war was a possibility. This was a problem which exercised the mind of Ohio representative William "Sausage" Sawyer. Great Britain, he told the House in 1846,

would find great trouble in disturbing us three thousand miles off - as, in her proper sphere, she is - if she had no possessions upon this little island of ours; but having so many possessions all around us, and in our immediate neighborhood, she has resting places where she can run in for supplies, refit her ships, and even build them. She can thus supply herself with all the means necessary to a protracted and disastrous war.³⁵

This war, if it ever came, would be fought on two fronts, according to most commentators. The most vulnerable front for the United

States was the eastern seaboard. "There", warned New Jersey senator Jacob Welsh Miller, "the first blow would be struck, there the second, and there the last."³⁶ Other members of Congress said that British fleets would rapidly blockade the whole eastern seaboard, "threatening every commercial city."³⁷ According to the House Committee on Naval Affairs, this was best avoided: "One of our great cities exposes to the depredations of an enemy [fleet] no less than a thousand millions worth of property."³⁸

In making these incursions, Americans believed, the Royal Navy would be strengthened by British North America. Britain could, if necessary, call on the ships and sailors of British North America's impressive merchant marine, a body which Americans in the Colonies had long been observing. The US Consul in Halifax, Thomas Livingston, wrote to Secretary of state John M Clayton in 1849 that though ship building had been neglected in the city during the recent depression, "to the eastward and westward, however, very many vessels are built and some of the largest class."³⁹ As early as November 1848, Israel de Wolf Andrews had stressed that the capabilities for ship building in New Brunswick were 'very great' and predicted that the province "will soon occupy a prominent part as a Maritime section of this Continent."⁴⁰ Thus, in the summer of 1849 he informed Clayton from New Brunswick that "in 1840, the British North American Colonies built as much tonnage as the United States."⁴¹

Under normal circumstances, however, the Royal Navy was more than strong enough to tackle the puny American navy on its own. But, Americans believed, the Provinces were particularly valuable to the Royal Navy because they gave it a base in North America.

This base was Halifax, Nova Scotia. "Halifax proper," wrote Livingston in the winter of 1849, "is a garrison town well and strongly fortified. The military force may be stated at 3000 rank and file including artillery and engineers -"⁴² A fortnight later Andrews confirmed this. Writing from the "Atlantic Citadel" he said:

a place of so much importance, so well known as Halifax - which, notwithstanding its beautiful and unrivalled harbour is of more consequence as a military than a trading port - a place in which England has expended many millions to fortify and make the Gibraltar of America, and is now one of the Chief Seats of her Military and naval power on this Continent.⁴³

Britain fortified this port for good reason. Livingston continued in his less detailed letter: "The Harbour may rank among the first in the world for Safety and convenience -"⁴⁴ The harbour was ice-free in winter, allowing its deep waters to be a refuge for the navy all the year round and serving the first link in a chain of communications stretching from Halifax to Quebec, Montreal and Toronto. In Britain's hands, the port would always be friendly to the Royal Navy, furnishing it with essential supplies of fresh food and water. Also, in the middle of the nineteenth century, Halifax had one additional quality which made it invaluable to Britain's navy. As Congress was to learn during the protracted Reciprocity negotiations, Nova Scotia had ample reserves of coal, and Britain had built up "artificial mountains" of the mineral.⁴⁵ In an age when steamers were beginning to revolutionise sea travel and warfare, Halifax was in every respect ideal as a home from home for ships operating thousands of miles from the Mother Country.

Democrat Representative Thomas Fuller had more reason than

most to appreciate this British naval threat. His constituency was Calais, Maine, on the border with New Brunswick and three hundred miles by sea from Halifax. Proposing a massive increase in federal funding for a fort on Penobscot, he said in February 1851:

It was the only fort East of Boston, and was of peculiar importance on account of the quantity of commerce along that shore, and of its vicinity to the great naval depot of Great Britain, Halifax.⁴⁶

Nearly three years earlier Indiana Senator Edward Allen Hannegan complained of Britain's naval strength in the Atlantic. "Is it not enough," he asked the Senate,

that she holds all the maritime power of the North Atlantic coast? Is it not sufficient that she holds Halifax, standing out as it does - that mighty observatory, the most prominent feature of the coast?⁴⁷

Land-locked in Indiana, Hannegan's electors were unlikely to suffer from British naval power, unlike the electors of Whig Congressman John Otis from Maine. In August 1850 he argued:

The whole coast of Maine is within striking distance of the great naval depot at Halifax. A powerful steam marine could in thirty-six hours reach any point of her coast. In case of war with England, her policy would be, by a powerful and rapid blow, to isolate Maine, and secure the communication with the Canadas.⁴⁸

Securing the communications to the Canadas was essential because British North America would be the second front in any future Anglo-American war. Isolated from Britain, especially in the winter, the land-based threat posed by the Canadas was taken less seriously in the States than the naval threat posed by Nova Scotia; even so, British North America could make Americans feel militarily vulnerable. Even a fire-eating Anglophobe like Lewis Cass conceded in 1852 that "England has great means of

annoyance;... and if she should put forth her full strength - and who doubts it - she would be a formidable coadjutor with her Canadian subjects in the defense of the country."⁴⁹ A basic problem was that British North America left the United States with an undefended frontier of 2,000 miles. It is true that in the decade that followed the Canadian rebellions of 1837-38 and the bloodless Aroostook 'War' between Maine and New Brunswick, the United States tried to strengthen its northern defences. It built forts near Detroit and Buffalo, began one at Rouse's Point on Lake Champlain, and in 1851 - a time of Anglo-American peace - spent more than \$600,000 on fortifying its border with British North America.⁵⁰ Yet the country had long resisted the idea of a standing army, and the number of troops available to defend it was pitiful. Admitted the War Department in December 1845: "On our northern borders, along the line of the British provinces, from Maine to Lake Superior, an extent of two thousand miles, there is now stationed but a single regiment."⁵¹ Nor did matters improve during the Oregon Crisis. Said Michigan representative Alexander Woodruff Buel in 1850:

the whole frontier was exposed, and without much ready defence, except that furnished by our fortifications, while the frontier from Fort Malden facing Detroit to the Vermont line was bristling with thousands of British bayonets, ready for action on the first sound of war. Such, to some extent must ever be the state of things with us on the eve of a war upon the northern and northwestern frontier.⁵²

Buel deliberately overstated the lack of preparation in 1846 in order to win more Federal funds for the defence of Michigan. However, his fears of Britain's northern base were echoed in Congress by Ohio representative Allen Thurman. Protesting at the undue attention given to Britain's naval threat, he asked: "Do not

Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, New York, Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin and Iowa present a northern frontier still more exposed?"⁵³

However, the Provinces did not just endanger a few Northern States, which would have been bad enough. In the eyes of some American military experts, British North America threatened national security by eating right into the heart of the Republic. Writing in the National Intelligencer in May 1845, one commentator claimed that Britain's possession of Canada left the United States split "by the most military and grasping nation in the world."⁵⁴ That day Lieutenant Matthew Maury, Superintendent of the Washington Department of Charts and Instruments, argued anonymously in the press that Canada allowed Britain to thrust herself deep into the United States.⁵⁵ To counter that danger, the Great Lakes had more or less been demilitarised after the War of 1812, but the Americans remained suspicious of British activities there. In August 1852, when debating whether the Federal Government should fund a ship canal round Saulte Saint Marie, Connecticut Democrat Isaac E Toucey told the Senate that the object of the British government was "to construct a ship-canal of this kind on the Canada side for the purpose of transferring their armed vessels into Lake Superior from Lake Erie and the other lakes."⁵⁶ This statement, while revealing Toucey's ignorance of American geography, was not unusual. Uneasiness about the military use of the Great Lakes came to the surface regularly in this period, particularly in Congress.⁵⁷

These fears were understandable. In any war along the northern boundary Canada would give Britain two strategic options.

She could use her navy to sweep American commerce from the Great Lakes and she could threaten the border with her troops. Quite simply, British North America gave Britain a military base. More than seventy years after the American Revolution, redcoats still drilled within sight of American citizens. The British were keen to remind their land-hungry neighbours of this fact. When Americans made official visits to Canadian cities, it was deliberate policy to treat them to a military display by British troops.⁵⁸ It was easy to belittle the British strength in the Provinces but even a hawk like McClernand knew that "The dangers which impend over us upon this immense front have been demonstrated in the events of the last war."⁵⁹ Then, as in 1837 and 1838, Americans got a bloody nose at the hands of the British army after invading Canada. Now, to the dismay of those Americans who took an interest, there were plans to link British North America more closely with both Britain and the British army. A frequent topic of discussion in both the Mother Country and the Provinces was the proposed Halifax-Quebec Railway. This promised countless social, political and economic benefits to the colonists, but it also promised to tighten Britain's grip on North America. In papers sent to the State Department by Israel de Wolf Andrews, the Chamber of Commerce of St John, New Brunswick said in 1846:

To Canada, it would be of great importance, affording it the advantage of a Port open to the Atlantic during the winter months... [and] in case of any disturbance with their restless neighbours, would be the facility and despatch by which the British Government would be enabled to place any number of Troops in Canada that the emergencies of the case might require; the late improvements in steam navigation and the advantages of the Rail Road would make it possible to have them comfortably lodged in Barracks at Quebec, in fourteen days from their embarkation at Portsmouth or Cork, and this

without undergoing any fatigue that would incapacitate them from entering upon active service on their arrival.

The prospect of thousands of troops pouring into British North America at very short notice was bad enough. But, after reading evidence presented to the House of Lords, the State Department learned that the railway would also help Britain maintain a balance of power in North America. By uniting the colonies, it would allow Britain "to meet the rapid advances and huge strides now making towards the Dominion of the whole of North America by the People of the United States."⁶⁰

The railroad was not built in this period - the pressure of economy in Parliament deterred British Governments from raising the funds which the colonies either could not or would not raise themselves. However, British North America remained a problem for the United States because she appeared as the closest arm of the ever-encroaching British Empire. In this context, the Provinces were not a group of weak and isolated colonies, but the northern arc of an ominous circle of hostile British territories which were gradually surrounding the young republic. Hence, in 1848 one senator who was by no means hostile to Great Britain said:

[She] holds one third of the North American continent. She has established her dominion in the Bermudas, the West Indies, and in Guiane, on the South American continent. She holds Belize, on the bay of Yucatan, in North America, with a district of about fourteen thousand miles.⁶¹

The significance of this was clear. Explained Indiana Senator Hannegan that year: "the whole coast of the United States, from [Nova Scotia's] Cape Sable to the mouth of the Rio Bravo... is as locked in as it possibly could be by fortified positions."⁶² Nor

would Britain necessarily use these possessions just to blockade the United States in an attempt to bleed her economy dry. Bermuda and Jamaica were "enormous naval depots and fortifications affording places of refuge for their vessels," said Virginia representative Thomas Henry Bayly. And on these islands, Britain was piling up supplies of guns, ammunition and Nova Scotian coal. Consequently "all the combinations which science has lent to these missive and destructive elements will strike at once", warned one Congressman in 1846.⁶³ And, according to House members, a war with Britain would provoke attacks from all the surrounding colonies. As in the first two wars, the British would unleash Indians from Canada and the American West on to American citizens.⁶⁴ But the real damage would come from regular forces. "England would ... fill Canada and Oregon with troops; the West Indies, Bermuda, and Halifax with her ships-of-war and war steamers" said Bradford Ripley Wood of New York.⁶⁵ And Virginia's Robert Mercer Hunter was still more vivid a spokesman:

with the Indian tribes on our western frontier,
with British and Canadian troops on our north,
and with British fleets covering the eastern
and southern line of our coast, we should be
encircled as with a wall of fire.⁶⁶

This, of course, was a terrifying prospect, given added credibility by memories of the War of 1812. Even so, Canada and the other provinces did not inspire universal awe. Indeed, many Americans saw them not as a strategic threat to the United States, but as Britain's Achilles Heel. And, like all true Achilles Heels, British North America was rumoured to be weak on the inside. Rather than bolstering Britain as an American power, Canada symbolised all that was rotten within the British Empire.

According to many American commentators, this alone made Britain a paper tiger, far removed from the world power they and the rest of the world had grown accustomed to fear.

The most obvious reason for not fearing British North America was that she was virtually indefensible. She shared a huge frontier with the United States, had a tiny population of about 1,500,000 compared to the republic's 23,191,000 in 1850, and she depended for her defence on a small army paid for and commanded by a country that was 3,000 miles away. Handicapping the British garrison was the climate. In winter, when the St Lawrence was frozen, the quickest channel of communication between Toronto and London lay through the United States. Viewed in isolation - that is, forgetting for one moment the Royal Navy, its base in Halifax, and previous unsuccessful American attempts to invade Canada - British North America appeared as a vulnerable and feeble arm of a distant Empire. Had Britain been confined to the British Isles or possessed an Empire without American territory, the United States would have found it hard to threaten any British territory. But British North America gave the republic a readily accessible British possession which it could attack or threaten at will. To some, this was a mouth-watering prospect. Responding to the popular belief that any Anglo-American war would be fought in Canada, Ohio representative Jacob Brinkerhoff declared in January 1846: "I believe it, and I am glad that Great Britain has, in the present conjuncture, an assailable point here, where we can reach her with effect."⁶⁷ In the same month, Ohio's Thurman shrugged off claims that the United States alone would suffer in a war with Britain. "Are there no British provinces to invade? Will there be

no means of bringing home to her the horrors of the conflict?⁶⁸ Knowing the Provinces to be weakly defended⁶⁹, many Americans were confident that they could actually win a land war. In 1846, one Michigan politician confidently predicted that a volunteer force from his state could take Canada in ninety days. Six years later Cass proclaimed that "should war come, Canada would fall, with comparatively little opposition."⁷⁰ British North America also served to counter the strength of the Royal Navy. Said Alabama representative William Lowndes Yancey:

The war [for Oregon] would be fiercely waged on the ocean and in Canada. Riding in large fleets the cross of St George might pass triumphant. In single and more equal combats, it would be as certainly lowered to the stars and stripes. Canada, too, would yield to our valour...

The War's end, he concluded, would find Canada in America's possession.⁷¹ This threat was ever-present in Anglo-American crises. In the 1852 Fishery dispute, New York senator William Henry Seward warned that Britain could not desire war with the United States. "She knows all this, and more: that war ... would find the United States able to surround the British colonies..."⁷² This power, claimed another senator during the Oregon Crisis, made the States Britain's most dangerous rival. The contiguity of her colonial possessions, he told the Senate,

renders it easy for us to wrench off that large portion of her empire, and thus give the signal to Russia and France, to do the same with her East India and Asiatic dependencies.

This threat, he claimed, "has imparted more circumspection to her aggressions."⁷³ In other words, the knowledge that British North America was at the very least vulnerable to American attack encouraged Britain to treat the United States with more respect than might otherwise have been forthcoming.

Further weakening any portrayal of British North America as a threat to the United States was the popular claim that the colonists were not loyal to Britain. True, some recognised that the Canadians had traditionally been less than friendly to republicanism and the United States⁷⁴, but events in the 1840s and 1850s suggested that the colonists' hostility to their neighbours and their love of Great Britain were both in rapid decline. Evidence of this came thick and fast in late 1848 and 1849 as the Annexation Movement gathered steam, and annexationists peppered the State Department with petitions and letters.⁷⁵ But before this, the American Government had reason to suspect that British North America was becoming less British all the time. As early as the Oregon crisis, Andrews had predicted that the financial burden of an Anglo-American war would prove too much for the inhabitants of New Brunswick. He predicted they would abandon the Empire for the United States "for I am convinced their loyalty is founded as much on interest as principle."⁷⁶

Justification for this slur on colonial loyalty came within three years, when the twin pressures of imperial free trade and a recession inspired many colonists to switch from violent loyalty to the Crown to violent support for annexation to the Republic. These developments did not and could not go unnoticed in the United States, where a belief in the innate moral superiority of the republican system was virtually an article of faith among all patriots. Newspapers covered the revolutionary events north of the St Lawrence - though not in today's minute detail - and the State Department received countless letters from its Consuls in the Provinces, and particularly from Andrews, adding flesh to the press reports.

These developments were of particular interest to Americans because they drew attention to the problems Britain was facing world-wide. British North America, it seemed, was suffering from the same chaos that was threatening to tear Britain and the whole British Empire apart. As the Old World teetered from one revolution to the next, Britain herself was being shaken to her foundations. The closest observer of all these developments was the United States' Minister to London, George Bancroft. Already an eminent historian, Bancroft's objectivity was blunted by his confidence in the values of republicanism and the glorious destiny of the United States. Consequently, his bold statement after a series of European revolutions in 1848 that "The old world has come to an end" was typically naive. However, he was more acute when analysing the state of a Britain racked by fear of the Chartists:

The results [of the European revolutions] for England must be momentous. A new impulse is given to Irish discontent and demands; and Smith O'Brien has gone over to Ireland, zealous, greedy of glory, and ready, it is said, if need be, to become a martyr. Scotland is impatient of the entailed monopoly of its lands. - Manchester stimulates active political opinion in England. There have been riots in London, Glasgow, Manchester, and Edinburg (sic), which it is the fashion to say are ridiculous and useful riots, being sure to prevent rebellion. Political parties are in a state of chaos... West India interests are ruined. Trade and industry are suffering from doubt and apprehension. There is a deficit in the revenue...

Such is the state of Great Britain.⁷⁷

The British Empire was not much better off. In an age of slow communications, Britain faced the virtually impossible task of trying to control an empire of conquered people stretching around the globe. With characteristic exaggeration Ohio Senator William Allen described Britain's empire as "One eighth part of the whole

race of men, held in subjection by the presence of less than a million of strangers, and by the terror of a distant Government, itself menaced with destruction, both by civil discord and anxious neighbors."⁷⁸ By definition, Britain's grip on these possessions was precarious. This impression got a boost from all the campaigns on which British troops were sent in this period. Apart from the constant tension in Ireland and the need to administer India, the thin red line got thinner as troops went out to South Africa to fight Kaffir tribesmen in a lengthy conflict and to China, Ceylon and the Punjab to tend to other unrest. Small wonder, then, that many Americans played down the threat posed by Britain to the United States. In the middle of the Fisheries dispute, New York's Seward told the Senate that Britain was in no position to wage war. "Her power has been extended over the east", he said, "and she employs nearly all her armies in India, and in Africa, to maintain herself against the natives of the one continent and the savages of the other."⁷⁹ This echoed a speech made six years earlier by Arkansas Senator Ashley. As war over Oregon threatened, he boasted that Britain could not fight America. She did not dare withdraw any part of her army from its present job of guarding her government against her own citizens and "preserving dominion over the fragments of her empire, scattered in every part of the habitable globe."⁸⁰ As well as preserving this dominion from the unrest of its inhabitants, Britain also had to guard against the threats posed by her Old World rivals. Having won large chunks of the Empire by routing European enemies in war, Britain, claimed one senator, was diplomatically isolated, "without a friend in any one of the nations of the earth." This inevitably stretched her forces still further and meant that she would not be able to launch the

full power of her navy against the States because most of her ships were busy guarding her colonies.⁸¹ In short, in time of war the Empire would be less of an asset and more of a drain on Britain's very limited resources. Already on its last legs, the Empire would disintegrate if Britain went to war, which inevitably served as a powerful restraint on the British. Seething with discontent, British North America was one of the biggest problems of them all. Said New York representative Samuel Gordon in 1846: "Let her [Britain] once become engaged in war, and let Canada or Ireland evince a disposition to regain their lost independence, and the British Empire will be at an end. She knows it."⁸²

As with the daunting descriptions of Britain's strength, many of these speeches were insincere. In reality, the orators were trying to deter or justify a hard line with England and to calm down or stir up the populace. In the Oregon debates the "54-40 or Fight" faction usually portrayed Britain as on the verge of collapse and British North America as disloyal or indefensible. By such arguments they hoped to give the impression that the United States need have no fear of war with Britain and that, as a result, they were justified in calling for a firm stand. To increase pressure on both the American and the British Governments, they would also whip up patriotic fervour by again referring to past British outrages and British North America's role in previous Anglo-American clashes. Thus, Ohio's Allen, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, tried to stoke up hostility to Britain by referring to her "horrible practice" in the War of 1812 of "bribing the pitiless Indians to butcher our women and children of the west, while asleep, at night, in their cabins." And he went on

to distort the Caroline incident of 1837 - in which one American border raider died - into the murder of several members of its crew.⁸³ On the other hand, the vulnerability of the United States to attack was used to justify a more moderate approach to Anglo-American relations. Thus in the same debates, South Carolina representative Holmes argued for greater restraint over Oregon by describing the ease with which the Royal Navy could descend on and destroy America's eastern seaboard. And in the Senate South Carolina's most eminent politician, John C. Calhoun, worked for peace by predicting that the next war with Britain would be the biggest and the bloodiest the world had ever seen.⁸⁴

Given the choice, though, most Americans would have preferred Britain not to have held territory in North America. Whatever the warring Congressional factions said, British North America did make the United States vulnerable, and she did increase Britain's scope to meddle in American affairs. If the colonies provided the United States with Britain's Achilles Heel, they also gave Britain a strategic back door into the republic. British North America was the only point on the continent controlled by a power able to go on the offensive against the United States. Britain would certainly have been reluctant to embark on a transatlantic war, largely because of its expense and the extensive commerce between the two countries. However, had such a war broken out, the Provinces would have given Britain the ability to wreak more havoc on mainland America than any other country. True, the colonies would have suffered in the land war, but they would have greatly reinforced the operations of the Royal Navy. For these reasons, and because of the long-term benefits expected from a global family of colonies

peopled by British settlers, successive British Governments were keen to retain British North America. Looking to the future, most in Britain believed that eventual independence was inevitable, but, reported Bancroft from London, "if they could exist separately from us, and as our rival, the number of friends to their emancipation would increase."⁸⁵ But if London saw British North America as a means of keeping a check on the United States, the position of the Provinces next to the republic spelled trouble for Great Britain. It gave both the colonists and the Americans a means of putting pressure on the Mother Country. As a result, the Provinces were unlike Australia or New Zealand. They were very much a hostage for the good behaviour of Great Britain.

CHAPTER ONE - NORTH ATLANTIC TRIANGLE

- 1 Lord John Russell to Third Earl Grey, January 1, 1849, GP.
For abbreviations used in these notes, see page 279.
- 2 Elgin to Grey, April 9, 1848, EGP, I, 141-2. The correspondence between Elgin and Grey also reveals that Grey was often pessimistic about the prospects of keeping Canada in the British Empire. See Peter Burroughs, "The Determinants of Colonial Self-Government", in The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, VI (1978), 322.
- 3 Grey to Duke of Wellington, June 29, 1849, GP.
- 4 Peter Burroughs, The Colonial Reformers and Canada, 1830-1849, (Toronto and Montreal, McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1969) 28 ff.
- 5 William Molesworth in Hansard, C, July 25, 1848, 829-31, Ibid., 31.
- 6 Ibid., 97, 104, 106.
- 7 First Viscount Halifax, Charles Wood to Grey, May 26 1849, GP.
- 8 Wood to Grey, October 6, 1848, GP. cf Wood to Grey, April 9 1847: "Your money concerns are more troublesome than all the other Departments in Westminster."
- 9 Wood to Grey, May 26 1849, GP. Compounding the problem was the Russell administration's lack of a parliamentary majority. It had to rely on the support of about 100 unpredictable Peelites, including the ambitious William Gladstone. See Ged Martin, "The Canadian Rebellion Losses Bill of 1849 in British Politics", in The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, VI (1977), 5-6.
- 10 J A Roebuck, The Colonies of England (1849), quoted in Burroughs, The Colonial Reformers, 207.
- 11 Russell speech to Parliament, February 8, 1850, EGP, II, 608, n. 1.
- 12 Grey to Elgin, May 18, 1849, EGP, I, 351-2.
- 13 Grey to Wellington, June 29, 1849, GP.
- 14 Article reprinted from the Morning Advertiser, enclosed in Elgin to Grey, January 14, 1850, EGP, II, 582.
- 15 Elgin to Grey, March 14, 1849, EGP, I, 307.
- 16 Elgin to Grey, October 14, 1849, EGP, II, 522.
- 17 Elgin to Grey, February 24, 1847, EGP, I, 13: "Take away your troops if you please, but give some gallant knights and titled Dames to maintain British connexion withall." See also Hew Strachan, "Lord Grey and Imperial Defence", in Ian Beckett and

- John Gooch, eds., Politicians and Defence: Studies in the Formulation of British Defence Policy, 1845-1970, (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1981), esp. 8-9.
- 18 Wellington to Russell, December 20, 1848, enclosed in Russell to Grey, December 21, 1848, GP.
 - 19 Third Earl Grey, The Colonial Policy of Lord John Russell's Administration, (2 vols, London, 1853).
 - 20 Russell to Grey, August 19, 1849, GP.
 - 21 Elgin to Grey, May 18, 1848, EGP, I, 166-7.
 - 22 Grey to Elgin, September 6, 1848, EP, A 397.
 - 23 Grey to Elgin, October 11, 1848, EP, A 397. See also Bourne, Balance of Power, 171.
 - 24 Grey to Elgin, July 27, 1848, EGP, I, 208.
 - 25 Russell to Grey, January 1, 1849, GP.
 26. Masters, Reciprocity Treaty, 146.
 - 27 Andrews to Marcy, March 31, 1854, Despatches ... Special Agents. See also Andrews to Marcy, April 3, 1854, Despatches ... Montreal: "The favorable moment for settling this whole matter [Reciprocity] was allowed to pass away by the American Government, and the present unfavorable position of affairs arises altogether from the neglect of former administrations"
 28. For an analysis of the roots of American Anglophobia, see William C Reuter, "The Anatomy of Political Anglophobia in the United States, 1865-1900", in Mid-America, LXI (1979), 118.
 - 29 Indiana Representative Kennedy, HR, January 10, 1846, Congressional Globe, 29:1, Appendix, 119; Virginia Representative Bedinger, January 15, 1846, HR, Congressional Globe, 29:1, Appendix, 119.
 - 30 New York Representative Gilbert Dean, HR, July 3, 1852, Congressional Globe, 32:1, 816.
 - 31 Abbott Lawrence to Webster, February 20, 1852, US Ministers ... Great Britain.
 - 32 Michigan Senator Lewis Cass, Senate, March 30, 1846, New York Representative Goodyear, HR, January 16, 1846, Kentucky Representative Davis, HR, February 7, 1846, Congressional Globe, 29:1, Appendix, 428, 111, 368.
 - 33 South Carolina Senator John C Calhoun, Senate, March 16, 1846, Congressional Globe, 29:1, Appendix, 474.
 - 34 Illinois Representative John A McClernand, HR, 1846, Congressional Globe, 29:1, Appendix, 277.

- 35 Ohio Representative William 'Sausage' Sawyer, HR, February 3, 1846, Congressional Globe, 29:1, Appendix, 228.
- 36 New York Senator Miller, Senate, March 26, 1846, Congressional Globe, 29:1, Appendix, 571.
- 37 Tennessee Representative Gentry, HR, February 5, 1846, Congressional Globe, 29:1, Appendix, 183.
- 38 Tennessee Representative Frederick P Stanton, Chairman of the Committee on Naval Affairs, August 17, 1852, Congressional Globe, 32:1, 1051.
- 39 Thomas Livingston to John M Clayton, November 21, 1849, Despatches ... Halifax.
- 40 Andrews, US Consul in St John, New Brunswick, to James Buchanan, November 1, 1848, Miscellaneous... Reciprocity.
- 41 Andrews to Clayton, August 1, 1849, Despatches ... Special Agents.
- 42 Livingston to Clayton, November 21, 1849, Despatches ... Halifax.
- 43 Andrews to Clayton, December 6, 1849, Despatches ... Special Agents.
- 44 Livingston to Clayton, November 21, 1849, Despatches ... Halifax.
- 45 South Carolina Representative I E Holmes, HR, January 29, 1846, Congressional Globe, 29:1, Appendix, 167.
- 46 Maine Representative Thomas J D Fuller, HR, February 22, 1851, Congressional Globe, 31:2, 651.
- 47 Indiana Senator E A Hannegan, Senate, May 5, 1848, Congressional Globe, 30:1, 597.
- 48 Maine Representative Otis, HR, August 1, 1850, Congressional Globe, 31:1, 1493.
- 49 Cass, Senate, August 16, 1852, Congressional Globe, 32:1, 943.
- 50 C P Stacey, "The Myth of the Unguarded Frontier, 1815-1871", The American Historical Review, LVI, (1950), 16.
- 51 Report of the Secretary of War, Congressional Globe, 29:1, 13-16.
- 52 Michigan Representative A W Buel, HR, July 31, 1850, Congressional Globe, 31:1, 981.
- 53 Ohio Representative Allen Thurman, HR, January 28, 1846, Congressional Globe, 29:1, Appendix, 165.

- 54 Saunders in the National Intelligencer, May 20, 1845, recorded in Frederick Merk, Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History, (New York, Alfred A Knopf, Inc., 1966), 69.
- 55 Matthew Maury, article in the National Intelligencer, May 20, 1845, Ibid., 69.
- 56 Connecticut Senator Isaac E Toucey, Senate, August 16, 1852, Congressional Globe, 32:1, 948.
- 57 Kentucky Senator James T Morehead submitted several resolutions to the Secretary of War seeking information. Resolution 6 called for the information on the "Adaptation of the commerce means of the lakes to purposes of defence and of military operations generally"; and Resolution 9 sought information on the "Adaptation of the British commercial means of the lakes to purposes of military operations generally." Senate, January 15, 1847, Congressional Globe, 29:2, 183. See also Virginia Representative Thomas H Bayley: "She [Great Britain] can now, at a moment's warning, throw any amount of her fleet upon the lakes, in the event of a conflict. She is stronger than she was before in that quarter." HR, July 31, 1850, Congressional Globe, 31:1, 1485-6.
- 58 Elgin to Grey, August 16, 1850, EGP, II, 709. See also Elgin to Grey, October 25, 1850, Ibid., 727: "I suppose your economists at home do not deign to take into consideration the good effect which Regiments in Canada produce on the American mind. The general notion on the other side of the line being that we are utterly effete, I really believe that the Yankees are much edified by witnessing the manoeuvring [sic] of a well disciplined British Reg[iment]." cf CP Stacey, Canada and the British Army, 1846-1871: A Study in the Practice of Responsible Government, (London, Longman's, Green and Co., 1936), 77, n. 2.
- 59 Illinois Representative McClernand, HR, 1846, Congressional Globe, 29:1, 277.
- 60 Report of the Chamber of Commerce of St John, New Brunswick, enclosed in Andrews to Buchanan, August 15, 1846, Despatches ... St John.
- 61 New York Senator John A Dix, Senate, January 26, 1848, Congressional Globe, 30:1, Appendix, 179.
- 62 Indiana Senator Hannegan, Senate, May 5, 1848, Congressional Globe, 30:1, 597.
- 63 Virginia Representative Thomas Henry Bayly, HR, February 22, 1851, Congressional Globe, 31:2, 641; South Carolina Representative Isaac Edward Holmes, HR, January 29, 1846, Congressional Globe, 29:1, Appendix, 167.
- 64 Virginia Representative R M T Hunter, HR, January 10, 1846, Congressional Globe, 29:1, Appendix, 90-1.

- 65 New York Representative B R Wood, HR, January 31, 1846, Congressional Globe, 29:1, Appendix, 218.
- 66 Virginia Representative Hunter, HR, January 10, 1846, Congressional Globe, 29:1, Appendix, 90.
- 67 Ohio Representative Jacob Brinkerhoff, HR, January 14, 1846, Congressional Globe, 29:1, Appendix, 103.
- 68 Ohio Representative Thurman, HR, January 28, 1846, Congressional Globe, 29:1, Appendix, 164.
- 69 New York Senator William H Seward asked the Senate on August 15, 1852: "What is the condition of English power in Canada, and in the British Provinces? They have never, since the war of 1812, had so small a military force in those Provinces as now." Congressional Globe, 32:1, 917.
- 70 Michigan Representative Buel, HR, Winter 1846, Congressional Globe, 29:1, Appendix; Cass, Senate, August 16, 1852, Congressional Globe, 32:1, 943.
- 71 Alabama Representative William Lowndes Yancey, HR, January 7, 1846, Congressional Globe, 29:1, Appendix, 87.
- 72 Seward, Senate, August 14, 1852, Congressional Globe, 32:1, 916-17.
- 73 Ohio Senator William Allen, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senate, February 10, 1846, Congressional Globe, 29:1, Appendix, 834-40.
- 74 Washington Daily Republic, October 13, 1849; Marcy to Andrews, September 12 1853, Instructions ... Special Missions.
- 75 H B Willson, editor of The Independent, (Canadian Annexationist Paper), to Clayton, August 6, 1849, Clayton Papers, LC; Andrews to Webster, July 10, 1851, Despatches ... Special Agents: In October 1849, said Andrews, "I came to Washington ... bringing a copy of the Annexation address which had not then been made public."
- 76 Andrews to Buchanan, April 16, 1846, Despatches ... St John.
- 77 George Bancroft to Buchanan, April 18, March 10, 1848, Despatches ... US Ministers ... Great Britain.
- 78 Allen, Senate, February 10, 1846, Congressional Globe, 29:1, Appendix, 840.
- 79 Seward, Senate, August 14, 1852, Congressional Globe, 32:1, 917.
- 80 Arkansas Senator Ashley, Senate, April 3, 1846, Congressional Globe, 29:1, Appendix, 441.
- 81 Illinois Senator Breese, Senate, March 2, 1846, Congressional Globe, 29:1, Appendix, 385-7.

- 82 New York Representative Gordon, HR, January 14, 1846, Congressional Globe, 29:1, Appendix, 116.
- 83 Allen, Senate, February 10, 1846, Congressional Globe, 29:1, Appendix, 836. For an account of the Caroline incident, see Stuart D Scott, "The Patriot Game: New Yorkers and the Canadian Rebellion of 1837-1838", in New York History, LXVIII (1987), 281 ff.
- 84 South Carolina Representative Holmes, HR, January 29, 1846, and Calhoun, Senate, March 16 1848, Congressional Globe, 29:1, Appendix, 167, 474.
- 85 Bancroft to Clayton, March 9 1849, William Roy Manning, ed., Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States, Canadian Relations, 1784-1860, (Millwood, New York, Kraus Reprint, 1975), 252.

CHAPTER TWO

1848: AMERICA LOOKS NORTH

For much of this period British North America and the United States behaved towards each other like a couple of ill-starred lovers. Though they often shared the same desires, they never did so at the same time. When American groups began in 1848 to talk of invading and annexing the Provinces, the Colonists clung contentedly to the skirts of the Mother Country. One year later, when an influential group of Colonists took the unusual step of petitioning the United States to annex Canada, it was the turn of the Americans to reject the amorous advances of their neighbour. The truth was that the prospective marriage between the two suitors was doomed from the start because of a lack of sincerity on both sides. British North America and the United States were acting out their own diplomatic version of the eternal triangle, with Britain forming the other apex. When elements on either side of the Republic's northern border made their advances, they usually did so in the hope of creating an effect in Britain. In reality, the Provinces and the United States were flirting, playing each other off against Great Britain. And in this way British North America became a pawn in the games of several different groups.

The first groups to show an interest in using Canada as an expendable chess piece were based firmly in the United States. In 1848 they summed up the chief dangers which the republic posed to the colonies: the twin threats of a popular invasion and of an attempt by the American Government to annex British North America.¹ The most obvious problem lay with the unpredictable behaviour of

American citizens. In the past, the United States had extended its borders by both diplomacy - like the Louisiana Purchase - and the relentless spread of American pioneers. They had fought their way to the annexation of Texas, and their steady flow west along the Oregon trail had helped precipitate the Anglo-American Oregon Crisis of 1846. But American citizens did not just try to annex territory informally, by settling outside the borders of the United States. They were also prone to acts of violence against other countries, as the Canadians remembered bitterly from 1837-38. Then, quite independently of their government and its armed forces, American adventurers and advocates of republicanism had tried to invade Upper and Lower Canada in support of fitful rebellions across the two Provinces. Ten years later, the danger remained that such adventurers might return if they were given the least encouragement. And in 1848 there were plenty of people willing to give the nod to any reckless men living along the Canadian border. Winking in the wings as he ranted from the hustings was the Democrats' presidential candidate, Lewis Cass, a man who had fought the British in the War of 1812 and, seemingly, never got over it. But the biggest danger of all came from the dispersed natives of Ireland, always Britain's most troublesome possession.

In the wake of the mass emigrations from the Famine, there were thousands of Irish men and women in the United States and British North America. Though they had left behind the misery of the potato blight, many still retained their hatred of England along with close links with relatives in their homeland. Thus in May 1848 - as news of European revolutions made Prime Minister Lord John Russell cast a suspicious eye over the French-Canadians² -

Elgin reported a more serious threat to internal order.

[A] secret combination of the Irish in Montreal is on foot, and bound together by Oath, having designs inimical to the Government... the number enrolled is at least 17,000 Canadians and Irish together and ... they look to the acquisition of the Arms and Gunpowder stored on St Helens Island in case of an Outbreak, - or if they cannot possess themselves thereof for use, ... they consider they will have little difficulty in succeeding to set the Building on fire, so as to destroy the depot and deprive the Govt. of the Stores.

Not surprisingly, the reported disloyalty of Irish settlers in Canada made Grey question the wisdom of peopling the Provinces with them. "I fear," he told Elgin in September 1848, "we must always consider that adding to the Irish population of Canada is adding to our enemies."⁴

Generally, Elgin played down the Irish problem within Canada, portraying their excitable factions as an uninfluential minority group.⁵ But that, he knew, was not really the point. However weak the would-be Irish rebels were in Montreal, they had to be taken seriously because of one unavoidable factor: the United States. The Republic's long border with Canada, never mind with the other Provinces, made it a natural haven for all who wished to defy British rule in North America. The leader of the Toronto rebellion of 1837, William Lyon Mackenzie, had set the precedent when he fled south to lick his wounds and regroup his forces, and all knew his successors might well adopt the same tactics. By moving south of the St Lawrence, they could plot and organise free from the interference of the authorities they sought to topple, knowing it would be easy to slip back into Canada when they were ready. And if they were Irish, they and their plans were sure of a warm

welcome in the United States, especially in the big cities on the north-eastern seaboard. Indeed, as rumours began to grow of something more serious than "a secret combination" in Montreal against the Government, Elgin reminded Grey of the influence of the Irish-Americans. "[A] large Irish contingent on the other side of the border," he wrote, "- fanatics on behalf of republicanism and repeal [of the Anglo-Irish Union] - are egging on their compatriots here to rebellion."⁶ Some of these 'revolutionary' Irish-Americans even visited Montreal to encourage their Canadian cousins⁷, but on the whole they confined their activities to south of the border. Here, though, they loomed as a major threat. The British learned in graphic detail of the activities of 'The Friends of Ireland' who had groups across the north of the United States. In Boston 5,000 men reportedly responded to an appeal from visiting Irish-Canadians "to raise men and money for the invasion of the Canadas." In New York 15,000 were said to have subscribed in a few days⁸ and up the Hudson Valley in Albany the Irish population were planning an invasion in support of an expected Canadian rebellion.⁹ All the time the Irish-Canadian rebels and their Irish-American supporters were crossing the border at will¹⁰, showing just how vulnerable Canada was to the United States.

Had this fund-raising and talk of military adventure been confined to expatriate Irishmen, the threat to Canada would have been alarming enough. But as tales of the preparations by the Irish spread, so too did the interest of many Americans grow. As early as March 1848 Elgin feared that the aspiring rebels in Montreal might well "turn the ... sympathies of the United States

to account."¹¹ By the spring, Elgin's fears looked to be coming true. Throughout the spring and summer of 1848, rumours flew round Canada that the United States was to be the springboard for a popular attack on the Province. Elgin had long heard rumours that the Americans - or Yankees as he disparagingly called them - were sending arms over the frontier¹², and he also learned that the United States was likely to serve as the arsenal of any invasion. Reporting third-hand news, one of his staff members wrote of the citizens of New York State:

[T]here was a strong feeling to sympathise with Anglo-Saxon Party in Canada, that, as at Washington in 1837-38, the key had been left in the door of the Arsenal, in which were 12 Brass guns, complete, 10,000 muskets and 4,000 Rifles, and that these were ready to be issued to anyone who desired to assist the French party in Canada.¹³

But the Americans were also apparently extending their assistance beyond mere material of war. In May 1848, Elgin told Britain's Chargé d'Affaires in Washington, John F. Crampton "Rumours reach me of 'Hunter's Lodges' being established on the American Side of the Boundary line."¹⁴ This was a direct reference to the groups set up along the Great Lakes in 1837-38 in sympathetic response to the Canadian discontent. Ten years later the dissident Canadians were giving every encouragement to the revival of the Lodges. Writing from near the Canadian-US border, Robert Battersby described in detail a Canadian group called "The Great Grand Eagle Degrees." Organised in Canada to plot against the Government, its ensign was ominous. "It was made of white silk, with an Eagle surmounting a Lion, tearing a Lion's eye out upon it." Nor was the link with the United States merely symbolic. Battersby claimed to have read a letter from an American General, called Millar, who had let it be

known that he would work with the 'Hunters'. If Battersby's information was correct, these 'Hunters' would have been formidable. Together with the Great Grand Eagle Degrees, the Americans had available:

1400 stand of arms at Port Stanley all Muskets
30 pieces of Canon at Cleveland, 330 Kegs of
Powder 20,000 Men organised two years since
40,000 in Ohio, in readiness to invade Canada
at a moments notice, Commanded by General
Wilson.

He added: "There is ... I have reason to believe a much larger quantity in other places."¹⁵

Serving as a potential catalyst in all this was the conclusion of the United States' war with Mexico. The British feared that the republic's success against its weakly southern neighbour "would create an appetite for excitement and gain" amongst "the worst Americans".¹⁶ Wrote Elgin:

Recent successes in Mexico have excited among the Citizens in many Quarters an appetite for Military renown, and a profound conviction of the invincibility of the Republic - ... vast numbers of disbanded Soldiers whom the termination of the Mexican War has thrown out of Work are now roaming through the states ready for any adventure which promises distinction or pillage.¹⁷

Indeed, some of the most lurid rumours gave great credence to the lust for battle and booty which the experience of war had given many Americans. Orange Lodge Grand Master Ogle R Gown, for instance, had heard that "a formidable enrollment" was underway across the St Lawrence for a hostile invasion of Canada. "50,000 disbanded men," he wrote "with an experienced General to lead, and who served in the destruction of Mexico, are to compose the expedition."¹⁸ Elgin himself wrote that any invasion in support of

the Irish would be led by "an American General lately returned from Mexico." By July Elgin was talking of an American invasion force of up to 800,000, including 50,000 Irishmen.¹⁹ Significantly, these figures grew and grew as the rumours became more fanciful, but the threat of Mexican War veterans was real enough. By the summer they were returning to their home states and many of them knew or desired only one profession - soldiering. For this reason, Crampton and Elgin took them very seriously.²⁰ Looking back, Elgin described the United States at that time as "boiling over with bandits and desperadoes."²¹ And, according to Crampton, this republican pot was likely to be fully on the boil "during the next autumn and winter months - the period of idleness in those [Border] districts, - and the season which they have on all former occasions chosen for political operations."²²

But long before the freezing of the soil and the long winter nights could spawn scores of idle hands along the border, a much more volatile influence entered the maelstrom: a presidential election. The British had long been convinced that American elections were excesses of republicanism, leaving the country open to mob rule and turning politicians into unprincipled demagogues. 1848 did nothing to change their minds. After bearing the brunt of the cross border tension for several months, Elgin gave Grey an accurate summary of its roots. "Your Lordship is doubtless aware," he began,

that for some time past demonstrations of a formidable character had been made in the United States having for their ostensible object to raise funds and by all other means which sympathy and enthusiasm can suggest to Afford aid and support to the people of Ireland in their Struggle for independence. This

movement originated with the Irish residents and the more advanced professors of the doctrine of Republican Propagandism. It has however been countenanced and abetted by some of the more active and unscrupulous leaders of the parties who are now engaged in recommending the claims of their respective Candidates to the Presidency and to whom it is of great moment to secure the Irish Vote... It is well known that one at least of the individuals now aspiring to the Presidency has declared himself in favor of the Annexation of Canada... These circumstances render it by no means improbable that an attempt may be made to turn against Canada the tide of Irish sympathy.²³

Leading the way as America's top demagogue was Lewis Cass, who had worked hard over a long political career to earn the right to be described as a fire-eater. With the United States' ultimate political prize as his guiding light, he resorted to a tried and tested electioneering tactic, twisting the lion's tail. Unfortunately for the British Lion, Canada gave Cass a readily accessible tail that was easy to twist. Even when just a senator, Cass was never slow to advocate the admission of Canada and her sisters into the Union, as his speeches during the 1846 Oregon Crisis and the 1852 Fishery Dispute reveal.²⁴ But in 1848 the British watched in trepidation as he emerged as the man who could very soon control the destinies of the United States. In May Crampton warned Elgin that the Michigan expansionist was

making very little secret of his intentions, so soon as the Mexican business is got rid of, of turning the attention of the American people towards Canada, which he boasts he could subdue with a very small force. All his speeches seem to be a preparation for something of the sort, and he never loses an opportunity of raking up²⁵ old subjects of irritation against H Ms Govt.

Thus, in June, after the Democrats' nominating convention in Baltimore, Elgin reported that the news was "somewhat warlike."

I am sorry to observe that Cass has been

nominated by the Democratic Convention as their candidate for the Presidency. -- He is the most pugnacious Gentleman in the Union ... war breathing Cass is the choice of the Democrats of the Union, and General Taylor the almost inevitable nominee of the Whigs -- If the flames of war are kindled in Europe there is no man so likely to drag America into the fire as Cass.²⁶

Along the Canadian border, Crampton expected Cass' nomination could heighten the tension by spawning the revival of Hunters' Lodges.²⁷ So concerned were the British about the prospect of having to deal with Cass as President that privately they began to side with his rival, "Old Rough and Ready", General Zachary Taylor.²⁸ Preferring this Louisiana slaveholder may seem odd; he was, after all, another military man, the victor of the battles of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma in the Mexican War.²⁹ But, explained Crampton, "as far as regards international questions [he] would from all I have heard of him, be as safe a President as we could desire."³⁰

Inevitably this constant talk of the threat to the Colonies from the United States began to take its toll on Crampton, Elgin and Grey. The most extreme response came in a letter written by the latter at his family home. As autumn began to spread across the Northumberland countryside, Grey told Elgin:

I have received today ... your confidential despatch respecting the danger from America to Canada. - The latter is a very serious subject indeed - I have so very bad an opinion of the people & still more of the Govt. & institutions of the United States, that I cannot but entertain great apprehensions for the future of a Province they can so easily invade.³¹

Concerning Cass, the British held several fears. Clearly, if he became President, relations between Britain and the United States were likely to deteriorate and, more specifically, Canada might

become the object of the American Government's territorial ambitions. Instead of being threatened by bands of marauding hot-heads, Canada could face a better organised, Washington-backed attempt at annexation. However, the British tended to treat outrageous statements by electioneering American politicians as insincere vote-catching. Thus, when Cass spoke boldly of annexing Canada or Cuba or the Sandwich Islands, Palmerston and Grey did not necessarily believe that he actually planned to seize these possessions as soon as he entered the White House. In fact, the responsibility of power and the possibility of war were likely to restrain even the most aggressive of presidents. Instead, the danger was that Cass's annexationist outbursts would stir up the loafers and adventurers south of the St Lawrence and encourage a repeat of 1837-38. It was also possible that his public support for expansionism might rebound on him. This, wrote Crampton, was the fear of a distinguished member of Congress who lived near the Canadian border. He believed that

if a protracted struggle were to take place in Canada, it would be next to impossible to prevent its being made the subject of a war cry by the Democratic party in order to bring in Genl. Cass as President, who has committed himself so far on this subject as to make it very difficult for him, under such circumstances, not to act upon his avowed intention of attempting to gain possession of Canada for the United States.³²

Cass had made such a show of declaring himself in favour of annexing Canada that if a rebellion did occur either during his candidacy or when he was actually president, he would be powerless to stop a popular invasion. Instead, despite the obvious risk to transatlantic peace, he would be obliged to jump back on the bandwagon he had conveniently created as a vehicle for his promotion to the White House.

