

***The Old Attorney General: A Biography of Richard John Uniacke, 1753-1830*, Brian Cuthbertson, Halifax: Nimbus, 1980. Pp. vi, 150. \$12.50 (cloth).**

In agreeable contrast to the policy of their counterparts in New Brunswick the senior staff at the Public Archives of Nova Scotia have consistently aimed to be productive historians. The biography under review is a late addition to a long series of useful imprints to appear under the direction of the eminent chief archivists D.C. Harvey and C.B. Fergusson.

Cuthbertson's *Life of Uniacke* sketches the public career of a politician of the first magnitude in the post-Revolutionary Maritimes. It begins, inauspiciously, with the day late in 1776 that Uniacke was carried in chains to Halifax for his part in attempting to bring the American Revolution to the Isthmus of Chignecto. Treason could not, however, hold down a bright lawyer with powerful connections in the Mother Country, and, by 1781, Uniacke had become His Majesty's Solicitor-General for Nova Scotia. In 1797 he was raised to Attorney-General, a position in which he continued the remaining thirty-three years of his life. Yet the burden of high office under the Crown did not prevent him from serving important years as Speaker of the House of Assembly or from developing the largest law practice in the province.

For fifty years Uniacke was at the centre of Nova Scotia's public controversies. It is one of the chief merits of Cuthbertson's book that he guides the reader through the byzantine complexity of the colony's politics with economy and assurance. There is a particularly impressive account of the interrelationship of church, education, and politics, containing much of value for students of the Church of England's role in the colonial constitution.

Uniacke was not a great intellect but he was a towering personality, and the contradictions between the earlier and later phases of his career are of the same magnitude. He began public life as an infatuated revolutionary. Thirty years later he prefaced the first consolidation of the Nova Scotia statutes with the most eloquent expression of Maritime conservatism ever penned. Early attracted to Roman Catholicism, later a pewholder in Halifax's dissenting meeting-house, he ended life as an aggressively erastian defender of the established Church of England. He made his public debut with an attempt to make Nova Scotia the fourteenth rebelling colony; he is now recalled as one of the prophets of the union of 1867.

The only major flaw in Cuthbertson's study is his failure to give the

intellect that embraced these massive contradictions any extended treatment. Otherwise, Cuthbertson's *Uniacke* is deeply researched, confidently written, elegantly produced, and altogether, one of the finest works of Maritime history to appear in a decade.

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Continuing Constitutional Dilemmas, W. R. Lederman, Toronto: Butterworths 1980. Pp. 442. \$25.95 (paperback)

When an individual begins to study constitutional law, the situation that arises is similar to that of a high school student embarking upon Shakespeare for the first time and anticipating that the subject will be dull, dry and barely comprehensible. Upon further investigation, however, like Shakespeare, the study of constitutional law is interesting and understandable. Certainly Professor Lederman's collection of essays written by him over a quarter of a century are rarely dull.

As we are told in the Preface, "The essays collected in this volume identify and analyse basic themes and problems of the constitutional law of Canada in a broad sense, including (but not confined to) the nature of Canadian Federalism since 1867".¹ In the 28 essays collected in this book, it is this constant referral to "basic themes" that makes this work so valuable to the student. While the themes presented are too numerous to detail in this note, three fairly broad concepts reoccur that deserve elucidation.

The first concept is one in which constitutional law arises out of the history and tradition of the Canadian people as a whole. "One must constantly relate these rules and principles of law and government to the organic ongoing life of our national community from which they derive their validity".² The book is very much an historical account of our constitutional past, an account essential in understanding the very foundation of Canadian federalism.

¹W.R. Lederman, *Continuing Constitutional Dilemmas* (Toronto: Butterworths), 1980, Preface, p.XV.

²*Ibid.*, at 91-92.