

MOTHERLANDS

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WE in Canada stand close to our origins. We have hardly got used yet to thinking of ourselves as inhabitants of this new land, rather than as detached individuals from some other. All of us have constantly in mind a "motherland". We are a new and very diverse people, settled in a new and imperfectly known country.

We have all the virtues and defects of newcomers in new countries. We are energetic. We are optimistic. We are adaptable, and show much initiative in meeting the physical conditions of our environment. On the other hand most of us have little sense of form, little respect for tradition, and—compared with the deep love of country manifested by older peoples—only a slight degree of attachment to or affection for our new habitat. Most of us came as individuals to seek our individual good, and we have not yet been here long enough for the worst excesses of individualism to have spent themselves. As individuals, we have manifested to the full the materialism and the ruthlessness in seizing Nature's wealth common to newcomers in new countries everywhere. Many of us have not, in a genuine sense, yet given our hearts to Canada; rather we have conquered it. Where we have busied ourselves with forging the weapons of conquest, the building of railroads, roads and cities, it will remain for our successors to build homes.

It may therefore be asked whether a genuine society has as yet been built in Canada. A society is very different from a collection of individuals. There is something organic about it. It is larger than the individual. It has not only breadth and length, but also depth: in other words, it depends not only upon the here and the now, but upon the past. It rests not only upon the present accomplishments of individuals, but upon the deeds of those who have gone before. Its ends are not only for the good of those who at present compose it, but they are determined by the spirit and ideals of previous generations and by consideration for the generations of the future. A society has not a multitude of individual wills or a multitude of groups of wills each pulling in its own direction, but a reasonable approximation to a single will. A society in which individualism is over emphasized (the old "Wild West", for example, now known only through

the medium of the screen), shades off into anarchism; one in which the general will is too completely triumphant becomes the totalitarian state, of evil repute. The strongest society is a compromise. It possesses the *morale* and *esprit de corps* of a regiment or a hockey team, but leaves to its members scope for the development of their own personalities.

Such considerations may be used as measuring rods to determine the answer to the question just put, whether we have as yet succeeded in creating a genuine society. It can be argued that our railroad system has united us, that our educational devices are casting our youth in a common mould, that our public institutions, such as our government and law, constitute a framework within which a human unity necessarily must build itself. All this is true. These things constitute the foundation of the society of the future. They do not necessarily indicate the existence of a society to-day.

It could be argued in the negative that no true community can arise as long as the dominating philosophy is pure materialism. Materialism leads to the rapid exploitation and destruction of our natural resources. The man who mines the soil or strips off the forest without regard to the future, intent only on his own present advantage, shapes his conduct on material principles. If in addition he is a transient, intent on "making his pile" and then running away somewhere else to live, acknowledging no duty to the neighborhood which has given him his living, he is the purest type of materialist. All new countries begin under the handicap of this short-sighted and selfish code. The men who first come are usually entirely ruled by it, and it is only good luck if they do not ruin the new country for their successors. Fortunately we are probably past the worst excesses of this process, though it is still with us. Pioneers are no doubt worthy people, but if there is something to thank them for, there is also much to blame them for. They are courageous and optimistic: they are also careless, undisciplined and short-sighted. The true community cannot rise by exploitation alone, nor can it rise until people cease to move about as much as they have heretofore done, and more generally come to live and die in the same place. A civilization cannot be built out of a collection of nomads.

Further, the true community argues considerable human similarity. You must at least be able to understand your neighbour when he speaks to you, and be on good enough terms with him to get along without too much friction. Of all the bars

to understanding, perhaps language is the greatest—language and the other fundamentals that gather round it, such as race, religions, custom and tradition. In the various regions of Canada we have a great diversity of peoples. The East and the Centre are still quite homogeneous, but in northern Ontario and in the western provinces those of foreign origin are now more numerous than those of the old stocks.

Throughout the land it has been the task and privilege of the Anglo-Saxon to supply the general *lingua franca*, the common language, by which everyone, no matter what his mother tongue, can speak to everyone else, and to provide the agencies most powerful in creating a common background for the civilization of the future. These agencies are government, law, the professions and especially the schools. Not the Church. The Anglo-Saxon churches have kept pace with their own people, but they have gone little beyond them. Unfortunately the English-speaking Protestant churches are becoming little more than the churches of the dominant racial group. As an agency for evoking a common civilization for all our people, the Church, although there are many splendid exceptions, has not grasped its opportunities.

Anglo-Saxons, in addition to providing the general institutional framework, have of course, like other groups, their own special and peculiar customs and traditions. Apposite examples of these are contained in their Christmas customs: Christmas pudding, Christmas gifts and the use of holly for decoration. These things, representing the more intimate ways of life, form that part of the ancestral heritage which each group may most easily contribute to the common stock of the new civilization. There are few of our many racial groups which will not have something of this sort to give the Canada of the future. Yet, while it is natural for everyone to seek to preserve his usages and traditions, it is inevitable that although many may be retained, many should also be lost. What happens is that a sort of common denominator is hammered out, one group yielding at one point, one at another. Some qualities or opinions may be acceptable to the general mass of the society under construction, some may not. Thus, to take an example, few welcome those sympathies with Fascism which have been brought over by newcomers from Germany; but most of us would accept from our German citizens their love of music.