The British were unsure quite how to react to these varied threats. Throughout, Elgin and his Canadian Executive Council were reasonably confident of the loyalty of the majority of the population³³, including the Irish-Canadians³⁴, and this lessened their fear of an internal rebellion. Equally, Elgin could be scathing about the prospects of an American-based attack. Thus, he played down reports that there were 800,000 Americans ready to invade Canada in support of a rebellion there by the Irish, noting with glee that the Montreal meeting intended to inflame the Irish was washed out by a thunderstorm.³⁵ Two months later, in September, his jaunty confidence allowed him to joke about the declining threat of invasion. Observing that the chief objects of American land-hunger were clearly California and Canada he described advertisements in American papers reflecting this. Referring to California's other name - the Black Bear Republic - Elgin said that some of these papers had announced that there was to be "a Bear Hunt ... to take place in the Sierra Madre during the winter." But some 'hunters' were looking to the north for adventure, he wrote.

The other amusement projected and announced is a red Fox Hunt in Canada. This game does not appear at the moment quite as popular as the other - It may be that the love of sport does not increase as it ought to do in a direct ratio with the danger attending it.³⁶

Yet, the British were never truly blase, largely because they could not afford to be. The military authorities maintained "a constant and careful vigilance" for as long as the province's Irish population was restive and, wrote Elgin, "all the military men here ... were confident that there was to be a rising of the French & Irish to welcome the Yankees." Though Elgin was less fearful, he

gave the commander of Britain's forces his "full permission to take the whole garrison of Montreal to the frontier if he judged it necessary to do so." There was, wrote the Governor-General, a black storm hanging over the Province.³⁷ While this storm cast its shadow, Elgin took steps to secure advance warning of any acts of aggression from the United States. In the first private letter that passed between him and Crampton, Elgin asked the Charge d'Affaires to give him any useful information about the Hunters' Lodges. Such a step - repeated two months later in July³⁸ was essential to distinguish fact from speculation, which was rife in Montreal that summer. Crampton did his best, passing Elgin any information that came his way, and sending a trustworthy man "to inquire about the existence of secret Associations on the Boundary line."³⁹ Backing up this work were the activities in Boston of the Agent for the British Mails, James Moore, and Elgin's Military Secretary, Colonel Bruce, who went to the States to get "accurate information with respect to the probable movements of the Sympathisers during the ensuing winter."⁴⁰ As polling day for the Presidency drew near, Elgin and Crampton watched the American election with the interest of men whose fates depended on the outcome. Thus, two weeks before the nationwide vote, Elgin reported that Canada was calm "although in the unsettled state of the World it will not do to slumber at any post - more particularly in the immediate vicinity of a territory which may be Cass's within a fortnight."⁴¹ If any interlopers did attempt an invasion, the British planned to give them a hostile reception.⁴² In this they had the full support of Colonial Secretary Grey. "I only trust," he told Elgin,

if there should be any attempts on the part of

lawless bands from the States to invade the Province they will not be treated with the consideration due to a fair and honorable enemy - I have no hesitation in saying that of such miscreants the fewer prisoners that are taken the better, since in these days of squeamish humanity (which I think no humanity at all) it is not easy to hang them afterwards as they deserve.⁴³

The British were determined to resist any attack on their North American Provinces and any attempt by the United States to annex them. Yet their resolution was not put to the test because these attacks never came. This was largely because of the insincerity of most of those who made verbal threats against Canada. In reality, their prime goal was not to annex the Colonies to the United States; rather, they used the threat of doing so to serve their own, varied ends. And when for diverse reasons these became unattainable, Canada reverted to its traditional role in American politics: the forgotten man of North America. It is true that some of those who favoured an attack on Canada did so because they thought it would be a valuable addition to the United States. But they were in the minority. The activities of the Irish, for instance, did not reflect any real desire to see British North America as a member of the Union. On the contrary, they were trying to help their compatriots in Ireland and to fight the hated British Empire. Thus, M T O'Connor, a New York newspaper editor and a leading light in the Irish Republican Union, told an opposition member of the Canadian Parliament that

with respect to himself and the thousands who felt with him there was no sacrifice they were not ready to make if they could humble England & reduce her to a third rate power.

This gave the Irish Republican movement in North America more altruistic motives than it really possessed. If all went to plan,

the hope of the Irish-Americans was not so much to weaken Britain but to bolster an eagerly awaited rebellion in Ireland. Wrote O'Connor in a New York paper at the end of May:

England must be attacked on all sides and at all points. Her doom will be certain, and her stocks will go down... Canada must and will be invaded whenever Ireland rises.

This rebellion, moreover, was expected within the next few weeks. When it came, the plan of the Irish-Americans was to create a diversion in North America which would dissipate the strength of the British army and prevent reinforcements being sent from British North America to quash the rebellion in Ireland. Though O'Connor tried to widen the appeal of this venture by talking of the benefits to the United States of annexing the Province⁴⁴, this would never had been a truly annexationist expedition. If the invasion had failed to wrest Canada from the Empire but had contributed to the success of the rebellion in Ireland, the Irish Republican movement would have been more than happy. Canada was not their target; it simply provided an easy way of hitting back at Britain.

The motives of the adventurers who would have formed the hard core of the Hunters' Lodges were less complex. In an unguarded moment, Elgin described them as some "of the dregs of the American people"⁴⁵, an extreme view which nevertheless held a fair amount of truth. Some, though, may have thought an invasion in support of a Canadian rebellion morally justifiable. Brought up in a country where republicanism was believed to be the best form of Government, they could see across the St Lawrence a colony groaning under the Old World oppression of Great Britain. As a result, Canada must

have seemed in particular need of liberty. With Britain widely seen as the natural enemy of the United States, a liberating mission would have been especially appealing. It would also have lent moral justification for an attack on the sovereign territory of a neutral neighbour. But few men are willing to risk their lives for abstract principles alone, and the reception invading Americans had received in 1812 and 1837 made it clear that any 'Hunters' would be taking their lives into their own hands. Another lure was needed and, as Elgin observed⁴⁶, the prospect of military glory and martial spoils served this purpose handsomely. As with the Irish-Americans, then, Canada was not the real target for these men. A fervent desire to spread the benefits of republicanism, wedded to a love of excitement and booty, was their motivation. As for Lewis Cass, he too was far from sincere when he made his annexationist rumblings at the hustings. Though the spin-off effect for Canada could have been disastrous, his objective was not British North America but the White House. And, like many an American politician before and after, he thought he might get a lift up the political ladder through verbal attacks on Britain and her New World territories. Such statements, he hoped, would appeal to the Anglophobes among the electorate, who were by no means all Irish. Moreover, his bold stance would get him publicity and at the same time prove his patriotism and capacity for office by showing that he would not kow-tow to the undeniable might of the British Empire.

Significantly, the much-heralded American-based attack on Canada never came. There were several reasons for this non-event, but one fact dominated. Virtually all the would-be attackers had

threatened Canada because it was a means to more important ends. But as the year progressed these goals either slipped out of their grasp or became available elsewhere. The first stumbling block was the rebellion in Ireland. Long-predicted, it was to be the signal for the Irish-Canadians to rise up and for the Irish-Americans and the Hunters' Lodges to invade Canada. But when it came, it was a fiasco. On July 25 James Finton Lalor staged an uprising in Tipperary, but the rebels were few, poorly armed and without a clear plan of action. Their sweeping blow against British rule was to seize the Ballingary farmhouse of Widow McCormack and take her and her five children hostage. Police surrounded the building and their leader was faced with having to blow up the farmhouse and its occupants. He could not do this. Instead of trumpeting out an heroic message to their cousins across the Atlantic, the insurgents were quickly rounded up, convicted and deported.⁴⁷ Deprived of the reason for their attack on Canada, the Friends of Ireland put away their arms. This, though, still left the returning Mexican War veterans and the loafers on the border. Without the support of the Irishmen who had aroused their interest in the first place, these men were unlikely to invade Canada, but they were still short of excitement. The news from California soon put an end to this. In January 1848 gold was found on the bed of the American River. The news did not get out immediately, but when it did, there was only one direction for fortune hunters and adventurers to go: west. The choice between the icefields of Canada and the goldfields of California was an easy one to make. Just as important for the security of Canada was the defeat of Cass at the polls. In London Russell urged caution, wanting to see how Taylor behaved before reducing the size of the Canadian garrison⁴⁸, but in Washington

Crampton was much more euphoric.

The Election of Zachary Taylor has, I think, with some assistance from the California "gold mania", quieted any mischievous schemes on the northern frontier which the success of Genl. Cass might have called into activity. Genl. Taylor is quite uncommitted on all these questions & ... has ... spoken out boldly his disapproval of the conquest & aggression and annexation system.⁴⁹

By the time of Cass' November defeat the American-based threat hanging over Canada had more or less disappeared. With the failure of the Irish rebellion, the lure of California gold and Taylor in the White House, the only purpose to a popular attack on Canada would have been to try to annex it. And in late 1848 very few people really wanted to do that.

CHAPTER TWO - 1848: AMERICA LOOKS NORTH

- 1 Elgin to Grey, December 6, 1848, EGP, I, 268: "There are two ways in which America may give us serious annoyance here and occupation for our troops - either by going Regularly to war with the view of wresting Canada from England, or by permitting bands of citizens under the denomination of fox hunters, buffalo hunters, - sympathisers, or what not, to invade this territory." See also Peter Burroughs, "The Determinants of Colonial Self-Government", in The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, VI (1978), 327.
- 2 Russell to Grey, March 12, 1848, GP; cf Grey to Elgin, March 22 1848, EP, A 397.
- 3 Colonel W C E Holloway to Lieutenant General Sir Benjamin D'Urban, enclosed in Elgin to Grey, May 4, 1848, EP, A 399; also in EGP, I, 150.
- 4 Grey to Elgin, September 6, 1848, EP, A 397; cf Grey to Elgin, July 27, 1848, EGP, I, 206.
- 5 Elgin to Grey, May 4, 1848, EGP, I, 148-9.
- 6 Elgin to Grey, May 4, 1848, EGP, I, 149.
- 7 Elgin to Grey, November 16, 1848, EGP, I, 257.
- 8 John Moore, British Despatch Agent in Boston, Massachusetts, to Elgin, December 26, 1848, EP, A 399.
- 9 S C Sewell, Albany, New York, to Colonel Wetherall, July 23, 1848, EP, A 398.
- 10 Irish-American leader M T O'Connor, quoted in un-named American paper, addressing the Irish Republican Union: "An agent is coming from Canada to buy arms here to take to Canada for the approaching crisis." Enclosed in John F Crampton to Elgin, May 29, 1848, EP, A 398.
- 11 Elgin to Grey, March 27, 1848, EGP, I, 139.
- 12 Elgin to Grey, April 26, 1848, EGP, I, 145: "It is said that the Yankees are sending arms over the frontier but I have no authentic information to this effect."
- 13 Joseph Alexander to unknown correspondent, presumably Elgin, May 27, 1849, EP, A 398.
- 14 Elgin to Crampton, May 20, 1848, EP, A 398.
- 15 Robert Battersly to Elgin, May 7, 1848, EP, A 399.
- 16 Grey to Elgin, September 6, 1848, EP, A 397.
- 17 Elgin to Grey, September 7, 1848, EGP, IV, 1478.
- 18 Ogle R Gowan to Major Campbell, August 7, 1848, EP, A 398.
- 19 Elgin to Grey, July 18, 1848, EP, I, 209-10.

- 20 Crampton to Elgin, August 4, 1848, EP, A 398.
- 21 Elgin to Grey, October 8, 1842, EGP, III, 1047.
- 22 Crampton to Elgin, August 4, 1848, EP, A 398; cf Elgin to Grey, August 16, 1848, EGP, I, 224: "Mr Crampton ... looks forward with apprehension to the winter when the Irish will have little work & the disbanded miscreants who are now returning in hordes from Mexico with appetites whetted for all deeds of rapine & blood will be ready for any congenial job."
- 23 Elgin to Grey, September 7, 1848, EGP, IV, 1477-8.
- 24 Cass, Senate, March 30, 1846, Congressional Globe, 29:1, Appendix, 429-30; Cass, Senate, August 16, 1852, Congressional Globe, 32:1, 943.
- 25 Crampton to Elgin, May 29, 1848, EP, A 398.
- 26 Elgin to Grey, June 1, 1848, EGP, I, 179.
- 27 Crampton to Elgin, May 29, 1848, EP, A 398.
- 28 Crampton to Elgin, August 4, 1848, EP, A 398.
- 29 Ray Allen Billington, The Far Western Frontier, 1830-1860, (New York, Harper & Row, 1956), 177.
- 30 Crampton to Elgin, May 29, 1848, EP, A 398.
- 31 Grey to Elgin, September, 1848, EP, A 397.
- 32 Crampton to Elgin, August 8, 1848, EP, A 398.
- 33 Elgin to Grey, May 4, August 16, 1848, EGP, I, 148-9, 225.
- 34 Elgin to Crampton, July 24, 1848, EP, A 398.
- 35 Elgin to Grey, July 18, 1848, EGP, I, 209-10.
- 36 Elgin to Grey, September 21, 1848, EGP, I, 240-1.
- 37 Elgin to Grey, April 26, 1848, EGP, I, 145; D'Urban to Major-General Gore, April 27, 1848, EP, A 399; Elgin to Grey, June 11, 1849, EGP, I, 369.
- 38 Elgin to Crampton, May 20, July 24, 1848, EP, A 398.
- 39 Crampton to Elgin, August 4, 1848, EP, A 398.
- 40 Moore to Elgin, December 26, 1848, EP, A 399; Elgin to Grey, September 7, 1848, EGP, IV, 1480.
- 41 Elgin to Grey, October 25, 1848, EGP, I, 251.
- 42 Major Campbell to Elgin, August 1848, EP, A 398: "It is most important that any attempt at invasion should be crushed at

once." cf Elgin to Grey, January 4, 1849, EGP, I, 280: "I only wish the scoundrels would come - we would give them a proper thrashing...."

- 43 Grey to Elgin, September 6, 1848, EP, A 398.
The British had already set a precedent for meting out harsh treatment to American invaders. After capturing scores of "Buffalo Hunters" in the rebellions of 1837-38, the British authorities transported at least 150 Americans to Australia, where they faced indefinite hard labour. Though the British granted pardons in 1844, the Americans had to find their own way home. The 27 who eventually returned had to work their passage on a Pacific whaler. See Stuart D Scott, "The Patriot Game: New Yorkers and the Canadian Rebellion of 1837-1838", in New York History, LXVIII (1987), 285 ff.
- 44 Elgin to Grey, July 18, 1848, EGP, I, 209-10; M T O'Connor article in American newspaper, enclosed in Crampton to Elgin, May 29, 1848, EP, A 398.
- 45 Elgin to Grey, September 21, 1848, EGP, I, 241.
- 46 Elgin to Grey, September 7, 1848, EGP, IV, 1478.
- 47 William L Langer, Political and Social Upheaval, 1832-1852, (New York, Evanston and London, Harper Torchbooks, 1969), 244-5.
- 48 Russell to Grey, December 20, 1848, GP.
- 49 Crampton to Elgin, December 18, 1848, EP, A 398.

CHAPTER THREE

1849: CANADA LOOKS SOUTH

If Elgin had reflected ruefully in 1849 that his problems were never-ending, he would have had just cause. One of his top priorities the year before had been to ensure that the Canadians did not give the Americans any excuse for invading. It therefore became a guiding light of his policy to do nothing which could spark off public displays of unrest in any part of British North America. By 1849, though, he could no longer keep the lid on the seething discontent in Canada which was being heated to boiling point by political and economic disquiet. This inevitably transformed the whole question of annexation to the United States. In the past, the United States had coveted Canada, only for the colonists to spurn their advances. In 1849, though, the roles were reversed. Influential groups in the Provinces urged the once-despised republic to admit them into the Union, only for their pleas to fall on what appeared to be deaf ears. Like their American predecessors of the year before, these men were far from sincere in their actions. In reality, the 1849 Annexation movement was a clumsy attempt by a minority of politically and economically alienated men to pressurise Britain and to seek dramatic solutions to short-term problems. They chose to do this by exploiting the close proximity of the United States and Britain's fear of losing British North America to her rising North American rival. But in taking this course, the annexationists dragged the United States into what was really an imperial quarrel; and to do this was to play with fire.

The warning signs, of course, had been visible for some time. As early as February 1848 Elgin told Grey that "Britain and British Institutions have no hold whatsoever on the affections of certain classes of the inhabitants of this Province - Powerful influences are at work dragging it towards the United States."¹ By November 1848 he was airing his often-repeated claim that in Canada "the conviction that they would be better off if they were annexed [to the more prosperous United States] is almost universal among the commercial classes at present."² However, to more distant observers, public demonstrations of unrest were slower to appear. When they came, they were undeniably spectacular. The first hint of serious trouble came in the last week of April 1849 on the streets of Montreal, straight after Elgin had given his consent to the passage of the Rebellion Losses Bill. Introduced by the Liberal ministry of Louis Hyppolyte La Fontaine and Robert Baldwin, this Bill proposed giving belated compensation to the loyal victims of the 1837-38 rebellions in predominantly French-speaking Lower Canada. But, because the families of known rebels like Louis-Joseph Papineau were planning to claim under its terms, the Tory party branded it as a measure designed to reward treason. Elgin's reward for giving his approval to the bill - passed by a majority in the Canadian Parliament - was to be pelted with stones as he rode through Montreal in his carriage. Five days later, notwithstanding his role as the official representative of Queen Victoria, the Mother of the Empire, a stone actually hit him. Compared to the Canadian Parliament, though, the Governor-General got off lightly. The mob vented its anger by burning it to the ground - though the arsonists did allow the Members to escape.³ In the wake of the Old World revolutions of the previous year, this

outrage was full of menace. Such was the tension in Montreal that six weeks later Elgin sent a military officer in his place to prorogue Parliament, fearing that his own presence might provoke a fresh outbreak of rioting.⁴ In the summer heat of August, Montreal again shook with violence. After the arrest of men implicated in the burning of the Parliament, a mob attacked the home of La Fontaine. In the fracas, one of the rioters was shot.⁵ But the agitation was not confined to futile acts of street violence. Among the discontented in Montreal - as across the rest of Canada - were influential, articulate men of means. In early October, with annexationist papers springing up across the province, they made the boldest move yet: they published the Montreal Annexation Manifesto. With this document, they sought to persuade their fellow countrymen that there was only one true remedy to Canada's economic, political and social ills:

A FRIENDLY AND PEACEFUL SEPARATION FROM (sic)
BRITISH CONNECTION AND A UNION UPON EQUITABLE
TERMS WITH THE GREAT NORTH AMERICAN CONFEDERACY
OF SOVEREIGN STATES.

These men, who included Members of the Provincial Parliament (MPPs) and some of the city's top commercial figures⁶, were openly inviting the American Government to carry out the peaceful annexation of Canada to the United States. One year too late, the United States received its pretext to invade Canada in support of an appeal for help.

Not surprisingly, the British took the annexationist threat seriously. In August 1849 Prime Minister Lord John Russell wrote that an account he had received "of the wish for annexation in the Lower Provinces is very formidable."⁷ Straight after the Parliament had been razed to the ground, Elgin told Grey: "I

confess I did not before know how thin is the crust of order which cover (sic) the anarchical elements that boil and toss beneath our feet."⁸ Nevertheless, the British were convinced that the movement was but a passing phase and that the annexationists, though noisy, were a minority.⁹ The British policy, outlined by Russell as early as March 1848, was to ensure that the minority did not become the majority. Wrote the Prime Minister:

People argue ... as if a million & a half of people were like one man, who wished for British rule, or were against it - But the truth is that if a million are for British & a half million for American connexion, the half million will soon get the majority on their side if they are active, combined, & zealous, while the opposite party are discouraged by the apathy, coldness, & indifference of the Home Gov^t. Whereas if the Home Gov^t shew themselves friendly and determined the half million may in a short time be reduced to 100,000.¹⁰

Russell was true to his word. Instead of the apathy, coldness and indifference expected from the Home Government by some annexationists¹¹, American Special Agent Israel de Wolf Andrews¹² and American administration and opposition papers¹³, the British acted firmly to demonstrate their commitment to the Colonies. But, having learned the lessons of 1837 and 1838, the authorities chose neither to inflame matters nor to store up long-term problems by using military force. Instead, Elgin opted to defuse the crisis by holding out the prospect of a solution to one of its causes. Thus, he and the British Government stepped up their efforts to secure Reciprocity with the United States which, even if unsuccessful, showed Britain's commitment to Canada as well as promising a relief to Canada's economic plight. At the same time, by disgracing the office-holding advocates of annexation, Elgin showed that Britain would not brook even the mildest form of treason. Such men were dismissed from office, an action clearly demonstrating the control

Britain still had over Canadian affairs.¹⁴ Grey underlined this decisive action by publicly stating the support Elgin had from Queen Victoria herself. He continued, in bold capitals:

HER MAJESTY CONFIDENTLY RELIES ON THE LOYALTY
OF THE GREAT MAJORITY OF HER CANADIAN SUBJECTS,
AND SHE IS THEREFORE DETERMINED TO EXERT ALL
THE AUTHORITY WHICH BELONGS TO HER FOR THE
PURPOSE OF MAINTAINING THE CONNECTION OF CANADA
WITH THIS COUNTRY, BEING PERSUADED THAT THE
PERMANENCE OF THAT CONNECTION IS HIGHLY
ADVANTAGEOUS TO BOTH.

Your Lordship will therefore understand that
YOU ARE COMMANDED BY HER MAJESTY TO RESIST, TO
THE UTMOST OF YOUR POWER, ANY ATTEMPT WHICH MAY
BE MADE TO BRING ABOUT THE SEPARATION OF CANADA
FROM THE BRITISH DOMINIONS, and to mark in the
strongest manner Her Majesty's displeasure with
all those who may directly or indirectly
encourage such a design.

Grey rounded his message off with a flourish: Elgin was to take all necessary measures to bring to account any people who were guilty of disloyalty.¹⁵ But long before this defiant official despatch was posted up around the towns and villages of Canada, Elgin had been working on his own initiative to undermine the annexationists with a subtle tactic. In the autumn he tested his faith in Upper Canada - modern Ontario - by going on an official tour of the largely British part of the fractious Province. Shell-shocked by his treatment in Montreal, Elgin set out warily to test the waters; but gradually he submerged himself in the spontaneous support that came his way until his tour turned into a glorious triumph. Throughout his journey - which took in the American frontier at Niagara and towns like Hamilton, Toronto, Brantford, Guelph and London - huge crowds flocked to see him. Indians jostled with schoolchildren, and officials mixed with the general public as they all tried to catch a glimpse of him. By adopting a "Royal walkabout" approach, he showed Britain's confidence in her Canadian

subjects - and came away more convinced than before that the Annexationists were a minority. Indeed, Elgin believed that the Montrealers issued their Manifesto as a desperate last throw of the dice, hoping to regain the initiative they had lost by Elgin's successful round of "feasting, speech making and addressing."¹⁶

If the British were sure that the Annexationists were a minority, they were also convinced that they were, on the whole, insincere. After all, the advocacy of annexation had long been a popular tactic in Canadian political life. Thus, during a lull in the tension of 1849, Elgin wrote: "In Canada, Rebellion or as it is more delicately styled, the severance of the connexion with England, is the remedy which first presents itself to the imagination of every disappointed man."¹⁷ Six months earlier, also in a letter to Grey, he wrote:

There has been a vast deal of talk about annexation as is unfortunately always the case here when there is anything to agitate the public mind. - If half the talk on this subject were sincere I should consider an attempt to keep up the connexion with Great Britain as Utopian in the extreme. For, no matter what the subject of complaint, or what the party complaining ... annexation is invoked as the remedy for all ills imaginary or real.¹⁸

What then, were the sources of the agitation? Undeniably, political immaturity had a contributory role. Canada, like the rest of British North America, was a young, sparsely populated colony with but a short tradition of political activity. This was clear to Elgin from the start. On his arrival in Montreal to take up the post of Governor-General, he spoke bluntly in his opening address. "I did not shrink from speaking my mind, but did what I cd - to raise Canadian politics from the dirt."¹⁹ Three months

later, he enlarged upon his analysis:

In a community like this where there is little if anything of public principle to divide men, political parties will shape themselves under the influence of circumstances and of a great variety of affections and antipathies, national, sectarian and personal ...20

Yet it was to this squabbling, fractious colony that Grey and Elgin decided to introduce Responsible Government under which Governments were answerable to the provincial parliaments, the chosen representatives of the electorate. In the past, Governments had depended more on the support of the Governor-General than of Parliament, but under the new system the role of the Queen's representative was like that of a constitutional monarch. He had to sanction the measures passed by Parliament, whether he approved of them or not. Accepting that this was a great "experiment", Elgin and Grey constantly bore in mind the novelty of the constitutional change. Thus, Elgin wrote Grey a note of caution.

It must be remembered that it is only of late that the popular assemblies in this part of the World have acquired the right of determining who shall govern them - of insisting, as we phrase it, that the administration of affairs shall be conducted by persons enjoying their confidence. It is not wonderful that a privilege of this kind should be exercised at first with some degree of recklessness - and that while no great principles of policy are at stake, methods of a questionable character for winning & retaining the confidence of these arbiters of destiny, s^d be resorted to -21

For the politically immature there was a lot to be reckless about by early 1849. One of Annexationism's strongest roots was the political discontent of the previously ascendant Tories who, under Responsible Government, were wallowing in impotent opposition. At the end of 1847, in the first elections under the new system, the Tories became the victims of Canada's move towards

democracy. After surviving for some time with the tiniest majority, the Tories were trounced 3-1 at the polls by an alliance of French and Anglo-Canadian Reformers. As a result, the Tories had to surrender office and all its perquisites to men whom they had recently denounced as "impracticable and disloyal."²² Added to their understandable disappointment and frustration was a deep sense of betrayal. The Tories had long seen themselves as Canada's true loyalists and over the years had grown accustomed to having the ear of a succession of sympathetic Governors and Governor-Generals. Indeed, Governor Metcalfe had been so partisan that Elgin believed he had damaged the British connection. His close association with the Tories had made them appear as the only group in Canada which Britain trusted²³. But under Responsible Government the Tories lost their influence over the Queen's representative. Despite thinking themselves ultra-loyal, from January 1848 the Tories found themselves marooned in the political wilderness, forced to watch Elgin accept repugnant measures introduced by Liberals and, worse still, French-Canadians.

Serving as a greater focus of discontent, though, was the economy. Throughout 1848, Elgin described the growing resentment of merchants as trade slumped dramatically. In August he wrote that "our mercantile and commercial classes are thoroughly disgusted and lukewarm in their allegiance, if not disaffected."²⁴ Two months later he repeated that "there is among the mercantile classes ... much sullen discontent."²⁵ The resentment in Canada was stronger than in ordinary recessions because the blame for it could be laid at Britain's door. For the desperate in search of a scapegoat, the argument was convincing. Having long enjoyed a

privileged trading position with Britain, Canada's commercial classes received the prospect of even greater profits with the passage in Britain of the 1843 Canada Corn Act. This guaranteed entry to the British market of Canadian wheat and, more importantly, flour of any origin milled in Canada. In anticipation of becoming the gateway to Europe for the corn of the United States' Midwest, Canadian entrepreneurs invested large sums in new mills. At the same time, Montreal licked its lips: it seemed at last to have trumped its long-standing rival, New York City. But before many of the new mills were even built, Britain removed whatever advantages the colony had over the United States by repealing the Corn Laws. This threw Britain's wheat market open to international competition and at once plunged the Canadians into a harsher commercial world. To a people used to a protected trading arrangement with their Mother Country - and who were expecting a rich harvest from the Canada Corn Act - this was a severe jolt. And, as the strongest advocates of protectionism were traditionally Tories, the decline in the economy came at a doubly unfortunate time for Elgin and the British connection. Of course, to blame Canada's economic problems solely on Britain's new policy of free trade was to miss several other influential factors. In 1845 and 1846, for example, the United States passed Drawback Laws which reduced duty to be paid on Canadian trade with Europe which passed through the Union. If this swung the balance slightly in favour of New York, especially in the winter when Montreal was ice-bound, a general slump in world-wide trade added to Montreal's woes.²⁶ But world-wide recessions and the activities of American politicians were beyond the control of Canadian merchants; the policies pursued in the Imperial Parliament were not.

Here lay the problem for Britain. Wrote Elgin:

With us, factions in the Colonies are clamorous and violent with the hope of producing effect on the Imperial Par^t and Gov^t just in proportion to their powerlessness at home - The history of Canada during the past year furnishes ample evidence of this truth. Why was there so much violence on the part of the opposition here last summer, particularly against the Governor-General? Because it felt itself to be weak in the Province, and look for success to the effect it could produce in England alone.²⁷

It was not that Elgin believed all annexationists to be insincere. Papineau and his Rouges undoubtedly wanted to see Canada in the neighbouring Republic, as did many of the Americans who had settled north of the Great Lakes. And across British North America there were men whose sympathies were genuinely republican. But for those who truly wanted to live under the American system or who found life in the British Empire unbearable, there was nothing to stop them selling up and heading south. There were no immigration controls on the border, there was plenty of land to spare in the Republic, and men and their families were forever leaving Canada for the United States. Small wonder, then, that Elgin portrayed the Annexation Manifesto as "an emanation from a knot of violent protectionists and disappointed party men."²⁸ Nor was he alone in his view. 1849 saw abnormal activity in the Canadian press as every paper vied with its rivals to air its opinions and as new journals sprang up to represent this view or that for its own local area. Many were annexationist, but their rivals were ruthless in their criticism. Wrote the Examiner:

Let us not be duped by disappointed men, who a few months ago were the bitter opponents of every Liberal measure, but now forsooth, when they have no chance of the loaves and fishes, are ready to run into the arms of the neighbouring republic.²⁹

To Elgin and many Canadians, annexationism just did not ring true: it was creating too many false alliances. The first was the proposed union with the United States. Because of their vulnerable position, the Canadians took more interest in the United States than vice-versa, but this did not reveal any great love of republicanism. Instead, under normal circumstances, most colonists were hostile to the republican and frequently Anglophobic system of the United States. The brash political experiment was generally seen as corrupt, vulgar, and ruled by the passions of the mob. But worst of all, it supported and was supported by slavery.³⁰ Even so, the example of the United States acted on Canadians like a constantly dripping tap: try as they might, they could not ignore it. And however much they disliked the republican system, they were always willing to pick out its advantages when it suited them. In 1849, with the United States more prosperous than Canada, the Canadians were being more fickle than usual. Countless papers ran features pointing out that land prices were higher and that there were many more miles of railroad and canals in the Republic. Even Liberal papers were quick to point the finger of blame at Britain. As early as 1847 the Montreal Pilot proclaimed: "Imperial interference in Canada has checked our enterprise... It requires but a partial endurance of such conflicting despotism on this free continent to alienate the best affections of a loyal people."³¹ And when the colonists looked carefully at America's rapid economic growth, they could see that it was paid for by British capital. Yet Canada constantly complained of the lack of interest shown in her by these same British capitalists. Wrote Elgin:

Our greatest present danger arises from the
impossibility of getting money on any terms and

the consequent paralysis of all trading operations. Your English Capitalists who are buying up large portions of the United States Loan will not look at our Provincial Securities - ... It begins, I fear, to be whispered in many quarters - "so far from our deriving any advantage from being Colonists, England would trust us much more readily if we were to cast her off for ever!"³²

Had Canada been isolated, like Australia, the effects of all this discontent would almost certainly have manifested itself internally within the British Empire. But the close proximity of the United States had two results. First, the colonists were able to compare their situation with the greener grass of the United States; and, second, the Republic provided them with an ally to turn to for help. But in 1849 the people who were loudest in their shouts for annexation were the very men who had traditionally considered themselves the staunchest loyalists in British North America. Thus, the Montreal Pilot - which was sympathetic towards the Reform Ministry - gleefully treated its readers to this article:

The history of the Annexation Party is remarkably instructive. But a few months ago, it boasted of its loyalty, and professed the most ardent attachment to the mother country; now it is making every effort to shake off its allegiance to the Crown of Britain, and to unite itself with a republic it has for years held up to scorn.³³

This was not the only strange alliance spawned by the Annexation Movement. Within Canada itself, the agitation brought together some of the Province's bitterest political rivals. Probably the strangest bedfellows were the Tories - who had long detested republicanism - and Papineau's radical followers who actually believed in it and had done so for some time. Canadian political and economic problems had, therefore, thrown together Francophobes or Orange Lodge members with French-Canadians, many of

whom were nominally Catholics. This situation was fraught with problems, which became clear from the signatures attached to the Annexation Manifesto of October 1849. Of the roughly 325 men who signed the declaration, only 26 had French names.³⁴ Such an alliance could not last - and Elgin knew it.

All is working as I expected. - The Tories have succeeded in rendering annexation disgusting to the Radicals by advocating it... You will observe that the policy of personally abusing me is the only one on which they can unite.³⁵

Fairly rapidly the movement disintegrated as old rivalries took their toll and the differing goals of the annexationists undermined what little unity there was. The genuine annexationists apart, the bulk of the activists did not really want to drag Canada into the Union. The merchants, faced with falling profits and, in many cases, bankruptcy, wanted an economic revival. After enjoying a protected economic relationship within the Empire and then suffering commercial betrayal by Britain, they naturally turned away from the Mother Country to the nearest glittering market at hand, the United States. But by the end of 1849, Britain was intensifying her efforts to secure Reciprocity, which promised all the economic advantages of annexation without its distasteful political consequences. Moreover, Britain's determination to retain the colonies made it clear that there could be no annexation without war, which was the last thing most merchants wanted. As these truths dawned on the men of commerce, Canada began to enjoy the long-sought economic upturn. With their prospects improving, the merchants began to shy away from extreme and dangerous political actions. The political wing of the British annexationists - basically the old Tories - also began to lose their way by the end of 1849. Traditionally hostile to the United

States, they had hoped that their involvement in annexationism could somehow give them back the political initiative. It was a desperate and ill-conceived tactic, but inspired, as Elgin had explained, by the belief that to change the system they had to do something dramatic to catch the attention of the Imperial Parliament and Government. Thus, during the burning of the Provincial Parliament, leading Tory Sir Allan MacNab declined to stop the riot, saying: "If we don't make a disturbance ... we shall never get in."³⁶ However, these Tories soon found that annexationism was not the key to the door that had been slammed in their faces by Responsible Government. The flood of loyal addresses that Elgin received on his tour of Upper Canada proved that annexationism had little appeal for the majority of Canadians, and the hard line taken by the British Government against office-holding annexationists proved that the movement was having little effect on the Imperial Parliament. There would, therefore, be no abandoning of free trade or of Responsible Government. Instead the annexationists were in disgrace and, as a result, even further from returning to office than before. Thus by early 1850, the movement - a combination of disparate and rival groups - was in rapid decline. All along, the chief goal of most of its participants had not been to unite Canada with the United States but to create an effect on the British. When that tactic failed, so did the movement.

From Britain's point of view, the insincerity of the majority of the Annexationists was small consolation. True, it meant that a firm British stand in Canada was likely to kill off the movement, but in international terms, the damage had already been done. By

openly applying to the United States for annexation, these men had dragged the republic - whose capacity for territorial expansion was well known - into the heart of an imperial quarrel. And though Elgin could shape the American response to Canada's internal crisis by his actions in the Province³⁷, he was in reality powerless to control the course adopted by either the United States Government or its unruly population. Alert to the American threat, the British took swift action to try to deter any intervention from south of the Border, and they were pleased by what appeared to be the mature and responsible stance of President Zachary Taylor and his Cabinet. But Taylor and his Secretary of State, Delaware's John M Clayton, were only partially honest in their dealings with Britain. They took as keen an interest in the Annexation Movement as anyone in North America and were almost certainly sympathetic to its aims. Ultimately, though, they had to bow to the realities of their relationship with Great Britain and in time the movement became more important as a useful weapon in America's dealings with the British and their North American Colonies. Even for the Americans, then, British North America was to be a pawn in a game.

Remote from Great Britain, Elgin could have been forgiven in 1849 for feeling as if he were sitting on top of two powderkegs. Even before the mob burned down the Provincial Parliament, Montreal was seething with discontent, and annexationism was giving birth to journals throughout Canada. But if Montreal was volatile, the United States was also notoriously unstable: in the past seventy years British North America had suffered from American disrespect for its sovereignty on at least three occasions. Elgin's fear was simple: that try as he might to control the noisy

minority of dissidents within Canada, the Annexation Movement might well give the United States an excuse for its fourth invasion of the British Provinces. Never one just to sit back and worry, he took the offensive to the States before they could go on the offensive against him. But he deliberately avoided taking any action which could inflame relations with Washington or which could turn a domestic Canadian crisis into an assault on the republic's fragile sense of national honour. Instead, he chose to give the United States Government a firm warning through the most direct diplomatic channels open to him. Thus, on April 5 1849, a few weeks before the Montreal Parliament warmed the spring air, he sent a letter to Crampton who dutifully passed it on to John M Clayton, for whom its message was intended. After starting in a carefree, almost chatty tone, Elgin got down to the real business. "I observe from your letter", he told Crampton,

as well as from comments in American newspapers that rumors of political discontent here have produced a considerable sensation in your part of the world. I do not at all wonder that this should be the case; for a very intimate acquaintance with men and things in Canada is necessary in order to enable a looker on to estimate correctly the value of such demonstrations as we have had lately. The fact is that, for some years past, it has been very much the fashion in this Province to talk of rebellion as the natural and obvious remedy in all cases of difficulty or disappointment. When a merchant speculates unhappily - when a jobber fails in securing the place he has applied for - when a politician does not succeed in inducing Government or the public to take into favor his pet project, whatever it may be, it is too much the practice to hint at annexation as the legitimate consequence of such a contretemps. This kind of talk is frequently indulged in by persons who have very little intention of acting on their threats. The habit is a bad one; but it fits very loosely, and is put off quite as easily as it is put on. I could not therefore in conscience recommend any adventurers who had a regard however slender for their persons to hazard an

invasion of Canada on the faith of cooperation
on the part of the inhabitants.³⁸

Ostensibly, Elgin's warning was for the jaunty adventurers who wished to continue the dubious traditions of the Buffalo's Lodges. Ever the diplomat, he avoided suggesting that the White House might itself turn into a Lodge for Red Fox Hunters. But, quite clearly, he also hoped to advise Clayton that the intervention of the American Government would neither be welcome nor wise for the simple reason that the Annexation Movement could not be taken at face value. The response of the American government was all that Elgin could have wished for. Even before he had penned his letter to Clayton, Crampton had told Foreign Secretary, Lord Palmerston of the Americans' good intentions:

Great excitement produced by uneasy state of political feeling in Canada: - this has not gone beyond inflammatory articles predicting the speedy annexation of Canada, - Mr C. [Clayton] has been informed that G[eneral] Taylor has expressed in decided tones his determination to suppress by Military Force, any such attempts on the Frontier by U.S. citizens such as on former occasions have jeopardised the friendly relations of the two countries.³⁹

Taylor repeated this pledge in mid-April⁴⁰ and by mid-July General Winfield Scott, another Whig hero of the Mexican War, had been confirmed as the officer charged with keeping the border districts in check.⁴¹ Moreover, as Clayton was quick to tell Crampton, all public officials working along the Canadian frontier were under orders to tell the Government if they heard of preparations for an American-based attack in support of the Annexationists. As evidence of his resolve, Clayton asked the British Charge d'Affaires to share any information he had of such developments because "he was determined to take measures to put a stop to such proceedings, and ... would wish to do so before anything of the

sort should be brought to maturity."⁴² The administration underlined its commitment to peace with soothing editorials in its official journals asserting that: "For our part, we have not the slightest disposition to alienate the affections of Canada from the crown"⁴³ These measures had the desired effect: there was no popular attack by Americans on Canada and, between them, Taylor and Clayton impressed the British with their peaceful intentions. Indeed, by the end of May Elgin wrote warmly that their actions were "so honourable to General Taylor and his Cabinet" and praised "the good feeling and cordiality evinced by the Executive Government of the United States."⁴⁴

Had Elgin known what the American Government really believed, he would have been less generous with his praise. Admittedly, Taylor and Clayton were determined to prevent yet another popular invasion of Canada, just as they were opposed to all filibustering expeditions from the United States. Thus, in the summer of 1849 Taylor acted swiftly to denounce expeditions that were reportedly being prepared in the Deep South as that section's Buffalo Hunters cast their covetous eyes towards Cuba. In August Taylor deployed two war steamers off New York and New Orleans to intercept any invasion fleet and publicly warned the adventurers that, as well as facing heavy penalties in the States, they would "forfeit their claims to the protection of their country." The reason for such strong measures was because they threatened the United States' relations with other powers. Declared Taylor in his proclamation against the Cuba expeditions:

An enterprise to invade territories of friendly nations, set on foot and prosecuted within the limits of the United States, is in the highest degree criminal, as tending to endanger peace

and compromise the honour of this nation.⁴⁵

Though he did not issue a proclamation regarding Canada - possibly because a large-scale invasion does not seem to have been planned in 1849 - these arguments were just as valid in the case of British North America. According to Treaty, the Provinces belonged to Great Britain, at that time a nation at peace with the United States. Hence, any unofficial attempt to invade the British territories would have endangered peace and compromised the honour of the Republic. As long as Taylor was in the White House, then, the British had every reason to believe that Canada was reasonably safe from an American attack. It seemed that Crampton had been right in December 1848 when he wrote of the old general's "disapproval of the conquest & aggression & annexation system."⁴⁶

Crampton and Elgin, however, were wide of the mark in their assessment of Taylor. Though as a politician he was opposed to aggressive expansion, this did not mean that he stood firmly against the territorial growth of his country. Indeed, if the right territory became available under the right circumstances, Taylor was more than willing to encourage the American eagle to spread its wings to the north, south or west. For instance, his objection to the plans of the Cuban-bound American filibusters stemmed not from their goals but from their illegal and violent methods. Little more than a month before Taylor issued his proclamation against the adventurers, he had sent an agent to Cuba specifically to try and buy the island. This man, Kentucky's Benjamin E Green, also had instructions to secure permission from the Dominican Republic for an American naval base at Samana Bay. Despite his confidence, Green's missions failed - but his very

appointment reveals Taylor's interest in peaceful territorial expansion.⁴⁷ Taylor was also active in the west. His guiding fear was that California might form an independent nation or be vulnerable to foreign interference if she did not proceed rapidly from territorial status to full statehood. Accordingly, he despatched T Butler King to the States' gateway to the Orient to speed up its entry into the Union.⁴⁸ Inevitably, the possession of California created a new range of problems - particularly the need for better communications between the east and west coast of the Republic - and Taylor and Clayton found themselves looking ever southward for a solution. Clayton's attention became fixed on the Central American Isthmus, thought suitable for canals and railroads which, when built, would greatly speed up travel between Washington and San Francisco. Heightening his interest still further was the open willingness of some of the Central American States to be annexed to the United States, a fact he revealed to Britain's Minister in Washington, Sir Henry Lytton Bulwer, very early in his embassy.⁴⁹ As early as September 1849 the Nicaraguan Minister to London had been working for the annexation of his country, San Salvador and Honduras to the United States⁵⁰, though the rivalries between the three countries meant the prospects of success were slight.⁵¹ Fearing British interference in the Isthmus, Clayton actually considered securing American interests there by annexing the territory. In an undated and unsigned memorandum - but which was clearly in the Secretary of State's own handwriting - Clayton argued:

Either we must take command of the Isthmus, or England will. To us it is vitally important that the wisest thing, perhaps, the U.S. could do would be to annex Nicaragua - with the other free & independent states, the fragments of the old Central America, into the bargain; besides

putting in train a project for purchasing
Panama & Vera Cruz.

And he had an answer for those who would claim that this expansion would upset the fragile sectional balance. "They are all free States," he wrote, "but their affinities and sympathies would be Southern."⁵² Clayton seems not to have gone beyond thinking about this option, for a combination of domestic and international reasons. But he was obviously sympathetic to the principle of territorial expansion - at the right time and if it was in America's interests. All that distinguished the Taylor administration from the previous Government was its greater caution, its desire to secure new lands through peaceful rather than warlike methods. Its hunger for land, though, was just as great.

The Taylor administration's pious protestations of disinterest in Canada were equally hollow. Among its supporters - and some senior officials - were men who either expected or desired the annexation of British North America to the States. In the wake of Montreal's incendiary outbreak, various influential northern Whig papers began urging the joint annexation of Canada and Cuba. Supposedly in the confidence of the State Department, a Washington-based correspondent of the Boston Courier wrote:

Now we are in favor, and we believe the country to be in favor, of annexing these provinces to the United States. We believe it will be for our advantage, and their advantage ... We therefore beg to suggest to our provincial neighbors that they take time by the forelock, and begin to initiate measures for the consummation of the great act of annexation. It will be their crowning deed of glory, the appropriate finale to their colonial apprenticeship ... It is a destiny they cannot escape ... and the sooner the transition is accomplished the better for the present

generation, as well as for coming generations.⁵³

More revealing, though, was a letter published across the North in early July. It predicted - and welcomed - the colonists' early separation from Great Britain and continued:

In my judgement the interests of both sides would be much promoted by annexation - the several provinces coming into the Union on equal terms with our present thirty States ... Though opposed to incorporating with us any district densely peopled with the Mexican race, I should be most happy to fraternize with our northern and north-eastern neighbors ... I think I cannot err in saying that two-thirds of our people would rejoice at the incorporation, and the other third soon perceive its benefits.

Though the author stressed he did not know the views of the Government⁵⁴, his public announcement was embarrassing for Clayton and Taylor. For the correspondent was Winfield Scott, writing from West Point where he was Commander in Chief of the Army, a prominent Whig and, moreover, the man charged with preventing a popular American invasion of Canada in support of the annexationists. Wrote Crampton in a despatch to Palmerston, "No doubt Gen^l Scott would discharge that duty honorably, but his present uncalled for avowal would impair his power of doing so with effect." Worse still, said Crampton, "his weight as an influential member of the party in power, tends to give to such a publication a certain significance in the eyes of the public at the present time."⁵⁵

Among the Whigs, support for the annexation of Canada was not confined to a few eccentrics; there were plenty of sympathisers among the ranks of the administration's officials. One such was B Hammatt Norton. As a reward for running the Boston "Rough and Ready Association" during Taylor's presidential campaign⁵⁶, he received the potentially lucrative post of US Consul to Pictou,

Nova Scotia. Bursting with enthusiasm, his first serious despatch told of "the wonderful change" in the loyalty of the People to the Crown.

