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Fifty years ago an emphatic expression of confidence in the self-governing competence of the people of North-eastern Australia was given by the British Government of Lord Derby. On 6th June, 1859, Queen Victoria in Council adopted Letters Patent—which had been already approved in draft on 13th May—"erecting Moreton Bay into a colony under the name of Queensland," and appointing Sir George Ferguson Bowen to be "Captain-General and Governor-in-Chief of the same." On the same day an Order in Council was made "empowering the Governor of Queensland to make laws and provide for the administration of justice in the said colony"; also to constitute therein a Government and Legislature as nearly resembling the form of Government and Legislature established in New South Wales as the circumstances of the colony would allow. This meant that representative and responsible government had been granted to the people of the new colony to the full extent that it was enjoyed by the people of New South Wales under the epoch-making Constitution Act of 1855. It meant also that the whole of the unalienated Crown Lands of the colony were vested in the Legislature.

Next day, the 7th June, the annual session of the Imperial Parliament was opened, and four days later an amendment upon the Address in Reply was carried in the House of Commons, whereupon Lord Derby and his Conservative colleagues forthwith resigned, and were succeeded by a Liberal (or Whig) Ministry under Lord Palmerston. The new Government included men of such distinction as Mr. W. E. Gladstone, Lord John Russell, and the Duke of Newcastle, the last-mentioned assuming the office of Colonial Secretary. The change of Ministry, however, caused no interruption in the continuity of Colonial Office policy; and no time was lost in despatching Sir George Bowen to discharge the highly responsible duties imposed upon him by the Queen's Commission.
In notifying Sir George Bowen of his appointment, Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton tendered him some friendly advice. He said that Sir George would experience the greatest amount of difficulty in connection with the squatters, and he went on in these words:—"But in this, which is an irritating contest between rival interests, you will wisely abstain as much as possible from interference. Avoid taking part with one or the other... The first care of a Governor in a free colony," he continued, "is to shun the reproach of being a party man. Give all parties and all Ministries formed the fairest play." In public addresses Sir George was advised to "appeal to the noblest idiosyncracies of the community—the noblest are generally the most universal and the most durable. They are peculiar to no party. Let your thoughts never be distracted from the paramount object of finance. All states thrive in proportion to the administration of revenue." A number of excellent maxims followed, among them—"The more you treat people as gentlemen the more they will behave as such." Again, "courtesy is a duty which public servants owe to the humblest member of the community." And, in a postscript, "Get all the details of the land question from the Colonial Office, and master them thoroughly. Convert the jealousies now existing between Moreton Bay and Sydney into emulation." All these generous didactics from the great novelist and Tory statesman, followed by congratulations and good wishes, must have been stimulative to the aspirations of the embryo Governor charged with the foundation of a new colony at the Antipodes.

The value of autonomous government is generally appreciated; but the free gift of land made by the Imperial authority to the various self-governing colonies has no parallel in human history. In the case of Queensland the recipients were a mere handful of people, mostly settled at one end of a vast territory, at least half of which was unexplored. Plenary authority was in fact given to manage and control the waste lands belonging to the Crown, as well as to appropriate the gross proceeds of the sales of any such lands, and all other proceeds and revenues of the same from whatever source arising, including all royalties, mines, and minerals, all of which by the Letters Patent and the Order in Council were vested in the Legislature. This vesting, however, was subject to a proviso validating all contracts, promises, and engagements lawfully made on behalf of Her Majesty before the proclamation took effect. The proviso also stipulated that there should be no disturbance of any vested or other rights which had accrued or belonged to the licensed occupants or lessees of Crown Lands under any repealed Act.

(at) These powers were given in the New South Wales Constitution Act, 1855, Sect. 2.
undoubtedly a great Australian patriot was unhappily not a *persona grata* with the controlling authority at the Colonial Office. The movement was from its initiation protested against by the enterprising Crown tenants who had driven their flocks and herds overland from New South Wales, and had, taking their lives in their hands, adventurously formed stations in the remote wilderness. They not unnaturally dreaded the effect of popular sovereignty upon what they deemed their vested interests. But British statesmen, whether Conservative or Liberal, appear to have felt that, responsible government having been granted to and enjoyed by the people of New South Wales—and consequently to the people of that part of its territory about to be separated—any Imperial limitation of popular rights already conferred would be regarded as an unjustifiable encroachment upon public liberty achieved after many years of ardent struggle in the parent colony. True, the language of the Letters Patent and Order in Council was afterwards construed to involve some temporary limitation of the manhood suffrage which had been affirmed by the Parliament of New South Wales; but whether this limitation was actual or inadvertent does not clearly appear. It was not of much practical consequence, perhaps, in a new country that was rapidly multiplying its scant population, whether or not the electors for the first Legislative Assembly were required to have some other qualification than adult age and six months’ residence; but the incident operated prejudicially against the Government, and gave a rallying cry to Opposition politicians.

A somewhat singular course adopted by the Home Government was the authorisation of the Governor-General of New South Wales to appoint the first members of the Queensland Legislative Council, with a term of five years, although subsequent appointments were to be made by the Governor of Queensland for the term of the members’ natural lives. Sir William Denison was also empowered to summon and call together the first Legislative Assembly of Queensland; to fix by proclamation the number of members; to divide the colony into convenient electoral districts; to prepare the electoral rolls; to issue the writs of election; and to make all necessary provision for the conduct of the first elections. It was required, moreover, that the Parliament should be called together for a date not more than six months after the proclamation of the colony, and should remain in existence, unless previously dissolved by the Governor, for a period of five years. Yet there was practically no limitation of popular authority except in respect of the preliminary arrangements, for the Queensland consolidating and amending Constitution Act of 1867 reaffirmed all rights and privileges conferred by the New South Wales Constitution Act.