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Empire Essay Competition

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on Boswell
Pritchard

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SUBJECT :-

The Man who did most for the
British Empire since 1783, with
reasons for my choice

[Lord Durham.]

John George Lambton, Lord Durham, did so much for the Empire in so many ways that he is easily the most prominent of those whose names live in the history of the British Empire. There are many reasons why this should be.

In England in the early eighteenth century the system of representation in Parliament was extremely bad; but so deeply was it rooted in custom and tradition that few people saw its evils. However, some people, including Lord Durham, did see them and as early as 1821 Lord Durham made an attempt to reform Parliament; but it was not till he tried again in 1830 when Lord Grey formed his Whig government that he obtained some support, and was appointed with three other men, Lords Russell, Duncannon and Graham, to form a committee to investigate the matter. Their recommendations, incorporated in a Bill, were startling to the world at that time. After a prolonged and bitter political battle the measure was finally passed and the changes were made. The franchise was very much widened and the people were more fairly represented in Parliament. More people were able to vote and many of the evils of "rotten" and "pocket"

boroughs were abolished. This changed the British government profoundly and put it on a really firm basis which had the people's whole support. It might be asked, "How does this affect the British Empire?", but with a little thought it becomes obvious what a great effect this had in the dominions and colonies. Not only did it lay the foundations for further reforms but it also did a great deal to turn the British government towards democracy. Britain is the head of the Empire and on the British Parliament were modelled the governments which rule the myriad peoples of these lands scattered ~~in~~ in the four quarters of the globe. Such an event in Britain resounded from one end of the earth to the other and affected nearly every country in the British Empire in one way or another. Nearly all the credit for this goes to Lord Durham. While the other members of the committee helped to draw up the Bill, and the Whig party had the necessary majority to pass it through the House of Commons, the Bill shows a very striking resemblance to Durham's earlier measure of 1821, and it was due to him that it was able to pass in a complete condition through

both Houses. He was the driving force and he used his energy to oppose the hackings and trimmings which it would normally have undergone, and to secure a majority for it. He used his profound influence on his father-in-law, Lord Grey who was then Prime Minister. He made magnificent and fiery speeches in the House in support of the Bill. For this reason if for no other he is worthy to be considered a prominent imperialist.

Another action which has won for him even more fame than the reform Bill is his influence on the Canadian situation within the last few years of his life. This situation was very complicated. In 1837 there were risings in both Upper and Lower Canada as a result of the friction there. There was a clash between two interests in Canada, not between the French and British peoples, as might have been expected, although this formed a part of the problem. The main quarrels were between what the French and the British stood for, what they represented, not between the peoples themselves. On the contrary they seem to have lived together and mixed together extremely well, considering how little they had

in common. The French people, to quote the words of Durham's Report, 'were mild and kindly and hospitable, industrious and honest and frugal, sociable and cheerful, and distinguished for a courtesy and real politeness which pervaded every class of society.' They had always been quiet conservative agriculturists and now their country was invaded by a horde of aggressive British merchants. The British were a different race altogether and had a totally different kind of life. They were more commercial, matter-of-fact and up-to-date. It was really a clash between the old and the new types of life, with complications of race and language added. The two types of life were bound to clash when set together in one small country - for Canada was still a small undeveloped land. The British must needs reshape everything to suit their own mercantile ways and this antagonized the French. The British further aggravated the antagonism by showing no sympathy and being impatient and intolerant of the old French customs and traditions which had governed the lives of these simple peasant-folk from time untold. Their differences were also political. The peasant class, mainly French people were very bad-ly

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represented in the government. The whole political system was in the hands of two groups, one in Upper Canada and one in Lower Canada - the "family compact" and the "chateau clique" who used the government for their own ends. By controlling the government they secured for their own families and friends many posts and sinecures which were denied to common people. The party in power was ~~the~~ British but it could never obtain a working majority and was defeated on most questions. This kind of government was hopeless, as nothing constructive could be done. In spite of all their grievances the peasants still had a great deal of faith in the British government, largely no doubt because it had treated them generously when they were defeated. Lord Durham was appointed by Melbourne's government partly because of his ability, and partly because he was a possible candidate for the Prime Ministership. However, they could hardly have done anything better, for he was the very man for the task. He was a noted Liberal and reformer - his extreme tendencies had won for him the title of "Radical Jack" - and his appointment aroused the greatest enthusiasm in the peoples of Canada who thought that their difficulties would now be satisfactorily overcome. His task was to

sum up the situation and to make a report with recommendations for the best solution of the problems, and he was given extra special powers to enable him to do this.