From the first day of my arrival to the present time I have not heard an individual, whatever his position in life, but what has been in favor of immediate annexation to the U.S. And could the vote be taken today, in this portion of the Province, not one hundred votes would be cast in the opposition.

Indeed Norton, who in his first proper letter to his employer presumably wished to avoid subjects which might cost him an early recall, actually advocated the annexation of British North America.

"Believing as I do," he wrote,

that the whole Continent of America is destined at no distant day to come under the rule of the Anglo-American, I am of opinion, that facilities for frequent intercourse should be fostered by our Government ... By this intercourse, the manners and customs of the American People would be introduced, and by these means pave the way to a result which will prove of the highest importance to our Country.⁵⁷

Aired by an American official in British North America, such views could reasonably have been seen as prejudicial to Anglo-American relations. Yet Norton does not seem to have incurred the displeasure of the State Department. Though Pictou was his reward for supporting Zachary Taylor, Norton went on to serve under President Millard Fillmore and his Democrat successor, Franklin Pierce. Norton, though, was small fry compared to the man Taylor chose to fill the country's most important diplomatic posting. As a wealthy New England industrialist, Abbott Lawrence fully understood the need to preserve friendly relations with Great Britain. He, too, saw annexation as imminent and was unwilling to lift a finger to stop it. Writing soon after his arrival in London, he told Clayton:

With regard to the British North American Colonies, I have strong reason to believe that the day of Annexation to the United States will be moved at an earlier period than is generally expected. I mean the proposition from the Colonies to annex themselves to us - and with the consent of this Government.58

There was no suggestion that the United States should either encourage or stop this; instead, Lawrence clearly favoured letting time take its course. This was entirely consistent with his attitude just before he left Boston for the Court of St James. He was treated to a visit by William Hamilton Merritt, the President of Canada's Executive Council, who tried to impress on him the importance of Reciprocity. But Lawrence wrote promptly to Clayton advising against taking part in any such measure. "It appears to me," he wrote,

that it is merely a preparation for another more important proposition to be made by the Colonies, to the Government of the United States. It must end in the manner indicated by you when I had the pleasure of being in Washington.59

Clearly Clayton had expressed a firm opinion on the Annexation Crisis to Lawrence as he briefed him on his duties as Minister to Great Britain. But if the Secretary of State ever took the unlikely course of writing down a prediction about the outcome of the movement, it does not seem to have survived. Even so, a close look at his actions suggests very strongly that he - and Taylor - were sympathetic towards annexation. The most compelling evidence for this is their decision to appoint a Special - some would say Secret - Agent to range over British North America during her period of torment. An even more important indication of their attitude was the background of the man they chose for this sensitive post and the actions he pursued in the Provinces with

their authority.

Appointing a special agent to gather information in a foreign country was nothing new to the State Department, but until 1849 there had never been a Special Agent to British North America - not even in 1837 nor during the Oregon Dispute. But in May 1849 - following the burning down of the Montreal Parliament - Clayton and Taylor began to take a close interest in the Colonies. Hence when their Consul to St John, New Brunswick was in Washington, DC on private business, they seized the chance to gain fuller information. The Consul, Israel de Wolf Andrews, later told Secretary of State Daniel Webster, that Clayton sent a State Department official to Andrews' hotel to summon him to an interview. "I called the next morning," wrote Andrews,

and this was the first time I had ever spoken to Mr Clayton.... He asked me many leading questions about the British North American Colonies, and made particular inquiries about the burning of the Parliament House in Montreal...

Mr Clayton sent for me in a day or two again, to go to the State Department where I found President Taylor & Mr Clayton with whom I had a long and confidential interview on Colonial affairs...

Whatever Andrews said, he seems to have impressed Clayton and, later, Taylor, for they offered him a succession of posts in Canada. At the initial interview, wrote Andrews, Clayton seemed to reappoint him Consul to New Brunswick, which Andrews declined. After talking with Clayton and the President, they offered him the post of Consul to Canada and New Brunswick along with a request to write a full and confidential report to the State Department on the political and commercial state of all the Colonies. Andrews again declined, unless he was paid in full for his special service and

all incidental expenses. A few days later, Clayton accepted these terms, and Andrews became the first American Special Agent to British North America.

This delicate appointment - made at such a volatile period in the Colonies' relations with both Britain and the United States - was not based solely on Andrews' secret conversations at the State Department. At the first meeting, Clayton asked Andrews if he had any papers recommending him for office, to which he replied "None whatever."⁶⁰ However, on file at the State Department were reams of letters sent by Andrews from his Consular outpost at the mouth of the St John River. Overlooking the Bay of Fundy, with its rapid tides and huge stocks of fish, it was at the centre of New Brunswick's lumbering and ship-building industries. Here he put to energetic use his personal knowledge of and links with British North America. Born in Eastport, Maine - a home port for hundreds of American fishermen working the Colonial fishing grounds - Andrews had grown up in an area with strong and ever-growing links with the Maritime Provinces. These connections were reflected in his family. His grandfather had left Massachusetts for Nova Scotia, marrying into an influential family in 1738. His son had reversed the trend, leaving Nova Scotia for Eastport, Maine, where Israel was born in 1813. Keeping up the family tradition, Andrews was to flit between the States and the Provinces with great regularity during his career with the State Department.⁶¹ Appointed Consul to St John in 1843, he had little in common with those Consuls who saw their posts as lucrative rewards for political services and who were determined to keep their correspondence with the State Department down to a minimum.

Instead of simply sending quarterly trading statistics, as required, Andrews filled his letters with accounts of the commercial and political state of the Provinces and showed his initiative by trying to win favourable deals for his government. Indeed, his activities as a 'Mr Fixit' seemed to be directed mainly towards strengthening links between the States and the Provinces. In 1846, by then an experienced Consul, he tried to exploit the cross-border tension of the Oregon Crisis to secure for American fishermen the right to work the waters guaranteed to the Colonists. Though unsuccessful in his efforts, he had no doubts as to the twin advantages such an agreement would bring: "it would greatly add to the value of our Colonial trade", he told Secretary of State James Buchanan, "and remove many barriers to a closer union between the United States and the Colonies." Similarly, in March 1848 he travelled up the St John River to New Brunswick's capital, Fredericton, as the successful representative of several American parties who wanted to build a telegraph line from Halifax, Nova Scotia to Calais, Maine. But the most striking characteristic of his record as an official representative of the State Department was his interest in and support for the annexation of British North America to the United States. As early as 1846 he was convinced that the loyalty of New Brunswick was in steady decline. At the height of the Oregon Crisis, when knowledge of Britain's strength in North America was vital to Buchanan, Andrews wrote assuringly:

If a war should unfortunately take place between the Governments of the United States and Great Britain, the people of this Colony would at the commencement undoubtedly bravely support the power of the Mother Country - but if the war should continue for a few years, & the Provincials should feel their share of the contest and be heavily assessed for the munitions of war &c &c I think they would change their flag and never return to its

By the summer, with the war clouds long since dispersed, Andrews was still convinced that in a few years New Brunswick would be peacefully annexed to the United States. Replacing the cost of war as the spur was the 1842 Treaty of Washington. This, he claimed, had not only solved the border dispute between Maine and New Brunswick, but had also opened the Province up to Americanising influences. When two years later the added pressure of a recession was beginning to test colonial loyalties, Andrews' confidence knew no bounds. In March 1848 he announced to the State Department that he would not be surprised "if the question of Annexation to the United States were to assume definite shape at the next general election." By then he had ceased to be a disinterested observer for he had made clear to his employers where he stood on this question. In the New Year he proclaimed:

I shall feel gratified to see such a measure adopted that will produce such grand results to our country and surely lead to the prostration of foreign rule in this continent.⁶³

Nearly a year later, as British North America became more restless, he was again unreserved in his praise of annexation. It would, he asserted, "contribute so much to the wealth and grandeur of the United States of America."⁶⁴ This, then, was the man Taylor and Clayton picked to represent the United States in British North America during the Annexation Crisis.

Under Clayton, Andrews' views showed no sign of mellowing; and this seemed to suit the Secretary of State. In June 1849 - just before his appointment as Special Agent - Andrews served as Clayton's unofficial adviser during the visit to Washington, DC of

Canada's William Hamilton Merritt.⁶⁵ This senior Canadian politician had been sent by Elgin "to aid Mr Crampton in his exertions to obtain reciprocity."⁶⁶ Throughout the fitful negotiations - marked by eagerness on Merritt's part and indifference on the Americans' - Clayton made sure that Andrews got copies of all the correspondence that passed between him and the British. Though operating in the background, Andrews seems to have used his knowledge of both British North America and the White House's opinions to shape Clayton's course of action. Near the end of Merritt's visit, Andrews wrote:

This question has a two fold aspect - commercial and political - without regard to political considerations we might properly admit the agricultural productions of Canada free of duty in exchange for the fisheries - but considering the political agitations of the Provinces it is unwise to enter with much zeal into any commercial arrangements - These agitations are aggravated by commercial embarrassments of the Provinces - and if we entertain the idea of annexation it is no part of our business to alleviate their condition. Our policy for the present is, a "Masterly inactivity" or a negotiation judiciously protracted.⁶⁷

Presented with the best terms Canada could then have offered, Clayton followed Andrews' advice. On the same day, he wrote to Crampton:

The President declines to decide any question in relation to the matters upon which we conversed this morning, until the British Government shall have clothed their Minister with powers to treat of those matters.⁶⁸

Merritt got a similar curt message.⁶⁹ No matter how the Secretary of State dressed up his actions, their effect was clear. Thanks to the difficulties of transatlantic communications, Clayton was delaying the progress of Reciprocity by at least six weeks. Knowing full well that economic hardship - which Reciprocity could

alleviate - was fuelling the Colonial annexation movement, he had opted for a "negotiation judiciously protracted."

Any doubts whether this meant Clayton was "entertaining the idea of annexation" were speedily removed by administration newspapers. Three days after Clayton had refused to deal with Merritt, the Boston Globe declared itself for Annexation. It argued that if Reciprocity failed, the Provinces would inevitably annex themselves to the Union. This, the paper maintained, was a desirable development. Hence, it declared:

we oppose, all projects for reciprocal free trade, on this ground alone. We think the administration has had its thoughts directed to this view of the subject, and we have reason to believe it will pursue a line of policy in harmony therewith.⁷⁰

Of course, this paper may not have been reflecting the views of the administration it professed to support. Instead of seeking to foster annexationism, Clayton may have denied the Canadians Reciprocity for several pressing reasons. The Colonists may not have been, in his judgement, offering enough concessions to persuade him to abandon his party's traditional support for the protective tariff. But the conduct of Andrews, and Clayton's continuing support for him, give the lie to this view.

Andrews' actions while Special Agent are particularly instructive because of the very vague nature of his orders. When Clayton and Taylor sent him back north in July 1849, his written instructions ranged from specific requests for information to cryptic references to conversations behind closed doors. With Canada pursuing a lively interest in Reciprocity, Andrews not surprisingly had to answer fifteen questions which sought detailed



economic statistics concerning the industries, economies and commerce of all the Colonies. But his mission was not solely economic. Clayton also asked him to keep the State Department informed about:

the history, conditions and future prospects of these Colonies, especially in connection with their present and prospective relations, commercial and political, with the United States.

Yet there were no specific political instructions, no list of jobs to do or facts to find. All Clayton would say was that:

On this subject I have had full and frequent conversations with you, in which I have explained the views of the United States, in reference to the neighboring Colonies, and the particular information which we desire to obtain through your instrumentality.

Why the secrecy? Quite simply, the American Government did not want to put down on paper that it was interested in the political condition of annexationist British North America. After all, as Clayton admitted in his instructions to Andrews, "The duty is a delicate and important one."⁷¹

Once Andrews began sending his lengthy despatches from the Provinces, it was obvious why his agency was so delicate. He had been sent, in part, to learn the strength of the annexation movement. It was clearly a job he enjoyed. His letters were full of bold predictions that Annexation was imminent, especially if the Reciprocity initiatives failed.⁷² His enthusiasm for admitting Canada - and her sisters - to the Union was also undimmed. In August 1849, only two months after Clayton had briefed him on what was acceptable to the United States, Andrews wrote expansively in an official despatch of "the great and important subject annexation, which when consummated will be considered the great

event of the age, relative to continental interests."⁷³ Shaping his views was regular contact with the Annexationist leaders. Later, when trying to secure payment for his work from the State Department, he claimed never to have got involved in their activities⁷⁴, but the evidence suggests that he was more than a passive observer. In New Brunswick, he had been in contact with the annexationists since at least March 1848 and while a special agent he not only met frequently with the Montreal activists, but also became a trusted contact. Three months into his mission, he reported from the chaotic Canadian capital:

I have had several private interviews with the leaders of the Annexation Movement and they beg of me to conjure you to protract the [Reciprocity] negotiations and finally refuse the terms offered by Great Britain.⁷⁵

A week later they enlarged on their message, using an argument which they clearly thought would appeal to both Andrews and the American Government. They urged the refusal of Reciprocity because "the passage of a law by Congress to that effect would annihilate them and indefinitely defer annexation."⁷⁶ These despatches followed soon after the appearance of the Montreal Manifesto, which also proved that Andrews had won the confidence of the annexationists. Though an official of a foreign government, he got a sneak preview of the Manifesto. More to the point, so did the State Department. Andrews repaid the faith of the annexationists by immediately travelling to Washington, carrying "a copy of the Annexation address which had not then been made public." If he had tried to keep aloof, then, he had clearly failed. Whatever he had told his contacts, they certainly knew who to give the Manifesto to if they wanted it to reach the American Government. Nor did Andrews disappoint them. On his arrival in Washington, he went

straight to Clayton and, in the course of a three-hour interview, read the Manifesto to his employer.⁷⁷ Clayton's response was unequivocal. Far from chastising his 'Consul' for aiding and abetting the annexationists, Clayton promptly packed Andrews off to Montreal.⁷⁸ The situation was hotting up, and he wanted Andrews at the heart of the furnace.

Throughout the winter, Andrews enjoyed Clayton's support, even after a November interview with Elgin which could easily have had a disastrous effect on Anglo-American relations. Having tracked Elgin down to Drummondville, between seething Montreal and the more loyal Quebec City, Andrews secured a private interview in his capacity as an American Consul. In it he could only have alarmed the Governor-General. The American Government, Andrews told Elgin, could not view the Annexation movement with indifference and, as a guide for its future conduct, he confidently referred him "to the history of half a century." Lest Elgin should forget the activities of the American Government and its citizens in that period, Andrews gave him a blunt reminder. The United States, he said, would face "the difficulty of maintaining a strict neutrality and keeping our people quiet if measures were pushed to extremities by the Government or the Annexationists." From Elgin's point of view, matters could hardly have been worse. But Andrews' message had a sharper sting in its tail. In his narrative to Clayton, the Special Agent added:

Nor did I hesitate to inform his Lordship, as a proof of my sincerity and candor that I had taken the liberty to give the leaders of the Annexation Movement in Montreal the same advice.⁷⁹

In short, Andrews admitted to Elgin that he, an American official,

had been meddling in Canadian politics. He had mixed with and given verbal encouragement to the leaders of a movement which threatened the very foundations of the Canadian government and the Empire. Andrews had more or less told the Montreal Annexationists - who had turned the Canadian capital into a no-go area for Elgin - that if they forced repressive action from the Imperial authorities, American support was likely. They therefore had no incentive to pursue a moderate course. Instead, they - and Elgin - had every reason to expect a positive response from the United States should annexationism ever fully mature.

In telling Elgin this, Andrews clearly did not go beyond his brief. Instead of being recalled to Washington where he could do no harm, he was left to continue his mission. What, then, were Clayton and Taylor hoping to achieve either through Andrews or from the Annexation Crisis? It is almost certain that they did not have a carefully thought-out policy. Instead, in the time-honoured tradition of their predecessors, they simply reacted to the opportunities and dangers thrown up by developments in Canada. Shaping their reactions were the twin pressures of domestic politics and the need to stay on friendly terms with America's greatest trading partner, Great Britain. But Clayton and Taylor had one other obligation: protecting the interests of their country. In 1849 this responsibility threatened to weigh heavily on them. For the first time since the formation of the Republic, Canada and her sisters personally demanded the attention of America's politicians. One year after Europe had been shaken by a series of revolutions, the Canadians looked to be heading towards their own revolution. If successful, they would have finished off

the work of Washington and Jefferson by ejecting the British Colonial masters once and for all from the New World. This alone guaranteed that any American government would take an interest. But this embryonic revolution north of the border was not a private function. Instead, the Americans had an open invitation to get involved. First, the majority of the activists were advocating - sincerely or otherwise - that Canada swap colonial status in the British Empire for statehood, and political maturity, in the United States' North American Empire. After decades of annexationist speeches - sincere or otherwise - by American politicians, the Colonists were offering an answer to the prayers of the expansionists south of the border. Secondly, the economic hardship which most acknowledged to be at the root of the agitation meant there was an alternative to annexation: reciprocal free trade between the Colonists and the United States. At first glance, it seemed as though the United States could not lose. Either they would acquire British North America, and thus remove the one land-based strategic threat still posed by the Old World, or they could expand economically across the whole of North America. But successive American Governments had operated in blissful ignorance of British North America, and developments in the Provinces were rapidly dating the information they already possessed. It was essential, if these golden opportunities were not to be lost, that accurate information be secured - and swiftly. Hence, Andrews' instructions on his appointment as Special Agent were in some ways honest: Clayton did want this acknowledged authority on British North America to provide him with facts about the Colonies. Only then could the Government formulate a policy towards the Provinces. As Andrews himself put it:

It is a law of prudence, in this case at least, that we should know what others will do, and what we can do ourselves before we decide on important matters, or to advise those we serve.⁸⁰

Without question, Canadian matters were important. Putting aside the prospect of acquiring all of British North America for the Union, the interest of the Colonies in free trade with the States raised various possibilities. If the Secretary of State - or Congress - were to conclude the most favourable deal, they needed detailed information on what the Colonies were willing to offer in return for Reciprocity. First, they needed to know whether only Canada was interested or whether all the Colonies could be brought in. Second, what were the Colonies willing to discuss? Were the Maritimes' Fisheries or the free navigation of the St Lawrence available? If so, what would be the value of these concessions to the United States? And were there any attributes of the Colonies which either threatened the Republic, like their coal or ship-building industries, or of which the Americans were ignorant? These, and countless other questions, had to be answered before any deal on Reciprocity could be considered. Thus, Andrews had extensive instructions relating to the economic state of the Colonies and, though Canada was the only province involved in any Reciprocity negotiations when he was appointed, he was told to study each Colony in turn. Clayton obviously wanted to exploit the Colonial disquiet to get as much as possible out of British North America in any Reciprocity deal.

But Clayton was after more than just economic information. Andrews had had detailed conversations with both the Secretary of State and the President on the political condition of British North

America and, when he headed north in July 1849, he knew precisely what their views were on annexationism and what information they were seeking. His enthusiastic accounts of the blooming annexationist flower, his covetous description of the Colonies and his close links with the annexationists give a strong indication as to the attitude of Clayton and Taylor to the prospect of acquiring British North America. Yet, according to traditional accounts, sectional strife within the Republic was getting so fierce that it would have been suicidal even to contemplate annexing the vast acreage of British North American free-soil. This, however, may be reading history backwards. Though Clayton and Taylor knew they had to proceed carefully with any expansionist plans, in 1849 the full fury of sectionalism had yet to be released. Unquestionably tension was building up, but no-one knew just how divisive the 1850 Compromise debates were going to be; and though talk of secession occasionally afflicted parts of the south, such talk was far from new and, in the past, it had come to nothing. Moreover, there were ways of annexing British North America without upsetting the precarious sectional balance. The most obvious was to bring the free-soil provinces in at the same time as slave territory. By expanding the Slave Power and the free states at the same rate, the Republic could reasonably be expected to expand safely as a nation. It may well be, therefore, that Benjamin E Green's mission to purchase Cuba and Andrews' mission to Canada were part of a speculative, but balanced, policy of expansion. Certainly, one day before Andrews received his official appointment as a Special Agent - by which time he had been working unofficially in this capacity for some weeks - Green was writing from Havana harbour that:

If I can believe what I hear 599,999 out of the

100000 (sic) inhabitants of Cuba are eager for annexation to the U.S. and only want a favourable opportunity to move it.⁸¹

About the same time both the Democrat and Whig press were carrying articles supporting the annexation together of both Cuba and Canada. The New York Herald, an administration paper, took the lead, claiming that the Cabinet was in favour of this balanced expansion. The response of the Washington Union, a Democrat organ, was confused. It seemed willing to accept the principle of simultaneous expansion to the north and south, but had strong political objections to its being carried out under the Whigs. At the proper time and in the proper manner, it wrote,

both Cuba and the British Colonies ... will ultimately be annexed to the ... Union. But these great measures will be affected by the democratic party and a democratic administration and not by the Whigs.⁸²

What the Democrats seemed to resent was that Clayton and Taylor were usurping their role as the masters of national expansion. But the principle of admitting Cuba and Canada at roughly the same time seemed quite acceptable.

Clearly, though, the chances of annexing two entirely separate territories at the same time - and without alienating their Spanish and British masters - were slim. Yet the annexation of Canada did not have to be ruled out. Put before Clayton in this period were other methods of admitting all or part of British North America to the Union which would not upset the sectional balance. One such scheme came inadvertently from the pen of the distinguished British MP, Edward Ellice. When he wrote to his American friend August Davis in April 1849, this close contact of Prime Minister Lord John Russell and Foreign Secretary Palmerston presumably thought his

predictions about the outcome of the Annexation Movement would be treated in confidence. As an American patriot, though, Davis wasted no time in sending a copy of the letter to Clayton. From it Clayton learned that the British believed war inevitable in Europe as a result of the revolutionary movements of the previous year, that the Canadians seemed set on leaving the Empire, and that the British Government would be "much obliged to them" for this. Their joining the United States or forming an independent republic would "allow us to withdraw from an unprofitable, & untenable position, we have no interest in the present connexion." Annexation was the obvious course, wrote Ellice, because it would end the conflict of the races in Canada. Moreover, he believed it could be achieved without causing any problems in the United States. There is, he claimed,

nothing so easy as the course to be taken.
Unite the part opposite to Main (sic), to the
state of Main (sic) - that opposite Vermont, to
Vermont - & the country from the River Chambley
to the Upper Province Line, including the
Island & Port of Montreal, to New York - The
upper Province would make a separate & a
homogenous (sic) state.⁸³

Though the admission of Upper Canada - modern Ontario - as a separate state would have upset the sectional balance, Clayton could see that all of British North America could be brought into the republican fold without creating new states. All he had to do was to join each Province to an existing state. Such a scheme might well have appeared as fanciful; but the seeds of the idea were there, and this meant that the annexation of any of the British Provinces did not have to be rejected out of hand. Moreover, when Ellice's letter is added to Taylor's attempts to buy Cuba, secure a naval base in the Caribbean and to woo the states of Central America, one thing is clear: there was no shortage of

options which made annexing British North America a possibility. Indeed, as long as Britain appeared willing to let the Provinces follow their own destiny and as long as the United States had a chance of acquiring southern territory, Clayton was interested in keeping in touch with British North America's annexation movement. And as long as this was the case, the professional relationship between Andrews and Clayton prospered.

By the spring of 1850, though, the political climate was changing. At the centre of American domestic politics and American foreign policy, it was Clayton who adapted the quicker. And, as the warm weather brought winter's thaw, Clayton began to grow cold towards his Special Agent. Andrews first noticed this transformation on March 17, when he arrived in Washington with his long-awaited report on the Provinces. Accustomed to free access to Clayton, he found the doors of the State Department's most senior office effectively closed to him. On my arrival, wrote Andrews, a year later,

I immediately waited on Mr Clayton and said I am ready with my report - He said to me he wanted to have a full Conference about the whole subject, to have the report explained to him &c &c - and that he would name a ... time for the interview. From that hour until May I called at the Department nearly every day but could not succeed in getting Mr Clayton to give me a hearing to name a day when he would take the report.

It was not until the arrival of the Colonial delegates in the capital on May 29 to press for Reciprocity that Clayton renewed his interest in Andrews - but not in his report. In the end, Clayton never actually had the report 'explained' to him. The closest Andrews got to doing this was in late June - three months after he returned to Washington - but Clayton abandoned the interview after

twenty minutes because of an 'interruption'.⁸⁴ The Secretary of State's determination to distance himself from Andrews even extended to the settling of the bills he had incurred as Special Agent. This problem arose in July 1850, by which time Taylor had died and Vice-President Millard Fillmore had moved into the White House. Sending Fillmore a copy of Andrews' report, Clayton tried to shift responsibility for paying Andrews to the Treasury Department, for whom the Special Agent had also worked. Clearly, if the State Department did not have to pay Andrews, then the links between him and Clayton were reduced. But Clayton went further. Though he praised the report, he said: "there is much unnecessary matter embraced in it."⁸⁵ Faced with a new President, Clayton was aware that much of the work he had asked Andrews to do could be embarrassing to the American Government and, as important in his eyes, to his own political reputation. He therefore suggested that in producing the more controversial aspects of his report, Andrews had exceeded his orders. In claiming this, Clayton was of course helped by the fact that he had never given Andrews written instructions about the political purpose of his mission. Instead, these instructions had all been verbal. But it was not simply the installation of a new President which had made Clayton so cautious: he had been distancing himself from Andrews for at least four months, since well before Zachary Taylor's death.

Clayton's newly developed caution about Andrews is easy to understand. By the early spring, the Annexation Movement had ceased to be an imperial squabble promising rich pickings for the United States. Rather it loomed more as a minefield in both America's domestic and diplomatic policy. In the first place, the

true strength of the Annexation Movement had become clear. Put simply, it was a minority movement riddled with factions. Despite Andrews' enthusiasm - which by March 1850 must have seem misguided to Clayton - the Annexation Manifesto had not heralded the final overthrow of British rule. On the contrary: for the men who published and signed the Manifesto, it represented the last, desperate roll of a dice which was already loaded against them. In a predominantly loyal colony, Her Majesty's subjects did not rise up. Instead, the annexationists and their American friends were forced to watch as the Loyalists and the British took centre stage. After Elgin's triumphal tour round Upper Canada, the elected government - which enjoyed a three-to-one majority - declared that the Annexationists were their political enemies. And a week after the Manifesto, the Montreal loyalists issued their own declaration of support for the Imperial connection.⁸⁶ When it came to the crunch, the Annexationists had failed to inspire support across the whole of Canada, and the loyalists remained in firm control. Giving them full support was the British Government, with its policy of dismissing annexationists from office and demonstrating its commitment to British North America. These acts, though intended largely for Canadian consumption, also had another audience in mind: the United States. Once Elgin had published Her Majesty's proclamation against the Movement⁸⁷, the American Government knew that Britain would not surrender Canada without a struggle. Just as important, it also knew that most Canadians did not want a change of sovereignty. Any attempt to comply with the wishes of the annexationists, therefore, was unlikely to succeed; moreover, it would cause serious friction with London, if not war.

By the spring of 1850, another crucial influence was working against annexing Canada: domestic sectionalism. When Congress met in December 1849, it took three weeks and 63 ballots just to elect the speaker of the House of Representatives⁸⁸; and for the next few months there was little let-up in the sectional feuding. At the same time came threats from southern politicians of 'disunion' should slavery be excluded from the Mexican territories or should the capital's slave trade be abolished.⁸⁹ Once more, the stage was set for a classic compromise agreement to preserve the union, but it would take several months to secure this fairly inadequate agreement. Though it was a temporary success in that it brought tranquility to the States⁹⁰, the furious, bitter debates which preceded the settlement created wounds in the nation's unity which all knew would be slow to heal. The significance of all this for the annexation crisis was twofold. First, when the annexationists were crying out for attention, the Americans were so deeply and desperately wrapped up in their own domestic squabbles as to be past caring about what their northern neighbours wanted. Secondly, the source of all the agitation, the dagger at the heart of the union, was the new territory acquired as a result of the war with Mexico. Before the war, the balance between the two sections at least allowed the South to believe that it had control of its own destiny. As long as this balance was maintained, it could believe that slavery, and other economic interests and state's rights, were reasonably safe. But as soon as the status of slavery in the new territories became subject for debate, it raised the possibility of the sectional scales being tipped in favour of the free states. As a result, tension was bound to soar within the Union. Predictably, this spelled doom for the cause of the annexationists. True,

British North America could have been admitted without upsetting the sectional balance. Yet, by the spring of 1850 these options had effectively disappeared. Taylor's attempts to buy Cuba had drawn a blank, and he himself had prevented American adventurers from securing the island by less than legal means. With Britain and the States meeting head on in Central America, there could be no safe annexation of any Central American state as a counter-balance to Canada. That left the possibility hinted at by Edward Ellice - admitting British North America to the Republic without creating any new free States. But by the spring of 1850 the merest hint of annexing these Provinces without Southern equivalents would have driven the already paranoid South into a frenzy. This strife, and the failure of the 'Cuban option', did not just mean that America's interest in annexing British North America had to cease. It also meant that it would have been dangerous for the future of both Clayton and the States if the shadier side of Andrews' mission became linked with the Government. So it was that, with the horribly misnamed "Compromise" debates still raging, Clayton chose to distance himself from the man to whom he had previously granted such easy access.

Andrews has justifiably been portrayed as a fairly cynical operator, ready to serve any Government that would pay him⁹¹, but in John M Clayton he appears to have more than met his match. Although the Secretary of State unquestionably tried to keep his distance from Andrews in the spring of 1850, this did not mean that the Special Agent had ceased to be useful. He and Canada remained important, even though by then the focus of Clayton's attention lay not in the north, but in Central America. The reason for this

switch in outlook was twofold. The first and most complex reason lay in the desire of the United States for speedier communications with its newly acquired west coast. This quest - and the prospect of large profits - had spawned several exotically-named companies, all hoping to build railroads or canals across the Central American isthmus. The most impressive scheme of all proposed using the existing waterways of modern-day Nicaragua and Costa Rica to link the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Its intention was to make full use of the San Juan River and Lake Nicaragua to make it possible to sail from the Caribbean to the Pacific in days rather than weeks. Here the problems began. Had the United States Government been dealing solely with native governments, there would have been trouble enough; but Britain also had an interest, and a say, in these Central American developments. Through a protectorate of dubious validity over the Mosquito Indians, the British had a claim to the eastern end of the proposed canal, the mouth of the San Juan River. Here there was a settlement which, in a naming controversy similar to that over the Malvinas/Falklands, the Americans called San Juan del Norte and the British referred to as Greytown. As a result, the British appeared as a major barrier to the construction of the canal, which was not surprising: they always seemed to be a barrier to American growth, be it territorial or commercial. The hostility towards Britain arising from this was very closely related to the suspicions widely held during the Texas annexation debates and the Mexican War that Britain was trying to prevent American expansion to the south and west. Many assumed that Britain's activities with the Mosquito Indians were a continuation of that policy. Britain hoped, the argument ran, to cause America to lose California and Oregon by preventing the canal or railroad

from being built. And, as always happened when British activities in the New World came up for debate, there was added indignation because of Britain's repeated violations of the Monroe Doctrine, not alleviated by Britain's possession of parts of Belize, then known as British Honduras. A further complication was that neither Government seemed able to control its citizens and representatives in the region.⁹² The friction between the two countries demanded settlement before either government or one of its irresponsible citizens provoked a conflict in the region.

As the situation became increasingly ominous, Clayton got the opportunity he had been seeking for a peaceful solution. In December 1850 Washington witnessed the arrival of Sir Henry Lytton Bulwer. The new British Minister to the United States, Bulwer was senior to the Charge d'Affaires, Crampton, both socially and professionally. Sensing that at last he had someone of sufficient rank to deal with, Clayton pressurised Bulwer about Central America from the start of his mission.⁹³ Significantly, Bulwer came out to the United States armed with detailed instructions about Reciprocity, and securing this agreement was seen as one of his most pressing tasks.⁹⁴ Moreover, the Americans had correctly anticipated this. In November 1849 Abbott Lawrence told Clayton from London: "Sir Henry Bulwer will soon be with you - What his instructions are upon Mosquito I know not - I think his first object will be to carry the Canadian reciprocity bill through Congress." As if he needed to, he added: "This Government is very anxious we should have free trade with their Provinces."⁹⁵ Yet for the first four months of his tour of duty in Washington, Bulwer's dealings with Clayton were almost entirely devoted to Central

American affairs. In fact, the Secretary of State only relaxed his pressure after the signing of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty in April 1850.⁹⁶ It was in the weeks preceding the signing of this treaty that Clayton suddenly started to avoid Andrews. The reason would seem to be obvious. When Andrews arrived in Washington in March, Clayton's negotiations with Bulwer had reached a very delicate stage. To have been linked with so overt an annexationist might well have been the death knell of any agreement over Central America. And if these negotiations failed, Clayton faced the possibility of sharing the responsibility for either losing California or for creating the conditions for a third Anglo-American war. From being an asset, Andrews had become something of a liability. As Clayton was to tell President Fillmore four months later: "the existence of such an agency should not be made known to the British Government."⁹⁷ Yet Clayton was hypocritical. In a way, he wished to enjoy the best of both worlds. He wanted to avoid any association with Andrews which could have threatened his negotiations with Bulwer; but at the same time he felt that the agitation in Canada was an invaluable weapon in those negotiations. Moreover, without the work of Israel de Wolf Andrews, he was unable to know precisely how powerful that weapon was. Such views received an airing in the unsigned, undated memorandum, written in Clayton's handwriting, entitled "Command of the Isthmus." This memorandum stressed the importance of the area to the future of the United States' Pacific possessions, and the threat posed by Great Britain. Having considered annexing Central America, Clayton talks of playing England at her own game by using tenuous treaties advantageous to the States. By so doing, he wrote, the United States would:

acquire that foothold on two of the most important points of the Isthmus which the great interests of the Republic, her present necessities & future strength & prosperity, require that we should immediately gain for ever and keep.

But he saved the most telling comment until last. "Finally," he concluded,

this is the moment above all others in which to wage & end this rivalry with England. The awkward state of things in Canada will render her more than ordinarily cautious and patient under disappointment.⁹⁸

The Canadian Annexation Movement, then, was a God-send to Clayton. Under normal circumstances, the United States was strategically vulnerable to the Royal Navy and diplomatically her hands were tied by America's economic dependence on Great Britain. But in 1849 Britain's Achilles Heel was there for all to see, and she lay right next door to the United States. For this reason, it was essential that Clayton knew the precise strength of the Annexation Movement; and even when admitting Canada to the Union had proved to be only a fleeting possibility, Clayton knew it was against his interests to remove the economic causes which had given birth to the agitation. Thus, he refused to grant Reciprocity, both when Merritt came cap in hand to Washington on behalf of the Canadians and when Bulwer came across the Atlantic armed with British instructions specifically expected to produce an accord. Indeed, when Bulwer arrived, Clayton effectively washed his hands of the measure, leaving it as a matter for Congress to vote on. This left Bulwer and Crampton with the impossible task of having to lobby not a handful of men - Clayton and his Cabinet colleagues - but the several bickering factions in the House of Representatives and the Senate, where the Government was in the minority.

Clayton's sole contribution to the British efforts was to promise not to oppose any Reciprocity Bill that they might secure.⁹⁹ But in his official dealings with Bulwer, the Secretary of State chose to ignore British North America and concentrate on Central America. True, other factors like the Whigs' traditional support for the protective tariff made reaching a Reciprocity agreement less than easy for the Taylor administration, but this ideological commitment worked in Clayton's favour. Riven internally, Canada made Britain vulnerable and the United States of America diplomatically stronger than usual. And when it came to negotiating over Anglo-American tension in Central America, Clayton chose to exploit this trump card to the full.

CHAPTER THREE - 1849: CANADA LOOKS SOUTH

- 1 Elgin to Grey, February 5, 1848, EGP, I, 123.
- 2 Elgin to Grey, November 16, 1848, EGP, I, 256.
- 3 Elgin to Grey, April 30, June 2, 1849, EGP, IV, 1461, 1473.
- 4 Elgin to Grey, May 28, 1849, EGP, I, 359; Elgin to Grey, January 14, 1850, EGP, II, 578; Elgin to Grey, May 30, 1849, EGP, IV, 1472-4.
- 5 Elgin to Grey, August 20, 1849, EGP, II, 449.
- 6 Montreal Annexation Manifesto, Montreal Gazette, October 11, 1849, enclosed in a Minute of Canada's Executive Council, December 1, 1849, EGP, IV, 1487-94.
- 7 Russell to Grey, August 3, 1849, GP.
- 8 Elgin to Grey, April 30, 1849, EGP, I, 350.
- 9 Elgin to Grey, May 18, 28, June 3, 1849, EGP, I, 351, 359, 363.
- 10 Russell to Grey, March 16, 1848, GP.
- 11 For example, in the Annexation Manifesto, EGP, IV, 1490: "... the Colonial policy of the Parent State, the avowals of her leading statesmen, the public sentiments of the Empire, present unmistakeable and significant indications of the appreciation of the Colonial connection. That it is the resolve of England to invest us with the attributes and compel us to assume the burdens of independence is no longer problematical."
- 12 Andrews to Buchanan, March 11, 1848, Despatches ... St John; cf Andrews to Clayton, August 29, 1849, Despatches ... Special Agents where Andrews refers to the "trouble, expense and anxiety it [Canada] has caused England - the difficulty she had experienced in governing it in a satisfactory manner to the Canadians...."
- 13 Washington Union, November 27, 1849: "It is also understood that the British government has intimated to the governor of Canada that no coercive measures will be adopted to prevent an annexation to the United States, if the popular will be decidedly in favor of that measure." Cf Washington Daily Republic, October 13, 1849, quoting from the Boston Transcript.
- 14 Elgin to Grey, November 15, 1849, EGP, II, 547: "We intend to dismiss the militia officers and magistrates who have taken part in these affairs and to deprive the two Q.C.s of their silk gowns." See also Minute of Canada's Executive Council, December 1, 1849, backing the dismissal of the Manifesto-signing office-holders, EGP, IV, 1486-7.

- 15 Despatch from the Colonial Secretary, January 9, 1850, enclosed in Elgin to Grey, February 11, 1850, EGP, II, 594-5.
- 16 For a typical description of Elgin's procession around the townships, see Hamilton Journal and Express, September 28, 1849, enclosed in Elgin to Grey, London, Canada West, October 4, 1849, EGP, II, 510-16. The success of Elgin's tour convinced him that the annexationists were becoming desperate men by the autumn of 1849. See Elgin to Grey, October 11, 1849, *Ibid.*, 519: "I am confident that the very favorable impression which I have produced in U[pper]. C[anada]. is the determining cause with the Montreal miscreants which induces them to adopt their present course". See also Elgin to Grey, September 30, 1849, *Ibid.*, 501.
- 17 Elgin to Grey, September 17, 1849, EGP, II, 471.
- 18 Elgin to Grey, March 14, 1849, EGP, I, 307.
- 19 Elgin to Grey, February 2, 1847, EGP, I, 9.
- 20 Elgin to Grey, April 26, 1847, EGP, I, 28.
- 21 Grey to Elgin, February 22, 1848, EGP, I, 120: "... you must accept such a Council as the newly elected Parl[iament] will support, & that however unwise as relates to the real interests of Canada their measures may be, they must be acquiesced in, until it shall pretty clearly appear that public opinion will support a resistance to them". See also Elgin to Grey, May 27, 1847, *Ibid.*, 45.
- 22 Elgin to Grey, October 8, 1852, EGP, III, 1047; Elgin to Grey, March 17, February 5, 1848, EGP, I, 136, 123.
- 23 Elgin to Grey, May 18, 1847, EGP, I, 39.
- 24 Elgin to Grey, August 16, 1848, EGP, I, 224.
- 25 Elgin to Grey, October 19, 1848, EGP, I, 250.
- 26 Gilbert Norman Tucker, The Canadian Commercial Revolution, 1845-1851, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1936), especially 208-14.
- 27 Elgin to Grey, January 14, 1850, EGP, II, 579-80.
- 28 Elgin to Grey, October 14, 1849, EGP, II, 522.
- 29 Toronto Examiner, December 26, 1849, in Cephas D Allin and George M Jones, Annexation, Preferential Trade and Reciprocity, (Westport, Connecticut, Greenwood Press, 1971), 227-8. The British press, too, was generally hostile to the Canadian Tories and the Annexationists, portraying them as selfish politicians striving to preserve their oligarchy. The visit to London of leading Tory Sir Allan MacNab only inflamed these views. See Ged Martin, "The Canadian Rebellion Losses Bill of 1849 in British Politics", in The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, VI (1977), 8, 12.

- 30 S F Wise, "The Annexation Movement and its Effect on Canadian Opinion", in S F Wise and Robert Craig Brown, Canada Views the United States: Nineteenth Century Political Attitudes, (London, University of Washington Press, 1967); see also S F Wise, "Through the Lace Curtain, Canadian Views of American Democracy in the Pre-Civil War Period", in Canadian Association for American Studies, II (1968), 46-68.
- 31 The Montreal Pilot, September 1847, enclosed in Elgin to Grey, September 27 1847, Elgin to EGP, I, 70-72.
- 32 Elgin to Grey, October 25, 1848, EGP, I, 251.
- 33 Canadian Free Press, quoted in the Montreal Pilot, November 6, 1849, Allin & Jones, Annexation, Preferential Trade and Reciprocity, 231.
- 34 Annexation Manifesto, as quoted in the Montreal Gazette, October 11, 1849, EGP, IV, 1492-94. For an analysis of hostility to Catholics in Canada, see J R Miller, "Anti-Catholic Thought in Victorian Canada", in The Canadian Historical Review, 66 (1985), 474-494.
- 35 Elgin to Grey, July 30, 1849, EGP, II, 438.
- 36 Elgin to Grey, January 14, 1850, EGP, II, 580.
- 37 Anonymous undated American letter to Elgin which warns: "The importance of managing the Matters in Canada, So as not to influence the choice of Mr Cass,... cannot, I think, be overstated." Enclosed in Elgin to Grey, March 2, 1848, EGP, I, 127 ff.
- 38 Elgin to Crampton, April 5, 1849, Manning, Diplomatic Correspondence, IV, 262, n. 2; also in EP, A 398.
- 39 Crampton to Lord Palmerston, April 2, 1849, Palmerston Papers, British Museum.
- 40 Crampton to Palmerston, April 15, 1849, Palmerston Papers.
- 41 Crampton to Palmerston, July 23, 1849, Palmerston Papers.
- 42 Crampton to Elgin, May 18, 1849, EP, A 398.
- 43 Washington Daily Republic, July 11, 1849.
- 44 Elgin to Crampton, May 21, 1849, EP, A 398.
- 45 Crampton to Palmerston, August 20, 1849, Palmerston Papers.
- 46 Crampton to Elgin, December 18, 1848, EP, A 398.
- 47 Ben E. Green to Clayton, Havana Harbour, July 7, 1849, Clayton Papers, LC. For Green's biographical details, see John E Findling, Dictionary of American Diplomatic History, (Westport, Connecticut, Greenwood Press, 1980) 195-6.

- 48 T Butler King to Clayton, Camp on the American River, California, July 22, 1849, Clayton Papers, LC.
- 49 Beckles Wilson, Friendly Relations: A Narrative of Britain's Ministers and Ambassadors to America, 1791-1930, (London, Lovat Dickson & Thompson, 1935), 170.
- 50 Francisco Castellan, Nicaragua's Minister to Britain, to Bancroft, July 12, 1849, enclosed in Bancroft to Clayton, August 1849, Despatches ... US Ministers ... Great Britain. In the letter Castellan describes Britain's exploitation of his country. "This situation," he said, "which unfortunately is too manifest not to confess it frankly, has induced me to adopt the project of annexation of the States of Nicaragua, San Salvador and Honduras to the United States' Confederation, and we wish to work for its realization."
- 51 Bancroft to Clayton, August 1849, Despatches ... US Ministers ... Great Britain.
- 52 Memorandum entitled "Command of the Isthmus", Clayton Papers, LC.
- 53 Boston Courier, July 3, 1849, quoted in the Washington Daily Union, July 15, 1849.
- 54 General Winfield Scott's public letter from West Point, June 29, 1849, printed in the Washington Daily Union, July 15, 1849.
- 55 Crampton to Palmerston, July 23, 1849, Palmerston Papers.
- 56 B Hammatt Norton, President of the Boston 'Rough and Ready Association', to Clayton, January 12, 1848, Clayton Papers, LC.
- 57 Norton to Clayton, November 21, 1849, Despatches ... Pictou.
- 58 Abbott Lawrence to Clayton, London, October 26, 1849, Clayton Papers, LC. Also in Manning, Diplomatic Correspondence, IV, 313.
- 59 Lawrence to Clayton, Boston, September 11, 1849, Clayton Papers, LC.
- 60 Andrews to Webster, July 10, 1851, Despatches ... Special Agents.
- 61 William D Overman, "I D Andrews and Reciprocity in 1854: An Episode in Dollar Diplomacy", Canadian Historical Review, XV (1934), 248, n. 1.
- 62 Andrews to Buchanan, April 20, 1846, March 11, April 16, 1848, Despatches ... St John.
- 63 Andrews to Buchanan, July 6, 1846, March 11, January 15, 1848, Despatches ... St John.

- 64 Andrews to Buchanan, November 1, 1848, Miscellaneous ... Reciprocity.
- 65 Andrews to Webster, July 10, 1851, Despatches ... Special Agents.
- 66 Elgin to Grey, June 11, 1849, EGP, I, 370.
- 67 Andrews to Clayton, June 28, 1849, Despatches ... Special Agents.
- 68 Clayton to Crampton, June 29, 1849, Notes to Foreign Legations.
- 69 Clayton to William Hamilton Merritt, President of Canada's Executive Council, June 30, 1849, Despatches ... Special Agents.
- 70 Boston Courier, July 3, 1849, quoted in the Washington Daily Union, July 15, 1849.
- 71 Clayton to Andrews, July 6, 1849, Instructions ... Special Missions.
- 72 Andrews wrote of the annexation agitation: "The probable result - its nature and maturity - is what we want to know ... If the people were untrammelled they would ... decide for annexation." Andrews to Clayton, July 31, 1849, Despatches ... Special Agents. See Ibid., Andrews to Clayton, October 20, 1849: "I reported to the Government in 1848 and in June 1849 that these Colonies ... must have free trade with the United States or be annexed - every days experience proves the truth of my statements." See also Andrews to Clayton, February 9, 1850, Despatches ... Montreal: "... there is more sympathy with the United States, which I again state is steadily and rapidly advancing, than there is between Colony and Colony or between the Colonies generally and Great Britain ... unless a reciprocal arrangement is matured with the United States, the excitement ... will unquestionably extend throughout all of the Colonies and eventually Control any power of resistance possessed by the Imperial or the Canadian Governments."
- 73 Andrews to Clayton, August 29, 1849, Despatches ... Special Agents.
- 74 Andrews to Webster, July 10, 1851, Despatches ... Special Agents.
- 75 Andrews to Buchanan, March 11, 1848, Despatches ... St John. Andrews to Clayton, October 20, 1849, Despatches ... Special Agents.
- 76 Andrews to Clayton, October 26, 1849, Clayton Papers, LC.
- 77 Andrews to Webster, July 10, 1851, Despatches ... Special Agents.