This mutual wearing down is a delicate process, for everyone is sensitive, not all are tactful and some are suspicious or

hostile. Possibly at present we stand at the parting of the ways. Haughtiness, arrogance, obstinacy, mere conservatism, sloth, selfishness, dishonesty, such qualities can easily drive wedges in between the different groups which may separate them for generations, if not forever. On the other hand, compromise and tolerance, a recognition that our citizens have a common future, not separate futures, that they all must live in the same Canadian house, these qualities will accomplish wonders in removing incompatible differences and incorporating in a common tradition the various heritages of permanent worth.

The truth of statements such as these is written in the history of the older groups. The French-Canadian, abandoned by his sovereign 175 years ago to the English conqueror, passed through a time of tribulation under the pressure of the conquest, and while he came out of the ordeal stronger for it, it lost the country an opportunity for a closer approach between the two major races. To-day his experience is his inspiration. He has discovered his own qualities, and has worked out a highly integrated society and a civilization which is not that of old France but his own. He is ready to teach us, if we desire to learn from him, "content with simple things", that possessions must not be confused with life, and the supreme lesson of faith in ourselves.

In a similar, if smaller, way the Iclander offers to the general sum his intellectualism and his poetry.

Those of British descent, the largest single group, have the advantage of the most unbroken tradition. They did not come as suppliants to this continent, but as masters. That accident has had both merit and demerit. It has given them self-assurance and energy; it has also added to their natural stock of arrogance and exclusiveness. The new world, with its riches waiting to be seized, enlarged their already too large bump of acquisitiveness, so that more than any other group they have tended to identify life with "making a living". That attitude, that materialistic outlook, is what has been at the bottom of our major political scandals and the irresponsibilities of our capitalism.

Anglo-Saxon traditions themselves are by no means unchanged. The old Roman saying proclaims that "they change their skies but not their minds who cross the sea in ships." That may be true within small limits, but it is not true for the emigrant who leaves behind him his native land forever. The space of sea between him and it does change his mind. It chang-

es his whole being, not only his ways of thought but, anthropologists are now telling us, even the more fundamental things like the shape of his face and the width of his skull. At least if the immigrant himself does not undergo these changes, his children do. Consequently, even the Anglo-Saxon cannot look upon himself merely as a Briton in a new country. Unobserved, the new country is making him again into an image of itself. Moreover, the Canadian-born of British origin represent a new amalgam of the various peoples of the British Isles, and they also include generous infusions of other blood. Many of them derive from the British motherland only indirectly, their ancestors having come from the United States either as Loyalists or at some time before or since the Revolution. To Canadians of Loyalist or other American descent, the United States is really the motherland, Great Britain being, as it were, the grandmotherland, a relationship accentuated by the fact that a considerable proportion of the Loyalists of Ontario were of German or Dutch origin rather than of British.

Those of us who come more directly from across the seas bring with us very different heritages according as we come from England, Ireland or Scotland, or indeed according to the period within the last century and a quarter in which our ancestors came out, and the social stratum or particular locality from which they came. The British Isles are by no means a complete racial or cultural unit. Certain characteristic aspects of their life, such as evangelical Protestantism, have developed luxuriantly on Canadian soil; others, such as the rigid division into classes, are hardly present at all. From one section of the British Isles we have derived one aspect of our life; from another, another. Thus it is to England and to England almost alone that we owe the essential and peculiar institutions of Anglo-Saxondom, self-government and freedom. Scotsmen and Irishmen have taken over and in some instances expanded this English heritage; but its essential, its determining elements are, in origin, purely English. For the great political tradition of the race it is to English history that we must go.

During this country's most formative years, say the middle third of the nineteenth century, the English element coming to Canada was possibly numerically the weakest of the three. Perhaps because of this, but also because we have come by our liberties rather too easily, we have not received the English heritage intact. We have much of it, but we do not have in

Canadian life as much concern for freedom and as much tolerance as is displayed in England.

In most of Canada, the three traditions have already broken down into one tradition. Many a Canadian begins the day with Scots oatmeal and ends it on English roast beef. That is as it should be: a new compound suited to our needs, drawing the best from all the old sources. This use of the tradition and custom brought across the sea by our people does not mean that we look backward, that we imitate. On the contrary, it involves forging our own way of life, but incorporating in it old materials. It involves avoiding an attempt to convince ourselves that we are of this race or of that race and ever more shall be so—exiles, as it were, in a strange land—and adopting an outlook which both respects the past and looks to the future, which uses the past to shape the future. If we were to continue to take our racial memories too literally, we would have no future, at least no Canadian future. We might have to contemplate a collection of Balkan states on Canadian soil. Only by fusing all elements of the past into the common element of the common life, into Canadianism, shall we have a future.

In doing so, is it not probable that we may build on Canadian soil a real society and a new civilization, a civilization compounded out of many things old and new, but distinctive, and contributing to the world a new expression of the human spirit, with new fruits of art and science and tolerance? Here is the true meaning of nationhood. This is the manner in which we Canadians may best make our contribution to the great stream of mankind's progress.