While he was in Canada he did one thing which earns him a place among our statesmen who have helped the Empire. While he occupied the position of High Commissioner he helped greatly to ease the antagonism between the United States and Canada and Britain which had been one of the results of the war of 1812-14. When travelling in Canada, he made several trips over the border and met and entertained many Americans. The impression which they received from this Englishman was wholly favourable, and they took a much better view of the British from that time onward.

Durham also sent Colonel Grey on a special mission to Washington, where he (Colonel Grey) was very well received by the President at the White House. Here too the impression left was wholly favourable, and it showed wisdom on Lord Durham's part that he sent Colonel Grey on this mission. The United States is a great country and its power is increasing. The man who did most to bring Britain and the United States together again

is indeed great. The world of today still feels the effect of this as the two countries (Great Britain and the United States) have ever since been on the friendliest of terms, while the peoples of Canada and the United States dwell together in peace on either side of one of the longest unguarded frontiers in the world.

He did not remain long in Canada; but while he was there he got to know the people thoroughly. He resigned because the British Government showed a lack of support for him. When he returned to England he immediately set to work to complete his famous report which he had begun in Canada. This remarkable document was presented to Parliament on March 11th. 1839.

The Report contained three primary recommendations and one or two secondary ones. The first was that Upper and Lower Canada should be united to form a single nation. This would give an assured British majority in the government and make it stable. The next recommendation was perhaps the most important of all. It was that Canada should have self-government. For this purpose the government was divided into two parts. The Canadian Parliament was to have complete control of all matters entirely inside her own

boundaries and purely her own affairs. Britain was to retain control of external affairs, and of the Canadian foreign policy. The third main recommendation was that Canada should be given a responsible cabinet government on the British model.

The other recommendations were secondary, but nevertheless important. They emphasised the need for education, especially in primary schools. The Report also recommended a reform of the municipal government system, and foresaw the need for railways everywhere to develop the country.

The effects of the report were tremendous. It laid the foundations of the prosperity which marked the history of Canada henceforward. Also it laid the foundations for a future reasonable and practical colonial policy by giving the statesmen a pattern on which to work. It has had more effect than any other document on the governmental principles of the Empire. Its results, in the principles it embodied, have been written into the very foundations of the Empire. Self-government and responsible government have been the aim, and attainment, of most of the countries of the Empire. Such countries as New Zealand, Australia,

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South Africa, Canada, and now we have the question of self-government and responsible government in India where the Indians are fighting for these principles with all the means at their disposal. In Palestine too the Arabs and the Jews are fighting for self-government. Even in Europe the principles apply today, for in countries such as Rumania and Greece and France elections have been held, with self government as an aim. Lord Durham gave us the principle of self-government rather than the previous assumption that the destiny of the colonies was independence. The principles of his Report ~~however~~ have done very much to help to weld the Empire into one unit, and to make the bonds between Britain and her colonies stronger.

Lord Durham also had a share in the founding of New Zealand, through Wakefield's New Zealand Association and Company, of which he was the chairman. This company really founded the colony, sending out survey ships and settlers to found the new settlement. While Lord Durham may not have taken a very active part in the work, it is un-

doubtedly true that he as chairman gave the Company much of the influence and power which it possessed, especially with the British Government.

He also helped Britain and the Empire greatly when he was the British ambassador in St. Petersburg. While here he eased anti-British feeling very considerably as he was to do in the United States later.

These reasons would be sufficient to claim that Lord Dunsam had done much for the Empire, but there are other men who have also done much for the Empire. "Did he do more than them?" may be asked. Such men as Arthur Balfour, Joseph Chamberlain, Lord Cromer, Disraeli, Cecil Rhodes, Lord Lugard and James Stephen spring to mind. Arthur Balfour came to an important agreement with France which helped the British in Egypt, and settled a dispute over Newfoundland fishing rights which had been a cause of trouble for a very long time. Mr. Chamberlain tried to give to the Empire a common trade and economic policy. Lord Cromer practically made Egypt what it is today. Disraeli believed in imperialism.

cohesion. Cecil Rhodes developed South Africa immensely. Lord Lugard developed and administered Nigeria and some of the West Coast of Africa, while "Mr. Over-Secretary Stephen" was one of the most important Under-Secretaries Britain has ever had. Lord Durham, however, did much more than any of these men in the service of the Empire. Firstly he was largely responsible for the Reform Bill of 1832, which had such important consequences. Secondly he put Canadian affairs on a sound footing. Thirdly, he gave the Empire his Report, the most important document in its history. He also made friends with the United States and this has been a great help to the Empire. His deeds have affected the Empire from that time forward, and have contributed greatly to its prosperity. In the short space of his time he did more than any other man for the welfare of the British Empire.

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