- 78 President Zachary Taylor to Andrews, October 10, 1849, Despatches ... Special Agents: Taylor authorises "a further advance of Four Hundred dollars" for Andrews. Andrews to Clayton, October 20, 1849, Ibid.: Andrews is already back in Montreal, at the heart of the annexationist agitation. Andrews to Webster, July 10, 1851, Ibid.: Andrews claims that Clayton sent him back to Canada "immediately", even though Andrews had warned of a danger that the US Government could be "compromised" through its unofficial links with him.
- 79 Andrews to Clayton, November 20, 1849, Despatches ... Special Agents. Elgin to Grey, November 22, 1849, EGP, II, 747-54.
- 80 Andrews to Clayton, August 29, 1849, Despatches ... Special Agents. Andrews to Clayton, February 9, 1850, Despatches ... Montreal: "... it is proper that our Government should fully understand before committing itself to any decided course of action"
- 81 Ben E Green to Clayton, July 7, 1849, Clayton Papers, LC.
- 82 Washington Daily Union, July 15, 1849.
- 83 Edward Ellice to August Davis, April 13, 1849, enclosed in Davis to Clayton, April 30, 1849, Clayton Papers, LC.
- 84 Andrews to Webster, July 10, 1851, Despatches ... Special Agents.
- 85 Clayton to President Millard Fillmore, July 20, 1850, Clayton Papers, LC.
- 86 Allin & Jones, Annexation, Preferential Trade and Reciprocity, 144-6.
- 87 Despatch from the Colonial Secretary, January 9, 1850, EGP, II, 594 ff.
- 88 Holman Hamilton, Prologue to Conflict: The Crisis and Compromise of 1850, (New York, W W Norton & Co., 1964), 42.
- 89 Ibid., 44-5.
- 90 Ibid., 184.
- 91 See Overman in Canadian Historical Review, XV, (September, 1934), 248 ff. T H Le Duc, Canadian Historical Review, XV, (1934), 438: "Other incidents in Andrews' picturesque career give the impression that he was essentially an opportunist, willing to advocate whatever cause his current employer might demand." Donald Masters, "A Further Word on I D Andrews and the Reciprocity Treaty of 1854", Canadian Historical Review, XVII, (1936), 159 ff.
- 92 Bourne, Balance of Power, 176 ff. See also Sir Henry Lytton Bulwer to Clayton, February 7, 1850, British Legation, in which Bulwer criticises the unauthorised actions in Central

America of Britain's representative Chatfield and the United States' Squiers. "It would be highly desirable," he said, "if the Agents of both Governments were imbued with a knowledge of the real policy of the Cabinets of Washington and St. James's, so that instead of acting in opposition to each other on account of jealousies and suspicions respecting projects which their Governments disavow, they acted in unity and harmony together."

- 93 Clayton's correspondence with Bulwer in the first six months of Bulwer's mission was dominated by Central American affairs: see Clayton-Bulwer correspondence in Foreign Legations, British Legation and Clayton Papers, LC.
- 94 Palmerston to Bulwer, November 1, 1849, enclosed in Grey to Elgin, November 17, 1849, EGP, IV, 1480 ff.
- 95 Lawrence to Clayton, November 23, 1849, Manning, Diplomatic Correspondence, IV, 322.
- 96 Clayton to Bulwer, April 19, June 28, 1850, Foreign Legations. See also Clayton to Bulwer, April 23, 1850, Clayton Papers, LC: Clayton said of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty "We have my dear sir worked a revolution." But even after this moment, Central American and Caribbean affairs figure prominently in their correspondence.
- 97 Clayton to Fillmore, July 20, 1850, Despatches ... Special Agents.
- 98 Memorandum entitled "Command of the Isthmus", Clayton Papers, LC.
- 99 Bulwer to Elgin, January 9, 1850, EP, A 399.

CHAPTER FOUR
THE CLASH OVER THE FISHERIES

For the next two years - from April 1850 to the summer of 1852 - Anglo-American relations enjoyed relative calm. Yet to the colonists who continued to press the United States for Reciprocity, these years were more like the doldrums. Despite their repeated trips to Washington, despite the efforts of the British officials in North America, Reciprocity remained as elusive as ever. By November 1851, these endeavours had stuttered to a halt when John F Crampton, again left behind as Charge d'Affaires after Sir Henry Lytton Bulwer's return to Europe, learned that only through large-scale bribery could Britain hope to secure the measure.¹ However, this non-descript period, marked by returning prosperity in British North America, was in reality the lull before yet another transatlantic storm. When it came, the tempest was like the one most feared by the fishermen at the centre of the dispute. It crept up on the United States unnoticed and without warning. By the time the republic had woken up to what was going on, it had lost control, and could only drift along, reacting to whatever came its way. After years of vulnerability because of her Colonies, Britain had seized the initiative - and was using British North America to do so.

In the ports of New England, especially in Massachusetts and Maine, the early summer of 1852 was much like any other. Keeping up a tradition which was older than the republic, vast fleets of American fishermen were preparing to work the rich fishing banks off the Maritime Colonies, a business employing between 2,500 and

3,000 American fishing vessels and about 27,500 men.² Braving the perils of icebergs and Labrador fogs, each of these vessels made up to three trips during the short summer season, landing "some thousands of valuable cargoes ... in the United States, adding largely to the wealth and prosperity of the people by the riches thus gathered from the deep."³ When the fishermen sailed north, they did so in great numbers, sometimes at great cost. Charged with caring for the American citizens shipwrecked on Prince Edward Island after a November storm in 1851, the US Consul to Pictou, Nova Scotia, B Hammatt Norton, found 100 ships had run aground from a fleet of not less than 900 vessels.⁴ By this time, moreover, the Americans were heading north in larger numbers than before as the fishing grounds off their own coasts were being exhausted.⁵ Their voyages in pursuit of cod and mackerel took them along the coasts and into the ports of Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Newfoundland. But in carrying out this dangerous industry, they were not alone. Though colonial fishermen occasionally worked on board American ships, the New Englanders were more likely to find themselves competing against the mariners of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Newfoundland for the richest pickings. Here the Colonists had the advantage. Apart from having home ports much closer to the fishing grounds, the Anglo-American Convention of 1818 had guaranteed them certain rights, the most important being exclusive enjoyment of waters within three miles of the British North American coast. Bound by no such rules, the fish swam where they wanted and, in the case of the more highly prized mackerel, the shoals regularly swam close inshore. Where they went, the fishermen of both countries followed.⁶ In normal years, this made for tense relations between Yankee and Maritime Loyalist

as the latter fumed at the trespasses of the former. But in May 1852 the British decided to send "a small naval force of steamers or other small vessels to enforce the observance" of the 1818 Convention.⁷ By July the Royal Navy squadron was in position and on July 5 Crampton formally told Secretary of State Daniel Webster of the new situation.⁸ Within three weeks, Washington buzzed with rumours about the first British seizure of an American vessel, the schooner Hyades. Meanwhile, down in Massachusetts, Secretary of State Daniel Webster learned by telegram that "The British Devastation had frightened off all our fishermen in the Gulf" of St Lawrence.⁹ The 1852-54 Fishery Dispute was under way.

Inevitably, the British decision caused great excitement, particularly in the United States. Ominously, one of the first to spout off in an aggressive tone was Daniel Webster. Two weeks after he became aware of the British decision, he announced the development to the nation, through an article in the Boston Courier. He warned:

[its] immediate effect will be ... a complete interruption of the extensive fishing business of New England, attended by constant collisions of the most unpleasant and exciting character, which may end in the destruction of human life, in the involvement of the Government in questions of a very serious nature, threatening the peace of the two countries.¹⁰

The problem was twofold. First, as Maine Senator Hannibal Hamlin and others were only too ready to point out, Britain had given the United States little or no warning of her intentions.¹¹ Second, as the Baltimore Sun explained, Britain was at fault

in conniving at a practice, until it has grown into a sort of prescriptive right, and then suddenly enforcing such a construction of the treaty as must involve thousands of our

citizens in heavy loss and expose them to great inconvenience.¹²

In short, Britain was back to her high-handed, deceitful worst. As rumours reached Washington that Webster and Crampton had begun to negotiate an end of the crisis, Members of Congress queued up to denounce such a move, with some drawing parallels with past British outrages. Among them was colourful Louisiana Senator Pierre Soulé who asserted: "England has, from time out of mind, attempted to arrogate to herself the supremacy of the ocean."¹³

But if certain members of Congress were - or chose to be - incensed by the British decision, the appearance of British ships off the colonies threatened to provoke an even sterner response from the American fishermen. Facing danger every day of their working lives, these mariners tended to be hardened characters who, even when not provoked, were capable of ruthless acts. In August 1851, a vast fleet of Americans descended on a Hudson's Bay Company outpost in Labrador, inspiring a desperate plea for help from the fur company's agent. "For God's sake," he begged,

send a Man of War here, for the Americans are Masters of the place, one hundred sail now lying in this Harbour ... They have stolen all my fire wood, and burnt it on the beach, fired the woods about the House, and if any change of wind takes place, the Establishment will be in ashes before the morning.

When they chose to fish in areas excluded to them, they deterred intervention by fishing in the most aggressive manner. Recorded one colonial report in January 1852:

the United States Fishing Vessels from September to the middle of November fish close in shore from half a mile to 1 1/2 miles of the Coast...
[T]hey have stout bowsprits and double chain bobstays, and threaten to run vessels down,

which may interfere with them, - many of them
are armed....14

Such were the men that Her Majesty's Government had chosen to antagonise. Under normal circumstances any attempt to deprive them of part of their income would have been strain enough; but in the summer of 1852 the British mishandled their announcement of the new measure. By telling the colonists long before either the American people or their government, the British caused widespread confusion among New England's fishermen. Writing from Nova Scotia in July, Norton told Webster that many American fishermen were "entirely ignorant of the construction of the Treaty of 1818, as now promulgated by the present British Ministry", a fact confirmed a week later by the US Navy's Commodore M C Perry, writing from Eastport, Maine.¹⁵ The inevitable outcome in the fishing ports was "much excitement"¹⁶, which various parties did their best to stoke up. In one Massachusetts fishing town, the local newspaper urged its already volatile readers to aggressive resistance. New England's fishermen were told by the Newburyport Herald to

arm their vessels, and resist any violation of the legitimate and long established construction of the treaty. Let them sink every British cruiser which molests them outside these limits, or if overpowered by force, let their own vessels go down with their flags flying.¹⁷

And when some Americans reportedly took such action, few, if any members of Congress condemned it. Instead, Democrat Senator Solon Borland was eager to condone it. On learning that the British had already seized one fishing vessel, he told the upper house with pride that

in the spirit which belongs to and becomes our people, a sufficient number from other vessels organized and armed themselves, and pursued the marauders, and "cut the vessel out" again,

leaving her commander, it is said, still a prisoner.¹⁸

No wonder, then, that Webster saw the crisis as "a very serious business."¹⁹ The potential for trouble between the two countries was great and the stakes were soon to increase. Those who saw the seeds of war in the arrival of the British fleet became further alarmed when President Millard Fillmore's administration gave in to Congressional pressure and sent a US Naval vessel to the Fisheries under the command of Commodore Perry.²⁰ No longer was the Royal Navy squaring up just to American fishermen; now the British and the American governments faced the prospect of a clash between their own men o'war.

Clearly, the way in which this crisis developed depended very much on the response of the aggrieved party, the United States. Happily, despite the public anger of some politicians, the American people and Government reacted with surprising maturity. Even the minority in Congress who replied with violent rhetoric were, on the whole, indulging in ritualistic posturing. In part, the abuse from the American side of the Atlantic was a natural act of defiance in the face of a foreign threat. Partly, the outbursts of men like Senator Borland were Democratic attempts to embarrass a weak Whig administration which, they claimed, had a poor track record in foreign affairs. Hence, Borland seized on Webster's decision to negotiate with Crampton in Massachusetts and not in Washington, claiming that he was making it "a matter of summer recreation."²¹ These charges were given added bite by the mounting presidential election campaign, whose nominations had left Fillmore a lame-duck President and the Democrats favourites to grab the White House. Thus, in late July the Democratic Washington Union linked the

British arrogance over the Fisheries with Fillmore's inability to deter Britain's recent jaunts around Cuba and Central America.

"The instruction to the British cruisers", claimed the Union,

to keep watch on our coasts to guard Cuba from invasion, and the doings to which we have alluded in Central America, and the non-resistance of the administration in both these cases, will be suspected by many persons to have had their effect in producing this new English move at this time.²²

A week later it shouted that the best hope for the protection of American interests and rights from foreign interference "seems to centre in the fact that the days of the whig dynasty are numbered, and that the power of the Chief Executive will soon be held by a firm and well tried democratic hand."²³ The pressures of the election, though, could not entirely explain the aggressive nature of Daniel Webster's first public pronouncement on the crisis. Certainly, a stern response in the face of British aggression could do his fading presidential campaign no harm; and, despite his rejection at the Whig nominating convention in Baltimore, he still harboured ambitions for the presidency. But these ambitions, like his grasp on domestic and foreign affairs, were increasingly becoming clouded through illness.²⁴ Instead, the real reason for his apparent belligerence lay in his need to cater for two distinct audiences - Britain and the United States. In mid-July, he knew that he was going to have to negotiate with Britain over the crisis, and he also knew that he would be negotiating from a position of weakness. The British had caught the Americans unawares and forced the State Department to formulate a policy towards developments which seemed beyond its control. Moreover, the relative strengths of the British and American naval fleets meant that the Royal Navy would have the upper hand in any maritime

clash, as the British knew only too well. Domestically, too, there were problems. As each day took Fillmore closer to vacating the White House, the power base of the administration in which Webster served was being eroded. This spurred on the Democrats, and wore down the fragile links between Fillmore and the Whigs, many of whom wished to hitch themselves to a rising, not sinking, star. Tying Webster's hands still further was Whig vulnerability to charges of weakness in foreign affairs. This reputation had to be fought if the British were not to become more arrogant and if the Americans were not to wash their hands of Webster's efforts. But he had another incentive to stand firm before the British threat. During a long Congressional career, he had often been accused of Anglophilia. Inevitably, the Fisheries crisis, coupled with election fever, brought this decades-old charge to the surface yet again. On the first day of the debate, Senator Borland said:

in the war of 1812 ... the distinguished Secretary of State, then a member of the other House, denounced and opposed the war, and used terms of reproach against those who were engaged in it ... That gentleman then, and those adhering to him, denounced the war in terms which I will not disgust the ears of an American Senate, or an American people, by repeating²⁵

Adding to this notoriety was Webster's role in negotiating the controversial Webster-Ashburton Treaty of 1842. Though it preserved peace with the British, it also surrendered large tracts of forest and mountain to British North America²⁶, leaving Webster wide open to slurs against his loyalty to the United States. He therefore entered the Fisheries Crisis burdened with countless handicaps. It was vital to the success of the negotiations that he let the British and his fellow citizens know of his determination to protect the rights of the American fishermen to the point of

war. However, his bellicose statement in the Boston Courier did not reveal a desire for war. On the contrary, Webster drafted this article with the preservation of peace in mind.

Fortunately, this objective was shared by the nation as a whole. One of the most sensible comments made during the early days of the Crisis came from the Baltimore Sun, which rightly played down the threat of war. Ran its commentary:

Now-a-days, it is hardly to be expected that any unsettled question between this country and England can possibly be disposed of without the "clink of armor" on the ear. Each country must "take a position", and then we get up the universal idea of "back out" on either side - the upshot of which, but for circumstances which rule often more imperiously than men, would be the downshot of war.²⁷

The Sun was very acute in its analysis. It spotted, correctly, that much of the row was politically inspired and not to be taken as a harbinger of war. It also spotted, correctly, that circumstances, like Anglo-American trade, were ruling in favour of peace. But it could have gone further. Men, too, were ruling imperiously during this crisis; and they, too, were opting for peace. Thus, the true tone of the American response was not angry but calm. The hot air of Senator Borland apart, most Congressional colleagues took the news of the British decision - and its execution - soberly. They did not like the appearance of a foreign fleet against American citizens, and they liked still less the short notice the American government had received. But many of them urged caution. Virginia's Democratic Senator James Murray Mason and Maryland's Whig Senator James Alfred Pearce, faced in late July with a debate which could have got out of hand, reminded their colleagues that they did not have the full facts. The

debate was, therefore, premature and any fire-eating was, by inference, irresponsible.²⁸ Others conceded that American fishermen had violated the 1818 agreement. Even Lewis Cass accepted that Americans trespassing on waters less than three miles from the colonial coast deserved punishment.²⁹ And Seward, presenting the case for the defence on behalf of the administration in the Senate, stressed that Britain was not really doing anything new in 1852: she had always kept ships off British North America to deter American and French encroachments on the Fisheries. In fact, he claimed, the British presence in 1852 was smaller than in the previous year.³⁰ Such considerations led politicians to belittle the chances of war. Tennessee Senator John Bell referred to America's puny navy as one reason why peace would have to be preserved³¹, while others dwelt on the factors restraining Britain. Seward, keen to keep the Congressional peace as a first step towards keeping international peace, cited British North America as one guarantee of British goodwill. War with the United States over the fisheries, he said, would result either in the independence of the British Provinces, or in their annexation to the United States. Just as important a consideration, he argued, was the disastrous effect war would have on British trade with the republic and British commerce generally.³² For such reasons, the Baltimore Sun confidently described the idea of war over the Fisheries as "very preposterous." "Can anybody seriously believe, for a moment," it asked, "that England would risk "the Derby" in that way?"³³

Putting these glib remarks aside, the British policy carried undeniable risks. However, the British did their best to minimise

them, both before and after announcing their new decision. Possibly the most important aspect of the action was its timing. Clearly an election year was not the best time to deploy warships off North America, but the presence in the White House of a man like Fillmore acted as a counterbalance to these dangers. The British were expert in judging what they could get away with, and in Millard Fillmore they had a President who cut an unlikely figure as a warrior. Once embarked on a policy of exclusion, moreover, the British went out of their way to appease the Americans. When Crampton formally told Webster of London's decision, he stressed, at Malmesbury's bidding, several mitigating factors. The British, he said, were doing nothing new and were not inspired by any aggression towards the United States. As evidence, he pointed out that the policy of Exclusion applied with equal force to the French.³⁴ The British, he implied, were not picking on the Americans; they were simply continuing to enforce their rights against all foreign transgressions. As American records showed, this policy was well established and had claimed several American vessels over the past quarter century.³⁵ When the crisis was under way, Crampton kept up the peace initiative. On receiving a request from Webster to come to Massachusetts as soon as possible, Crampton promptly headed north for Marshfield. Shortly after his arrival, Webster rushed off a brief note to the President, saying: "Mr Crampton is here and is willing to do anything to keep the peace."³⁶

Yet all this goodwill would have crumbled had there been a clash on the fishing grounds. Whatever Webster and Fillmore might have wished, they could hardly have prevented a war cry if an

American vessel had been sunk or an American citizen killed. The conduct of the British and colonial enforcement vessels was, therefore, critical to the preservation of peace. Here, too, the British were up to the challenge. The orders given the Royal Navy were deliberately restrained. As a result, Crampton was able to tell Webster that the Royal Navy was

specially enjoined to avoid all interference with the vessels of Friendly Powers, except when they are in the act of violating the Treaty, and on all occasions to avoid giving ground of complaint by the adoption of harsh or unnecessary proceedings when circumstances compel their arrest or seizure.³⁷

The British were true to their word. When Commodore Perry, of the US Navy, opened his official correspondence with Admiral Seymour, he confirmed that he had "heard of no unnecessary exercise of rigour or harshness by the officers under your command." Instead they had displayed an "honorable" degree of "forbearance."³⁸ They were unquestionably helped by the British decision not to enforce the more controversial aspects of the 1818 Convention. At the heart of the dispute was whether the Americans should be allowed within the great bays of the Provinces, or whether the British should claim exclusive rights to the waters behind a line drawn from headland to headland. But by late August Webster knew, courtesy of an official British despatch read to him by Crampton, that the largest and richest bay of all, the Bay of Fundy, was open to his countrymen.³⁹ The other bays, moreover, also remained open, as a result of an appeal from Crampton to the Royal Navy to practice moderation.⁴⁰ Since the Americans disputed only Britain's interpretation of her right to the Bays, but respected the three-mile limit⁴¹, by the end of August the diplomatic side of the quarrel was all but over. Physically, though, the crisis continued

on the fishing grounds. But despite all the row about their presence, the British vessels were, if anything, lax in enforcing exclusion. In 1852 the British seized only seven American vessels and, once arrested, these boats were not necessarily doomed. One of the first victims of the fishing season, the Helen Maria, was actually released on the orders of the Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia. He let it be known he was unwilling to press a severe construction of the law on the American captain because there was "reason to hope that friendly negotiation may, before long, adjust the Fishery questions."⁴² Faced with taking action which the Americans were sure to resent, the British opted to do so in the least offensive manner possible.

Indeed, the British could have argued with some justice that their vessels had been sent to the colonial waters not to provoke Anglo-American conflict but to prevent it. One of the chief threats to peace lay in British North American outrage at continued American violations of their fishing rights, coupled with anger at repeated American snubs to colonial appeals for Reciprocity. As prosperity returned and annexationism evaporated, the colonists grew in self-confidence; and in this climate their indignation at American injustice began to bear ominous fruit. Some spoke of fighting American protectionism with Canadian protectionism, a trend that Elgin deplored and which never became law.⁴³ But over the Fisheries, the colonies acted with an independence which may well have surprised both the British and the Americans. In the summer of 1851, a Toronto railway conference of delegates from Canada, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick - which simply by taking place hinted at early steps towards colonial unity - took a stand

on the Fisheries. Canada pledged to help Nova Scotia protect the Fisheries "by providing either a steamer or two more sailing vessels to cruise the Gulf of St Lawrence and along the coasts of Labrador." Nova Scotia was to employ at least two other vessels, and New Brunswick was to consider deploying one vessel to patrol the Bay of Fundy. These resolutions, unusually, produced concrete results. In 1852 Nova Scotia laid on four vessels, New Brunswick two and Prince Edward Island one.⁴⁴ From colonies which had traditionally resisted paying towards their own defence, this was a dramatic gesture. Quite graphically, the colonists gave notice of their frustration with the Americans - and with the inadequate protection of the Fisheries offered by Britain. Among Westminister-based advocates of colonial economy, this financial precedent might well have been cause for celebration; but the deployment of colonial-manned boats against the Americans promised as much for transatlantic peace as border raids by Yankee Hunters Lodges. Untrained and hot-headed, the crews on the colonial patrol vessels were protecting their livelihood; many were driven by years of bitterness towards their American rivals. But they lacked the firepower, expertise and authority to enforce their interpretation of the 1818 Convention. If they were left to themselves, a violent clash with the equally unruly Americans was almost certain. It was therefore essential that the British took control of this volatile situation. The presence of the Royal Navy - and public announcements throughout the colonies of their purpose - went a long way to defusing the tension. Its mission removed one dangerous source of grievance by proving that Britain had not abandoned British North America or, more particularly, the Maritimes. Also, because they were not preserving their

likelihood, the Royal Navy's officers could be more impartial and, as an official and especially powerful armed service of the British Empire, they had an authority which made enforcing exclusion that much easier. Significantly, once Seymour's squadron arrived, the colonial patrol vessels were put under the command of Royal Navy officers. Thus the journal, the New Brunswicker, was not being biased when it wrote: "It was to insure the continuance of peace, and prevent the possibility of hostile encounters, that the Imperial Government has dispatched its vessels to the shores of North America."⁴⁵

With great versatility, the British used this explanation of their action to try to boost rather than damage Anglo-American relations. They did this by striving to foster a spirit of Anglo-American cooperation during the crisis. When Crampton formally told Webster of the British decision, he all but invited the American Government to send its own vessels to patrol the fisheries. The British orders, ran the despatch from Malmesbury which Crampton presented to Webster, were adopted against both American and French encroachments. Indeed, said Malmesbury, "a considerable proportion" of the British craft "were placed there in order to use means equally used by the French Govt to protect French Rights." This, though, did not mean peace was at risk.

Now with regard to such species of protection the Govts of Gt Britain and France have not been in the habit of evincing any national jealousy, or of considering that offence was thereby intended. On the contrary, both Govts have found that the surest mode of preventing misunderstanding was to join in effectually protecting their respective lines of demarcation.

There was, he added, a precedent for this cooperation. In the

English Channel French and British cruisers worked together to prevent encroachments, especially by their own countrymen.⁴⁶ Though the American decision to send Perry north was taken before this despatch arrived in Washington, its tone and spirit served to calm the ruffled feathers of the American Eagle. So too did the treatment given Perry and, in 1853, Commodore Shubrick when they took up their patrol duties. Before Perry had even arrived, Admiral Seymour had told Elgin: "I Shall be glad to show him the attention I have always found the Superior Naval officers of the United States well entitled to." He did just that, exchanging a regular and friendly correspondence with his opposite number, and meeting with him on dry land. Such was the cooperation between the two rival navies that at Seymour's request the Admiralty sent Perry four books and 80 charts of the eastern seas in early 1853.⁴⁷ Joining Seymour in giving Perry and, later, Shubrick a red-carpet welcome were the colonial officials. Writing in 1852, the Acting US Consul to Halifax told the State Department that Perry had been received with "the usual courtesies due to his rank by the Admiral, ... the Lieutenant Governor ... and the Military and Civil Authorities of the City", and "had every facility afforded him for the completion of his Mission in these Waters." The next year the new Consul to Halifax reported that Shubrick got the same respect.⁴⁸ In fact the colonies seem to have competed with each other to give the American naval commanders the best reception. As a result, the fisheries patrol was scarcely a hardship posting: the Americans enjoyed dinners all round the Maritimes. The St John News commented that the Commodore could not have been better received or more honoured had he been the President. "The first people have vied with each other to do him homage, plainly showing

that the best feeling exists" These dinners - like one on Prince Edward Island in 1853 - were occasions where the top men publicly aired their wishes for amity and a peaceful settlement of the dispute. These men also stressed that the presence of the Royal Navy did not stem from ill-feeling towards the United States.⁴⁹ Such displays clearly did much to cool the passions in and off the Maritimes; they also helped soothe the Cabinet in Washington, since Perry informed his masters of the pacific intent of the colonists and the British.⁵⁰ The result of all this close and friendly contact was peace. Instead of clashes, there was increasing amity; indeed, the only broadsides were those of the feasting British and American naval officers.

But Perry and Shubrick were, in the classic phrase, only following orders. And like those sent to their British counterparts, these too were restrained. On his arrival off the Maritimes, Perry informed Seymour that he was there "to warn the American fishermen not to encroach upon" Britain's fishing rights, as well as to protect law-abiding American fishermen from British seizures.⁵¹ These orders reflected both the sensitive nature of Perry's mission and the determination of the American Government to preserve the peace. In this the government operated on several fronts: domestic, naval and diplomatic. One of their top priorities, wrote Fillmore, was to ensure that the "public mind should not be misled on this subject."⁵² This was especially important in an election year. Thus, the Government used its own papers to play down the seriousness of the dispute. The National Intelligencer, for example, reported that all who took part in the Senate's first Fishery debate "seemed to repel the idea that this

question could, under any circumstances, endanger the peace of the two nations."⁵³ This report was significant because it was not true. American Senators would never have argued for peace under any circumstances, and they did not on this occasion. Though the overall tone of the speeches was sensible, some did get fired up. Among them was the Maryland Whig, Thomas George Pratt, who saw a greater possibility of war over the Fisheries than he had over Oregon.⁵⁴ But the Whig administration knew that few people would pore through the Congressional Globe when it was eventually published and that their version of the debate - which would be printed in papers across the nation - would carry more weight than the truth. In their efforts to preserve the peace, Fillmore and his supporters presumably felt the odd white lie was justifiable. Also designed to keep the nation's passions on an even keel was Fillmore's decision to send the US Navy vessel to the Maritimes, a move also announced in the National Intelligencer.⁵⁵ This at once countered dangerous criticism that the Government was letting Britain dictate events, and reduced the sense of isolation among American fishermen which could have inspired them to desperate acts. Even so, the presence of just one vessel on so extensive a station could only be symbolic. As Perry's orders revealed, he had not gone to British North America to increase the tension; he was there to keep the peace.

These deliberate efforts to maintain Anglo-American harmony were the platform on which the American Government based its dealings with the British Government. Here, too, Fillmore and his men displayed a sensitive touch. He refused to allow his government to adopt a bullish, bellicose tone. There were no

Anglophobic tirades or appeals to a bloody patriotism. Compared to the rantings inspired in American politicians by previous Anglo-American crises, Webster's statement in the Boston Courier was only mildly aggressive. Yet even this provoked a gentle rebuke from the President, who 'suggested' that the Secretary of State write something more pacific. In it, wrote the President, Webster could regret any misunderstanding between the American and colonial fishermen and stress that negotiations between the British and American governments were imminent.⁵⁶ Within a week Fillmore was even more conciliatory. Though he pledged to resist unjust arrests "by force if necessary", he told Webster that the Government could not refuse to submit to all of them "for some seizures might be perfectly legal and just." Moreover,

a general refusal to submit might be deemed a threat, that would unnecessarily stir up anger, cause popular agitation and premature commitments on both sides, and finally place us in the wrong by appearing before the world to have claimed that to which we were not entitled.

He believed Britain was "right in her construction of the treaty", but favoured an "appeal to her magnanimity, her sense of justice - and not to arms." He concluded: "I can not believe an appeal will be made in vain."⁵⁷

Fillmore was right. His softly-softly approach, coupled with Britain's determination to prevent a flare-up, helped preserve the peace. In fact, the reason for its survival was quite simple: neither country wanted war. Yet, if Britain had not wanted a crisis, why had she decided to send her ships to British North America at all? Here the picture becomes less simple. In pursuing this course, the British Government was playing an apparently

low-risk game where success promised several possible rewards. A top priority was to induce the Americans to grant Reciprocity by actually making them interested in this superficially uninteresting measure. But there was more, much more, to the British initiative. Above all, the new boldness over the Fisheries revealed the extent to which Britain saw the Colonies as a liability in foreign policy. Moreover, it showed how the British could use British North America as a diplomatic weapon.

That Prime Minister Derby hoped exclusion would lead to Reciprocity is not in doubt. The Russell administration had spent years trying to persuade the Americans to grant North American free trade, but had never come anywhere near success. Once in office, Derby opted for a more aggressive policy of coercion. The theory behind his new policy was convincing: the enforcement of British fishing rights had been so lax in the past that the Americans had had no incentive to opt for a Reciprocity agreement which opened the Fisheries to them. But if the British enforced their rights - or demonstrated their ability to do so - the Americans might at last appreciate the economic boon that was on offer. Thus, as he made his plans for the Royal Navy's North American station, Derby told Colonial Secretary Pakington of the importance of "bringing Brother Jonathan to his senses". On August 5th, Foreign Secretary Malmesbury wrote: "I understand our decision to defend the fisheries as having for its principle (sic) object the attainment of other privileges denied to us."⁵⁸ However, for the sake of transatlantic calm, he put this view over more diplomatically in a despatch to Webster via Crampton. Stressing the need to preserve

friendly Anglo-American relations, Malmesbury expressed the government's hope that: "the attention which has thus been drawn to the subject of the Fisheries should lead to an adjustment, by amicable negotiations, upon a satisfactory footing, of the System of Commercial intercourse between the United States and her M's North American Colonial Possessions."⁵⁹

And in their "amicable negotiations" with the Americans after opting for Exclusion, successive British governments made full use of the Fisheries as a bait. In defiance of the American wish to have separate settlements on fishing rights and Reciprocity⁶⁰ the British insisted on one all-encompassing Fishery and Reciprocity agreement.⁶¹ Aware of the need for a permanent agreement over the Fisheries, the Americans wanted an arrangement that was not tied to an economic treaty vulnerable to changing commercial or international relations. But the British, aware that in the Fisheries they had the only weapon which could bring the Americans to book, held out successfully until the summer of 1854 for a joint measure.

The British interest in securing Reciprocity may seem strange, however. During the dark days of the Annexation crisis, Reciprocity appeared to both the British authorities and large numbers of the colonists as the only measure which could preserve the British connection. But by 1852, to the chagrin of Israel de Wolf Andrews, all this was beginning to change. "When the subject was first considered," he wrote in 1853 and 1854, the "Lower Colonies would have surrendered, without any other equivalent, a full right to the Colonial fisheries." But, he added, "Since 1850

the British North American Colonies have enjoyed a degree of prosperity increasing year by year, and still on the advance such as they have never before possessed, and scarcely dreamed of attaining." As a result, their appeals to the American Government for reciprocal trade became less urgent until 1852, when they ceased altogether. At present, he concluded, "the Colonies, on the whole, are quite indifferent about the matter."⁶² A barometer of the changing atmosphere was New Brunswick, traditionally less protective of the fisheries than Nova Scotia. In December 1852 the New Brunswick Executive Council declared that "no concession could be made by the Government of the United States which would be at all equivalent to throwing open its fisheries to the American fishermen." It did, however, concede that in the wider interests of all the Provinces it might consider a British North American Reciprocity agreement.⁶³ Even in Canada, where the yearning for North American free trade had burned the strongest and longest, Reciprocity seemed to be less popular. In April 1852 Elgin wrote: "As to the state of feeling which exists in Canada with respect to this measure ... [t]here is not assuredly the heat on the subject that there was some time ago." In fact, Canada was heading into the arms of the protectionists. Reciprocity was, therefore, a curious measure for the British to risk war over.

As was often the case, the British had valid reasons for taking such chances. Most important, they knew the colonies were not truly indifferent to Reciprocity. Although in April 1852 Elgin warned Crampton of Canada's waning interest in the measure, he rounded off his letter by asserting: "Nevertheless there are certain classes and certain districts where the feeling is

strong."⁶⁴ And in May 1853, with colonial prosperity still rising, Andrews qualified his description of the hostility to Reciprocity in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick by stressing that "Canada, Newfoundland and Prince Edwards Island are not disposed to press unreasonable demands."⁶⁵ Indeed, most of the Canadian threats of protectionism revealed just how strongly they still wanted Reciprocity. Though some sincerely advocated closing the border to American goods, many more hoped that a spell of protectionism - or even the threat of it - would remind the United States of the value of its trade with the Colonies. This, in turn, would persuade the Doubting Thomases in Washington of the merits of Reciprocity.⁶⁶ Similarly Canada and Prince Edward Island cooperated in barring the Americans from the Fisheries largely in the hope that this would inspire fresh, and successful, Reciprocity negotiations.⁶⁷ The British, therefore were wise not to take Colonial Protectionism at its face value. They were also wise to continue to press for Reciprocity. At the root of their policy was a determination to prevent a revival of Annexationism and to avoid negotiating again from a position of weakness with the Americans. Throughout 1848 and 1849 Elgin had repeatedly told Grey that Annexation was the automatic recourse of the dissatisfied in the Provinces. As the British had learned to their cost, there was nothing like a depression - or even a mere recession - to cause dissatisfaction and, hot on its heels, Annexationism. Though in 1852 loyalty went hand in hand with prosperity, everyone knew this economic success could not last indefinitely. The best way for Britain to soften the blow of any future downturn - and thereby prevent a return to Annexationism - was to secure Reciprocity in a period of prosperity. Such a healthy economic climate was doubly auspicious

for any Reciprocity negotiations. In 1848 and 1849 the recession-inspired clamour for Annexation had crippled British efforts to obtain the cure-all, Reciprocity. The Americans had revelled in Britain's discomfort and tried to exploit it by naming an unreasonable price for the measure. But if Britain chose to negotiate when the Colonies were loyal, calm and a shade anti-American, her chances of reaching a sensible deal with the Americans were much greater. Thus, having once struggled to cure British North America of the malignant imperial illness, Annexation, the British chose to avoid a potentially fatal relapse through a long-term policy of prevention.

While revealing that Britain still valued her British North American possessions, this course also proved that she saw the colonies as a potential threat to her diplomatic affairs. She did not pursue the policy of exclusion merely to avoid yet another round of embarrassing Reciprocity negotiations in the distant future. As a world power Britain was rightly determined to eliminate any problems which might leave her vulnerable to the seemingly insatiable ambitions of her rising young rival. The past had shown that whenever the loyalty of British North America wavered, two things happened. First, Britain appeared much less formidable to the United States and, second, the United States became much more confident in her dealings with Great Britain. It was therefore sound policy for Britain to do all she reasonably could to keep British North America loyal. The sending of the fishery protection fleet and the continued pursuit of Reciprocity were both calculated to do this. One of the biggest problems facing Britain was that the Provinces felt the Mother Country

always sacrificed their interests on the altar of Anglo-American relations. Reinforcing this suspicion were the frequent statements from British politicians which seemed to underline their hostility to Empire. But the announcement of the policy of exclusion helped heal these wounds. Coming after years of colonial lobbying, it showed conclusively that Britain still treasured British North America and that the Provinces could still influence British foreign policy. Moreover, denying the Fisheries to the Americans served to unite the Provinces both with each other and with the Mother Country against their traditional foe. This was clearly on Derby's mind in October 1852, after exclusion's first summer. "I have no doubt", he told the Foreign Secretary, "that the part we have taken will do us good in our most important colonies, and will have widened the breach between them and Jonathan, so as to afford little apprehension on the annexation question."⁶⁸

But the Fishery policy of 1852 had an even wider significance in British foreign policy. Despite slow communications, the British had long been adept at playing pressure politics with the United States. They were always looking for fresh diplomatic advantage, and in 1852 they chose British North America as a key weapon in their game of bluff. The colonies were useful because at that time the claims and counter-claims of fishermen off the Maritimes were not the only source of Anglo-American tension; just as volatile was the rivalry between the two countries over Cuba and Central America. More to the point, this rivalry had been coming to a head long before Derby opted for his new, improved fishery policy. Since the autumn of 1851 at the latest the Cuban issue had become particularly sensitive. On several occasions in the late

1840s and early 1850s, the large island off the Florida Keys was rumoured to be the target of lawless, American-based filibustering expeditions. To a beleaguered American South, absorbing a territory where slavery was still a basic economic prop had obvious appeal; but to the British, the annexation of the Spanish colony would have been one strategic step too many in the ominously rapid territorial growth of the United States. As such, Britain had taken determined steps to prevent Cuba falling into - or being seized by - American hands. On at least two occasions British officials had advised the State Department of impending American-backed invasions of Cuba, and in September 1851 the British Government risked a worsening of Anglo-American relations over the issue by taking international law into its own hands. "Her Majesty's Ships of War on the West Indian Station", Crampton told Webster, "will have orders to prevent by force any adventurers of any nation from landing with hostile intent upon the Island of Cuba."⁶⁹ Seven months later, as the British Government formulated the fishery policy, it turned the Cuban screw more tightly. Malmesbury ordered Crampton to read an official despatch to Webster which formally declared that "Her Majesty's Government could never see with indifference the Island of Cuba in the possession of any Power whatever but Spain." And the Foreign Secretary backed this up by putting the American Government on the spot with regard to Cuba. Included in this unwelcome despatch was a cordial invitation to the Americans to help guarantee Cuba's independence. The United States could do this, said Malmesbury, by joining with other governments in agreeing to "bind themselves severally and collectively to renounce, both now and hereafter, all intention to obtain possession of the Island of Cuba and to discountenance all

attempts to that effect on the part of others.⁷⁰ From Webster's viewpoint, this proposal for a so-called Cuban Tripartite Convention was an alarming prospect. Britain was threatening both to extend her policing role in the Caribbean and to limit the territorial growth of the United States. Not only did she have the gall to suggest that the Americans work to extend her influence while reducing their own, but she had the backing of a third party. And there was the rub. For joining Britain in this scheme was France, Britannia's traditional enemy - and the United States' partner in the two previous Anglo-American conflicts. Webster's response was as unconvincing as the Anglo-French ploy was cunning. Denying any American interest in possessing Cuba, he declined to join the Convention. His bolt-hole - dug for him and countless Secretaries of State by George Washington - was America's established policy of avoiding entangling alliances.⁷¹ This response was predictable but, in view of American misbehaviour over Texas, Oregon and California, his claims of uninterest in Cuba must have rung hollow. The clanging echoes carried all the way to London, and they arrived as Derby was finally deciding whether to send the ships of the West Indian Station on a summer patrol of the British North American fisheries.

Over Central America, too, there was stalemate. After months of negotiating, Clayton and Bulwer enthused about their 1850 agreement⁷², but this vague treaty had merely won both countries a breathing space. Certainly it had settled nothing. By 1852 the Americans' interest in a trans-isthmian canal was still as strong as their fears about British ambitions in the region. These concerns grew as reports reached Washington of the Union Jack being

raised in two parts of Central America - on Tigre Island in the Gulf of Fonseca and on the Bay Islands off Honduras. These rumours were offensive in several ways. They violated the spirit of that solid plank of American foreign policy, the Monroe Doctrine, which in 1823 had warned the Old World that the Americas were no longer open to colonisation. The raising of the Union Jack also heightened suspicions that Britain was set on hindering attempts to secure the Atlantic-Pacific link which many believed to be crucial to retaining California. And to those Americans who saw Britain as an inveterate and scheming foe, the two islands were the latest pieces in an encircling British jigsaw. Thus, in the early days of the Fishery Dispute, when most papers were focussing on New England and Nova Scotia, one editor reacted angrily to reports of a British colony on the Bay Islands. These islands, ran the editorial,

constitute a capital naval station, for depots of supplies, &c, in the event of war; for, with the island of Jamaica on the opposite side, in their occupation, the British navy may now shut up the southern outlet of the Gulf of Mexico almost completely, between Cuba and Yucatan, or render it certainly very hazardous for an American vessel to pass through those straits. At the northern pass, a fleet of observation between Cuba and the Florida Keys would lock up the Gulf entirely, and reduce our vast commerce therein, at both extremities to the pressure of a practical blockade.⁷³

In a sense, this was all a fuss about nothing. Neither country seriously wanted to colonise any part of Central America; but neither country trusted the other. So it was that Britain continued her protectorate of the Mosquito Indians, even though its validity had been questioned years earlier by some of Russell's cabinet.⁷⁴ Meanwhile, the Americans continued to read the worst possible interpretations into this British behaviour. So important was the issue that it continued to occupy the time of Crampton and

Webster. And in April 1852 the two of them sat up late into a spring night, not retiring until they had reached an agreement over Nicaragua. Flushed with success, Webster told Fillmore: "The English Govt never has been, & never will be, in a better temper for adjusting these difficulties than it is now." So convinced was he that a final settlement was in his grasp that he said his Government should "use some urgency with Nicaragua & Costa Rica, to induce them to bring the whole matter to a conclusion."⁷⁵ Webster was to be disappointed. The Nicaraguan Government did not share his enthusiasm and rejected the scheme. He also misjudged the British. Though Crampton, a footsoldier in the front line, was willing to cooperate, his general, 3,000 miles from the action, was not. And in June Malmesbury made this perfectly clear. Through another official despatch to Crampton, he told Webster that Britain could not surrender her protectorate over the Mosquitos unless the tribe got proper compensation.⁷⁶ Thus, as Britain prepared for the squalls arising from her fishery policy, she in no way softened her line on Central America.

In taking this course, Britain enjoyed two trump cards - the Royal Navy and the current warm relationship with France. One of the appeals of the Exclusion policy, moreover, was that it allowed Britain to lay these cards firmly on the diplomatic table. And this, of course, exposed the very poor hand that the United States had been dealt. Most obviously, the revamped protection of the Fisheries allowed Britain a legitimate display of her impressive naval power within striking distance of the United States. At the same time, this demonstrated the crippling inadequacy of the puny US Navy. But Britain's goal was not just a Fisheries settlement.

She also hoped her policy would inspire the Americans to cooperate over other issues. Hence, in a fairly subtle way, the British tried to link their stance over British North America with their position over Central America. They did this from the start. On July 5, when Crampton brought Webster the bad news of Exclusion, he apparently tried to soften the blow by stressing that it was also directed at France. But by adding that France was cooperating with Britain in enforcing the policy - as she was in the English Channel - Crampton found a fresh opportunity to remind the Secretary of state of Anglo-French cooperation over other issues.⁷⁷ Significantly, during the Fishery Dispute there was no let-up in British pressure on the United States. Malmesbury's refusal to abandon the Mosquito Indians kept Central America on the boil, and over Cuba Crampton managed to be even more explicit. Only three days after he announced Exclusion - and barely two months since Webster's original refusal - he again pressed the United States to join the Cuban Tripartite Convention. This, he said, ingenuously, would have but two objects: "the one a Mutual Denunciation of the future Possession of Cuba, - the other an Engagement to cause the Renunciation to be respected." The only way to enforce such a "Renunciation", though, was by using powerful navies. Thus, for the second time in three days Crampton reminded the Americans of their naval impotence and of Britain's virility. Just as loaded, though, was a comment he made later that day. Referring to the possibility of a trans-isthmian communication, he then spoke of Cuba. That island, he said, "is so placed geographically that the Nation which may possess it, if the Naval Forces of that National should be considerable, might either protect or obstruct the commercial routes from one ocean to the other."⁷⁸

Superficially harmless, these musings could have been read another way. They could also have meant that a nation - or nations - with a considerable navy could easily blockade the United States, a tactic widely expected to be adopted by Britain in any future Anglo-American war. And if, as the Convention suggested, Britain had France by her side, there would be very little that the Americans could do to stop her. The message, then, was clear: Britain was not going to compromise over Cuba or Central America and, if Webster wanted to know why, all he had to do was look to the waters just north of Maine. There, a short voyage from New York, was the Royal Navy. Freed from its traditional fears of France, it could concentrate its attention on the United States - and that was precisely what it planned to do.

There was nothing new in the British Government using British North America to pressurise the United States, but this may have been the first time that the colonies had been dragged into a dispute which did not directly affect them. In 1838 Westminster had responded with unusual speed to an official Nova Scotia petition complaining about American fishing encroachments and "praying for additional naval protection to British interests." Lord Glenelg's reply was heartening: "It has been determined for the future, to station, during the Fishing Season, an armed force on the Coast of Nova Scotia, to enforce a more strict observance of the provisions of the Treaty by American Citizens"⁷⁹ This swift, decisive action was not, however, aimed solely at protecting the fisheries. The navy almost certainly went to the Maritimes to protect British North America generally - and Canada in particular - from the United States. The Nova Scotian appeal had coincided

with the tail-end of the Canadian rebellions of 1837-38, which got new life from open American support. The British badly needed to strengthen their ability to defend British North America, and they also needed a show of force which would deter further American interference without escalating the crisis. The defence of the fisheries was an ideal pretext. Thus, between January 1838 and the spring of 1839, the number of regular soldiers in Canada grew from 2,000 to 10,500, and between New Year's Day and November 1, 1838, the naval strength of the North American and West Indian Station grew from 27 to 41 vessels. Then came the decision to use these vessels to drive the Americans from colonial waters.⁸⁰ Only three years later, Britain put the colonial waters to similar use to try and influence the verdict on Alexander McLeod. On trial for his life in New York State after boasting that he had killed the one fatal victim of the 1837 Caroline incident; this British citizen became the focal point of deepening Anglo-American tension. Indeed, the crisis found Foreign Secretary Palmerston at his aggressive best. With unconscious irony, he told Andrew Stevenson, the American Minister to London, that "Speaking not officially but as a Private friend ... if McLeod is executed there must be war." The tension survived the arrival of Peel's new administration which put Aberdeen in the Foreign Office. Though he was more cautious and conciliatory, his Government decided on a show of strength. Here again British North America provided the opportunity. The First Lord of the Admiralty, Lord Haddington, successfully recommended that Canada's new Governor-General, Sir Charles Bagot, go out in a battleship. This, argued Haddington, was "a very useful way of having a great ship in these waters without giving the least offence."⁸¹

This was the value of the Exclusion policy. It could, of course, be argued that if Britain had wanted to exert more pressure on the United States over either Cuba or Central America, then she would not have been so obscure as to send ships to British North America. Instead, she would have sent them to the heart of the problem: to Cuba and Central America. But, as Malmesbury revealed in September 1851, British vessels were already operating in this area, on the look-out for Cuban-bound filibusters from the United States. The reaction of the White House to this, however, revealed that Britain could intensify such action only at her peril. Fillmore's response was clear: he believed these orders

could not be carried into effect without leading too probably to abuses & collisions that wd. constantly jeopard & might seriously disturb that peace & good Will which he sincerely wished to see cultivated & made perpetual between the United States & Great Britain.⁸²

Deep down, the British must have known that he was right. To send more ships to neutral waters to interfere with the activities of foreign nationals was a risky policy and only advisable as a last resort. If a show of strength was all that was needed, it was much safer to send the Royal Navy on patrol in British waters where they had every right to be. The goal of this policy, after all, was not to provoke the Americans, but to remind them that Britain was a power to be reckoned with. This, Derby and Malmesbury hoped, would aid negotiations over Cuba and Central America. These tactics, moreover, were clear to one clerk at the Foreign Office in 1852. That this man, Lord Stanley, was also the son of the Prime Minister adds weight to his testimony. Ideally placed to know what was going on that summer, he wrote in his diary:

My Father's object in mooting the question, was

not so much to protect our colonists against competition, as to make America feel that there were some rights which, if we were willing to cede, she might find it for her interests to buy ... We have also in hand a plan of convention between England, France, and America, for the purpose of checking designs on Cuba.⁸³

In short, for years British North America had been to Britain a diplomatic liability and an asset for the Americans. But in 1852 the boot was at long last very firmly on the other foot.

