

## Duty to the Public

*It is certainly one of the most painful duties which I have had to perform since I have occupied the position of chief advisor of the crown in this country, but notwithstanding all the sympathy which one must feel for the poor girl, the crime remains an abominable one.*

—Laurier to Minto, 26 December 1899

Blake's audience in Ottawa was not as innocent as her Brandon audience. Less likely to scold her for listening to coon songs and at the same time less likely to weep 'great big tears' with her in her repentant moods, the politicians in Laurier's government had recently been through long debates about the sexual mores and moral responsibilities of young women. They also understood the nuances of political praise and blame that could attach to such a case. Killam's decision not to recommend clemency boded ill for Blake's chances of avoiding execution, but her fate now rested with the 'Governor-General in Council': in other words, Prime Minister Laurier along with the federal cabinet would review the grounds for clemency and instruct Governor-General Minto whether the sentence should be commuted or delayed.

A number of options were available. Section 11 of the Criminal Code specified that no one could be convicted of a crime while 'labouring under natural imbecility, or disease of the mind'.<sup>1</sup> Commissions were therefore frequently appointed to decide on the accused's mental state,<sup>2</sup> and one could have been appointed for Blake if cabinet found merit in Yeomans's diagnosis of Blake.