CHAPTER FOUR - THE CLASH OVER THE FISHERIES

- 1 Crampton to Elgin, November 3, 1851, EP, A 398. Also in James J Barnes, Authors, Publishers and Politicians: The Quest for an Anglo-American Copyright Agreement, 1815-1854, (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), 180 ff. See also Masters, Reciprocity Treaty, 60-61.
- 2 Commodore M C Perry to J P Kennedy, Secretary of the Navy, Island St Paul, August 26, 1852, Despatches ... St John.
- 3 Harold A Innis, The Cod Fisheries: The History of an International Economy, (London, Oxford University Press, 1940), 326.
- 4 Norton to Webster, November 27, 1851, Despatches ... Pictou.
- 5 Innis, The Cod Fisheries..., 330.
- 6 Ibid., 326-7; cf Ibid., 334, n. 1 which cites an 1852 account in Nova Scotia's Journals of Assembly. This claimed that half the masters of American ships and that the best hands on many American fishing boats were Nova Scotian. See also Perry to Kennedy, August 26, 1852, Manning, Diplomatic Correspondence, IV, 474: two of the six vessels seized in 1852 were commanded by British subjects.
- 7 Letter by Sir John Packington, Britain's Colonial Secretary, to the British North American colonial governors, May 18, 1852, quoted by Michigan Senator Lewis Cass, Senate, August 3, 1852, Congressional Globe, 32:1, 896.
- 8 Crampton to Webster, July 5, 1852, British Legation. Also in Manning, Diplomatic Correspondence, IV, 452.
- 9 Andrews to Webster, Telegram from Eastport, Maine, July 24, 1852, Webster Papers, LC.
- 10 Boston Courier, July 19, 1852, quoted in the Washington National Intelligencer, July 21, 1852.
- 11 Maine Senator Hannibal Hamlin, Senate, August 5, 1852, Congressional Globe, 32:1, 902: "So far as we know, not a word of notice or warning has been given to our Government. The first intimation we have, a hostile fleet is sent to enforce, with naval power, this construction upon our honest and hard working fishermen." cf Virginia Senator Mason, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senate, July 23, 1852, Ibid., 1890: "When no such notice is given, ... it strikes me as a far higher offense than a breach of national courtesy - as one of insult and indignity to the American people."
- 12 Baltimore Sun, July 31, 1852, Despatches ... St John.
- 13 Louisiana Senator Pierre Soule, Senate, August 12, 1852, Congressional Globe, 32:1, 906.

- 14 Innis, The Cod Fisheries..., 349-50. See also the "Memorandum of alleged American infractions of the Convention of 1818", enclosed in Vice Admiral Sir G F Seymour, Royal Navy, to Perry, Halifax, August 18, 1852, Manning, Diplomatic Correspondence, IV, 477; also in Despatches ... St John.
- 15 Norton to Webster, July 29, 1852, Despatches ... Pictou; Perry to Kennedy, August 5, 1852, Manning, Diplomatic Correspondence, IV, 470: Perry refers to the fishermen's "ignorance of the extent, to which the British Cruisers might carry their seizures."
- 16 J R Chadbourne to Webster, Eastport, Maine, July 24, 1852, Webster Papers, LC.
- 17 Unnamed paper quoting the Newburyport Herald, of c. July 1852, Despatches ... St John.
- 18 Arkansas Senator Thomas Borland, Senate, July 23, 1852, Congressional Globe, 32:1, 1894.
- 19 Webster to Fillmore, July 17, 1852, Webster Papers, LC.
- 20 Kennedy to Perry, July 28, 1852, Manning Diplomatic Correspondence, IV, 466, n. 1: Kennedy ordered Perry to "proceed without delay" from New York on board the steamer Mississippi "to the places where those seizures are said to have been made, and to any other points on the same coasts where other seizures may be threatened or apprehended."
- 21 Borland, Senate, July 23, 1852, Congressional Globe, 32:1, 1892.
- 22 Washington Daily Union, July 21, 1852.
- 23 Ibid., July 28, 1852.
- 24 For the Baltimore Convention, see Robert F Dalzell, Jr., Daniel Webster and the Trial of American Nationalism, 1843-1852, (New York, W W Norton & Co., Inc., 1975), 259 ff; and Irving H Bartlett, Daniel Webster, (New York, W W Norton, 1978), 270 ff; for his illnesses, see the Webster Papers, LC, especially his outgoing correspondence in the summer of 1852.
- 25 Borland, Senate, July 23, 1852, Congressional Globe, 32:1, 1896.
- 26 Bourne, Balance of Power, 104 ff; Bartlett, Daniel Webster, 179 ff.
- 27 Baltimore Sun, July 31, 1852, Despatches ... St John.
- 28 Virginia Senator Mason and Maryland Senator Pearce, Senate, July 23, 1852, Congressional Globe, 32:1 1891-2, 1897.
- 29 Cass, Senate, August 3, 1852, Congressional Globe, 32:1 896.
- 30 New York Senator William H Seward, Senate, August 14, 1852, Congressional Globe, 32:1, 915-16.

- 31 Tennessee Senator Bell, Senate, July 31, 1852, Congressional Globe, 32:1, 1895.
- 32 Seward, Senate, August 14, 1852, Congressional Globe, 32:1, 916-17.
- 33 Baltimore Sun, July 31, 1852, Despatches ... St John.
- 34 Foreign Secretary Lord Malmesbury to Crampton, August 10, 1852, as transcribed by the US State Department, c. late August 1852, Manning, Diplomatic Correspondence, IV, 463 ff; see also Lawrence to Webster, London, August 10, 1852, Ibid., 456.
- 35 Livingston to State Department, August 7, 1852, Despatches ... Halifax: "... these seizures are nothing new to me ... you will find in my despatches to the Dep[artmen]t as early as 1842 mention made of several seizures."
- 36 Webster to Crampton, Franklin, Massachusetts, July 17, 1852, Webster Papers, LC: "I am anxious to see you at once. On receipt of this inform me by Telegraph when you can be in Boston." See also Webster to Fillmore, July 24, 1852, Ibid. On his arrival, Crampton told Elgin: "I have done all I can to persuade Mr Webster of the most conciliatory disposition on our part." August 4, 1852, EP, A 398.
- 37 Crampton to Webster, July 5, 1852, British Legation.
- 38 Commodore Perry, USN, to Vice Admiral Seymour, RN, August 20, 1852, Manning, Diplomatic Correspondence, IV, 479; also in Despatches ... St John.
- 39 Malmesbury to Crampton, August 10, 1852, presented to Webster c. late August, Manning, Diplomatic Correspondence, IV, 463 ff.
- 40 Fillmore to Webster, July 20, 1852, Webster Papers, LC: "Mr Crampton informed me also, that he has addressed a circular to the several Governors of the British Provinces of North America advising moderation and Forbearance." Webster wrote back that Crampton had written to the Colonial governors urging them "to use all their diligence and best judgement, to prevent any collision between British armed vessels and the American Fishermen." Webster to Fillmore, July 24, 1852, Webster papers, LC. See also Seymour to Elgin, August 12, 1852, EP, A 398, in which he confirms that he has ordered British ships to seize American vessels only if they are within three miles of the shore. Fishing within the great bays beyond that limit was acceptable.
- 41 Fillmore to Webster, July 20, 1852, Webster Papers, LC.
- 42 For boats seized see Perry to Kennedy, August 18, 1852 and Commander Colin Y Campbell, RN, to Seymour, HM Steam Sloop Devastation, Port Hood, October 21, 1852, Manning, Diplomatic Correspondence, IV, 472, 484, n. 2. For the release of the

- Helen Maria see Joseph Howe to Thomas M Nett, August 6, 1852, Despatches ... Halifax.
- 43 Elgin to Grey, October 6, 1850 and Grey to Elgin, October 25, 1850, EGP, II, 720, 722; Grey to Elgin, January 9, 1852, EGP, III, 984. Masters, Reciprocity Treaty, xxi-xxii, 4. Lester Burrell Shippee, Canadian-American Relations, 33-36. See also A A Den Otter, "Alexander Galt, the 1859 Tariff and Canadian Economic Nationalism", in The Canadian Historical Review, 63 (1982), 159-61.
 - 44 Innis, The Cod Fisheries..., 350. Elgin to Grey, June 21, 1851, EGP, II, 831. See also Masters' Reciprocity Treaty, xxi-xxii, for the 1850 intercolonial reciprocity agreement between Canada, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, which marked another step towards colonial unity.
 - 45 The New Brunswicker, August 3, 1852, quoted in the Senate by Seward, August 14, 1852, Congressional Globe, 32:1 916.
 - 46 Malmesbury to Crampton, August 10, 1852, presented to Webster c. late August, Manning, Diplomatic Correspondence, IV, 463 ff.
 - 47 Seymour to Elgin, August 12, 1852, EP, A 398. Everett to Crampton, February 14, 1852, Everett Papers, LC.
 - 48 Thomas Braine to Webster, September 4, 1852; Robert Wilson Fraser to William L Marcy, August 17, 1853, Despatches ... Halifax.
 - 49 St John, New Brunswick News, September 7, 1853, quoted in the New York Herald, September 13, 1853, Despatches ... Pictou.
 - 50 Perry to Kennedy, August 18, 26, 1852, Manning, Diplomatic Correspondence, IV, 471.
 - 51 Perry to Seymour, August 20, 1852, Ibid., 479.
 - 52 Fillmore to Webster, July 25, 1852, Webster Papers, LC.
 - 53 Washington National Intelligencer, July 23, 24, 1852.
 - 54 Maryland Senator Pratt, Senate, July 23, 1852, Congressional Globe, 32:1, 1897.
 - 55 Washington National Intelligencer, July 28, 1852.
 - 56 Fillmore to Webster, July 20, 1852, Webster Papers, LC.
 - 57 Fillmore to Webster, July 25, 1852, Ibid.
 - 58 Lord Derby to Sir John Packington, April 14, 1852 and Malmesbury to Derby, August 5, 1852, Wilbur Devereux Jones, The American Problem..., 109, 110.
 - 59 Malmesbury to Crampton, August 10, 1852, presented to Webster c. late August, Manning, Diplomatic Correspondence, IV, 463, n.1.

- 60 Fillmore to Webster, July 24, 1852, Webster Papers, LC.
Edward Everett to Joseph R Ingersoll, US Minister to Great Britain, December 4, 1852, Diplomatic Instructions, Great Britain.
- 61 Lawrence to Webster, August 10, 1852, Ingersoll to Marcy, June 10, 1853, Manning, Diplomatic Correspondence, IV, 458, 510.
Foreign Secretary the Earl of Clarendon to Elgin, May 19 1854, EP, A 400.
- 62 Andrews to Marcy, May 3, 1853, Despatches ... Montreal.
Andrews to Marcy, March 31, 1854. Despatches ... Special Agents.
- 63 Andrews to March, April 3, 1854, Despatches ... Montreal.
- 64 Elgin to Crampton, April 29, 1852, EP, A 398.
- 65 Andrews to Marcy, May 3, 1853, Despatches ... Montreal.
- 66 Masters, Reciprocity Treaty, 20.
- 67 Royal Gazette, Extra edition in Charlottetown, PEI, July 19, 1852, enclosed in Norton to Everett, November 8, 1852.
- 68 Derby to Malmesbury, October 3, 1852, in Jones, The American Problem..., 115.
- 69 Bulwer to Webster, July 30, 1851, and Crampton Memorandum, September 27, 1851, British Legation.
- 70 Malmesbury to Crampton, April 8, 1852, enclosed in Crampton to Webster, April 23, 1852, British Legation.
- 71 Webster to Crampton, April 29, 1852, Foreign Legations.
- 72 Clayton to Bulwer, April 23, 1850, Clayton Papers, LC.
- 73 Unnamed newspaper, c. July 1852, headlined: "ENGLISH ENCROACHMENTS IN CENTRAL AMERICA - THE NEW COLONY OF THE BAY ISLANDS", Despatches ... St John.
- 74 Grey to Russell, March 6, 1848, which provoked Russell's frustrated reply of March 8, 1848, GP: "The Mosquito King ... is almost as troublesome as the insect from which he derives his title."
- 75 Webster to Fillmore, April 22, 1852, Webster Papers, LC.
- 76 Malmesbury to Crampton, June 18, 1852, British Legation.
Crampton was ordered to read the full despatch to Webster and leave a copy with him. This would have reached the Secretary of State just about the time when Crampton declared Britain's new vigorous policy of Fishery enforcement.
- 77 Crampton to Webster, July 5, 1852, British Legation. Also in Manning, Diplomatic Correspondence, IV, 452. See also

- Malmesbury to Crampton, August 10, 1852, Manning, IV, 463.
- 78 Crampton to Webster, July 8, 1852, British Legation.
- 79 Lord Glenelg to Sir Colin Campbell, November 5 1838, in Innis, The Cod Fisheries..., 346.
- 80 Bourne, Balance of Power, 78-79.
- 81 Ibid., 76, 86, 95.
- 82 Crampton Memorandum, September 21, 1851 and John J Crittenden to Crampton, October 6, 1851, British Legation.
- 83 Edward Henry, Journal, August 13, 1852 in John Vincent, Disraeli, Derby and the Conservative Party: Journals and Memoirs of Edward Henry, Lord Stanley, 1849-1869, (Sussex, Harvester Press, 1978), 79-80.

CHAPTER FIVE

RECIPROCITY: THE ROCKY ROAD

In 1854, two years after the Fishery policy was introduced, Lord Elgin returned from leave in Britain on a special mission to Washington. His task: to secure Reciprocity. It was, by any standards, a tall order. For the past eight years British and colonial officials had been trying - with varying degrees of urgency and the same lack of success - to persuade the United States to adopt this measure. In fact, by 1854 the efforts of the Imperial authorities had dragged on for so long that the colonies, Newfoundland apart, had largely lost interest in free trade with the United States. In 1854 Britain was also negotiating from a position of weakness. The Crimean War made it very clear that she was in no position to be heavy-handed with the United States. As long as she was fighting a European war, she had to avoid trouble in North America, not foment it. Yet in 1854 there was cause for optimism about Reciprocity, and most of it lay in the United States. Whereas for the past eight years domestic American political conditions had worked against the measure, in that year the conditions were ripe for a settlement. And the best way to understand why the clouds parted in 1854 is to study the fog that bedevilled the British efforts in the previous years.

First, an understanding of the economic problems and clashes of interest besetting Reciprocity is vital. When first broached half-heartedly in 1846, the measure was intended to be limited in scope. It would have brought free trade between its instigator, Canada, and the United States, allowing the colony to export its

timber, corn and other agricultural products to the Republic duty free - and allowing the same products to travel in the opposite direction. As an added incentive, the Canadians offered the free navigation of the Saint Lawrence and its canals to the Americas. But as the recession bit deeper, other colonies complicated the issue by pressing for inclusion. Prince Edward Island, largely an isolated farming community, knew the value of North American free trade through years of supplying American fishermen with fresh food. To Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, also hit by a decline in world trade, the United States offered even greater potential as a trading partner. Free access to the American market would have allowed the more competitive export of timber, fish, coal, iron and, possibly, colonial built ships. But to these Maritime Provinces, the United States was also a commercial threat, particularly if Reciprocity threw open the jewel in their crown, the Atlantic Fisheries.

In the United States, too, Reciprocity offered both competition and promise. On the negative side, the wheat growers of the Midwest, Maryland and Virginia, the coal and iron industrialists of Pennsylvania and Virginia and the shipbuilders of New England had reason to fear colonial competition. And across much of the Deep South, the remoteness of British North America gave Reciprocity faint appeal. Yet the Midwest could see benefits in a new market for its agricultural produce and access to the St. Lawrence, the traditional rival of New York's Erie Canal. Traders in the states bordering British North America had every reason to welcome free trade, and the lumber men of Maine could see in Reciprocity the promise of a removal of duties on timber cut in the

United States but floated down the river system of New Brunswick. Finally, the fishermen of New England had sound commercial grounds for backing any agreement which would let them fish on equal terms with their colonial rivals.

Yet a quick glance at the late 1840s and early 1850s suggests that the British could have saved their efforts. In simple terms, the conditions were never suitable in the United States for the passage of Reciprocity. Presidential elections in 1848 and 1852 meant that in those years Congress effectively lost interest in passing legislation and, when it turned to such humdrum matters, it was politically dangerous for any party with its eyes on the White House to start backing measures which might appear favourable to America's Old Enemy. Compounding this was the death of President Taylor in 1850, which led to the introduction of a new President and a new cabinet. For virtually the whole of its career, moreover, the administration of 1849-53 lacked a majority in Congress and was therefore to a large extent impotent. This impotency also afflicted the Democrat administration in 1848, especially after it became clear that President Polk was not standing for a second term. From then on the members of his cabinet were at least as interested in furthering their own political careers as in acting as a government. Once Cass lost the election, this Democratic administration was stripped of real power, a severe blow to the friends of Reciprocity because in Robert H Walker they had a Secretary of the Treasury sympathetic to the measure.¹ Worse still, the new Whig government was unlikely to move heaven and earth for Reciprocity. Though the party was no longer rigidly committed to the tariff, it was the American

political grouping least friendly to free trade. Wrote Crampton in March 1849:

As far as the Govt of the United States is concerned I fear our prospects have not been improved by the late change of Administration - Mr Clayton the new Secretary of State when in the Senate was I understand opposed to the measure - he is a protectionist though not as strict a protectionist as others of his party.

Such was the pressure of the tariff men on Taylor's minority administration that in July 1849 Clayton told Crampton:

the present Administration of the US wont (sic) have any thing to do with the matter unless they can get such a quid pro quo for it as will make it go down with their own party, the Protectionists, save themselves from the appearance of inconsistency, and at the same time do something which would make them some political capital with the American people generally.²

Nor did matters improve under Taylor's successor, Millard Fillmore. Within a short time of his taking over in the White House, the Whig press was denouncing Reciprocity, and, by the spring of 1851, Fillmore's position was that the United States had nothing to gain from reciprocal free trade in agricultural products because Canada and the United States were economic competitors. And in October 1850 Bulwer predicted a bleak future for Reciprocity because of a rising tide of American protectionism.³

Another major handicap was the rise in sectional tension. This served as an obstacle to North American free trade in three main ways. First, so much time was spent on debates about slavery that other matters were neglected by Congress, and only the most pressing stood any chance of receiving attention, let alone a final vote. In fact, in 1848, 1849 and 1850 Congress failed to act on Reciprocity largely because it ran out of time due to the nation's

obsession with slavery.⁴ Secondly, the sectional feuding heightened Southern suspicions about attempts by the 'abolitionist' North to whittle away their power and their right to retain slavery. This was unfortunate because Reciprocity was widely believed to be the first step towards political union between the Colonies and the States.⁵ It was thought that 'commercial annexation' would hasten 'political annexation', a fear which encouraged many southerners to be at best suspicious of the measure. The British were painfully aware of this problem. "Caution is most necessary," wrote Bulwer in February 1850. "The south will oppose reciprocity if they think it favors annexation. The North supports it, because they think it defers but prepares the way for it."⁶ Hence, a great supporter of Reciprocity, John A Dix, probably did more harm than good when he spoke of Reciprocity and Annexation in the same breath.⁷ Finally, relations between North and South became so embittered that many Southern politicians would oppose any measure which seemed especially to favour the rival section.⁸ Reciprocity was especially vulnerable to this charge because the states which traded most heavily with the Colonies were in the north.⁹

There were, then, several factors working against Reciprocity, most of which were beyond the control of the British. Yet political principles are usually very flexible; if the powerful can be convinced that a measure is in their interests, they will usually find some reason for supporting it. Here lay the biggest problem facing Reciprocity: it was difficult to arouse any enthusiasm for it among American politicians. Time and again, the issue failed to arouse the sort of interest needed for it to

succeed in Congress. Indeed, a constant theme of Andrews' correspondence with the State Department was the need to overcome American indifference to Reciprocity. For every member of congress who opposed it, there were several who did not care whether it failed or not. Like the vast majority of Americans they knew little about British North America and cared even less. All they knew was that they had got along quite well without Reciprocity so far, and could probably manage without it in the future.¹⁰ If they were undecided, the thought that they might be helping Britain out of her difficulties would often swing them towards opposing the measure. There they were joined by the economic groups who felt threatened by Reciprocity. Chief among these were the wheat growers of Maryland and Virginia, the coal miners of Virginia and Pennsylvania, and the ship builders of New England.¹¹ Others believed that the proposed Reciprocity measures not only threatened specific American interests, but also offered America nothing in return. Reciprocity was embracing, wrote the Philadelphia Enquirer in 1852, "only those articles of which the people of the British provinces have a surplus, and carefully excluding all articles for which we might find a market, with them."¹² Such opponents were adept at discovering pretexts for blocking Reciprocity. One of the favourites was the claim that it was a violation of the Constitution to control commerce by treaty, an argument rehearsed by President Fillmore in 1852:

The express power having been given by the Constitution to Congress, to regulate commerce with foreign nations, and to lay and collect duties, has this deprived the treaty-making power of authority so to regulate commerce, as to declare that no duty shall be collected on a particular article imported into the country from abroad?

And, even if the Senate were allowed to pass commercial measures,

would this not threaten existing commercial arrangements with other countries?¹³

The cause of Reciprocity was not completely hopeless, though. There were strong supporters who were motivated by the benefits they expected Reciprocity to bring to their own particular districts. This was especially true of the four main American advocates of North American free trade: John A Dix, Joseph Grinnell, Stephen Douglas and Israel de Wolf Andrews. Senator Dix came from New York State, near the border with Canada, a region to which Reciprocity was likely to bring a massive expansion in the already growing trade with the Provinces. Representative Grinnell's Massachusetts constituency depended on the exploitation of the colonial fisheries and could only benefit from any agreement which gave freer access to these northern waters. Douglas hailed from Illinois and, like many in the Midwest, had his eyes on the St Lawrence waterway. In summer this was the swiftest route to the Old World for what was already becoming the wheatbowl of Europe. Andrews, though, was the most active petitioner for Reciprocity. Raised on the Maine/New Brunswick border and from one of the busiest ports of America's north-eastern fishing fleet, he knew all about the potential of free trade with the Provinces. Moreover, as a land speculator, he had material interests of his own that he **wished** to develop in the Canadas.¹⁴ But between 1848 and 1852 few supporters for the measure could be found whose constituencies were not directly involved in trade with the Colonies. This, Douglas explained to Crampton in 1851, was the Reciprocity movement's greatest weakness. "This is a measure," he said,

for, or against which, there cannot be got up
any national or even party feeling - we cannot,

therefore, hope to carry it by a - hurrah! It is one which requires great study to understand its advantages or even its bearings on the different interests of the Country: -- its supporters are friendly to it, not on any general principle, but from various local and peculiar consideration - the opposition to it is of the same varied character, the only means we have of getting at it is therefore one which involves great knowledge of men's characters and of their local and personal interests and prejudices - Great knowledge of the question in its bearings on each of their interests - great tact in the manner of approaching the subject with different men - and above all - great labour in keeping account of the "ayes and noes" - and when we are assured of a majority, keeping it up to the mark at the moment required - I have ... carried measures in this way myself, and I know the hard work it requires.¹⁵

It was ironic that Douglas, of all people, should advise Crampton on how to secure the ratification of Reciprocity because he, along with other Americans, had helped kill off possible agreements through sheer greed. One object of lust in some circles was the use of the St Lawrence, and, once these Americans got the merest hint that it might be on offer, they would not let go. This Bulwer learned to his irritation in early 1850. The previous year, he told Elgin, Crampton had innocently lent Dix a private despatch from London stating that Her Majesty's Government would not block any Canadian wish to open the waterway to the Americans. Unfortunately, Dix had promptly shown it "to half the world".

What has followed has been that Mr Douglas, a Senator, in order to obtain popularity, by acquiring for this Country what he supposes we are willing to concede, has brought forward a reciprocity bill in the Senate, including the Navigation of the St Lawrence, and a motion has been made to recommit the bill in the House of Representatives for the purpose of making a similar addition... I have seen and talked to Douglas, but he says that unless the St Lawrence is granted, the bill will not pass; and it is probable that as an expectation on the subject has been excited, it must be satisfied.¹⁶

Greed even reared its ugly head among those groups least friendly to Reciprocity. When William Hamilton Merritt visited Washington in June 1849 to press for Reciprocity, Clayton sought advice from his resident expert, Andrews. Though Andrews was an advocate of Reciprocity, he was a past master at telling his employers what they wanted to hear. His inclination, for political reasons, was to do nothing about the measure in the summer of 1849. But, faced with the possibility of an agreement between the United States and Canada alone, Andrews urged Clayton to hold out for more if he started negotiations with the British.

If the Government decide to entertain favorably the proposition of the Canadian Government I propose that we exchange the articles named in Mr Dix (sic) bill, except lumber, on reciprocal terms - provided the Imperial Government guarantee to our Citizens the right to enjoy in common with British subjects the sea and coast fisheries of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia - Prince Edwards Island, and Newfoundland. The abolition of the export duty in New Brunswick upon Lumber cut on Lands owned by Maine and Massachusetts on the headwaters of the St John and floated down that river to the sea. With an explicit understanding that this Government is not by this offer committed to adopt a similar policy with the other Colonies.¹⁷

In short, Andrews felt that the United States should not settle for a simple agreement with Canada. The rest of the Provinces had so much to offer that even a pro-tariff administration could find something appealing in a free-trade agreement with all of British North America. This, presumably, was what Clayton meant when he told Crampton that any Reciprocity agreement had to give his administration 'capital' with the American public. Certainly in that same month Crampton reported to Palmerston the rising price demanded by Clayton for any deal on North American free trade. Though Clayton could not recommend to Congress a deal on reciprocity between the States and Canada and New Brunswick,

it was, he said, not to be inferred that the American Cabinet were opposed to the principle of a more unrestricted commercial intercourse between the US and the neighbouring British Colonies; on the contrary, - the US Govt were sincerely desirous that an arrangement of that nature should be made, which should embrace not only Canada and New Brunswick, but all the other Colonies on the northern frontier, more particularly those which possess any exclusive Rights with regard to the fisheries, - it being understood that the abrogation of such exclusive Rights should be made an indispensable condition of the arrangement, for which concession he doubted not that proper equivalents could be found by the US.¹⁸

For his own political reasons - both diplomatic and domestic - Clayton was largely bluffing. His goal was not to secure a Reciprocity agreement but to cause delays in any negotiations without offending the British. Yet had Britain called his bluff and granted him all that he sought, Clayton would almost certainly have found it fairly easy to sell the deal to the American people. But until either such a wide-ranging measure was available or different pressures began to work on both the American Government and nation, there was little reason for the States to agree to any form of free trade with British North America. Instead the American Government was in the pleasant position of being able to name its price while knowing that it did not matter if the British refused to pay up.

Giving successive American Governments every encouragement to adopt this arrogant attitude was the behaviour of the Colonists themselves. The different squabbling factions north of the American border did much to block Reciprocity by their actions both at home and in the States. The most obvious obstacle to Reciprocity was the stance of the annexationists. The burning of the Canadian Parliament and the Annexation Manifesto were the most

powerful symbols of the annexationists' strength and persuaded many Americans that unlimited concessions could be wrung out of the teetering Province. But the annexationists were also working in subtler ways. Believing that the United States wished to admit the colonies to the Union, they told American officials that to grant Reciprocity would kill off annexationism. They also painted a glowing picture of the benefits that annexation would bring the United States.¹⁹ Yet the annexationists should not shoulder all the blame for the repeated failure of the Reciprocity negotiations. Some of the biggest villains were the colonists who actually advocated the measure. The problem was simple: though Britain controlled the colonies' foreign policy, she could not control the colonists' actions inside and outside their Parliaments. The dangers inherent in this became clear in October 1849. In an effort to keep the pressure on the British Government, the New Brunswick Executive Council issued a minute stating that if the efforts to secure Reciprocity failed, "a stern necessity will ere long impel the public mind to seek for relief by an incorporation with the neighbouring Republic". This sort of action repeated throughout the colonies, posed all sorts of problems for the British. Grey described it as a "direct inducement" to the Americans to refuse Reciprocity "if (as can hardly be doubted) the real wish of the people of the U. States is to increase their territory by adding to it Bsh. N. America."²⁰ Such actions by the colonists were a hindrance in other ways. They demonstrated very clearly to the United States that, during the annexation crisis in particular, the governments of British North America were so desperate for Reciprocity that, in return, they would surrender almost anything. Indeed, in July 1849 Andrews was able to report

that the Maritime Provinces were "in favor of yielding the fisheries to the Americans and in addition will give anything else they have for free trade with the United State". He was encouraged to believe this by private conversations with colonial officials who had, in the space of a year, abandoned a zealous defence of the fisheries in favour of using them as bargaining counters for free trade.²¹ This sort of irresponsible gossiping went on throughout the Anglo-American negotiations and, claimed Bulwer, it was fatal to his efforts.

The conviction [in the United States] that we must have it, or that the Colonies will separate from us, & that if it is so much desired by the Colonies, it must be very prejudicial to the U.S. has gained upon public opinion here.²²

The colonists did more than make it hard for Crampton and Bulwer to negotiate new agreements. They also helped to scupper arrangements that were near completion. The British had at first sought free trade exclusively between Canada and the United States, partly because the Canadians had been the first to press for Reciprocity and partly because the Annexation movement was strongest in that Province. Moreover, the British felt that it would be easier to get a limited Reciprocity agreement and expand it later than to get one including all the colonies from the beginning.²² But the agitation in the Maritimes ended all hopes of this. Thus, in the summer of 1848, with an agreement between Canada and the States close, the visit to Washington by Woodward, a member of the New Brunswick Legislative Assembly, spelled disaster for Crampton and Canada. Once in Washington, Woodward visited several Senators to tell them that New Brunswick wanted to be included in the proposed settlement. Single-handedly, noted

Crampton, Woodward had wreaked havoc among Congressional supporters of Canadian Reciprocity.

I observed that many Senators who were before favourable to the Canada Bill appeared now to hang back, & hints were made of an equivalent being desirable from New Brunswick in an extension of a right of fishing in the Bay of Fundy.²⁴

The bill, due before the Senate, was instead returned to the lower house for reconsideration - adding to the already interminable delays the negotiators had faced. The reason was simple. Once the Americans knew that the other colonies were clamouring to be included and, what was more, they were offering more sparkling jewels than the St Lawrence, they sensibly held out for a better deal than trade with Canada alone. At the same time this allowed Clayton to prolong Britain's North American embarrassment by delaying negotiations on Reciprocity still further.²⁵ Small wonder, then, that early in his mission Bulwer found "negotiations here are the very devil: I should know privately & they (the colonists) should not say publicly what they desire and what sacrifices they will make to obtain it."²⁶ But say it they did - and, like Woodward, many of them travelled to Washington specifically to do so. To the great annoyance of Bulwer, hordes of colonists flocked to the Capitol at their own expense whenever negotiations reached a critical point. Instead of leaving the affair to the diplomats, these naive would-be lobbyists promptly launched into amateurish if well intentioned attempts to influence Congress. Predictably, they did more harm than good. Representing conflicting interests, they confused those members of Congress who would listen by recounting their differing views on Reciprocity. Moreover, by appearing overly keen on North American free trade, these colonial subjects merely aroused American suspicions. In

despair, Bulwer watched these eager men undo the patient, professional lobbying he and Crampton had carried out with the help of colonial officials sent by Elgin. It was all too much for him. Hence in Late February 1850 he protested to the Governor General:

I hear more gentlemen are coming to urge the reciprocity bill on. Another and another. - God forbid! In such case, I wash my hands of the consequences. Of course I know you cannot prevent the calamity, and I shall do my best to control it; but you have no idea of the mischief it produces.²⁷

By autumn 1851, though, the political climate was changing, if only slightly. True, the United States still lacked any real incentive to take Reciprocity seriously, but Britain's main weakness in the negotiations - her desperation for the measure - had long since disappeared. The return of prosperity to the Provinces had destroyed the economic base of annexationism by demonstrating that economic upturns did not depend on trade with the United States. Yet a further American barrier remained: Congressional corruption. This came to a head in November of that year when Crampton was considering Reciprocity's prospects in the coming session. From a political associate of Illinois Senator Stephen Douglas, Crampton learned that payment of £20,000 to a group calling itself 'The Organisation' would secure the passage of the Reciprocity bill. However, he was also told that non-payment of this fee would ensure the bill's failure in Congress. The proposal, stressed Crampton, was genuine.

The truth is that what they call the "Organisation" has within the last five or six years been brought to such a system that what may be called the outside Congress is more powerful than the Congress itself - and there is scarcely a measure the passage or obstruction of which is not previously arranged by mutual compact long before it comes before that body and even before the Session begins.

... I will only say that knowing who they are - and what are the means at their disposal I am fully convinced that they can pass this Bill if they choose; and that they can secure its rejection if they choose; - indeed, even their inaction would ensure that.

In short as things now stand I fear that we have not the smallest chance of getting the question settled by fair means.²⁸

With this, Britain's pursuit of Reciprocity ground to a halt. It would be uplifting to learn that the British government declined to take these matters any further on a point of principle; that, reared in the honourable traditions of 'The Mother of Parliaments', it refused to interfere in the domestic politics of a foreign country through bribery. However, when it suited them, British officials were quite happy to contemplate - and practice - corruption. Bulwer considered bribery at least twice and in 1850 the British had pressed for Reciprocity in Congress by 'jobbing' - or "canvassing this individual member of Congress or the other". Moreover, both the British and Canadian Governments readily contributed to Andrews' funds, believing he could secure the passage of Reciprocity.²⁹ In truth there was nothing noble about Britain's decision not to pay 'The Organisation' in 1851. The truth was that the British avoided bribery because Reciprocity's prospects were so bleak that the British believed they would be wasting their money. Moreover, with the colonies at long last prosperous, and quiet, there was no need for such desperate measures.

Yet the summer of 1852 brought a signal change to the Anglo-American negotiations over Reciprocity. At long last the United States did have an incentive to take the measure seriously, and it was an incentive which could bend the sternest of political

principles: the threat of war. The British decision to enforce the colonial fishing rights guaranteed by the Convention of 1818 inspired the American hawks to talk boldly, but they also led to three serious negotiations in the States between John F Crampton, newly promoted to British Minister to Washington, and three different Secretaries of State.

If the British had adopted the policy of exclusion in an effort to concentrate the minds of the American cabinet on Reciprocity, they would have been pleased with Fillmore, who responded by expressing his characteristic desire to avoid trouble. Knowing that Crampton was on his way to Boston to see the Secretary of State, Fillmore expressed the hope that the two would be able "to agree upon some line of proceeding that will allay the present excitement and prevent any bloodshed." The course he favoured was the one suggested by Webster, that the United States "take up the whole subject of the Fisheries and the Canada trade at once, as matter of negotiation". Even here, Fillmore was hardly decisive. The "reciprocal trade between us and the British Provinces is one which I greatly prefer should be settled by legislation," he wrote. "If however that cannot be done, it may be best to settle it by a treaty for a limited time". Basically, Fillmore was so worried about the prospect of war that he wanted peace at any honourable price, and he was convinced that Britain's price was Reciprocity. Thus, after years of stalling by the United States, there at last seemed some hope of success. By July 24 Crampton had arrived at Marshfield, Webster's Massachusetts home, as had telegrams from Andrews recounting the great excitement among the American fishermen. Six days later Andrews, too, was at Marshfield

reporting on the state of the fishing grounds and putting his considerable knowledge of British North America at Webster's disposal.³⁰

Despite this urgency and Fillmore's willingness to negotiate on Reciprocity, such a deal was never feasible in the summer of 1852. The immediate concession of North American free trade would have left the government wide open to accusations from both the opposition and its own supporters that it had capitulated in the face of British cannon. Even Fillmore admitted that "I am rather averse to negotiating upon this subject under a state of things that looks a little like coercion on the part of Great Britain, in reference to our fisheries".³¹ Only the day before in the Senate Whigs and Democrats, Northerners and Southerners, had spoken out against giving in to Britain's tactics. The statement of Texas Senator Thomas Jefferson Rusk was typical. "It seems to me," he said,

that the conduct of Great Britain in this business should be met promptly, on our side. It is supposed by some Senators to be designed to bring about an enactment for reciprocity of trade on our part with the British colonies. If that be so, I will never give a vote for such a measure under such circumstances, no matter what may be the consequences. I will never yield to any threats made by the British Government, and cannon will be found to be the least available argument that could be used.... Can we negotiate at the cannon's mouth? No, sir, I would not negotiate, nor would I sanction a negotiation, nor stop to inquire into the justice of a negotiation brought about under such circumstances..... I would not submit to this domineering spirit which has manifested itself too much in all the conduct of Great Britain with other nations.³²

This pressure inevitably affected the negotiations between Webster and Crampton. Wrote the latter on August 4:

I have done all I can to persuade Mr Webster of the most conciliatory disposition on our part. This is not difficult as far as he is concerned, but Congress seems I am sorry to see inclined to take matters in an angry tone - The Protectionist & more particularly the "Scott Whigs (sic), with I believe the notion of increasing his General Scott's chances of success by showing that the Country may be in need of a military President, have joined [the Democrats'] Young America in an absurd war cry ab^t the fisheries.³³

But party political manoeuvring was not the only hindrance to negotiations in the immediate aftermath of the Admiralty's orders concerning the Fisheries. American national honour also ruled out any real hope for Reciprocity in July and August 1852. Among the many papers expressing this view was the New York Herald. The day before Crampton's troubled letter to Elgin, the journal trumpeted:

The course now adopted by England, is, doubtless, with a view of forcing the whole matter upon the executive as a subject now proper for negotiation; and the attempt will be made to carry the reciprocity measure by treaty.... A more fatal mistake was never made - Whatever chance that measure might had had it is now out of the question.³⁴

Instead, the negotiations degenerated into attempts to preserve the peace rather than to secure Reciprocity. Here the British were partly to blame. Their pacific attitude belied American claims - or fears - that they were practising brinkmanship for all it was worth. Crampton, who rushed straight to Webster's Massachusetts home at the Secretary of State's request, made it clear that Britain "was willing to do anything to keep the peace". By July 30 Webster was able to report to Fillmore that Crampton had given evidence of Britain's peaceful disposition by writing to Elgin and British North America's Lieutenant-Governors urging moderation. Because the order to exclude Americans from the Fisheries had caused excitement in the States, wrote Webster:

and as there is apparently with us, some disposition to settle the whole matter, either by Act of Congress or Treaty, he recommends to them, to use all their diligence and best judgement, to prevent any collision between British armed vessels and the American Fishermen.³⁵

While this greatly boosted the cause of peace, it also reduced the pressure on the United States' government. But even had Crampton pressed to the utmost of his power, little could have been achieved. The obstacle was Daniel Webster. Though an Anglophile, Webster's first loyalties were to himself and the United States. And in July 1852 his private and political lives were in turmoil. Along with President Fillmore and the Mexican War hero, General Winfield Scott, Webster had been a front-running candidate at the Whig nominating convention in Baltimore. But on June 21, after several stalemated ballots, Webster's bid for the one political prize which had eluded him came to an end when he withdrew his candidacy. This defeat deeply depressed him. Despite the efforts of political friends to cheer him up with dinners and glittering receptions, Webster seemed shell-shocked. Among the people Webster dined with in Washington on his return from the convention was Rufus Choate. He likened their meeting to the "first meal after the return from the grave, when the full force of the bereavement seems to be realized".³⁶ Webster chose to lick his wounds away from the oppressive climate and scheming of Washington and headed for New England; which is where he first heard of the Fishery dispute. But even in the first flush of the crisis, Webster clearly did not have his heart in the labours of his office. While Fillmore was hoping for advice about how to handle the question, Webster was hinting at resigning.³⁷ However, Webster avoided the rather dramatic and dangerous act of quitting in the middle of an

ominous international dispute and instead tried to sort out the affair. Freed from the electoral need of playing to the galleries, he was theoretically in a position to conduct foreign affairs as he saw fit. But the Whigs failed to unite around Scott, and by the middle of July a movement was underway in Massachusetts, presenting Webster as an independent Whig candidate. Though this campaign was to spread to at least five states, Webster preferred to be left alone. Even so, his public position was ambiguous. On August 4 he let it be known that he would neither invite nor encourage his promotion as an independent candidate. However, he would not "interfere to prevent any portion of the people casting their votes for him, if they should see fit to do so". Thus, well into the crisis, Webster's hands were still tied by his life-long involvement in the 'Great Game' of American politics. Indeed the presidential election profoundly affected the negotiations over the fisheries. Whoever won the battle of the White House, the failure of Fillmore to secure the Whig nomination meant that within seven months he and his Cabinet would be out of office. Just as debilitating was Webster's conviction that Scott could not lead the Whigs to victory in November. In Webster's eyes this was a significant obstacle to a lasting agreement over the Fisheries and Reciprocity. He wrote: "I confess that I have very little hopes from Congress, now or next session. Many of its members are opposed to the whole project, and others who favor it, prefer to leave its final disposition to the next administration."³⁸

In other words, the supporters of the rival candidates for the Presidency would not allow this lame-duck administration to end on a high note; they wanted the credit for any international

settlement to go to the successors of Fillmore and Webster. More cynically, they wanted the Fillmore administration to fail. Echoing Crampton's alarmed letter to Elgin on August 4, that same day Webster sent a very worried note to Fillmore. "I have been informed of the flare-up in the Senate, yesterday, respecting the Fisheries", he wrote. "I have very considerable alarm on this subject. Your enemies, and mine, among the Whigs, and the Young Americans, among the Democrats, are very like to join in opposing the Administration, and in embarrassing the state of our affairs with England."³⁹ With a presidential election well under way, any issue was fair game to the candidates. The Democrats wanted to humiliate their rivals by highlighting their weak handling of foreign affairs, while the Scott Whigs wished to contrast the bungling of the Fillmore administration with the promise of their own strong government. More important, since circumstances were in any case working against Webster's chances of even securing an agreement, the constant talk of electioneering did much to sap his energies. And by the summer of 1852, the seventy-year-old statesman had precious little energy left. Summer was always a bad time for him, bringing annual attacks of chronic catarrh. It was partly because he believed this condition to be exacerbated by the steaming Washington summer that he had returned to New England. This year his catarrh attack held off for a fortnight; yet his health was in rapid decline. He reluctantly managed a three-week stint in Washington in August, and fitted in desultory negotiations with Crampton, held up as much by the vagaries of the Atlantic mail as by Webster's illness. But by September, when he had returned to Marshfield, death was fast approaching. Inevitably, the business of the State Department rapidly slipped into arrears, with letters

about the Fisheries written from London in August remaining unanswered until December ⁴⁰ As a result, foreign affairs were left in the hands of a man who was remote from Washington and, increasingly, remote from all but his closest friends. Such a man was not one who could have solved the Fishery dispute and the rising pressure for Reciprocity.

Webster's death at 2.37 am. on October 24 was mourned across the nation⁴¹; but it also brought to the State department a man who was ideally qualified to settle the Anglo-American crisis. Following Webster into the quagmire of foreign affairs was his old friend and colleague, Edward Everett. Another Anglophile, Everett had been the US Minister to Great Britain in the 1840s and had established close relations with several of the most prominent British politicians of his generation. Indeed, his correspondence reads like a 'Who's Who' of British politics. When Joseph Ingersoll sailed to Britain to replace Abbott Lawrence as the US Minister, Everett gave him letters of introduction to, among others, Lord Aberdeen, the Earl of Derby and Lord Brougham, and urged him to see a close friend, Dr Henry Holland, the personal physician of both Aberdeen and Palmerston. So close were Aberdeen and Everett that when the former became Prime Minister, their letters crossed in the post, Everett congratulating Aberdeen and Aberdeen congratulating Everett on his appointment as Secretary of State. The most telling phrase came from the ageing aristocrat, who spoke of "my great satisfaction at your official elevation, and the advantages which I expect from it to both our countries". Three days before he penned this in London, Everett was trying to take advantage of their friendship, bypassing Crampton and the

British Foreign Secretary to write direct to Aberdeen about the Fisheries and Reciprocity.⁴² Political contacts aside, Everett's appointment was promising for another, perhaps more important reason: he was well acquainted with the agreements between Britain and the States over the Fisheries. As a young man, Everett had actually worked on the terms of the 1818 Convention which was now in dispute between the two countries, and in the 1840s, when he was the US Minister to Great Britain, the Fisheries had been the subject of "a long and interesting correspondence with Lord Aberdeen, the Foreign Secretary". Included in the exchange of notes was the subject at the heart of the current dispute, the definition of 'Bays'. Nor had Everett lost touch with matters since his return from London ten years earlier. He had been one of a handful of men who had given Webster expert advice in the early days of the crisis⁴³ and from mid-July onwards had worked hard to keep himself informed. He sought out a list of documents on the Fisheries given by the President to the Senate, asked Cass for a copy of his speech on the Fisheries, prepared a letter to The Times of London and a Fisheries article for another newspaper and conferred with an acknowledged expert on the subject, Lorenzo Sabine. In addition to bringing all this expertise to the State Department, Everett brought much-needed continuity to the handling of American foreign affairs. A sincere man, he took on the job out of respect for the memory of his old friend and political ally⁴⁴, which made it unlikely that he would use the crisis to make political capital for himself. Thus, as Everett embarked on his mission to iron out the many foreign difficulties bequeathed to him by Webster, it seemed as if at last the United States had the right man for the moment.

Any optimism on the part of the British was well placed. Soon after his appointment, Everett wrote with great authority about the Fisheries, assuring the new US Minister to Great Britain, Joseph Ingersoll, that he hoped

in a very short time to be able to enter upon the negotiation with Mr Crampton, and it is the President's desire that it should be conducted on the footing of the most liberal reciprocity. He will deem it a piece of good fortune if, among the last acts of his administration, should be a measure calculated to strengthen the friendly relations of the two countries.⁴⁵

Everett was as good as his word. On December 15 the Cabinet authorised him to open negotiations with Crampton about the Fisheries and Reciprocity; only two days later he was able to report that they had agreed on the basis of a Convention.⁴⁶ Their success was possible because the negotiations were indeed conducted in a liberal manner, with the Americans making the most significant concession: dropping their insistence that the Fisheries and Reciprocity be treated separately.⁴⁷ Such was the determination on both sides to reach a settlement that after the first day's haggling Everett enthusiastically noted in his diary:

Agreed upon the basis; & promised to meet again tomorrow to consider the project. I doubt if as much was ever agreed on, at one meeting, in time of peace.

News of the progress naturally found its way into Everett's informal, congratulatory letter to Aberdeen. "The Secretary of Foreign Affairs," wrote Everett,

will find that Mr Crampton & myself have agreed provisionally on an arrangement of the questions of the Fisheries & Canadian Reciprocity. There is the best disposition here to consummate the arrangement... the only difficulties concern details.

The details, indeed, still had to be sorted out, but other, sharper swords hung over the treaty. The most fatal was the Convention's

timing. The first of two death blows was the collapse of the Derby administration in December, news of which reached Everett and Crampton in early January. In one way, this change was beneficial. As well as bringing Everett's friend Aberdeen to 10 Downing Street, it also removed Malmesbury from the Foreign Office. This brought cheer to Everett because the two men had been at loggerheads ever since the British Foreign Secretary had accused Webster of using the Fisheries for electioneering.⁴⁸ However, the change in Government came just as Everett and Crampton were preparing to sort out the finer points of their agreement, and the uncertainty surrounding the position of the new administration was clearly a major hindrance. More so were the comings and goings at the Foreign Office. Malmesbury's replacement, Lord John Russell, stayed just long enough to return the Convention to Crampton before resigning in favour of Lord Clarendon.⁴⁹ Ministers take time to read themselves into their office, and by the time Clarendon had mastered his brief, time had run out for Everett in the United States. Just as the British Government fell in the middle of the negotiations, so had Everett's administration received a short-term death sentence before the negotiations had even begun. When Everett was sworn in as Secretary of State on November 6, Pierce had already trounced Scott at the presidential polls - and Everett knew that he only had until March 4 to iron out any difficulties in foreign affairs bequeathed to him by Webster. By the time Crampton received Russell's new draft on February 1, time was running out. Even had Everett and Crampton been able to agree final terms on February 1, there would have been insufficient time for the two governments to approve the convention and give Everett the chance to present it to an uncooperative Congress before he vacated the

State Department. Yet there were still minor difficulties with the agreement sent out by Russell - and they had to be sorted out.

Confided Everett to his diary on February 3:

I am satisfied that it is impossible to negotiate a convention before the rising of Congress. There are points on which new instructions must be had by Mr Crampton & there are difficulties in the way of passing a bill which cannot be overcome.

To his credit, Everett worked to the end in a bid to allow the Fillmore administration to finish on a triumphant note, but his problems were best illustrated by his activities on February 28. That Monday he sent the correspondence on the Fisheries to the Senate, but nothing was done about it. The reason was simple. That evening President Fillmore was giving a "great state dinner" for his successor, Franklin Pierce.⁵⁰ Quite clearly, the power and influence of the government in which Everett was serving had long since been surrendered and with them vanished any chances of success for the Everett-Crampton Convention. Spurred on by the desire to preserve the peace between their countries, the pair of diplomats had made rapid progress in the most unpromising conditions but they had, quite simply, run out of time.

Even so, they had laid the foundations for a future agreement, if only there had been willingness to pick up from where they had left off. Everett did his best to pass on the baton, but saw Congress let it drop at his feet. Appearing before Congressional Committees on Foreign Relations, he continued to press the need for a settlement, but Washington was more interested in the activities of the new, Democrat administration than in the opinions of an outgoing, Whig, Secretary of State. The frustration began to tell by mid-March when Everett wrote that the Senate had failed to take

any action because it lacked a quorum.

There is no disposition on the part of the Senate to do business. Many of the members are light & frivolous persons without feeling of responsibility; - more are absorbed in President making & general electioneering. The public good is the last tho't of theirs.⁵¹

The truth was, however, that Everett had had his chance - and, through no fault of his own, he had missed it. Now the responsibility for negotiating a settlement fell to Everett's successor, William Learned Marcy. Like Congress, though, Marcy was unable to build on Everett's agreement. In a sense, this was surprising. As Secretary of War under President Polk, a term which covered the conflict with Mexico, Marcy was no stranger to the pressures of the Cabinet. As a former New York Governor and an experienced Washington hand, Marcy was a veteran of many a political fight at both the state and national level. In addition, he had supposedly been a senior member of The Organisation, the powerful group which, according to Crampton and others, had controlled the success and failure of Congressional legislation in the early 1850s.⁵² But, as he freely admitted, his biggest problem at the State Department was his inexperience of foreign affairs. As late as August 1853 - five months after taking office - Marcy complained to a friend:

I had not given until recently much attention to our foreign relations and really was not qualified for the position assigned me. I have been obliged to make up this deficiency - with really no leisure to do it and without much assistance from any quarter.⁵³

Marcy, to be fair, worked hard to overcome his acknowledged weakness, seeking and obtaining advice from the more experienced. His advisers were not just Democrats. Predictably, James Buchanan, the newly appointed Minister to London, was free with ideas,

drawing on expertise gained as Secretary of State under Polk.⁵⁴ Perhaps more surprising was the regular correspondence Marcy had with recent Whig Secretaries of State John M. Clayton and Edward Everett, both of whom answered his appeal for support in the national interest.⁵⁵ The greatest cooperation came from Everett, who, as the outgoing official, probably had the most to offer. While this action showed that Marcy had an admirable appreciation of his own limitations, it inevitably slowed down the impetus towards Reciprocity built up by Crampton and Everett. Instead of deciding what he should do, he spent a lot of his time finding out what other men had done and what they would do in his shoes. As many of his advisors were rival politicians, it was hardly a satisfactory situation. Weakening his commitment still further were the weather, the shortage of staff and, at the end of August, the death of his son Edmund.⁵⁶ When Marcy did find time to work on foreign affairs, he seemed inclined to concentrate on Central America. Nevertheless, at the end of July, Marcy did slip away from Washington, leaving visitors no forwarding address, to spend five days negotiating with Crampton.⁵⁷ In the Virginian spa town of Berkeley Springs, the two escaped the grim summer conditions in the District of Columbia which damaged Marcy's health, but could not settle the differences between their countries. They were both willing to compromise, but, as ever, they got bogged down in detail. According to Marcy's diary, they began by comparing the sketch treaty produced by Everett and Fillmore with one proposed by the British government. Refreshed by their spell in the hill country, Marcy and Crampton managed to overcome sticking points concerning the fisheries - largely by making the treaty's language more precise - but ground to a halt when trying to decide which

products should be included in the reciprocal free trade between the United States and the Colonies. Wrote Marcy: "The great difficulty in negotiating the Treaty has been to agree upon the list of products." During the next five days, they haggled over whether to include goods like coal, iron, rice, unrefined sugar, stone and unwrought marble and whether the United States government should continue its payment of a bounty to its fishermen. By the second day, Marcy was convinced that "the only obstacles to the immediate conclusion of the Treaty" were "the Coal Registry and Bounty." But even the arrival of the State Department's trusty British North American expert Israel de Wolf Andrews, on August 3 could not overcome these hurdles. They were made unsurmountable by two crucial factors. The British government failed to give Crampton the power to act on his own initiative and negotiate a treaty which he thought his political masters would accept. Instead, he had to refer all Marcy's proposals to a higher authority in London and, as a result, the negotiation was scuppered by the painfully slow communications between Britain and America. On three occasions Crampton seemed willing to agree to points in principle but would not do so formally until his government gave him firm instructions. This inevitably frustrated Marcy. On only the second day, he had worked out where they were - or were not - heading:

It is evident that Mr. C. does not see any serious objection but will not assent to these propositions until he is instructed so to do. He is daily expecting a reply to his communication to the home government.

But while they were in Berkeley Springs, this reply failed to arrive; and the talks went the way of all previous negotiations.⁵⁸

Nevertheless, the five days at the Virginia spa town yielded one concrete result - a draft treaty sent by Marcy to Crampton on September 1. It was, put simply, unlikely to win the heartfelt thanks of the British government or its colonial charges. In Marcy's formal despatch he added several conditions. The United States demanded the right of free access to British North America's Pacific fisheries in return for allowing the colonists to fish off California and Oregon. The Americans also insisted on including Newfoundland in the Treaty and then followed these demands with a series of refusals. They would not, said Marcy, abolish the cod bounty paid to American fishermen. This would not affect the colonists, he claimed, because they were not active in the cod fishery. Nor would the Americans admit colonial-built vessels to the American registry when they had been bought by citizens of the republic. Such a clause, wrote Marcy, would provoke opposition from groups whose support was essential to Reciprocity's success. He refused to admit colonial seamen to America's east-west coasting trade and insisted that coal be left off the list of enumerated articles in the free-trade agreement. Though to Nova Scotia the inclusion of coal in Reciprocity was essential compensation for opening her fisheries to the Americans, Marcy feared that opposition of American coal-producing states like Pennsylvania, Virginia and Maryland. Marcy did make one concession, accepting the exclusion of American sugar and tobacco from the free-trade list. But even here he demanded something in return: the expansion of the list to include rice, tar, pitch and turpentine, all products of Southern states. Without this, he argued, the treaty "has the aspect of being an arrangement for the almost exclusive benefit and accommodation of the British Provinces and the Eastern

and some of the Middle States."⁵⁹

Such a stance did not promise a successful outcome, especially when presented to a man as politically impotent and remote as Crampton. Indeed, six months after his September 1 letter, Marcy was still waiting for a reply from Crampton's bosses in Whitehall.⁶⁰ Clearly what Reciprocity - and the Fishery dispute - needed were not negotiations between the Foreign Office in London and the Secretary of State in Washington or Berkely Springs. What they needed was a special mission from a man with a wide ranging brief who could make decisions on the spot. Hamstrung by the Atlantic and his inferior social origins, Crampton was not this man; indeed, in the summer of 1853 such a man did not exist.

CHAPTER FIVE - RECIPROCITY: THE ROCKY ROAD

- 1 Crampton to Elgin, January 15, 1849, EP, A 398. President Polk backed free trade in his annual message, December 5, 1848, and Treasury Secretary Walker backed Reciprocity between Canada and the United States in his annual message, December 9, 1848, Congressional Globe, 30:2, 1 ff, 15.
- 2 Crampton to Elgin, March 6, 1849; Crampton to Palmerston, July 9, 1849, enclosed in Crampton to Elgin, December 21, 1849; Crampton to Elgin, July 1849, EP A 398.
- 3 Bulwer to Palmerston, September 23, 1850 and Bulwer to Elgin, April 1, 1851, in Shippee, Canadian-American Relations..., 33-36. Bulwer to Elgin, July 11, 1850, "I hear that the President will be opposed in our measure." See also Bulwer to Elgin, October 1, 1850, EP, A 399.
- 4 Crampton to Elgin, August 15, 1848, March 6, December 21, 1849, EP, A 398; Bulwer to Elgin, July 1850, EP, A 399. New Hampshire Representative Amos Tuck, HR, August 27, 1852, Congressional Globe, 32:1, 1185. Masters, Reciprocity Treaty, 147.
- 5 Andrews to Buchanan, January 15, 1848, Despatches ... St John: "If Congress ... will pass a law immediately to admit the Products of the North American Colonies into the United States free of duty ... I am certain all the North American Colonies would petition to be annexed before five years."
- 6 Bulwer to Elgin, February 28, 1850, EP, A 399. cf Crampton to Elgin, April 15, 1850, EP, A 398: "I am told fairly by the Northern men who were interested ... that unless we can get rid of the objection felt by the South to the measure, as one tending to annexation, the attempt to pass it would be worse than useless."
- 7 New York Senator John A Dix, Senate, January 23, 1849, Congressional Globe, 30:2, 331.
- 8 Crampton to Elgin, January 15, 1849 and, especially, December 21, 1849, EP, A 398: "The word has only to be passed, - "it is a Northern question," - or "it is a Southern question -" and it is equally sure of being defeated without even an examination of its merits." See also Bulwer to Elgin, July 11, 1850, EP, A 399; Crampton to Elgin, September 27, 1852, EP, A 398; Masters, Reciprocity Treaty, 66..
- 9 Mr Rossiter of New York to Clayton, February 19, 1849, Clayton Papers, LC: "The subject [Reciprocity] is of vast importance to the commercial interests of the Northern & Middle States ..." See also New York Senator William H Seward, Senate, August 14, 1852, Congressional Globe, 32:1, 913: "The fisheries are practically and peculiarly a northern interest."
- 10 Crampton to Elgin, December 21, 1849, EP, A 398. Andrews to Marcy, May 3, 1853, Despatches ... Montreal. Masters, Reciprocity Treaty, 55.

- 11 Crampton to Elgin, August 15, 1848, January 30, July 1849, EP, A 398; Russell to Grey, October 13, 1849, GP.
- 12 Philadelphia Enquirer, July 22, 1852, Despatches ... St John.
- 13 President Fillmore to Webster, July 24, 1852, Webster Papers, LC.
- 14 Andrews to Elgin, August 13, 1851, EP, A 399. For an example of support for Reciprocity from Americans living near the Canadian border, see Charles F O'Brien, "The Champlain Waterway, 1783-1897", New England Quarterly, 61 (1988), 172-4.
- 15 Crampton to Elgin, November 3, 1851, EP, A 398. Also in Barnes, Authors, Publishers..., 180 ff.
- 16 Bulwer to Elgin, February 28, 1850, EP, A 399.
- 17 Andrews to Clayton, June 28, 1849, Despatches ... Special Agents.
- 18 Crampton to Elgin, July 1849; Crampton to Palmerston, July 9, 1849, enclosed in Crampton to Elgin, December 21, 1849, EP, A 398.
- 19 Andrews to Clayton, October 26, 1849; H B Willson to Clayton, Washington, August 6, 1849, Clayton Papers, LC.
- 20 Grey to Sir Edmund Head, Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick, October 12, 1849, GP.
- 21 Andrews to Clayton, July 31, 1849, Despatches ... Special Agents.
- 22 Bulwer to Elgin, July 11, 1850, EP, A 399.
- 23 Bulwer to Elgin, February 28, April 20, 1850, EP, A 399.
- 24 Elgin to Crampton, August 15, 1848, EP, A 398.
- 25 Elgin to Crampton, December 21, 1849, EP, A 398.
- 26 Bulwer to Elgin, no date, but c. March 1850, EP, A 399.
- 27 Bulwer to Elgin, February 28, May 27, 1850, EP, A 399.
- 28 Crampton to Elgin, November 3, 1851, EP, A 398. See also Barnes, Authors, Publishers..., 180 ff; Masters, Reciprocity Treaty, 55.
- 29 Bulwer to Elgin, July, December 6, 1850, EP, A 399. Elgin to Grey, November 1, 1850, EGP, II, 733-4. Overman, in Canadian Historical Review, XV (1934), 258-9; Le Duc, in Canadian Historical Review, XV (1934), 437; Masters, in Canadian Historical Review, XVII (1936), 164 ff.
- 30 Fillmore to Webster, July 20, 1852; Webster to Fillmore, July 24, 1852; Andrews to Webster, July 24, 1852; Webster to Fillmore, July 30, 1852, Webster Papers, LC.

- 31 Fillmore to Webster, July 24, 1852, Webster Papers, LC.
- 32 Texas Senator Rusk, Senate, July 23, 1852, Congressional Globe, 32:1, 1893.
- 33 Crampton to Elgin, August 4, 1852, EP, A 398.
- 34 New York Herald, August 3, 1852, cf Philadelphia Enquirer, July 22, 1852: "But this would indeed be a short-sighted policy. The Americans may be reasoned with or persuaded, but they cannot be intimidated or driven." Despatches ... St John.
- 35 Webster to Fillmore, July 24, 30, 1852, Webster Papers, LC. Crampton to Elgin, August 4, 1852, EP, A 398.
- 36 Dalzell, Daniel Webster, 273, 278.
- 37 Webster to Fillmore, July 25, 1852, Webster Papers, LC.
- 38 Dalzell, Daniel Webster, 289; Webster to Fillmore, July 30, 1852, Webster Papers, LC.
- 39 Webster to Fillmore, August 4, 1852, Webster Papers, LC.
- 40 Webster to son, Daniel Fletcher Webster, August 22, 1852; Webster to Fillmore, August 23, 1852; Webster to Franklin Haven, September 12, 1852; Webster to Fillmore August 22, 1852, Webster Papers, LC. Everett to Mr Denison, November 29, 1852, Everett Papers, LC. Everett to Ingersoll, December 4, 1852, Diplomatic Instructions, Great Britain.
- 41 Bartlett, Daniel Webster, 3.
- 42 Separate letters of introduction for Ingersoll from Everett to Lord Aberdeen, the Earl of Derby and Lord Brougham, all September 15, 1852; Everett to Henry Holland, September 14, 1852; Everett to Aberdeen, January 10, 1853; Aberdeen to Everett, January 13, 1853, Everett Papers, LC.
- 43 Everett to Webster, July 19, 1852, Webster Papers, LC.
- 44 Everett to G J Abbot, August 11, 1852; Everett to Cass, August 20, 1852; Everett's Diary, September 13, August 26, October 12, 1852; Everett to Denison, November 29, 1852, Everett Papers, LC.
- 45 Everett to Ingersoll, December 4, 1852, Diplomatic Instructions, Great Britain.
- 46 Everett's Diary, December 15, 17, 18, 1852, Everett Papers, LC.
- 47 Everett to Ingersoll, December 4, 1852, Diplomatic Instructions, Great Britain. See also Lord John Russell to Crampton, January 15, 1853, EP, A 400.

- 48 Everett's Diary, December 17, 1852; Everett to Aberdeen, January 10, 1853; Diary, January 6, 1853 and December 28, 1852, Everett Papers, LC.
- 49 Everett's Diary, January 11, 25, 1852, Everett Papers, LC. Russell to Crampton, January 15, 1853, EP, A 400.
- 50 Everett's Diary, November 3, 6, 1852, February 1, 3, 28, 1853, Everett Papers, LC.
- 51 Everett's Diary, March 14, 1853, Everett Papers, LC.
- 52 Crampton to Elgin, November 3, 1851, EP, A 398. Barnes, Authors, Publishers..., 185-6.
- 53 Marcy to General P M Whitmore, August 17, 1853, Marcy Papers, LC.
- 54 Marcy to Buchanan, March 5, 1853; Buchanan to Marcy, March 8, June 7, 1853, Marcy Papers, LC.
- 55 Clayton to Marcy, June 4, 11, July 1, 1853; Marcy to Everett, April 19, 1853; Everett to Marcy, April 29, July 15, August 15, 26, 1853, Marcy Papers, LC. Everett's Diary, March 7, April 21, June 7, 1853, Everett Papers, LC. Everett became a regular visitor to the State Department in the early month's of Marcy's term of office.
- 56 Marcy to Whitmore, August 17, 1853, Marcy Papers, LC: "The weather had also had a more debilitating effect upon me than it ever had before. I have not been able to work - not even to write letters after dinner. I now have more on my hands to do - & which ought to be done within a brief period, than ten able men could do - and I hardly account myself one of that description." For the death of his son, see Marcy to unnamed correspondent, August 27, 1853, Ibid.
- 57 A French, State Department, to Philo. White, July 30, 1853, Marcy Papers, LC.
- 58 Marcy's Diary, August 1-3, 1853, Marcy Papers, LC.
- 59 Marcy to Crampton, September 1, 1853, Foreign Legations.
- 60 Marcy to Buchanan, March 11, 1854, Diplomatic Instructions, Great Britain.

CHAPTER SIX

LORD ELGIN GOES TO WASHINGTON

If progress were to be made, then, negotiations needed a fresh impetus. It was at this point that Lord Elgin took centre stage - with remarkable success. In May 1854 he set out from London for Washington with Reciprocity as his goal. After he and his flamboyant entourage had been wheeling and dealing around the Capitol for but a short time the breakthrough so long sought after by Britain and the Colonies came. At midnight on June 5 the Canadian Governor-General and the elderly William Learned Marcy met, along with assorted helpers, in the State Department. To Elgin's precocious assistant, Laurence Oliphant, it was both an historic and comic scene. In his memoirs, he described how Marcy's aides read out the proposed treaty, and, in the meantime: "the aged man listens, while he picks his teeth with a pair of scissors, or cleans out the wick of a candle with their points, which he afterwards wipes on his grey hair." This, though, was a prelude to the one action which Elgin had pursued since his arrival: Marcy's signature to the agreement which would at a stroke solve the fishery dispute and bring reciprocal free trade to North America. With his teeth-picking and candle-cleaning finished, Marcy signed and, wrote Oliphant in his journal:

Thus was concluded in exactly a fortnight a treaty to negotiate which had taxed the inventive genius of the Foreign Office and all the conventional methods of diplomacy for the previous seven years.¹

Such lightning work clearly deserves credit - and in most traditional accounts of the summer negotiations, Elgin receives generous praise. The most detailed study, Donald Masters' The

Reciprocity Treaty of 1854, argues that Elgin's skill, diplomacy and tact were "probably the deciding factor in the success of the negotiations."² On the whole, accounts of his success in Washington are tributes to his cunning and charm, portraying the British aristocrat as outwitting a naive and faction-ridden Congress. Elgin, so the story goes, came out to Washington posing as a tourist, apparently without a care in the world. He adopted this approach deliberately: to have come publicly in search of Reciprocity would have put the Americans on their guard and hindered his efforts. Once there, he embarked on a vigorous social whirl of parties, parties and more parties, and, as the alcohol flowed, he cultivated influential members of Congress. He was helped in this by the sharpening of sectional divisions in the aftermath of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. In the past, the friction and distrust between North and South had always been a problem for Reciprocity. In both sections, Reciprocity had long been linked with annexation, the assumption being that the measure would pave the way for admitting British North America into the United States. But, during his visit, Elgin was able to exploit the uncertainty about the likely effects of Reciprocity. He could argue that Reciprocity would prevent annexation by guarding against the economic dislocation that produced the agitation. Equally, he could claim that Reciprocity was a form of economic annexation and could lead to political annexation. The former argument, of course, appealed to the South; the latter to the men of the North. "Thus", wrote Masters,

was afforded the amazing spectacle of two groups of men, the north and the south, sitting in the same House and supporting the same measure for contradictory reasons.³

Once Marcy and Elgin had signed the Treaty, Elgin's job was done.

He accordingly returned to British North America to resume his normal duties as Governor-General, knowing that Marcy and his administration would secure the ratification of the agreement by Congress. Elgin's visit to Washington, DC, was, therefore, a triumph of his charm and political skill.

This version is attractive for several reasons. It has a hero without any villains and, because Elgin helped avert a possible Anglo-American war, it has a happy ending. To the glee of the reader, it personalises a potentially dull subject - negotiations for an economic agreement - and, throughout the drama, the main actors perform in the way that their stereotypes demand. The suave aristocrat arrives in the capital of the New World and, sparkling in the unsophisticated society of the young country, literally dances his way to the solution of an ominous crisis. At the same time, the boisterous but well-meaning Americans fall victim to their own vices - their love of alcohol and socialising, their constant divisive bickering over slavery, and their naive respect for British upper-class charmers. Better still, by only securing the measure he came out for, the charmer does not take advantage of the Americans' weaknesses; instead, he nobly takes only what is fair. Then, his job done, he retires to the Colony whose interests he has served so well. In the meantime, Anglo-American cooperation receives a much-needed boost through the actions of the ageing, but responsible, Secretary of State who works to guarantee the Treaty's passage through Congress. It all reads like a romantic novel - which in many ways it is. And like the best of such novels, this story is based firmly on the truth, but misses the point in several vital areas. The pity is that, in so doing, it also misses an

equally good yarn, full of pretty girls, parties and political skullduggery.

The first part of the myth to overcome is that Elgin fooled the Americans by pretending to be travelling through the States on his way back to Canada. This was certainly the image the Foreign Secretary wanted Elgin to give. He said so in his instructions to the Earl; and he also completely fooled the American Minister to the Court of St James, James Buchanan.⁴ However, the American government in Washington was under no such delusions. Andrews had worked out Elgin's intentions and informed the State Department; moreover, Special Agent Andrews had even suggested an inter-colonial meeting in Halifax or New York as a prelude to the visit. There, he thought, the colonists could hammer out what they were willing to concede and what they wanted in return.⁵ The fact that Elgin had banned such a meeting as likely to be counter-productive also gave the lie to the purpose of his visit.⁶ Moreover, when he came to the capital, he was both preceded and accompanied by colonists - hardly the company he would have kept on a pleasure visit. Especially revealing was the presence of Francis Hincks. The State Department knew he had been in England with Elgin before they sailed together for the States, and they believed he was very influential. According to Marcy in March 1854, the Canadian Inspector-General "has heretofore been much consulted on the subject of this Treaty and great consideration has been given to his opinions."⁷ Finally, if the American Government had failed to take note of all these tell-tale signs, Elgin soon put a stop to their ignorance. On his arrival in Washington he went to Marcy and

Pierce and told them the object of his mission.⁸

The second plank of the myth is the credit that falls to Elgin. Unquestionably, he deserves praise for having known what had to be done to get Reciprocity through Congress and having then worked singlemindedly to achieve it. The speed with which he worked was also remarkable: in his instructions, Clarendon supposed that even under the most favourable circumstances Elgin could scarcely be expected to "finally conclude an arrangement at Washington within the limited time to which in the first instance your stay there must necessarily be restricted...." Clarendon thought Elgin would stick to discussing general terms and deal with specifics on a second trip.⁹ Elgin surprised everyone including, perhaps, himself. Yet his achievement, though remarkable, would not have been possible but for the work over the years by several other men. John F Crampton and Sir Henry Lytton Bulwer, for instance, receive criticism when they should have had a little more praise for their work since 1846. Bulwer, it is true, was often ill. Moreover, he had been sent to the United States as a punishment for his activities in Spain, and was eager to return to Europe, the natural habitat of a Victorian diplomat.¹⁰ Yet he, like Crampton, worked diligently for Reciprocity. The failures of their negotiations before Elgin's arrival owe far more to the state of American domestic politics and the actions of the colonists than to their supposed indolence. Crampton, in particular, does not warrant accusations of laziness. It is true that he liked a good social life - he offended Everett by some of his actions, like smoking in the street.¹¹ Yet he worked hard and carried out the duties of Britain's Minister to the United States even though his

promotion to that post came only in 1852. His main problem, it seems, was not indolence, but a lack of clout in the Foreign Office stemming from his non-aristocratic lineage.¹² With Bulwer, he had kept alive American interest in Reciprocity, a measure most Americans found unappealing. At the same time, both had liaised regularly with Elgin and the Foreign Office on the state of the negotiations, worked with visiting Colonists, and attended to the other duties of their office, including lengthy Central American diversions. Unlike Elgin, who visited Washington for about a fortnight, they had had to carry out this work in the capital's appalling climatic conditions. Described twelve years earlier by Charles Dickens as "the headquarters of tobacco-tinctured saliva", the city was "scorching hot in the morning, and freezing cold in the afternoon, with an occasional tornado of wind and dust."¹³ There had been little improvement by 1854: Washington, wrote Oliphant,

is a town without a population, and exists only by virtue of its being the seat of Government... this is a most relaxing and depressing place, close muggy air - Kandy [in Ceylon] temperature exactly - and streets silent and lifeless. The last place in the world, notwithstanding the pretty girls, that I should choose as a residence.¹⁴

If Bulwer and Crampton at times appeared less than dynamic, it was no wonder; like members of Congress, they were keen to spend as little time as possible in the marshlands of the Potomac. But in the past few years, they had not been the only men to have been working for Reciprocity in Washington. Also struggling against a tide of indifference were Canadians like William Hamilton Merritt, and Francis Hincks, representatives from the Maritimes, and, of course, Israel de Wolf Andrews. They, too, had worked with members of Congress like John A Dix, Stephen Douglas and Joseph Grinnell.

If no agreement had been reached, they had at the least laid the foundations for Elgin's success. Crampton, for instance, had come close to finalising a Treaty in the winter of 1852-53 with Everett, and the summer had seen him come close with Marcy. Immediately preceding Elgin's mission, Merritt had been in Washington preparing the way. Moreover, after Elgin's departure, much of the work which secured the treaty's passage before Congress rose in August was carried out by Andrews.¹⁵

Equally important to Elgin's success was the deliberate way in which the British Government had turned the tables on the Americans from late 1853 by affecting a lack of interest in Reciprocity. Thus, in March 1854 a very frustrated Marcy wrote to Buchanan that negotiations had been suspended for more than five months "in consequence of the delay on the part of the British Government to act upon the project of a treaty which I submitted to Mr Crampton early in September last." Britain's excuse was that she had to "ascertain the views of the several provinces on the subject" but Marcy knew that in that time she had done little. Instead she was now becoming very choosy about the treaty she would accept. Indeed, wrote Marcy,

Within a few days past Mr Crampton read to me part of a despatch from Lord Clarendon from which I infer that there is no desire on the part of the Home Government to conclude the proposed Treaty. The despatch stated that the Provinces were now prosperous and much less solicitous than they had been for reciprocal free trade with the United States.

To Marcy's distress, this confirmed information coming to him from Andrews who reported from British North America that the colonists, thanks to the economic upturn, were less keen than ever before on Reciprocity. A novice at foreign affairs, Marcy walked straight

into the trap the British were building for him. With no settlement in sight, "a collision" seemed inevitable over the Fisheries.¹⁶ Though he was determined to uphold American rights over the Fisheries, he found himself wanting Reciprocity more than the British apparently did. It is also a mistake to see Elgin's visit as a negotiation. By the time he arrived, the details of what was possible were already clear. As a negotiator, he was also hamstrung because on one aspect of Reciprocity, Newfoundland, he did not receive his instructions until he was about to leave.¹⁷ Though he did have to iron out problems in the proposed agreement, his task and his achievement was to create "an atmosphere of mutual goodwill" between the countries.¹⁸ In this climate, opposition to Reciprocity would wilt as rapidly as the belles at the balls attended by Elgin to promote the measure.

Yet Elgin had considerable barriers to remove in order to create a mood of goodwill conducive to the success of Reciprocity. Masters underestimates these barriers and fails to explain how Elgin set about removing them. The assumption in traditional accounts seems to be that the biggest obstacle before the Governor-General was sectionalism. However, the sectional strife that racked the Union may well have been one of Elgin's greatest allies. When he arrived in Washington, the Kansas-Nebraska compromise debates were at last drawing to a close, and Elgin went with his party to watch the closing session. In the long term, the Act was to help drive a wedge between North and South by drawing a furious response from Northern voters, by weakening the national organisation of the Whigs and by stimulating the organisation of the Republican party.¹⁹ This, however, was for the future. Elgin,

out on a brief, speculative mission, was interested only in the present. By pure chance he arrived on the day when the United States had scraped over another hurdle when to have stumbled could have led to Civil War. The relief that followed was enormous, particularly among the bickering Democrats who saw the Act as a party triumph. Cannons were let off in the capital²⁰ and, though Congress had another ten weeks left to run, politicians were caught up in an end-of-term mood. After months of anxiety, they were ready to relax in style. As it was already the height of the social season²¹, Washington unwound through a series of parties. And these crinoline-rustling festivities, Oliphant discovered, went on round the clock.

At two o'clock our whole party went to a grand luncheon at a senator's. Here we had every sort of refreshing luxury, the day being piping hot, and dozens of champagne were polished off. Several senators got screwed, and we made good use of the two hours we had to spare before going to the French ambassador's matinee dansante at four. Here the same thing went on, with the addition of a lot of pretty girls whom I had before met, and who bullied one to dance, and were disgusted if you did not flirt with them. Everybody drinks champagne here, and there was a bowl on the table in which you might have drowned a baby, of most delicious and insinuating concoction. Then there were gardens, and bouquets, and ices, and strawberries, and bright eyes till six, when we had to rush off and dress for a grand dinner at a governor's. Here we had a magnificent repast. The old story of champagne, besides a most elaborate and highly got up French cookery dinner, lasting from seven till ten, when we left the table, having been eating and drinking without intermission since two. We then adjourned with a lot of senators to brandy-and-water, champagne, and cigars till twelve, when some of us were quite ready to tumble into bed.²²

In this atmosphere of revelry and relief, Elgin's hosts were always likely to be receptive to a man "of brilliant repartee and

racy anecdote."²³ But what did Elgin tell the Americans? Almost certainly he impressed on his hosts the many benefits that Reciprocity would bring. Fortunately, he could do this without getting bogged down in the details of the Treaty. The clearest and the most important advantage was that Reciprocity would end the risk of war which hovered over the Atlantic as a result of the Fishery Dispute. Further, it would improve relations generally between British North America and the United States. However, when studying his visit to Washington one can more easily pick out what he did not say. The idea that he told the South one story about the links between Reciprocity and annexation and then told the north the exact opposite is hardly credible. The North and the South were not monolithic political bodies, thinking as two separate groups. Southerners did not mix solely with Southerners; nor did Northerners keep to themselves. Certainly, the South may have resented the abolitionists and at times felt that the whole of the North was lined up against it. Nevertheless, in May 1854 the two main political parties, Whigs and Democrats, were still national organisations, with members in both sections and in all states. Consequently, men from the same party but different sections still mixed and worked with each other. Moreover, members of the different political factions also met socially to debate the great issues of the day. Nor were they worried about doing so in front of strangers. Hence, after one party, Oliphant wrote:

Our host ... belonged to the Republican, or, as it was then more generally called, the Whig party. Notwithstanding the divergence of political opinion among many of those present, the merits of the all-absorbing measure [Kansas-Nebraska], and its probable effects upon the destinies of the nation, were being discussed freely. [Among those speaking was] Senator Toombs, a violent Democrat...

Similarly, on May 26 Oliphant went with Elgin to another lunch and "Sat between a Whig and a Democrat senator, who alternately poured abolitionism and the divine origin of slavery into the ear they commanded."²⁴ Clearly in such a close-knit, incestuous and gossiping community, it would have been fatal to tell two different stories to rival groups who met regularly in the no-man's land provided by parties. Elgin would have been caught out immediately and forced to leave Washington with his reputation in tatters and his mission an abject failure. That he returned to British North America in triumph points to his having adopted a different approach.

Instead, Elgin almost certainly avoided playing one section off against the other. Having seen members of Congress arrive at the Kansas-Nebraska debates armed to the teeth²⁵, and having watched America's internal wrangling from north of the border since 1847, Elgin must have known that to play with sectionalism was a dangerous game. Fortunately, he did not need to interfere in this way. Despite the furore about the status of slavery in Kansas and Nebraska, his biggest problem was not the rift between North and South, but the rifts within the Democratic party. On his arrival, Elgin went to see Pierce and Marcy to announce that Reciprocity was his object. They told him

that it was quite hopeless to think that any such treaty as he proposed could be carried through, with the opposition which extended to it on the part of the Democrats, who had a majority in the Senate, without the ratification of which body no treaty could be concluded. His Lordship was further assured, however, that if he could overcome this opposition, he would find no difficulties on the part of the Government.²⁶

Elgin, therefore, was in a strange situation. The administration, which was Democrat, in principle favoured Reciprocity, but the Senate, also controlled by the Democrats, opposed the measure. Elgin could have been forgiven for thinking that Marcy was tricking him into doing all the hard work needed to get Reciprocity through Congress, but the Secretary of State was not bluffing. His problem, and that of the Pierce administration as a whole, was the Democrats' popularity at the polls. They had learned to their cost that landslide victories are not necessarily advantageous. On the coattails of their presidential triumph in 1852, the Democrats had been equally successful in the Congressional elections. With a two-thirds majority in the House of Representatives and similar dominance of the Senate, the party should have been celebrating. But, without the pressure of a vigorous opposition, the Democrats struggled to maintain unity. Pierce's Cabinet, too, fell foul of the huge Congressional presence of its supposed supporters. With more factions to please than most presidents, Pierce faced an impossible task when distributing office. The result was a catastrophe, according to Michael F Holt: "by trying to please everybody, he alienated all factions." Indeed, many members of Pierce's own party were so disgusted by his appointments that they began to vote against him. Worse still, the Democrats' large majority gave individual members the freedom to pursue their own interests rather than those of the party. Instead of working together in Congress, the Democrats allowed themselves to be governed more by what they believed would be popular in their own constituencies. Local issues, more than was normally the case, dictated behaviour in national politics.²⁷ In short, at the very time when the Democrats should have been enjoying the fruits of

their electoral success, they were blunting the power of their own President. Hence, Marcy was in no position to promise to get Reciprocity through Congress. In fact, the success of Elgin's mission depended to a large extent on Marcy and Pierce keeping a low profile. The best thing they could do to help Reciprocity was neither to sponsor it during negotiations nor to oppose it when it was before Congress. Eager to end the fishery dispute, this, in effect, was the course they chose, and they left Elgin to work on their wayward Senatorial colleagues. This Elgin did with a vengeance, observed throughout by Oliphant. Elgin and the rest of the British party went to receptions attended by senators opposed to the treaty and over the first ten days of their visit they kept meeting and charming the influential men - and women - of Washington. But, to Oliphant, it was all very confusing.

Meantime, to my inexperienced mind; no progress was being made in our mission... At last, after several days of uninterrupted festivity, I began to perceive what we were driving at. To make quite sure, I said one day to my chief -

"I find all my most intimate friends are Democratic senators."

"So do I," he replied, drily.²⁸

Elgin had established which political group held the key to Reciprocity's future and then done all he could to get that group to open the lock. But another, dangerous, hurdle remained: hostility to Great Britain, an unpredictable force which could easily have undermined any Anglo-American agreement. Never far from the surface in mid-nineteenth-century American politics, at the time of Elgin's visit this hostility rose steaming from the pot. Providing the heat was the Crimean War, which from March 28, 1854 saw Britain fighting alongside America's traditional ally,

France, to protect the Turks against Russia. Wrote Edward Everett to an English friend: "The popular feeling in the grand European struggle is with the Turks against the Russians; - but our Admⁿ dislikes Your alliance with France & believes that it has ulterior bearings against us."²⁹ Significantly, the administration's Washington mouthpiece chose the second day of Elgin's visit to air these views - and it did not spare its language. Under the headline "THE WAR BETWEEN RUSSIA AND TURKEY. - OUR INTERESTS REQUIRE THAT THE FORMER BE SUCCESSFUL" a front-page article raged against Britain and France while praising the Tsar. What worried the paper - and the Pierce administration - was the long-term effect of an Anglo-French victory over Russia.

Having kept the Czar landlocked, with such fleets as the world never saw, what shall prevent these merchant kingdoms, with their eyes resting on their pacific commerce and the narrow isthmus from which at Central America it is separated from Atlantic communication, taking their stand on Cuba, the Gibraltar of the Gulf of Mexico, and saying to Republican America, Thus far shalt thou come, and no further.

This led the author to a predictably Anglophobic conclusion:

the immediate discomfiture of the Russians and termination of the war would be events that might prove in the sequel very inconvenient to us. With a navy at their command resistless by any power we possess, flushed with recent victory over Russian absolutism and expansion, the occasion to strike at American liberalism and progress would be too opportune not to be adverted to.

For one, the writer dares avow that he wishes success to Nicholas, and that if he should not prevail now, he will fail only after his enemies, wearied by a long and exhausting war, shall cordially desire repose and peace.³⁰

The tone of this article was entirely in keeping with the brief sent by Marcy to Buchanan in March which, though mocking the "happy accord" between France and Britain, revealed very clearly

his anxiety about the future goals of this alliance.³¹ Throw into the pot the continuing uncertainty about the fishery dispute, and there was enough to keep Anglophobia bubbling away well into the future. Elgin's job, therefore, was to take this pot off the boil for as long as was needed to secure an agreement and then get the agreement through Congress. The way forward was not to launch into long-winded defences of Britain's Crimea policy but to create general good-will towards Britain and her North American Colonies. Elgin therefore found himself in the role of Britain's public relations manager and, with Crampton's help, promptly gave the Americans what turned out to be a very tempting taste of their own razzmatazz. No time was wasted. Only two days after Elgin arrived in Washington - and on the same day as the Washington Union carried its Anglophobic article about the Crimea - Crampton turned on the charm. The British Minister gave a widely publicised "entertainment at his residence, in honor of the birthday of England's Queen, which, it is said, will be a magnificent affair."³² It lived up to all expectations. Held in the cooler climes of Georgetown, it overcame a thunderstorm to be a sparkling social success. Papers excelled themselves in describing the elegance of the affair. Wrote the Washington Star in an article that was reprinted all over the States:

There were foreign ambassadors, cabinet ministers, grave senators, army and navy officers, heads of bureaus, authors, artists, savans and philosophers. Embroidered coats and bespangled uniforms of high officials afforded a glittering contrast to the plain black suits of the distinguished civilians. As for the ladies present, our pen falters in the attempt to do justice to their charms.

Yet, even in this exalted company, there was no argument about who was the star of the event.

Amid the soft footfalls of fairy feet - the graceful sweep of \$500 dresses - the glittering of jewels - the sparkling of eyes which shot forth alternately flashes of lightning and love - were two gentlemen who appeared to be the 'observed of all observers'. One was the Earl of Elgin, and the other Sir Charles Gray.³³

But the evening was not just a social success; according to the Star, it produced political rewards. By bringing everyone together at a spectacular social occasion - in honour of the head of state of the country with whom the United States was in dispute - Elgin helped defuse the tension between the countries. And, as the guest of honour, he was able to mingle freely with the capital's key men and point out the benefits of Reciprocity. Thus, the Star's reporter proclaimed:

More was accomplished last evening in the way of negotiation than has been accomplished from the days of Ashburton to the advent of Elgin. We regard the fishery question as settled, both parties having partaken freely of the bait so liberally provided by the noble host.³⁴

Such claims were premature: Elgin had several more days' lobbying before him. It is likely that he used this time to impress on his contacts the many benefits of Reciprocity. Throughout, he behaved in the way expected of him, playing the urbane diplomat, while at the same time never standing aloof. As senators 'got screwed on champagne', he stayed sober by pretending to drink with them - without touching a drop.³⁵ Thus, he appeared to enter into the spirit of the parties without losing his dignity - or his sense of purpose. This performance did the trick. By the end of the week his popularity with Democratic senators was so "unbounded" that "they ceased to feel any restraint in his company." After one late-night jaunt around town, Elgin's hosts paid him probably the highest honour they could. In the small

hours, they declared that it was a great shame he was not born an American, because that prevented him from becoming President.³⁶ Having thus won the approval of the Democrat senators, Elgin was confident that there was now enough support for the measure in Congress. At last, wrote Oliphant,

after we had been receiving the hospitality of Washington for about ten days, Lord Elgin announced to Mr Marcy, that if the Government were prepared to adhere to their promise to conclude a treaty of reciprocity with Canada, he could assure the President that he would find a majority of the Senate in its favour, including several prominent Democrats.... Nothing remained for us but to go into the details of the tariff, the enumeration of the articles of commerce, and so forth... For the next three days I was as busily engaged in work as I had been for the previous ten at play.³⁷

The final form of the Reciprocity Treaty³⁸ reveals just how well Britain understood the obstacles to its success. Broadly, Elgin and March produced an agreement which, unlike previous drafts, had a strong chance of passing. They did this by ensuring that the Treaty either met the desires of various critical groups or compensated the discontented. Some groups could not be bought off, but the terms of the Treaty ensured that they could not defeat it. Yet perhaps most important of all, if the Treaty did not bring an economic boon to a lobby or section, it often did not harm their interests either. The Treaty, therefore, represents a skilful bid for success by the negotiators. They strove to produce a vessel which could chart the treacherous waters between the day they agreed terms and the day of its final ratification by Britain, the United States and British North America.

In the Provinces, the most important group to placate were the fishermen. Of all the groups affected by the terms of the treaty,

they probably had the most grievances. Reciprocity delighted the mariners of New England by throwing open the colonial fisheries to American endeavour; but this inevitably threatened the livelihood of the Maritimes' seamen. Under Reciprocity's terms their American rivals could at long last:

take fish of every kind, except shell-fish, on the sea-coasts and shores, and in the bays, harbors, and creeks of Canada, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward's Island, and of the several islands thereunto adjacent, without being restricted to any distance from the shore, with permission to land upon the coasts and shores of those colonies and the islands thereof, and also upon the Magdalen Islands, for the purpose of drying their nets and curing their fish.

The only restrictions were on the salmon, shad, river and estuary fisheries, which the Treaty reserved for the British; the Americans also had to respect the property and rights of the colonists. Such sweeping legislation had to be balanced, if Nova Scotia were ever to support it. Accordingly, the British secured for the Provinces the right to export their fish duty-free to the United States. Though this free trade, as with all the items on the duty-free list, was reciprocal, that clause was unlikely to benefit American fishermen as much as Nova Scotians. Also, in return for opening up the colonial fisheries, the Americans opened up theirs to the colonists, with one significant exception: the waters South of the 36th parallel. This kept the fisheries of virtually the entire South - from Cape Hatteras down - in American hands, and respected Florida's determination to keep the British abolitionists out.⁴⁰ As the American fisheries were not highly prized by the colonists, who were spoiled by the bounty of the seas lapping their own territory, this reservation angered few in the Provinces, while pleasing many in a suspicious South.

Just as important a boon to the colonists was the inclusion of all raw timber on the enumerated list. Though the fisheries were the staple of Nova Scotia's economy, they were nevertheless a seasonal occupation. Out of season, one of the main forms of alternative employment for Nova Scotian fishermen was lumbering. Across the water in New Brunswick, the attractions of the Bay of Fundy found fierce competition from the Province's healthy timber industry, which had its eyes on the lucrative American market. Yet, for the American timber lobby, the Treaty raised the unappealing prospect of competition from the abundant - and cheaper - supplies of colonial lumber. Here, again, there was a pay-off. One of the key areas of the New England timber industry was Maine, and in particular the area on the border with British North America, where the St John River provided access to the sea via New Brunswick. A long-established source of bitterness was that American lumber cut in Maine and floated down the St John was subject to colonial duty before it could reach its native market. The Treaty changed all this. In Article IV, the signatories agreed that

no export duty, or other duty, shall be levied on lumber or timber of any kind cut on that portion of the American territory in the State of Maine watered by the River St. John and its tributaries, and floated down that river to the sea, when the same is shipped to the United States from the province of New Brunswick.

Another daunting set of rapids facing the negotiators was the inclusion of "grain, flour, and breadstuffs, of all kinds" on the free list. But they sailed neatly round them thanks to the St Lawrence seaway. To Canada, the right to export wheat duty-free to the United States - and to mill American grain in Canada - underpinned its support for Reciprocity. Yet, to American grain

producers, notably in the Midwest and Maryland, this was a far from attractive prospect, raising fears of a home market flooded with Canadian wheat. The British fought this resistance on two fronts. In Congress and through the American press, Andrews worked hard to play down the economic threat.⁴¹ By then working as much for the British as the Americans, he claimed that Canada rarely produced a wheat surplus. But far more effective - because it won over the Midwest and isolated Maryland - was Article IV. This agreed that

the citizens and inhabitants of the United States shall have the right to navigate the River St. Lawrence, and the canals in Canada used as the means of communicating between the great lakes and the Atlantic Ocean, with the vessels, boats and crafts, as fully and freely as the subjects of Her Britannic Majesty, subject only to the same tolls and other assessments as now are, or may hereafter be, exacted of Her Majesty's said subjects...

At a stroke, the Treaty gave the Midwest an economic advantage it had long sought. To the farmers - and particularly the wheat growers - of that fast developing section, the St Lawrence represented the most direct summer route to Europe. But, just as important, the waterway was a rival to New York's Erie Canal. This had dominated their trade for so long thanks to protectionism, Drawback Laws and, in winter, a more favourable climate than that of the St Lawrence. Now, though, the Midwest had every reason to hope that competition with the Canadian route to Europe might lead the Erie Canal to lower its tolls. And with the support of the Midwest - which could be almost as sectionalist as the South⁴² - the opposition of Maryland ceased to matter.

Perhaps a more considerable foe was Pennsylvania, whose mining industries were sure to resist the Treaty because of the inclusion of Nova Scotian iron and coal on the free list. The

trade-off here is less clear. The British and Andrews stressed that the British coal was of a different quality and had a different market to that from Pennsylvania⁴³, but such hair-splitting was a weak argument to put before men defending their livelihood. As a result, the British had to accept that Pennsylvania was unlikely to support the Treaty. Consequently, they had to ensure that no other groups took offence. They did this by not including requests which could have alienated a whole region. Thus, both Elgin and Marcy resisted strong pressure from the powerful Maritimes ship-building industry to have their vessels put on the American registry when bought by Americans. Though a reasonable request, it would have been too much for New England's shipwrights who had good reason to fear colonial competition.⁴⁴ Without this threat, Reciprocity was fairly safe in New England thanks to the support of the region's fishermen. Equally, Elgin was determined that Reciprocity should not appear as a 'British' question, that is, a measure which could benefit Britain.⁴⁵ If that occurred, it would have been very easy for the Treaty's enemies to use Anglophobia to whip up an artificial opposition. Hence, Elgin abandoned British pressure to have their own merchant vessels admitted to the coasting trade between the United States' Atlantic and Pacific coasts, usually described as the east-west coasting trade. In the past, the British had intermittently used the Reciprocity negotiations - and the repeal of their own Navigation Laws - as levers for this concession. Their argument was that Parliament had thrown open to American shipping the carrying trade between Britain and her colonies, and that this was similar to the 'coasting' trade between New England and California. An American vessel carrying British cargo between London and

Bombay, they claimed, was no different from a British vessel carrying American cargo between New York and California. The only difference was that the former was allowed and the latter was not. But, said the British, neither voyage could be justifiably described as 'coasting'.⁴⁶ However, such attempts to use Reciprocity to produce economic concessions for Britain were, on the whole, speculative. The British always met with - and probably expected - refusals. But in return for Britain abandoning the pursuit of concessions over the coasting trade and colonial-built ships, the Americans accepted the Treaty without the right of sending their manufactured goods duty-free to British North America.

As an attempt to please or placate as many voters as possible, the Treaty was a success; but part of this success was because it did not offend people who would not benefit from it. For most of the South, for instance, the Treaty was of minimal economic importance. Their trade with British North America was either small-scale or non-existent, and Reciprocity hardly heralded a new commercial dawn for the section. But to the South the Treaty was innocuous. Though it could not change Canada's image as a haven for fugitive slaves, it contained nothing which could threaten the South's economy. In fact, it made some concessions, like including rice, cotton-wool and tobacco on the duty-free list and leaving the Lower South's fisheries exclusively to the Americans.

But throughout the negotiations, one problem continued to cast its shadow over the affair. On returning to British North America from Washington, Elgin told the Foreign Secretary: "In coming to

an understanding with the Government of the United States on the Provisions of this Treaty the main obstacle which presented itself was the case of Newfoundland."⁴⁷ To be more accurate, the difficulties concerned the rich fishing grounds which lay off the poverty-stricken island. For as long as the British had pursued Reciprocity, the Americans had wanted access to these fisheries included in any agreement.⁴⁸ This was still the case in the summer of 1854, as Elgin found to his annoyance early in his visit. For sound reasons, he - and the British Government - were keen to keep Newfoundland out of any agreement. Elgin found Marcy unsympathetic. "Mr Marcy... expressed much unwillingness to adopt this course, feeling apprehensive, as he alleged, that it might lead to embarrassing discussions in the Senate."⁴⁹ Newfoundland, clearly, was seen by the Americans as vital to the success of Reciprocity. Moreover, the islanders themselves had pressurised Britain to include them in any free-trade deal.⁵⁰ Yet the British believed that the inclusion of Newfoundland would threaten the success of any agreement. The problems were several - and all difficult to overcome. On a personal note, Elgin was handicapped because he spent most of his time in Washington without instructions regarding Britain's position on the Newfoundland fisheries. Indeed, he had to wait until the last two days of his short mission before Clarendon's despatch regarding the island arrived.⁵¹ This may in part explain why Elgin devoted the first ten days of his visit to drumming up support in the most general and frivolous way - and the last three days to the more detailed work of negotiation.

Once under way, the talks about Newfoundland had several

potential sticking points. The first involved Britain's relations with France. The French - Britain's allies in the struggle against the Tsar - had long ago secured by treaty exclusive fishing rights off certain areas of Newfoundland. Even Britain was barred from these areas, even though all acknowledged Newfoundland to be her colony. To add to the confusion, the rights of the French were the subject of a dispute between London and Paris, and for some time the two Old World governments had been negotiating to resolve their differences. Stirring matters up still further were old and apparently ignored treaties under which the United States enjoyed fishing rights in areas now claimed solely by the French. Clearly the British had nothing to gain by alerting the Americans to rights they had long since forgotten.⁵² The claims of Newfoundland to be included in any agreement, then, posed countless headaches for Britain's diplomats. They were reluctant to open these fisheries to the Americans, fearing this would jeopardise Britain's sensitive discussions with France.⁵³ And, keen to secure a speedy Reciprocity settlement, the Foreign Office naturally wished to avoid any peripheral subjects which could either hold up or kill off negotiations.

The difficulties caused by Newfoundland, however, were not all of an international nature. Just as tricky were local issues. Poor and with a tiny population, Newfoundland raised a paltry £60,000 a year through revenue. Of this, £20,000 came from duty levied on imports which were under Reciprocity, to be on the duty-free list. Clarendon agreed that it would be ruinous for the island to lose at a stroke one-third of its limited revenue. One possible solution - proposed by the islanders themselves - was to

allow Newfoundland, unlike the other colonies, to keep reduced duties on specified articles. In other words, Newfoundland wished to join in an international free-trade agreement while retaining limited protectionism. Such a plan, conceded Clarendon, was fraught with dangers. The United States, he noted, was unlikely to agree to such preferential treatment and, once the other colonies learned what Newfoundland was seeking, they might start claiming similar favours. Having at last forced a semblance of unity onto the other Provinces, the last thing Britain wanted was for each colony to start pursuing its own selfish ends once again. But even if Elgin was able to secure a treaty including Newfoundland, Britain's problems with the island would not be over. As a result of the granting of responsible government to Canada, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, any treaty had to be ratified by the legislatures of all the colonies involved. Since the proposed convention was with British North America as a whole, and not with individual colonies, the refusal of one Province to accept the terms offered would have destroyed the agreement for everyone else. Of all the Provinces, Newfoundland was thought the one most likely to reject the treaty. Partly this was because her requirements were so special that there was little hope that they would be met in full. Partly, it was because Newfoundland's unsuccessful bid to secure fully responsible government - in line with other Provinces - had made her politicians unpredictable and resentful. But Clarendon was determined not to allow this sparsely populated island to hold up an agreement which was so important to the rest of British North America and to a Mother Country with more pressing business in Europe. "It is impossible," he wrote

to make the settlement of the embarrassing question in regard to Colonial intercourse

which the British Government and that of the United States are equally desirous of effecting, dependent on the contingency of the assent of the island Legislature which there is every reason to suppose it would be withheld.⁵⁴

This, then, was the thorny problem to which Elgin had to devote much of his time to solving with Marcy and the State Department. But with both countries wanting a solution to their difficulties, a compromise was possible. Hence, having stated in Article V of the treaty that it would come into effect as soon as the Congress and the Imperial and Provincial Parliaments had passed the necessary laws, Elgin and Marcy inserted an escape clause, Article VI:

And it is hereby further agreed that the provisions and stipulations of the foregoing Articles shall extend to the island of Newfoundland, so far as they are applicable to that colony. But if the Imperial Parliament, the provincial Parliament of Newfoundland, or the Congress of the United States shall not embrace in their laws, enacted for carrying this treaty into effect, the colony of Newfoundland, then this Article shall be of no effect; but the omission to make provision by law to give it effect, by either of the legislative bodies aforesaid, shall not in any way impair the remaining Articles of this treaty.

Understandably, Elgin returned to British North America in triumph. Yet, as he headed north, he knew the hard work was just beginning. Before the celebrations proper could start, the treaty had to be ratified - in Britain, in the United States, and in the provincial legislatures of British North America. With the Crimean War demanding North American calm, an easy passage was expected in the Imperial Parliament; but the reactions of Congress and the Colonies were impossible to predict. Consequently, Elgin still had to ensure ratification on his side of the Atlantic.

CHAPTER SIX - LORD ELGIN GOES TO WASHINGTON

- 1 Laurence Oliphant, Episodes in a Life of Adventure or Moss from a Rolling Stone, (Edinburgh & London, William Blackwood & Sons, 1887), 55-6.
- 2 Masters, Reciprocity Treaty, 78-80.
- 3 Ibid. 86.
- 4 Foreign Secretary Lord Clarendon to Elgin, May 4, 1854, EP, A 400: After giving Elgin "Full Power" to negotiate a Reciprocity Treaty, Clarendon warned: "It is not however desirable that Your Lordship should appear at Washington in the Character of an Envoy from Her Majesty specially appointed to settle these troublesome questions. The mere suspicion of such a purpose would of itself suffice to render the Government of the United States still more inaccessible to reason on the subject, inasmuch as it would conclude, however erroneously, that the British Government was prepared to make sacrifices for the sake of averting a discussion with the United States while engaged in an arduous warfare with an European Power." Yet twelve days later, Buchanan, the US Minister to London, reported home after meeting Clarendon that he doubted whether Elgin would have "any specific instructions or authority upon the subject [Reciprocity]". Buchanan to Marcy, May 16, 1854, Manning, Diplomatic Correspondence, IV, 580.
- 5 Andrews to Marcy, May 4, 1854, Marcy Papers, LC. Andrews to Marcy, April 3, May 13, 1854, Despatches ... Montreal.
- 6 Elgin to Clarendon, August 25, 1855, EP, A 399.
- 7 Andrews to Marcy, May 19, 1854, Marcy Papers, LC. Marcy to Buchanan, March 11, 1854, Diplomatic Instructions, Great Britain.
- 8 Laurence Oliphant, Episodes..., 49.
- 9 Clarendon to Elgin, May 4, 1854, EP, A 400.
- 10 Grey to Russell, May 27, 1848, GP: Grey wrote of Bulwer's behaviour as Britain's Minister to Spain that "He seems to have regarded it as his business to take an active share in the internal party politics of Spain ... Now I must say, that I think such conduct altogether indefensible." See also George Bancroft, US Minister to London, to his wife, Edith Bancroft, February 8, 1849, Bancroft papers, LC: "By getting Sir Henry out of Europe, Lord Palmerston will be able to come back to diplomatic relations with Spain." Masters, Reciprocity Treaty, 56-7, is particularly critical of Britain's men in Washington, portraying Crampton as lazy, Bulwer as often ill, and both as easily distracted from Reciprocity.
- 11 Everett's Diary, February 8, 1853, Everett Papers, LC.

- 12 Buchanan to Marcy, December 22, 1853, Marcy Papers, LC: "I like Mr Crampton, but it is unfortunate that the English Minister at Washington is not better known & does not enjoy a higher position & possess more influential connexions at home. A gentleman in his position, however meritorious, cannot undertake any thing upon his own authority, representing as he does this highly aristocratic country."
- 13 Charles Dickens, American Notes for General Circulation, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Penguin Books, 1972), 160, 162.
- 14 Margaret Oliphant W Oliphant, Memoir of the Life of Laurence Oliphant and of Alice Oliphant, His Wife, (New York, Harper & Brothers, 1891), I, 113, 116.
- 15 William Hamilton Merritt to Elgin, Baltimore, Maryland, May 23, 1854, EP, A 398.
- 16 Marcy to Buchanan, March 11, 1854, Diplomatic Instructions, Great Britain.
- 17 Clarendon to Elgin, May 19, 1854, EP, A 400.
- 18 Masters, Reciprocity Treaty, 78-80.
- 19 Michael F Holt, The Political Crisis of the 1850s, (New York, John Wiley & Sons, 1978).
- 20 Washington National Intelligencer, May 30, 1854.
- 21 Laurence Oliphant, Episodes..., 46.
- 22 Laurence Oliphant to his mother, May 28, 1854, in Margaret Oliphant, Memoir..., 118-19.
- 23 Laurence Oliphant, Episodes..., 49.
- 24 Ibid., 45-6, 47.
- 25 Margaret Oliphant, Memoir..., 113.
- 26 Laurence Oliphant, Episodes..., 49.
- 27 Holt, Political Crisis..., 140 ff.
- 28 Laurence Oliphant, Episodes..., 48-9.
- 29 Everett to Henry Holland, April 25, 1854; Everett to Lord Aberdeen, May 9, 1854: Everett says American politicians are "jealous of [the] Anglo-French alliance". Everett Papers, LC.
- 30 Washington Daily Union, May 24, 1854.
- 31 Marcy to Buchanan, March 11, 1854, Diplomatic Instructions, Great Britain. See also Marcy to Buchanan, March 12, 1854, Marcy Papers, LC: "Should Russia be defeated in her object and crippled in her power - and the entente cordiale between Great

Britain and France continue, their abstention from intermeddling in our affairs can hardly be expected -"

- 32 Washington Daily Union, May 24, 1854.
- 33 Washington Star, undated, quoted in The State of Maine: A Daily Commercial and Literary Newspaper, June 3, 1854, and The Daily Mirror, Bath, Maine, June 2, 1854.
- 34 Washington Star, undated, quoted in The State of Maine..., June 3, 1854.
- 35 Laurence Oliphant to his mother, May 28, 1854: "Lord Elgin pretends to drink immensely, but I watched him, and I don't believe he drank a glass between two and twelve. He is the most thorough diplomat possible." In Margaret Oliphant, Memoir..., 120.
- 36 Laurence Oliphant, Episodes..., 49-51.
- 37 Ibid., 53-4.
- 38 Masters, Reciprocity Treaty, 243-9, reprints the 1854 Reciprocity Treaty in full. All passages from the Treaty cited in the text are taken from Masters.
- 39 cf Masters, Reciprocity Treaty, 86: "The Reciprocity Treaty was a skilfully drafted compromise calculated to rally support in its favour and to appease, by compensating privileges, interests who were opposed to some of its provisions."
- 40 Marcy to Crampton, September 1, 1853, Foreign Legations: Marcy explained that Florida wished to exclude British fishermen from her coasts because she feared that her slaves would try to escape to the Bahamas - where slavery was abolished - on the British vessels.
- 41 Andrews to Elgin, July 7, 20, 1854, EP, A 399. Masters Reciprocity Treaty, 74-5.
- 42 Elgin to Grey to Clarendon, June 12, 1854, EP, A 400: "In return for this advantage [the admission of Canadian natural products duty free into the United States], the people of the United States, obtain certain rights of fishing and navigation, which they value highly". See also New Hampshire Representative Amos Tuck, HR, August 27, 1852, Congressional Globe, 32:1, 1188; Masters, Reciprocity Treaty, 73; Andrews to Elgin, February 15, 1851, EP, A 399: Andrews describes the rivalry between the Northwest and Southern States over military appropriations. For an example of the value placed by Americans on the St Lawrence waterway as a possible rival to New York's expensive Erie Canal, see Charles F O'Brien, "The Champlain Waterway, 1783-1897". New England Quarterly, (1988), 173-4.
- 43 Everett to Marcy, August 15, 1853, Everett Papers, LC: "With regard to coal, I think our Pennsylvania & Virginia friends

stand in their own light in refusing to admit it into the free list. Certainly the Pennsylvanians do, for the Province [ie Colonial] coal is a different affair from the Penn Anthracite & used for different purposes. We shall soon send more coal into Upper Canada than we import from Nova Scotia." See also Andrews to Everett, September 2, 1854, Ibid, and Francis Hincks to Crampton, December 22, 1853, EP, A 400: "There can be no doubt that British America will take a much larger quantity of Coal from the United States than it would send." cf Bronson to Marcy, July 3, 1854, Miscellaneous, Reciprocity: "Canada will continue to be a large consumer of bituminous coal from Western Penna. through Erie, and two railroads are now in progress of construction, having in view, as a leading object, to conduct the anthracite coal from the center of the state to Canada."

- 44 Elgin to Clarendon, June 12, 1854, EP, A 400: "I was unable to induce Mr Marcy to consent to the introduction of a clause conceding to Colonial built vessels registration in the United States when owned by Citizens of that Country." See also Merritt to Elgin, Baltimore, May 23, 1854, EP, A 398: "Mr Marcy informed me that every point except one, was, or could be arreigned, viz the Registration of Vessels - which altho personally he did not believe disadvantageous to the U.S. still he did not believe the Senate were prepared to sanction it -". From the other side of America's political divide, Everett backed Marcy's judgement. Writing to Lord Aberdeen on January 10, 1853, Everett warned: "Our ship building interest has taken the alarm & it is too powerful and popular to be defied." Everett Papers, LC.
- 45 Elgin to Clarendon, August 22, 1855, EP, A 399.
- 46 Bancroft to Clayton, May 4, 1849, Manning, Diplomatic Correspondence, IV, 265: Bancroft predicted that Britain's 1849 repeal of the Navigation Laws would lead to Anglo-American negotiations about the American east-west coasting trade. See also Crampton to Webster, August 25, 1852, British Legation. Later this year, Crampton revealed he had given President Fillmore a memorandum outlining the three outstanding Anglo-American commercial questions - Reciprocity, the east-west coasting trade and American registration for colonial-built boats, Crampton to Foreign Secretary Lord Malmesbury, September 26, 1852, EP, A 400. See also, Russell to Crampton, January 15, 1853, Ibid.: Russell agrees not to press for the East-West coasting trade in the proposed treaty drawn up by Crampton and Everett. For Everett's view, see Everett to Crampton, December 19, 1852, Everett Papers, LC. For Derby's goals in announcing the policy of exclusion, see John Vincent, ed., The Stanley Journals..., 80: "My father's object in mooting the [Fishery] question [in 1852] was ... to make America feel there were some rights which, if we were willing to cede, she might find it for her interest to buy. The chief of these is the opening of what is called the coasting trade to California, now closed to British ships." But when Clarendon gave Elgin his instructions in May 1854, this had been dropped as a condition. Clarendon to Elgin, May 4, 1854, EP, A 400.

- 47 Elgin to Clarendon, June 12, 1854, EP, A 400.
- 48 Andrews to Clayton, June 28, 1849, Despatches ... Special Agents. Elgin to Bulwer, January 26, 1850, EP, A 399. Webster to Andrews, October 13, 1851, Instructions to Consuls. Russell to Crampton, January 15, 1853 and Andrews to Hincks, December 14, 1853, EP, A 400. Marcy to W S H Newman, US Consul to Newfoundland, February 11, 1854, Instructions to Consuls.
- 49 Elgin to Clarendon, June 12, 1854, EP, A 400.
- 50 Masters, Reciprocity Treaty, 22-23; W Strachey to Elgin, May 5, 1854, EP, A 397.
- 51 Elgin to Clarendon, June 12, 1854, EP, A 400: "I received Your Lordships final instructions on this point ... only two days before the period beyond which it was impossible that my visit to Washington should be protracted."
- 52 Colonial Office Memorandum on Newfoundland and the Reciprocity Treaty, May 1854; Colonial Secretary, the Duke of Newcastle, to Clarendon, May 1854, EP, A 400; W S MacNutt, The Atlantic Provinces: The Emergence of Colonial Society, 1712-1857, (London, McLelland & Stewart Ltd., 1965), 249.
- 53 Clarendon to Elgin, May 19, 1854, EP, A 400.
- 54 Strachey to Elgin, May 5, 1854, EP, A 397. Clarendon to Elgin, May 19, 1854, EP, A 400.

CHAPTER SEVEN
RATIFICATION IN NORTH AMERICA

From the day he left Washington to the final ratification of the Reciprocity Treaty in November 1854, Elgin was a bit like a dancer on a tightrope. If his efforts in Washington were not to have been in vain, he had to make sure that Congress and the colonial parliaments ratified the Treaty. Action, then, was essential, but every move was fraught with danger. An accomplished political acrobat, he got round his problems by avoiding extreme movements and shuffling quietly to safety. But in doing so, he demonstrated his understanding of American and colonial politics and the lip service the British paid to colonial self-government.

With regard to Congress, Elgin's hands were tied. He - and all the British officials - could not interfere in the internal politics of the United States. Not only would that have been improper, but it could have aroused American suspicions by making the Treaty seem vital to Britain and her colonies. Hence, in a review of the negotiations, Elgin wrote:

When Mr Marcy had signed the treaty I said to Mr Crampton that as the credit of the Gov. of the U.S. was now to a certain extent at least engaged in procuring its passage through Congress [nothing] as it appeared to me could be more injurious than that either he or I should seem to meddle in the matter. In pursuance of the opinion w. wh. he entirely concurred, I left Washington by the first train after the treaty had been signed.¹

Hence, when Elgin was besieged with complaints from Andrews that Crampton was doing nothing to help get the Treaty through Congress², the British Minister was not being lazy. He was,

instead, following orders. But this policy of inaction required strong nerves. Though Elgin placed some reliance on the support of President Pierce and Secretary of State Marcy, their influence was far from strong. The administration was, after all, no stronger after the Treaty was signed than it was during the British mission. Then the internal divisions of the Democrats had made it essential that Elgin, and not Marcy, should sing the praises of Reciprocity.³ But without Elgin to prolong the mood of goodwill towards both Britain and the Treaty, resistance threatened to grow. According to American Special Agent Andrews, Reciprocity faced two related hurdles: "the Weakness of the Administration - 'and an indisposition among even its professed friends to do anything to make it more popular and more respectable.'"⁴ Adding to Reciprocity's problems in Congress was the huge backlog of legislation caused by the Kansas-Nebraska debates. When Elgin left Washington Congress had only two months left to sit - and, occasionally, it looked as though it might rise even before the first week of August. This left little time to get the Treaty through, particularly as the members of Congress were showing more interest in measures specifically related to the United States or their own constituencies. The chief rival for a place on the Congressional agenda was the River and Harbour Bill, but Reciprocity was fighting with countless other bits of legislation. In truth, the Treaty was caught up in "the last struggle for the Governmental bills, Appropriations &c &c and of Land bills, Steam bills, and of innumerable private bills, on which the fate of some Mr Smiths or Mr Browns election hangs."⁵

Sitting on the sidelines, Elgin could do little directly to

secure the American ratification of Reciprocity. Yet he could still pull a few strings to smooth its progress through Congress. Perhaps his most important decision was not to shun the shady advances of Andrews. By 1854, Andrews was well known to Elgin. The two had met during the Annexation Crisis in Canada, and since the summer of 1850 the American official had been writing to the Governor-General on various subjects, particularly Reciprocity.⁶ These letters appear to have been unsolicited, but this did not deter Andrews. By 1853, still serving as the United States' Special Agent in British North America, he began to work, at least unofficially, as a double agent. In June of that year, for instance, he told Elgin that James Buchanan, the newly appointed American Minister to Britain, would sail for London in July with "full instructions on the Central America subject which is to be settled in England."⁷ Andrews thereby let Elgin and the British government know that Marcy was retaining control of the Fishery dispute and that he would not link Reciprocity and Central America in any negotiation. Andrews had, therefore, established his credentials as a valuable source and as an obvious American authority on British North America. Elgin, however, did not hold the venial Andrews in high esteem, and the two clashed on the eve of Elgin's mission when the Governor-General vetoed the inter-colonial conference on Reciprocity which the American was trying to organise. But, claimed Elgin one year later, Andrews decided to cooperate once he saw that Elgin's mission looked likely to succeed.⁸ Having invested several years in the pursuit of Reciprocity and, it transpired, large sums of money on bribery and promotional materials, Andrews stayed in Washington after Elgin left and, at the request of Marcy, worked hard at persuading

members of Congress to support the measure. Despite Marcy's apparent defeatism⁹ Andrews lobbied editors and had articles favouring Reciprocity published in the capital and around the country. He met Senators to tell them of the Treaty's importance, wrote speeches for them favouring Reciprocity¹⁰ and saw his efforts rewarded when the treaty passed with minimal opposition in both houses on the last day of Congress.

But throughout this Congressional battle Andrews saw himself as working for both the British and the Americans. As Elgin later admitted to Foreign Secretary Clarendon, Andrews "kept up a constant fire of letters & telegraphic messages" outlining the state of the Treaty in Congress. This placed Elgin in a difficult position. He suspected that Andrews was trying "to obtain from me something which he could construe into an authority to incur indefinite expenditure" to promote Reciprocity. Such a use of imperial funds Elgin could not and would not agree to and, accordingly, he did not reply to any of Andrews' communications. However, Elgin knew silence to be dangerous. "It was impossible," he wrote,

to throw over Mr Andrews altogether as his hostility might have been dangerous, and in acknowledgement of his voluminous correspondence one or two notes of encouragement were written to him by Mr Ross [a Canadian official].

Elgin also turned a blind eye to payments made by the Canadian authorities to Andrews for his services. Elgin knew that between 1849 and 1854 the Canadian government had already donated £2,000 to a fund directed by Andrews to 'enlighten' the public mind about Reciprocity, and in 1854 the government paid him another £2,000. The Governor-General allowed this by directing all his

communications to Andrews through Canadian Ministers. They, Elgin explained to Clarendon, "could deal only with Provincial funds & ... could not sanction any expenditure ... which they were not prepared to justify in the local Par[liamen]t." In this way Elgin was able to influence events in Washington without spending any imperial money and without appearing to meddle in the domestic politics of the United States. For in Andrews he had a useful, though far from perfect, ally. Andrews was not only an American citizen, but an official of the American government. He was, moreover, an acknowledged authority on British North America and Reciprocity in a country which was woefully ignorant about both. These different qualities, coupled with years of working for different American administrations, had given him access to the top men in Washington. Venial he might have been, but in the short term he was also very valuable. Elgin, moreover, acknowledged this in the account he gave Clarendon of his relationship with Andrews. Superficially, this despatch was carefully worded, designed to protect Elgin from charges of improper behaviour. But this did not stop him recommending that Andrews be rewarded from imperial funds for his services. "As your Washington Treaty" he wrote,

which has relieved the north American fleet,
and deprived Her Majesty's subjects in the
British Provinces of their only pretext for
desiring annexation to the United States on
commercial grounds, has cost, special Mission
and all included, only about £400 perhaps you
might afford to give a helping hand.

As a sum, he suggested the difference between the cost of securing the Reciprocity Treaty and the 1842 Webster-Ashburton Treaty. Either way, he stressed: "I should be greatly rejoiced if Andrews claims could be settled."¹¹

While Andrews was working on Congressional opinion, Elgin was also able to influence the passage of the Treaty in the United States by his actions in British North America. One of his first actions - in agreement with the Foreign Office - was to instruct the Fishery protection vessels to adopt a particularly gentle approach to their duties. He followed this up by effectively bringing the Treaty into effect before Britain, the United States or British North America had ratified it.¹² His goals were simple - and obvious. First, the treaty had been negotiated, at least from the American viewpoint, as a means of avoiding a war-threatening collision on the colonial fishing grounds. Britain, already in one major war, shared this pacific sentiment. By putting the treaty into immediate effect, calm could return to the fisheries and the clouds of war could begin to disperse. This, in turn, would reduce the chances of a clash on the fishing grounds which could only have destroyed the mood of Anglo-American goodwill Elgin had worked so hard to create. Second, the implementation of the treaty was likely to boost its chances of ratification by Congress and British North America by showing off its many commercial benefits. Just as important was Elgin's decision to control the response of the colonies to the Treaty. As recommended by Andrews¹³, he ensured that the Colonists did not make the Americans think they had been duped by going overboard with their public praise of Reciprocity. Hence, though he returned to the Provinces in triumph, he refused to publish the details of the Treaty until after it was ratified by the American Senate.¹⁴ In this way, he reduced the number of articles in the Canadian press praising the agreement and the chances of a colonial outburst against it - which could have persuaded the Americans that

ratification was pointless. With a mass of bills before Congress, all competing for very limited time, it was essential that the Treaty's opponents had no excuse for shelving it. Having learned from his experiences during the Annexation Crisis, Elgin was determined that no colonist should provide Washington with such an excuse.

If Elgin could operate only indirectly in the States as Congress prepared to ratify the treaty, he was able to exert more influence over the legislatures of British North America. He was, moreover, prepared to be ruthless. The crux of the problem was that for Reciprocity to come into effect, each province had to pass the necessary laws. Even before Elgin had left for Washington, Clarendon had decided that, if necessary, Britain would overcome this barrier by imposing a treaty on the Provinces. Thus, in his instructions to Elgin, Clarendon wrote:

It is clear that if the Provinces on the one hand and the United States on the other refuse to abate any portion of their pretensions, it is useless for her Majesty's Government to negotiate any further; but in such an extreme case, and more particularly if it originated in the pertinacious adherence of the provinces to their demands, Her Majesty's Government might, however reluctantly, be compelled to look rather to Imperial than to Colonial interests alone, and as in the case of Newfoundland, ... be driven to consider whether it were right to sacrifice the former for the latter.¹⁵

Such action, though, was clearly undesirable. One goal of Reciprocity was to strengthen ties between Mother Country and colonies by removing the financial sources of discontent which in the past had led to annexationism. If this agreement could only be secured by imposing the treaty on a Province against its will, relations with that colony would be put in jeopardy. Moreover,

responsible government was still in its infancy and, as the Canadian Annexation Crisis had shown, the colonists had still not adjusted to all its implications. For Britain to ride roughshod over the new system would have been to risk its long-term survival for the sake of short-term imperial interests. Hence, Colonial Secretary Sir George Grey informed Elgin:

it is scarcely necessary to say that to enforce that power would be contrary to the principles on which the Government and Legislature of this country have long acted towards the inhabitants of Her Majesty's Colonial Dominions. It will therefore be advisable to apply, in addition, to the several Colonial Legislatures, as has been assumed by Your Lordship in framing the Treaty.¹⁶

With Newfoundland's power of veto already removed, Elgin could make this application to most of the colonies with confidence. Canada was, on the whole, overwhelmingly in favour, and gave Elgin an almost royal reception on his return from Washington. According to Oliphant, "All the way from the Canadian frontier to Montreal arches were erected, addresses presented, and all the paraphernalia of a triumphal progress exhibited." Even Montreal received Elgin well as he made his way to the state opening of Parliament in Quebec.¹⁷ Prince Edward Island, too, welcomed the Treaty. This tiny Province had been a consistent advocate of Reciprocity and was willing to use the fisheries as bait for the Americans. Though it was an island, it had little direct involvement in the fishing industry. Instead, it had long played host to large fleets of American fishermen, making a living by supplying them with bait and services in return for American goods.¹⁸ Thus, rather than wishing to deny the United States access to the colonial fisheries, it wanted to encourage them. It had even supported the Nova Scotian inspired exclusion of the Americans in 1852 as the most effective

means of securing Reciprocity.¹⁹ Not surprisingly, therefore, in June 1854 Elgin was convinced that the island would support Reciprocity.²⁰

But deeper into the Maritimes, support for the treaty became less reliable. New Brunswick, which shared the fish-rich Bay of Fundy with Nova Scotia, was less than committed to the measure. Wrote the new Lieutenant-Governor, J Henry T Manners Sutton, in October 1854: "Objections are of course raised to particular parts of it by different Interests, who think (however wrongly) that better terms might have been obtained, or should have been insisted on." Nevertheless, even here, resistance was lukewarm.

The People generally, are, I am confident, strongly in favour of the Treaty as a whole, ... Your Lordship may I am confident rely on my assurance that the Treaty is safe, as far as this Province is concerned.²¹

The newly-arrived official was as good as his word. Three weeks after Prince Edward Island and a month after Canada had taken the action needed to bring Reciprocity into effect, New Brunswick followed suit, taking legislative action on November 3.²²

But nothing was clear-cut in Nova Scotia. There, opposition to the treaty ran deep and for several understandable reasons. Of all the colonies apart from Newfoundland, Nova Scotia was the most involved in the fisheries. And it was these fisheries which Reciprocity proposed to open to the Americans. Just as Prince Edward Island's non-involvement in the fisheries had made it willing to surrender this boon for Reciprocity, so too had Nova Scotia consistently been reluctant to share her fishing grounds with her republican neighbours. Indeed, Nova Scotia had led the

way in 1852 and in 1853 in securing the stricter enforcement of the Convention of 1818, and the colony had even supplied and manned ships of her own to patrol the fishing grounds.²³ By 1854 this jealous guardianship of her maritime rights had been bolstered by a variety of influences. Repeated American snubs to colonial overtures had reduced Nova Scotia's willingness to treat with the United States, while, at the same time, the return of prosperity had added to her confidence that she could live without North American free trade.²⁴ Fuelling this spirit of independent defiance was a tradition of anti-Americanism, dating from the settlement of Nova Scotia after the American Revolution by the United Empire Loyalists.²⁵ This hostility to things republican could ebb and flow according to the state of the colony's economy; but in times of relative prosperity republicanism was rarely in vogue.

Yet the United States was not the sole target of resentment. In Nova Scotia it was widely felt that the colony which had made least sacrifices but which stood to benefit most from the Treaty was Canada. Whereas the Maritimes were surrendering the source of their livelihood, argued the dissenters, Canada was opening up the Saint Lawrence. Rather than cause economic hardship, this move was likely to bring profits to the Canadians. Such suspicions consequently swelled another chip on the Nova Scotian shoulder: jealousy of Canada. For those wishing to take offense, there were plenty of slights to choose from. To the chagrin of many Maritimers, British politicians tended to refer to the Provinces collectively as Canada rather than as British North America, giving the impression that they viewed Canada as the most important

colony. Similarly, the Governor-General of British North America was the Governor-General of Canada, the other colonies making do with Lieutenant-Governors who answered to the Governor-General. He, moreover, had initiated and controlled the colonial role in British negotiations for reciprocity and, at first, had worked for an agreement between just the United States and Canada; the other colonies had been included only after throwing the diplomatic equivalent of a tantrum. If Elgin had hoped that everyone would appreciate his hard work in Washington, he was to be disappointed with Nova Scotia. There, even the manner of his triumph was cause for complaint. The Province noted that Elgin had been accompanied in New York and Washington by top-level representatives from New Brunswick and Canada, but there had been no Nova Scotian representatives in his party. It mattered not that their absence was almost certainly due to a misunderstanding on the part of the province's Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Gaspard Le Marchant; what mattered was that Nova Scotia had not been consulted.²⁶ To the dissidents in the Province, this went a long way to explaining why the fruits of Elgin's labour were so unappealing. They felt, quite bluntly, that he had failed in his duty to secure an advantageous agreement for them. For instance, in September 1852 Nova Scotia's Provincial Secretary had claimed that the proposal that Nova Scotia should admit the United States to her fisheries in return for access to the Florida fisheries was "equivalent to a Cornwallis Farmer allowing his neighbour to mow his march in return for the privilege of mowing a piece of pasture."²⁷ Yet Elgin's treaty did not even include free use of Florida's fishing grounds. To many it seemed that Elgin had allowed the Americans to steal the Nova Scotian pasture while keeping the gates to their own march firmly

barred.

However, the friends of Reciprocity in Nova Scotia had reason for optimism. While acknowledging in July 1854 that the treaty would face "the most decided hostility" in some quarters, even Le Marchant predicted that:

notwithstanding these obstacles in my way I feel sanguine that when the Time does come for a final settlement of this great Question, that I shall succeed in restoring unity of action to an extent that will defeat all the threatened opposition now attempted to be raised against it.²⁸

Of course, Le Marchant might have been whistling in the dark or telling Elgin what he believed the Governor-General wanted to hear. But Le Marchant knew that Reciprocity had enough to offer his Province's diverse economic interests to win support on its own merits. Even the fishermen had an incentive to back the terms agreed. Clearly, the prospect of fishing America's eastern seaboard held little appeal for men who had such rich pickings on their own doorstep; but these pickings had to be sold, and Reciprocity threw open the vast American market. In addition, as leading Nova Scotian politician Joseph Howe explained in June, the fisheries were just one seasonal industry among many trades thriving in Nova Scotia.

In Nova Scotia we do not follow the fishing so exclusively as in Newfoundland nor lumbering as in New Brunswick. The bulk of our people are farmers. A large body living on the seacoast are fishermen, but not fishermen only. Having plenty of free timber when the fishery is unproductive, our men go into shipyards and build vessels for themselves or their friends, and manning them go into the carrying trade or coasting business.²⁹

This wide range of economic activities - Howe did not mention them all - was Reciprocity's strength in Nova Scotia. Hence its chances

of success were enhanced by the inclusion on the duty-free list of coal and iron. Nova Scotian coal, for example, was already used in large quantities in New England to produce gas for street lamps; by removing all restrictions on trade, Reciprocity promised the coal industry even bigger profits.³⁰ Reciprocity also included lumber on the enumerated list, thereby favouring another important industry - and one which employed many fishermen outside the fishing season. Thus, the Halifax Morning Chronicle probably best summed up the Province's mixed feelings about Elgin's agreement when it wrote that Reciprocity was "a Treaty which, however objectionable the mode in which it was negotiated, confers solid, substantial and lasting benefits on the people of this country."³¹

As for anti-Americanism, though undoubtedly a factor in colonial politics, it should not be overstated. The fishing industry, in particular, had long fostered personal contacts between Americans and Nova Scotians. Annually the pursuit of fish brought huge fleets of American ships to Nova Scotian ports and, reflecting this, Nova Scotia had two US Consulates, more than any other colony. Though the actions of the American fishermen often angered Nova Scotians, their presence guarded against the colonists thinking of Americans as completely alien. Moreover, large numbers of colonists regularly worked with the New Englanders on board their fishing and coasting vessels. Indeed, American fishing boats had often violated colonial waters by running up the British flag on the strength of having Nova Scotians among their crew.³² The Americans and the Nova Scotians, then, were not in two separate, rival camps. For good and for ill, their paths often overlapped. Consequently, though appeals to local patriotism were powerful,

especially in times of economic hardship, the prospect of peace and prosperity was always likely to be more potent.

However, Elgin could not rely on these local considerations to ensure the success of a measure so important to the Empire. Therefore, he chose to use all legitimate means to get Reciprocity through the Nova Scotia Assembly. The most direct stage of his campaign was to inundate Le Marchant with letters designed to keep Reciprocity right at the top of his priorities. Between the June signing of the Treaty in Washington and its December acceptance by Nova Scotia, Elgin, Lord Clarendon, Colonial Secretary George Grey, Sir Edmund Head and Crampton kept up a barrage of letters. They told him of the ratification of the Treaty by the American Congress, the imperial Parliament and the provincial Parliaments of Canada and New Brunswick.³³ In case he did not grasp the importance of Nova Scotia's role in the Treaty's future, Elgin also sent him a letter expressing the hope that

the Legislature of Nova Scotia will be disposed to meet the advances of the Government and Congress of the United States in a liberal spirit, by repealing such laws as may be an obstacle to the admission of the Fishermen of that country to the Fisheries, by providing for the admission, duty free, of such articles, the produce of the United States, as are included in Article III of the Treaty.³⁴

On a similar vein, Grey hinted at Nova Scotia's imperial duty to accept Reciprocity. "Her Majesty's Government sincerely trust," he wrote,

that the common advantages which this Treaty will secure to Her Majesty's subjects in North America, will be fully appreciated by the inhabitants of Nova Scotia, and that its Legislature will readily acquiesce in passing any Bill which may be requisite for giving effect to its provision within the Province.³⁵

And, to stress the urgency of the matter the Governor-General dropped Le Marchant a line suggesting that Nova Scotia's Assembly might be called early specifically to deal with Reciprocity.³⁶ As a spur to Le Marchant, who does not emerge as the most dynamic colonial official in British North America, this lobbying by mail was advisable; but the former Lieutenant-Governor of Newfoundland, having served the Empire in some of its more inhospitable outposts, needed no reminding of his imperial duty. Indeed, even before Elgin had reached Washington, Le Marchant was convinced of the "great necessity" of a settlement over the Fisheries, and had been passing his conviction on to his colonial charges. "So deeply impressed am I in this belief," he told Elgin,

that I have been using my best endeavours with all Parties here, to induce them to relax in their views; and now that England is at War & embarrassed in Europe, to regard the subject more in an Imperial Light, rather than in its Local character - as subjects of Great Britain they have Duties to discharge to the Parent State, fully as deep as that which they owe to their own Province.³⁷

Keeping the pressure on Le Marchant was one thing; encouraging Nova Scotia's politicians to favour Reciprocity was quite another. Britain did this partly by not waiting for the Colonies to ratify the Treaty before putting it into effect, at least as far as the United States were concerned. However, this step was taken less with colonial views in mind and more in the interests of transatlantic calm. One goal of Reciprocity for both the British and the Americans - who called it the Fishery and Reciprocity Treaty - was to preserve peace on the Fishing Grounds. Hence, once Congress had accepted the Treaty³⁸ Britain wasted no time at all in allowing Reciprocity to act as peacemaker off the rocky shores of the Maritimes. Indeed, Clarendon took just twenty four hours to

respond to a request from Buchanan that the United States' ratification of the Treaty should secure their free access to the colonial fisheries. Thus, on August 17, one week before Britain and the United States exchanged their ratifications, Clarendon told Buchanan that he was calling off the Royal Navy. He had, he wrote, "requested the Colonial Office and the Admiralty to send out instructions tomorrow that ... will secure to American fishermen at once the privileges of the Treaty."³⁹ But Britain went still further. On August 19 Elgin wrote to Marcy that - subject to the approval of the Imperial and Canadian Parliaments - he was opening the St Lawrence to American vessels, as provided for by the Treaty.⁴⁰ Two months later, and three days after Canada had accepted the Treaty, Elgin again wrote to Marcy, this time to say that the Canadian Government had introduced a temporary bond system to cater for the possibility that the Treaty might not come into effect for another six months. This would allow the United States to trade freely with Canada, with refunds on duties once the Treaty went into operation. Thus, by October 1854, long before Nova Scotia voted, Reciprocity was already in action for the Americans.

Significantly, the British and the other colonies were not alone in working on Nova Scotia. The United States, too, pursued pressure politics with the recalcitrant province, using both the stick and the carrot. The first person to feel the force of the stick was the unfortunate Le Marchant. In mid-September he cheekily asked Crampton to make

active intervention with the Government of the United States in order to obtain for Her Majesty's subjects in Nova Scotia, the immediate enjoyment (irrespective of future legislation) of the privileges which are eventually to be secured to them by the

Not surprisingly, the Americans declined to allow Nova Scotia the best of all possible worlds and adopted their favourite ploy when saying 'No' to foreigners: they hid behind their confusing republican constitution. Neither the President nor Congress, they argued, possessed any constitutional power which would enable them to dispense, even temporarily, any part of the provisions of a treaty which, once ratified, formed part of the law of the land.⁴³ But this diplomatic language was just a thin shield for a much blunter message. Put simply, the Americans were telling Nova Scotia that she could enjoy the benefits of Reciprocity only when she had ratified it.

It was left to American Treasury Secretary Guthrie, with a little help from Sir George Grey, to hammer this warning home. Just before the Nova Scotia Assembly debated Reciprocity, Grey forwarded to Le Marchant a letter from Guthrie stating that "The [American] tariff laws will ... be in force as though the Treaty had not been made, until the British Colonies shall legislate upon the subject,"⁴⁴ However, the Americans knew that they had to avoid offending provincial pride. After all, they suspected that their refusal to treat on Reciprocity in the past partly explained Nova Scotian obstinacy in 1854. Hence, the United States government opted to give the colonies an incentive to back the treaty. The carrot they chose to wave in front of Nova Scotia was intended for the treaty's strongest critics. On October 16, the United States brought a bond system into effect for all colonial fish caught and sold in the republic since the opening of the fisheries.⁴⁵ Thus, without ratifying the treaty, Nova Scotian

fishermen could enjoy effective free trade with the United States. Yet the Americans had made sure that before the Nova Scotians could claim a refund on duties paid since about mid-September, the Treaty had to be in full operation. Thus, the colonists knew that to vote for the measure was to vote for a financial windfall; equally, a vote against could prove very expensive. They therefore had a pressing, personal incentive to abandon their resistance to Reciprocity.

The effect of all this was to present Nova Scotia with a fait accompli. When the Province's Assembly met in November to debate and vote on Reciprocity, its members knew that everybody else was depending on them. The United States, Great Britain, Canada, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island had all shown how much they wanted Reciprocity by adopting the treaty; yet, by rejecting it for Nova Scotia, the Provincial Parliament would be rejecting it for all. Consequently, unlike the Provinces which had voted earlier, Nova Scotia could not easily consider Reciprocity in a purely local light. Adding to this pressure were Le Marchant's lectures about the need for a vote in the wider interests of the Empire. These talks accompanied claims from other sources that Reciprocity would bring countless economic blessings to Nova Scotia.⁴⁶ Moreover, in the build-up to the Halifax debate, the effective operation of the Treaty had whetted the appetite of its supporters and weakened the resistance of others. They now knew that their failure to win the day would disappoint not just faceless Yankees and British North Americans but also damage their own economic interests. For those who in November still opposed the Treaty, despite the behind-the-scenes lobbying and public propaganda, the future looked

bleak. The British decision to open the fisheries to the Americans proved two things, neither of them palatable to the enemies of Reciprocity. First, having negotiated what she clearly thought was a fair and honourable Treaty, Britain was not going to continue risking war with her major trading partner on the insistence of one dissident colony guided by purely local interests. The Crimean War, which was demanding Imperial unity by draining Britain's military and naval resources, merely strengthened this British resolve. Second and, according to MacNutt, probably the most telling argument, the British had shown that they were no longer going to spend the time and money needed to deter the Americans from the Fisheries. If Nova Scotia wanted to continue the policy of exclusion, she would have to do it on her own. The Royal Navy would not be there to back her vessels up.⁴⁷ In short, by November 1854 Nova Scotia was completely, and deliberately, isolated. This left Nova Scotia with one choice only: to vote for the measure which for so long had been seen as British North America's cure-all, Reciprocity. That Britain had gone to such trouble to force Nova Scotia to toe the line reveals quite clearly the importance she attached to Reciprocity - and her readiness to ride roughshod over colonial self-government. Neither attitude is surprising, but both are basic to understanding relations between Mother Country and colonies in this period. Reciprocity fitted neatly into Britain's current commercial policy of free-trade, but it was also expected to yield countless economic and political benefits to the colonies and, indirectly, Great Britain. Though British North America had long ceased to clamour for the measure, Reciprocity was expected to bring greater prosperity by giving the colonies access to the American market. This prosperity would then

act as the strongest preventative medicine for political discontent. As long as British North America was economically buoyant - or able to enjoy the republic's prosperity - the colonists were unlikely to seek a radical change in their political status. This would in turn reduce the chances of Britain losing her strategically valuable possessions to the ominously expanding United States. Having at long last secured this measure, then, Britain was naturally determined not to let petty local considerations destroy it.

Yet here Britain faced a constitutional dilemma. By introducing responsible government, Britain had by definition switched considerable power from Whitehall to Toronto, Halifax and Fredericton. She had done this because the colonial pressure for it was intense and because the colonies were thought to have sufficient political maturity to handle the new responsibility. In addition, allowing greater political freedom within the Empire seemed one way of keeping British North America out of the arms of the Americans.⁴⁸ But Britain - either deliberately or through neglect - had never specified the absolute limits of responsible government.⁴⁹ Here lay the problem. Superficially Reciprocity was an imperial matter because foreign affairs and commercial policy remained in Whitehall's control. But Britain had opted for a Reciprocity Treaty instead of a simple commercial agreement in order to link the settlement of the Fishery Dispute with the benefits of reciprocal free trade. This was problematic because it meant that the ratification of the treaty hinged on the amendment of local legislation by the various colonies. The vague terms of responsible government, in other words, had given the colonies a

say in this complex and vital commercial agreement. The manipulative actions of Lord Elgin - determined to win acceptance for the economically advantageous treaty at a time when European war demanded calm in North America - reveal that Britain was willing to operate within this nebulous system. But if necessary she would stretch the rules of responsible government to the limit in the pursuit of her own interests. The colonies may have won responsible government, but they remained members of the British Empire. And as such, Britain still pulled the strings - and she pulled them quite tightly if it suited her.⁵⁰

CHAPTER SEVEN - RATIFICATION IN NORTH AMERICA

- 1 Elgin to Clarendon, August 25, 1855, EP, A 399.
- 2 Andrews to Elgin, June 19, July 11, 21, 23, August 21, 1854 and especially July 29, 1854, EP, A 399: "I have not seen Mr Crampton for a fortnight and get no aid from him directly nor indirectly."
- 3 Laurence Oliphant, Episodes..., 49.
- 4 Andrews to Elgin, June 13, 1854, EP, A 399.
- 5 Andrews to Elgin, July 30, 31, 1854, EP, A 399.
- 6 Andrews to Clayton, November 20, 1849, Despatches ... Special Agents. Elgin to Grey, November 22, 1850 and Andrews' memorandum, enclosed in Elgin to Grey, December 4, 1850, EGP, II, 747, 752-4. Andrews to Elgin, December 7, 1850, EP, A 399.
- 7 Andrews to Elgin, June 21, 1853, EP, A 399.
- 8 Elgin to Clarendon, August 25, 1855, EP, A 399.
- 9 Andrews to Elgin, July 11, 14, 20, 29, 1854, EP, A 399. Marcy's correspondence, however, suggests he was more optimistic than Andrews believed. See Marcy to J Y Mason, July 22, 23, 1854, Marcy Papers, LC. Crampton also found Marcy to be cautiously hopeful: Crampton to Elgin, June 25, 1854, EP, A 398.
- 10 For Andrews' work with the press, see: Masters, Reciprocity Treaty, 74-75; Andrews to Elgin, June 9, July 20, 21, 1854, EP, A 399. For Andrews' work on Congress, see Andrews to Elgin, July 4, 7, 18, 23, 29, 30, 1854, EP, A 399.
- 11 Elgin to Clarendon, August 25, 1855, EP, A 399.
- 12 Elgin to Clarendon, June 12, 1854, EP, A 400.
- 13 Andrews to Elgin, June 13, 1854, EP, A 399.
- 14 Elgin to Crampton, July 11, 1854, EP, A 398: "The Treaty is incomplete until it has been ratified by the Senate, in its Executive capacity - and I have felt so strongly on this point that I have hitherto refrained from making it public in any way."
- 15 Clarendon to Elgin, May 4, 1854, EP, A 400.
- 16 Colonial Secretary Sir George Grey to Elgin, August 24, 1854, EP, A 399.
- 17 Laurence Oliphant, Episodes..., 59-62; Margaret Oliphant, Memoir..., 134.

- 18 B Hammatt Norton to Webster, July 29, 1852; Royal Gazette of Charlottetown, PEI, July 19, 1852, enclosed in Norton to Everett, November 8, 1852; St John News of New Brunswick, September 7, 1853, quoted in the New York Herald, September 13, 1853, and enclosed in Marcy to Norton, September 1853, Despatches ... Pictou. See also MacNutt, The Atlantic Provinces..., 239, 258.
- 19 Royal Gazette of Charlottetown, PEI, July 19, 1852, enclosed in Norton to Everett, November 8, 1852, Despatches ... Pictou. See also Innis, The Cod Fisheries..., 350.
- 20 Elgin to Sir Edmund Head, Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick, June 28, 1854, EP, A 396.
- 21 J Henry T Manners Sutton, Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick, to Elgin, October 27, 1854, EP, A 398.
- 22 Head to Elgin, October 2, 1854, EP, A 396. Elgin to Sir Gaspard Le Marchant, Lieutenant-Governor of Nova Scotia, September 23, 1854; Manners Sutton to Le Marchant, November 11, 1854; Note in collection reveals that New Brunswick ratified the Reciprocity Treaty on November 3, 1854, EP, A 399.
- 23 Innis, The Cod Fisheries, 350.
- 24 Andrews to Marcy, March 31, 1854, Despatches ... Special Agents. Earl Grey, Colonial Policy, I, 246 ff.
- 25 Everett's Diary, October 12, 1852, Everett Papers, LC: Even moderates like Everett felt that Nova Scotia's loyalist heritage shaped its relations with the United States: "[Fisheries expert Lorenzo Sabine] says that Mr Joseph Howe is at the bottom of all the trouble ... He is the son of a loyalist refugee from Boston; a class of men among whom bitterness towards the United States is an hereditary principle."
- 26 Nova Scotia Parliament resolutions by MPP's Johnston and Wilkins, enclosed in Robert Wilson Fraser to Marcy, December 13, 1854, Despatches ... Halifax. The chief complaint was that Elgin had negotiated the Treaty and surrendered Nova Scotia's fisheries without consulting the colony. For the colonial delegates who accompanied Elgin, see Elgin to Head, June 28, 1854, A 396. For the confusion between Elgin and Le Marchant, see Elgin to Le Marchant, May 27, 28, 30, 1854, and Le Marchant to Elgin, May 30, June 6, 1854, EP, A 399. In Elgin to Le Marchant, May 30, 1854, Elgin expresses his great disappointment at the absence of the Nova Scotian delegates.
- 27 The British North American, Halifax, Nova Scotia, September 3, 1854, enclosed in Thomas Braine to Webster, September 4, 1852. Despatches ... Halifax.
- 28 Le Marchant to Elgin, July 8, 1854, EP, A 398.

- 29 Joseph Howe to unnamed correspondent, June 5, 1854, in Innis, The Cod Fisheries..., 334, n. 2.
- 30 Marcy's Diary, August 1, 1853, Marcy Papers, LC.
- 31 Halifax Morning Chronicle, December 14, 1854, enclosed in Fraser to Marcy, December 14, 1854, Despatches ... Halifax.
- 32 Innis, The Cod Fisheries..., 325. Commodore Perry to Navy Secretary Kennedy, August 26, 1852, Manning, Diplomatic Correspondence, IV, 474.
- 33 Clarendon to Le Marchant, August 18, 1854; Sir George Grey to Le Marchant, August 30, October 24, 1854; Elgin to Le Marchant, September 14, 23, October 10, 16, 18, 1854; Manners Sutton to Le Marchant, November 11, 1854, EP, A 399.
- 34 Elgin to Le Marchant, September 14, 1854, EP, A 399.
- 35 Sir George Grey to Le Marchant, August 30, 1854, EP, A 399.
- 36 Elgin to Le Marchant, October 10, 1854, EP, A 399.
- 37 Le Marchant to Elgin, May 3, 1854, EP, A 398.
- 38 Marcy to Buchanan, August 4, 1854, EP, A 399: Marcy reports the passage that day of the Reciprocity Treaty in the Senate.
- 39 Marcy to Buchanan, August 4, 1854, Diplomatic Instructions, Great Britain; Marcy to Buchanan, August 4, 1854; Buchanan to Clarendon, August 16, 1854; Clarendon to Le Marchant, August 18, 1854, EP, A 399. Buchanan to Marcy, August 18, 1854; Clarendon to Marcy, August 19, 1854, Manning, Diplomatic Correspondence, IV, 592-3.
- 40 Elgin to Marcy, August 19, 1854, Ibid., 593.
- 41 Elgin to Marcy, October 21, 1854, Ibid., 601.
- 42 Le Marchant to Crampton, September 14, 1854, EP, A 399.
- 43 Crampton to Le Marchant, September 25, 1854, EP, A 399: the constitutional argument was put forward by Marcy, cf Crampton to Le Marchant, October 13, 1854, Ibid.
- 44 US Treasury Secretary James Guthrie article in the Washington National Intelligencer, September 21, 1854, enclosed in Crampton to Clarendon, September 25, 1854, and forwarded to Le Marchant by Sir George Grey, October 24, 1854, EP, A 399.
- 45 US Treasury Department circular, October 16, 1854, enclosed in Sir George Grey to Le Marchant, October 23, 1854, EP, A 399.
- 46 Halifax Morning Chronicle, December 14, 1854, Despatches ... Halifax.
- 47 MacNutt, The Atlantic Provinces..., 249.

- 48 Peter Burroughs, "The Determinants of Colonial Self-Government", in The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, VI (1978), 321, 324-7.
- 49 Ibid., 325. Ged Martin, "The Canadian Rebellion Losses Bill of 1849 in British Politics", in The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, VI (1977), 18.
- 50 Even as late as 1911, the British Government was trying to ensure that negotiations for Canadian-American Reciprocity did not compromise the interests of Empire; but this time Canada, by now more than thirty years into Confederation, went her own way. See R A Shields, "Imperial Policy and Canadian-American Reciprocity, 1909-1911", in The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, V (1977), 151 ff, 169.

CONCLUSION

POWER TO THE POWERLESS

It may be dangerous to draw parallels between modern times and the past, but events as recent as 1982 prove the validity of this study's basic premise. The hi-tech battles of the South Atlantic were a world and more than a century away from mid-nineteenth-century Canada, but they still exposed one of the perils of Empire. When General Galtieri ordered Argentinian forces to invade the Falkland Islands, he clearly showed how the possession of distant territory could complicate Britain's relations with other distant countries. True, between 1848 and 1854 nothing as dramatic as war broke out over British North America, which perhaps explains why historians have neglected the colonies' significance in Anglo-American relations. But the five Provinces nevertheless exerted considerable influence over the diplomatic affairs of both countries. Thus in 1852, as in 1982, Britain deployed her navy to protect overseas subjects from a powerful neighbour. On this occasion, common sense prevailed; but the goodwill of Britain and the United States would not have been tested in this way had British North America not existed. The colonies, quite simply, raised the stakes in Anglo-American diplomacy and repeatedly acted as an irritant in an already tense relationship.

This is not to claim that British North America dominated either nation's foreign policy; that would be absurd. To Britain, the United States and British North America were largely a distraction. The great games of mid-nineteenth-century diplomacy

were in Europe, where the threat, reality or consequences of revolution were dominating public life. Moreover, though the United States was gaining in strength, the simple facts of geography meant that European republics and monarchies seemed a greater threat to Britain. Hence Sir Henry Lytton Bulwer's 1849 posting to Washington was not a promotion but a punishment. He was sent across the Atlantic after meddling in the internal affairs of Spain, his last posting. In the United States he was able to continue his career as a diplomat, and Britain was able to defuse the embarrassment he had caused. But he was so reluctant to head for the diplomatic wilderness that, after his appointment in February 1849, he delayed his departure by nine months - and with impunity. Once in America, he took every opportunity to come home, despite the dangers of cruising the Atlantic.¹ But if Britain's diplomats put a low priority on the United States, they paid the republic attention for three main reasons - its commercial links with Britain, its growing power, and the threat it posed to British North America. These possessions, however, were just one group of countless colonies worldwide. They were, moreover, remote, expensive and not particularly profitable. To the frequently aired frustration of the colonists, they did not dominate the consciences of the British politicians who decided their destiny in Westminster.

Washington, though, had a different view of the world. British North American affairs were still a low priority, but to successive American governments, Britain was at the top of the diplomatic tree. Thus, until 1855, London was one of only eleven foreign postings to carry a salary. After that date, when the

salary scale for ministers changed, not only did Washington's man in London earn the top diplomatic salary, but he earned more than members of the American cabinet. They received \$8,000 a year; he received \$9,000 a year and, in his first year overseas, a bonus of \$9,000 to help cover the costs of crossing the Atlantic and settling in London.² The importance attached by the Americans to Britain is easy to understand. Historical and cultural links apart, Britain was the United States' closest partner and rival. Britain was not only America's main trading partner and greatest source of foreign capital, but she was, until 1846, the only major power with which the United States had ever been at war. Throughout this period the Royal Navy meant that, of all the countries in the world, Britain was still the one most capable of doing the United States damage in a third conflict. No wonder, then, that Washington liked to keep a close eye on the British and staffed its London mission with men of calibre, like Louis McLane, Abbott Lawrence and James Buchanan. Yet British North America received much less attention. Remote, ice-bound, sparsely populated and split into powerless provinces, it was not the stuff of which dreams were made in Arkansas or Alabama. Thus, ignorance about British North America prevailed³ - a situation which seems to have survived into modern times.

This indifference, moreover, extended to foreign affairs generally. London may have been the top diplomatic posting for an American, but diplomacy was far from the top function of the American government. This was perhaps a product of North America's remoteness from Europe and of the exciting domestic issues which occupied the public mind. But it was also a result of the

republic's determination to break free of Old World corruption and to avoid entangling alliances. The United States, so the sentiment ran, was best left alone, and the best way to be left alone was to stand aloof. This self-conscious insularity carried into the organisation of the Federal Government. In 1849, 64 clerks worked at the War Department, 125 at the Interior Department, and 332 at the Treasury. By contrast, the full complement of State Department personnel was ten. Indeed, one clerk handled all the business relating to Britain, France, Russia, the Netherlands and its near neighbour, China.⁴ Despite the prestige attached to the post of Secretary of State, the nation did not give its holder the means to carry out the work. Foreign affairs and Anglo-American relations in particular could, from time to time, dominate American politics; but for most of the time the American public were preoccupied with other issues - like the tariff, internal improvements and slavery.

Predictably, the odd man out in all this was British North America. Like its American neighbour, it tended to be preoccupied with internal affairs. But, because it could not yet stand alone as an independent country or countries, it had an incentive to take a strong interest in world affairs. Inevitably, the two countries which had the greatest power over British North America for good or ill were Britain and the United States. For obvious reasons, though, the country which drew most attention was Britain. Partly, the magnet was cultural and emotional - the French Canadians of Lower Canada apart, most of the colonists were either immigrants from the British Isles or descended from British or Irish stock. But, given that many had left their homeland because of poverty or persecution, the dependence on Britain was prolonged by more than

just vague emotion. The Mother Country was also the provider of many of the colonies' essential services. Despite the move to free trade, Britain was the colonies' main trading partner, a relationship built up since Britain first acquired the colonies from the French. Politically, too, British North America remained heavily dependent on its Mother Country. Though the middle of the nineteenth century saw the introduction of responsible government, this experiment in loosening the financial ties with Britain was both novel and limited. After decades of close control from London, the colonists could not adjust instantly to their new freedom. Britain was still seen as the colonial ruler, a concept bolstered by the continued presence and importance in British North America of the Queen's representatives, the Governor General and the Lieutenant Governors.

Moreover, responsible government was limited. First, Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island were excluded; second, in Canada, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick Britain retained many crucial powers. Though successive British governments yearned to see the colonies take on a greater share of the costs of defending themselves, Britain was still the protector of British North America. British troops and British officers led the defence of the North American realm; and British money paid for it. Moreover, the foreign affairs of all the colonies remained in the hands of British officials. Representation of colonial interests in foreign courts was handled by British diplomats, acting under orders from the Foreign Secretary. This situation reflected the relative importance which Britain attached to all its colonies. The British retained the Empire partly because they did not know how or whether

to dismantle it and partly because they believed it brought them certain advantages. Anxious to protect their standing as a world power, they were naturally determined to prevent the possession of this empire becoming a liability. If each individual colony had been allowed to handle its own foreign affairs, without regard to the interests of Britain, this Empire would rapidly have become a crippling burden. The colonies would have hindered British diplomatic efforts generally and, when they fell victim to their own political inexperience and lack of supporting military power, they would have turned to Britain to bail them out. Britain, therefore, regarded the foreign affairs of the colonies, from Canada to Australia, as an imperial matter, and she coordinated them to suit herself.

As a result, Britain suffered from a split personality in colonial eyes. Colonists saw the Mother Country as both their champion and a distant power which had to be persuaded to pursue their interests. Similarly, the United States loomed as both a threat and an opportunity. On the plus side, the republic represented a huge market on British North America's doorstep. This potential grew in importance with the swing to imperial free trade, especially as transcontinental trade was already expanding. The United States, moreover, represented a permanent reminder that there was a viable alternative to British North America's state of colonial dependency. With its strong traditions of territorial expansion and hostility to Britain, it also seemed a likely ally in any power struggle with Westminster.⁵ But the colonists had to face one disturbing fact: for the most part, the United States was not really interested in them. To exploit the political and

commercial potential of the United States, British North America had to overcome deep-rooted American indifference. Adding to the colonists' frustration was that when Washington did take an interest, it was normally for all the wrong reasons. Quite simply, the United States represented the only martial threat which the colonies faced. British North America - and Canada in particular - was permanently at risk from popular invasions, either by gangs of drunken Americans or more organised groups, like the Hunters' Lodges of 1837 and 1848. But the colonists also knew that they were vulnerable because of their links with Great Britain. Thus, one of the arguments used in the 1849 Annexation Manifesto to justify seeking union with the republic was that:

In place of war and the alarms of war with a neighbour there would be peace and amity between this country [Canada] and the United States. Disagreements between the United States and her chief if not only rival among nations [Britain] would not make the soil of Canada the sanguinary area for their disputes, as under our existing relations must necessarily be the case.⁶

Nor was this mere sophistry. Elgin, too, fully understood Canada's unique position in Anglo-American relations. "Canada," he told Grey, "has a special claim for protection beyond any other Colony, because it is the fact of her connexion with Great Britain which exposes her to hostile aggression."⁷

Small wonder, then, that British North America took an interest in the affairs of both Britain and the United States. It was this interest, moreover, which explains in part why she was able to have a role in Anglo-American relations. She saw Britain, the States and Anglo-American relations as important and sought to influence all three. In doing this, though, she was painfully

aware of her own impotence. She had no army or navy, no vast population and no economic muscle with which she could bully Britain or the United States. Hence, Prime Minister Lord John Russell's smug declaration in August 1849: "Canada has no voice in imperial affairs."⁸ Before the year was over, he was to appreciate his folly in writing this to his beleaguered Colonial Secretary. British North America did have a voice in imperial - and Anglo-American - affairs, but only through indirect action. When under sufficient pressure, the colonies did not hesitate to take such an initiative.

The official channels open to the colonists were clear and well-established. Elections at home gave the public a chance to air their views on imperial issues, but as single-issue elections were rare, their results could not be conclusive. A more direct course was to send a petition to the Queen's representative in the Provinces or to the Queen herself. And, if money was available, colonists could choose to exercise pressure by sending men to London to lobby government and parliament. But at no point did the five colonies - or the factions within each colony - speak as one. Thus, in 1849 after the burning of Montreal's Parliament, Elgin sent Francis Hincks to London to represent the Canadian government. But on arrival, Hincks found himself competing for attention with Sir Allan MacNab, who was implicated in the arson attack.⁹ The Montreal outrage symbolised the other option available to the colonists when they were trying to influence their imperial masters: extreme, eye-catching actions. The burning of the Canadian parliament, accompanied by a band playing 'God Save the Queen', was the product of many forces. Mob rule, frustration with

domestic politics and economics, and the political immaturity of a people still unaccustomed to responsible government - all played a role. But just as important was the frustration of certain factions with their inability to influence imperial policy towards Canada. In much the same way as the IRA today apparently believes one bomb attack in London is worth a hundred in Belfast, the disaffected colonists saw one violent outburst as worth a hundred formal petitions to the Queen.¹⁰ Such actions, however, sometimes had a more devious purpose. For many signers of the Annexation Manifesto, for instance, the goal was not union with the United States. Though the more radical signatories hoped to usher in a new era of republicanism, many of the men behind the manifesto had commercial backgrounds. To them a return to the imperial protectionism which pre-dated the recession would have been more acceptable than life in a slavocracy. They hoped to frighten Britain into a change of policy by threatening the one development which she could not accept for Canada - its loss to the United States.

American channels open to the colonists were less clear. Though most British North American subjects lived close to the American border, the United States was something of an enigma. Its republican system appeared alien, with its elections for a massive range of public posts and its complex constitution. But, as with Britain, the colonists tried to find ways of influencing the Americans. Essentially, they relied heavily on lobbying. Through their pressure on British officials on both sides of the Atlantic, they hoped to shape Britain's policy towards the United States. Second, and more directly, they headed south in person to the

financiers of New York and the politicians of Washington, DC, in bids to lobby the powerful. But often they tripped themselves up through either inexperience or the efforts in the United States of rival colonial factions. Thus, in 1849 the colonists must have caused confusion in Washington. Clayton and his staff were to learn that granting Reciprocity would either foster or kill off Annexation. As a result, the colonists found that it was one thing to try to influence Washington and quite another to succeed. But the men who travelled south, though influential in British North America, were in the minority. The majority stayed at home and, if they bothered at all with the views of the Americans, tried an early version of megaphone diplomacy. The Annexation Manifesto, for instance, could be seen as an appeal to Washington over the heads of Elgin and Grey.

In diplomatic terms, then, British North America's favourite ruse was to throw a tantrum. This may have proved its relative insignificance and impotence, but the very fact that Britain and the United States paid any attention at all shows that the two powers attached some importance to the Provinces. In fact, the British placed considerable value on British North America, despite occasional statements to the contrary. The Empire, they believed, made them a world power. As such, the loss of any part of it by force would have threatened not only that Empire but also Britain's global standing. This would have been more than a diplomatic or psychological blow: it could have had commercial repercussions. Moreover, though the British concentrated their diplomatic and military efforts on checking their traditional European rivals, they were also aware that the United States' republican experiment

was throwing up a new, possibly stronger rival for the future. Here, too, British North America was important. Its loss would have strengthened the United States and, in turn, weakened Great Britain. The separation of the Provinces from Britain would have left the United States completely secure in its North American fortress. Worse still, the American annexation of the Provinces would have boosted the republic's naval power through the acquisition of the Maritimes' shipbuilding industry. But the British did not want to retain the colonies purely to keep them out of American hands. British North America also had a significant strategic value to the Mother Country. It allowed Britain to keep an eye and a physical check on the United States. These factors, and the level of British investment in British North America, made the Mother Country very sensitive about all threats to her North American territory. Lord John Russell may have been willing to grant the colonies their independence if and when they sought it; but he and his successors desperately wanted to prevent them leaving the Empire for the United States. And under no circumstances could Britain tolerate the seizure of the colonies by force. Thus, in 1849 Russell declared: "If the Americans make war for Canada, we must meet them with war."¹¹

In the United States, attitudes to British North America were even less clear cut. In truth, the Provinces were veiled in mystery, largely because the Americans had never taken the trouble to get to know their neighbours. To those in the know - like Midwestern grain growers, New England lumbermen, Atlantic fishermen - the Provinces had a value in their own right. They possessed attractions like the St Lawrence and St John rivers, iron, coal,

timber and low-cost, good-quality ships. To those not in the know - in other words, the vast majority of Americans - British North America was not important in itself, but as an arm of the British Empire. Thus, the Provinces got most attention in Congress in times of Anglo-American tension. Here, though, American politicians displayed a convenient ambivalence. Invariably, they portrayed the colonies as either a threat or an asset to the United States. Usually, such comments reflected less the politician's knowledge of the colonies and more the course he wanted the government to take with regard to Great Britain. Thus, if he favoured a hard line, he would describe Canada as on the verge of toppling corrupt and overstretched British rule. If he was pacific, he would point out that British North America was not only loyal but also allowed Britain to deploy troops and refuel her navy on the republic's doorstep. The first argument implied that the United States could fight and beat Britain easily; the second argument suggested that Britain could conduct such a war with vigour in North America. Such stances, moreover, did not usually lead to ridicule. Quite simply, either argument was valid. A mid-nineteenth-century Anglo-American war would certainly have seen Britain victorious at sea, courtesy in part to Halifax, Nova Scotia; on land, the United States would have been the narrow favourite, though a naval blockade sustained by Nova Scotian coal could have brought an eventual British triumph.

As a result, Americans did tend to see British North America as a factor - though not always a major factor - in Anglo-American relations. This, and a popular belief in the republic's manifest destiny to occupy all of North America, meant that there was

considerable support in principle for the eventual acquisition of the Provinces. Adding to the appeal of this outcome was the prospect of at last expelling the British from the Americas. But subtle forces were working to restrain the more restive elements of the populace. The strongest was the knowledge that the annexation of one or all of the Provinces would almost certainly be fatal to the republic. Not only was British North America free soil, but it was renowned throughout the South as a haven for runaway slaves. Its annexation was therefore sure to provoke intense opposition across the slave states, despite the faint prospect of recapturing fugitive slaves. A mere attempt to acquire British North America would have fostered deep suspicion that the North was trying to increase its constitutional and Congressional strength at the South's expense. Such a growth in tension could have had only one result: the secession of the South. South Carolina, for instance, had threatened secession over much less obvious dangers - like tariff reform. In addition, the British made it clear that they would resist any attempts at forcible annexation.¹² In short, American efforts to acquire Canada needed to be handled very carefully or else they might cause two wars - one with Britain and one between the States. For this reason, British North America appeared as a dangerous neighbour. It was Pandora's box of sectionalism - which could only be opened at great risk, particularly when Britain was strong.

For these reasons, the British and American governments paid British North America intermittent attention in these years. As a result, the nominally powerless Provinces assumed surprising importance in Anglo-American relations. But, of all the roles that

fell to them, the least obvious was to make Britain and the United States take more notice of one another. Transatlantic trade and a common language clearly fostered closer relations between the British and Americans than they enjoyed with other countries; but the existence of British North America made the rival governments take an even closer look at one another. The need to protect British North America focussed British attention on the United States because it was the Provinces' only enemy; and British officials stationed in the colonial cities could not help but observe developments to the south. Indeed, by the time Elgin paid his 1854 mission to Washington, he was already an acute commentator on the republic's politics. Similarly, Britain's possession of North American territory - and her consequent ability to threaten the States - forced the American government to take British power more seriously than might otherwise have been the case.

Yet this closer contact did not necessarily breed a better understanding across the Atlantic. Instead, as is often the way with foreign travel today, it seems largely to have confirmed existing prejudices. Years of trying to second-guess American intentions towards British North America convinced Elgin and Grey more than ever before that the Republic was unprincipled and territorially rapacious. Thus, the Elgin-Grey correspondence has countless examples of public corruption in the States. Writing after an 1850 meeting with America's Special Agent Andrews, Elgin declared: "I have had a nice specimen of the model republic and underpaid officials in a certain Yankee consul..." Andrews, said Elgin, had claimed to hold "very sound views" on Reciprocity "and that if he had the command of a considerable sum of money others

might be induced to take the same."¹³ But more alarming was the expansionist culture of the United States, which Elgin described with disgust in 1853. The American political system, he wrote,

secures to the citizens the privilege of molesting unoffending neighbours with absolute impunity, except when the said neighbours are sharp enough to catch them in the Act. Given an Executive at Washington which has an objective to gain by winking, and any amount of war may be carried on, on private account, by the inhabitants of that Country, without its being possible to fix the liability elsewhere.
....¹⁴

Within two months he had fresh evidence: President Franklin Pierce's expansionist inaugural address which vaguely declared that certain territories should be acquired for America's protection. "I wonder," mused Elgin, "what would be said in Europe if Mr President or Emperor Napoleon made such an announcement."¹⁵ Similarly, Grey declared that the system of presidential elections prevented steady government because "it renders the measures of that Govmt. one perpetual canvass, & it tends to encourage the most pernicious system of flattering all the worst passions of the people by the leading Statesmen."¹⁶

In American eyes, the British did not come out of their links with British North America any better. The retention of the Provinces - and occasional examples of political disquiet there - confirmed what many Americans wanted to believe: that their former colonial master was still a world-wide oppressor of peoples yearning to be free. Similarly, the Provinces reminded the Americans of Britain's global empire and world-power status - which fed a well-established national inferiority complex. Thus, as the two countries squared up over Oregon in 1846 President Polk told one correspondent:

the only way to treat John Bull was to look him straight in the eye; that I considered a bold and firm course on our part the pacific one; that if Congress faltered or hesitated in their course John Bull would immediately become arrogant and more grasping in his demands....¹⁷

Similar considerations played a role in forcing Webster's defiant address in 1852, when he replied to the new British fishery policy. Instead of fostering greater friendship, then, the colonies were quite capable of fuelling well-established suspicions and hostility. Yet there were plusses to the existence of British imperial territory north of the Republic. Contact between colonists and Americans convinced many of their great similarities; and, close observations of the antics of the Americans taught the British not to take every Anglophobic statement seriously.

If the colonies encouraged greater mutual interest between the British and the Americans, their primary role in Anglo-American relations was to drag the two countries into a long-drawn-out series of negotiations. Britain retained control of the foreign affairs of all the Provinces and, in diplomatic terms, nearly all their problems were with the United States. As a result, British diplomats in Washington, their hands full representing Great Britain, found themselves having to handle countless British North American issues. Many of these tasks, though time-consuming, were trivial: the position of border posts between Canada and Vermont or routine American requests to use the St Lawrence.¹⁸ But the pursuit of Reciprocity was not trivial, and it took up thousands of diplomatic man-hours on the part of British and American officials. It also sucked British North America into the very complex world of international relations. What in Montreal seemed a simple matter of securing a trade agreement was in reality a business of juggling

countless interests. In fact, each party - British, American and colonial - found itself trying to exploit the others.

In this way, British North America was largely a hindrance to Great Britain. At the simplest level, the colonies frequently complicated matters for Crampton and Bulwer as they worked on their behalf in Washington. The outbursts of the colonists, whether in annexation manifestos or ominous political resolutions, usually served only to alert the Americans to the rifts existing within British North America and between Mother Country and colonies. Just as frustrating, whenever Crampton and Bulwer got to a delicate stage in their negotiations, Washington was invaded by colonists who rarely acted in unison. The British then had to sit and watch their efforts being undermined by the very North American subjects they were trying to protect. Inevitably, the American government saw such divisions as heaven-sent weapons to use against the British. The annexation crisis and the desperate demands from the colonies and Britain for Reciprocity persuaded the Americans that they could name their price for granting North American free trade.¹⁹ But the activities of the colonists did not just weaken the British in their negotiations for Reciprocity. To the Americans, British embarrassment in Canada always had much wider implications for Anglo-American relations. Just as Washington believed that London was more confident when France was quiet²⁰, so too did Washington watch with glee when Montreal was in turmoil. A turbulent British North America guaranteed a cautious Great Britain. Hence, one of the reasons why Clayton backed away from Reciprocity in 1849 was that it was in his interests to prolong the Annexation agitation. Partly this was because he entertained vague

hopes of admitting British North America to the Republic at the same time as Cuba; partly it was because he was at loggerheads with Britain over Central America. The prospects of American success in any negotiations could only be boosted if Britain was unsure of her position in the Americas. Distracted by the threat of a revolution in British North America, she would find it difficult to be bullish over Central America.

The British, too, were quite willing to use British North America in the grand game of transatlantic pressure politics. Thus, the 1852 fishery announcement undoubtedly drew part of its inspiration from colonial appeals for protection against American marauders. But the announcement had a more devious intent. At the time, Britain and the United States were squaring up once again over Central America, and the fishery dispute provided Britain with the perfect excuse for a display of power. It allowed her to warn her rival not only that the colonies were loyal once more but that Britain had a navy which could refuel within hours of New York. Significantly, the announcement did not introduce any changes to the existing policy; it just restated that policy in a very public way. Moreover, the colonies had been calling for a show of Royal Naval strength for years; only in 1852 did Britain see fit to respond. Similarly, Elgin's spectacularly successful Washington mission in 1854 had more than just a love of Reciprocity as its motive. When he set sail for North America, Britain had already gone to war with Russia over the Crimea, and Britain wanted to avoid a weakening of her war effort through North American distractions.²¹ Securing North American free trade, even though the colonies had long since stopped clamouring for it, was one way

of removing the economic seeds of future unrest. For once, this political expediency suited the Americans as well. Faced with rising sectional divisions, Washington also wanted peace in North America. A war with Britain over the Fisheries would have appeared to the South as a war for free soil and Northern interests, and there was no knowing what impact that could have had on the Republic. Moreover, European wars involving Britain had always led to hardship for the United States as the Royal Navy had exercised - or invented - its right to search neutral ships. To the Americans, the appeal of settling the fishery and Reciprocity issue was clear. Apart from possible economic benefits, it might well keep both North America and Britain calm. Thus, throughout this period the colonies, Britain and the United States were acting out a coy diplomatic version of the eternal triangle. But in this case, none of the lovers could reasonably play the aggrieved party: they were all as guilty of scheming and infidelity as each other.

If, in these strained circumstances, British North America was able to hold down several roles within Anglo-American relations, transatlantic diplomacy had an equally profound impact on British North America. Most notably, it helped push the Provinces into their first hesitant steps towards national unity.²² Partly, these moves came in response to other pressures. Thus, a desire for better communications and trade between Canada and the Maritimes led to a Nova Scotian delegation visiting Quebec in 1848 to press for free trade and the Halifax-Quebec Railway.²³ And in 1851, as prosperity killed off fancies of annexationism and provincialism, Elgin found himself attending the dinner of an inter-colonial conference on the Railway.²⁴ But behind the steady swing towards

eventual Confederation, the strongest force was the peculiar position of the colonies in Anglo-American relations.

The Annexation Crisis, for instance, emphasised that attempts to join the colonies to the United States were unlikely to succeed. For all the agitation of the articulate annexationist minority, the movement never won widespread support. Despite the economic problems of all the Provinces and the comparative prosperity of the neighbouring Republic, Annexationism drowned in a sea of loyalty which swept across British North America. Leading annexationists were tarred as virtual traitors and their dismissal from public office caused little unrest. The most public manifestation of the movement, the Annexation Manifesto, was condemned as the product of politically and economically desperate men. Such attacks, moreover, gained strength as the economy began to pick up in late 1849. But the basis of the failure of annexationism was that the vast majority of the population was either loyal or preferred to live in the British Empire than to opt for the uncertainty of union with a country whose morals and political system they had long despised. Even the group which had least reason to feel loyalty towards Britain did not rally to the Annexationist cause. Papineau and his radical allies apart, French Canadians seemed to take the view that their community was more likely to survive in British North America than in the slave-owning, largely Protestant republic to the south. Under the British system, the Catholic church was respected and men like Louis Hippolyte La Fontaine could hold the highest office; such a situation was almost unthinkable in the States. Wrote one commentator in January 1849: "The French Canadians would be a doomed race." Small wonder then that in 1848

Elgin advised Grey:

Let them feel ... that their religion, their habits, their prepossessions, their prejudices if you will, are more considered here than in other portions of this vast continent which is being overrun by the most reckless, self-sufficient and dictatorial section of the Anglo Saxon race, and who will venture to say that the last hand which waves the British flag on American ground may not be that of a French-Canadian?25

But perhaps just as crucial a blow to future outbreaks of colonial annexationism was the reaction of the United States. At long last given the chance to realise its dream of acquiring Canada, it chose to stand on the sidelines looking sheepish. Whatever Andrews did behind the scenes, the American government deliberately refused to give the movement the overt encouragement it needed to succeed. As a result, the torrid months of 1849 saw decades of declarations by vote-seeking American politicians vanish into hot air. Gradually, it became clear to the British North Americans that their political future did not lie with the United States. Instead, they would have to work out their political future within an imperial framework. And if they wanted to leave the Empire, they would have to do so either as individual Provinces or as a new nation.

Adding strength to the moves towards intercolonial unity was the long-drawn out quest for Reciprocity. If the failure of the Annexation movement had shown the folly of trying to link up with the States, the Reciprocity negotiations showed the Provinces the wisdom of working together. It was, at times, a tough lesson to learn. The Canadians watched in anger after pressure from the other colonies for inclusion in any free-trade measure destroyed

the Canada Reciprocity Bill before it could pass through Congress. Thereafter, the movement for Reciprocity ceased to be a matter for each colony to pursue individually with the United States. Instead, Bulwer had to negotiate a deal involving all of British North America - and Elgin was ordered to coordinate and control the actions of the five colonies.²⁶ Increasingly, he allowed the elected representatives of each colony to play an advisory role in the negotiations for a free trade measure involving all of British North America. This trend came to a head in 1854 when he called for delegates from all the colonies to help him in his mission to Washington. Only Nova Scotia let him down - but not out of any misguided provincialism. Its Lieutenant Governor apparently misunderstood Elgin's request.²⁷

Throughout this process it became clear that the colonies were better off together than apart. Thus, though delays were legion, the American government took more interest in Reciprocity when it offered the Fisheries and free navigation of the St John instead of just Canadian bargaining counters. But perhaps most significant was the response of the colonies to American maltreatment over the Reciprocity issue. Repeated snubs to delegations to the States trying to win Reciprocity certainly provoked parochial hostility; but it also reinforced the deep-rooted sense that the United States was not an ally but an untrustworthy, greedy neighbour. In short, American arrogance united the Provinces by giving them a common external foe. This feeling came to a head in 1851 and 1852 when the Provinces agreed without any prompting from London to provide vessels to guard the Fisheries against American violation.²⁸ Not only was this an astonishing step from colonies which had

previously refused to pay for their own defence; but it also underlined their growing sense of unity. First, it showed that the Provinces were both willing and able to work together in the face of a foreign threat. Second, they clearly understood that the United States saw them more as a group than as individuals. Among the Provinces providing ships were Canada and Prince Edward Island, who were hardly dependent on the fisheries. But by denying the Americans access to the fishing banks, they knew there was a greater chance of securing Reciprocity. This group effort, then, saw Canada and Prince Edward Island preparing to use the properties of their sister colonies as bargaining weapons against the United States.

Finally, the Reciprocity Treaty itself both underlined the increasing sense of intercolonial unity and gave it its biggest test. The Treaty applied to the whole of British North America but had to be ratified by each colonial parliament, apart from Newfoundland's, to become law. The danger lay in Nova Scotia. But, despite a widespread belief among Nova Scotian fishermen that Elgin had sacrificed their Fisheries on the altar of Canadian commercial demands, the Province ratified Reciprocity. Partly it did so because the Treaty catered for other sectors of the Nova Scotian economy; but partly the vote reflects Nova Scotia's knowledge that the future of Reciprocity rested with her. All her sister colonies had given it their backing, and to vote against would have been to let them down. Thus, Nova Scotia's ratification of Reciprocity reveals that, at last, the concept of colonial unity was slowly coming of age.

In these nationalistic developments, though, there was considerable irony. Through moves to create closer unity with the United States - either through annexation or Reciprocity - the colonies found themselves being welded together in an increasingly independent confederation. But in this period confederation remained an embryonic dream. In reality, the colonies still tended to act separately: it was only under pressure that they were likely to come together, and even then the alliance could be uneasy. Partly because of this political immaturity, and partly because they had grander games to play, neither Britain nor the United States treated British North America as an equal. Instead, the two powers saw the colonies as both a liability and an asset; and their handling of Anglo-American relations reflects this ambivalence.

CONCLUSION - POWER TO THE POWERLESS

- 1 Grey to Russell, May 27, 1848, GP. George Bancroft to Edith Bancroft, February 8, 1849, Bancroft Papers, LC. Grey was particularly critical of Bulwer, telling Elgin on January 23, 1850 that he had "a very low idea" of Bulwer's ability; see also Grey to Elgin, November 16, 1849: "I cannot say how much I am annoyed at his having been allowed to linger for so long." EGP, II, 576, 528. For Bulwer's late arrival, see the Washington Daily Republic, December 22, 1849.
- 2 Foster Stearns, "Edward Everett", in Samuel Flagg Bemis, ed., The American Secretaries of State and their Diplomacy, (New York, Pageant Book Company, 1958), 169-70.
- 3 Masters, Reciprocity Treaty, 55.
- 4 Illinois Representative John A. McClernand, HR, January 23, 1851, Congressional Globe, 31:2, 91-8.
- 5 For a thorough study of mid-nineteenth-century Canadian attitudes to the United States, see S. F. Wise and Robert Craig Brown, Canada Views the United States....
- 6 The Montreal Annexation Manifesto, Montreal Gazette, October 11, 1849, EGP, IV, 1491.
- 7 Elgin to Grey, December 6, 1848, EGP, I, 267.
- 8 Russell to Grey, August 19, 1849, GP.
- 9 Elgin to Grey, May 13, 1849; Grey to Elgin, June 1, 14, 1849, EGP, I, 354, 355, 360. Francis Hincks to Sir Allan MacNab, London, June 8, 1849, Hincks Papers, PAC. Allin & Jones, Annexation, Preferential Trade and Reciprocity, 9.
- 10 Elgin to Grey, January 14, 1850, EGP, II, 579-80.
- 11 Russell to Grey, August 19, 1849, GP. Elgin to Grey, May 18, 1848, EGP, I, 166-7. Grey to Elgin, October 11, 1848, EP, A 397. Bourne, Balance of Power, 171. Russell to Grey, January 1, 1849, GP.
- 12 Elgin to Crampton, May 1849, EP, A 398.
- 13 Elgin to Grey, November 22, 1850, EGP, II, 747.
- 14 Elgin to Colonial Secretary, the Duke of Newcastle, January 28, 1853, EP, A 396.
- 15 Elgin to Newcastle, March 12, 1853, EP, A 396.
- 16 Grey to Elgin, January 10, 1851, EGP, II, 778.
- 17 Polk's Diary, January 4, 1846, in Milo Milton Quaife, ed., The Diary of James K. Polk During His Presidency, 1845-1849, (4 vols, Chicago, A. C. McClurg & Co., 1910), I, 155.

- 18 Crampton to Buchanan, February 5, November 15, 1848, British Legation. See also Clayton to Crampton, May 25, 1849, Foreign Legations.
- 19 Andrews to Clayton, June 28, 1849, Despatches ... Special Agents.
- 20 Marcy to Buchanan, March 11, 1854, Diplomatic Instructions, Great Britain. Marcy to Buchanan, March 12, 1854, Marcy Papers, LC.
- 21 Clarendon to Elgin, May 4, 1854, EP, A 400.
- 22 John Ingham, "Power to the Powerless: British North America and the Pursuit of Reciprocity, 1846-1854", in The Bulletin of Canadian Studies, II (Autumn 1984), 133.
- 23 Elgin to Grey, June 6, 15, 1848, EGP, I, 181, 183.
- 24 Elgin to Grey, June 21, July 5, 1851, EGP, II, 831, 834.
- 25 Montreal Pilot, January 3, 1849, enclosed in Elgin to Grey, January 4, 1849; Elgin to Grey, May 4, 1848, EGP, I, 284, 149-50. Burroughs argues that Grey's determination to introduce self-government to Canada proves that by 1846 he believed the French-Canadians were no longer a threat to the integrity of the Empire. See Peter Burroughs, "The Determinants of Colonial Self-Government", in The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, VI (1978), 326-7.
- 26 Grey to Elgin, November 17, 1849; Palmerston to Bulwer, November 1, 1849, EGP, IV, 1480 ff. Grey to Elgin, October 24, 1849, EGP, II, 517.
- 27 William Hamilton Merritt to Elgin, Baltimore, May 23, 1854, EP, A 398. Elgin to Le Marchant, May 27, 30, 1854; Le Marchant to Elgin, May 30, June 6, 1854, EP, A 399.
- 28 Innis, The Cod Fisheries..., 350.

ABBREVIATIONS

- Bancroft Papers -
The Papers of George Bancroft, LC, Washington, DC.
- British Legation -
Notes from the British Legation in the United States to the Department of State, 1791-1906, M 50, USNA.
- Clayton Papers -
John M Clayton Papers, Document Collection, LC, Washington, DC.
- Congressional Globe -
The Congressional Globe, (Several volumes, Washington, DC, US Congress), The records of Congressional debate between December 1845 and August 1854.
- Despatches ... Halifax -
Despatches from US Consuls in Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1837-1906, T 469, USNA.
- Despatches ... Montreal -
Despatches from US Consuls in Montreal, 1850-1906, T 222, USNA.
- Despatches ... Pictou -
Despatches from US Consuls in Pictou, Nova Scotia, 1837-1893, T 47, USNA.
- Despatches ... Special Agents -
Despatches from Special Agents of the Department of State, June 28, 1849 to October 8, 1857, M 37, USNA.
- Despatches ... St John -
Despatches from US Consuls in St John, New Brunswick, 1835-1906, T 485, USNA.
- Despatches ... US Ministers ... Great Britain -
Despatches from US Ministers to Great Britain, 1791-1906, M 30, USNA.
- Diplomatic Instructions, Great Britain -
Diplomatic Instructions of the Department of State, 1801-1906, Great Britain, M 77, USNA.
- EGP -
AG Doughty, ed., The Elgin-Grey Papers, 1846-1852, (4 vols., Ottawa, J O Patenaude, 1937).
- EP -
The Elgin Papers, Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
- Everett Papers -
The Papers of Edward Everett, Document Collection, LC, Washington, DC.

- Foreign Legations -
 - Notes to Foreign Legations in the United States from the Department of State, 1834-1906, M 99, USNA.
- GP -
 - Papers of the Third Earl Grey, Department of Palaeography and Diplomatic, University of Durham,
- HR -
 - House of Representatives.
- Instructions ... Special Missions -
 - Diplomatic Instructions of the Department of State, 1801-1908: Special Missions, M 77, USNA.
- Instructions to Consuls -
 - Instructions to Consuls, USNA.
- LC -
 - Library of Congress.
- Manning, Diplomatic Correspondence... -
 - William Roy Manning, ed., Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States, Canadian Relations, 1784-1860,
(several volumes, Millwood, New York, Kraus Reprint, 1975).
- Marcy Papers -
 - William L Marcy Papers, Document Collection, LC, Washington, DC.
- Miscellaneous ... Reciprocity -
 - Miscellaneous Documents concerning Reciprocity Negotiations of the Department of State, T 493, USNA.
- PAC -
 - Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
- Palmerston Papers -
 - The Palmerston Papers, British Museum.
- USNA -
 - United States National Archives, Washington, DC.
- Washington Daily Republic,
Newspaper Division, LC, Washington, DC.
- Washington Daily Union,
Newspaper Division, LC, Washington, DC.
- Washington National Intelligencer,
Newspaper Division, LC, Washington, DC.
- Webster Papers -
 - The Papers of Daniel Webster, Dartmouth College Project, Manuscript Division, LC, Washington, DC.

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Sir John Gaspard Le Marchant, Lieutenant-Governor of Newfoundland, 1847-52, Nova Scotia, 1852-57.

Sir Edmund Walker Head, Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick, 1847-54.

Sir Francis Hincks, Canadian Inspector-General, 1848-51.

Duke of Wellington, Commander in Chief of the British Army.

Lord Raglan, Military Secretary to Wellington, 1827-52.

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