

CULTURAL ORIGINS IN COLONIAL LIFE

By GORDON DICKIE

ONE of the most interesting periods of history for the social student is the eighteenth century. It was a period of revolutionary change, and revolutions are likely to be dangerous as well as interesting. Thus the very fact that three of these occurred within a span of one hundred years should mark off the century as at least unusual, and therefore worthy of consideration.

More important, however, for our purpose, was the great social change taking place in this period, unheralded for the most part, and very frequently recognized only after it had taken place. At this time various political, religious, and economic forces, in existence at the beginning of the century, seemed to be slowing down and before the middle of the century had been reached, were beginning to be superceded by new ones. Thus the Puritan Revolution was being rapidly modified by the advancing tide of prosperity, the 'social contract' theory was being called in question, and the 'mercantile system' was shortly to be superceded by larger views of trade and commerce.

When an unusual number of these changes synchronize, it gives the suggestion of recurrence, which we call a cycle. This social change of the eighteenth century constituted a period of transition, when the forces developed by the English Revolution gradually subsided, while in the latter half of the century the forces culminating in the American and French Revolutions, gathered strength and began to transform social life.

Both material and psychological forces were working to produce this change. The social order was approaching what Ogburn calls 'the threshold of invention.' Wealth was increasing rapidly and capital was calling for new agencies of production. More important than all from the cultural point of view was what Bagehot describes as the third period of cultural evolution, namely, "the dissolution of the dominance of custom, by the appearance of an age of reason." These elements served to speed up the rate of change in the culture of the period and suggest what we would call the recurrence of the cycle.

Now there are different interpretations of cultural growth. Beer suggests that history does not form a mental or social unity. Even Jews, Greeks and Romans had their period of Antiquity, their Middle Ages, and their Modern Times. They evolved certain institutions, which corresponded more or less in all countries to those periods. Spengler also insists that

history can be forecast in a somewhat similar outline, but he finds universal and biological lines underlying all material development. Instead of dividing civilization into periods of Antiquity, Middle Ages, and Modern Times, he divides them into successive stages of youth, maturity, and senile decay. Folsom remarks that "the greatest hope of progress does not lie in the preserving of any existing type of culture in pure form, but in the mixture and recombination of culture traits from many sources. A truly progressive culture is eclectic."¹ Judged by this standard we may expect to find in colonial life with its fresh environment and unhampered ways a larger and more liberal culture than that obtaining in the Old Land. And if we define culture to include "all of Man's power of control over nature and himself" we find growing out of the background of a fast expanding life in the Old Land, a new adaptation destined to surpass, as the years roll on, anything the world has ever seen.

In his book "Cultural Evolution," Charles Ellwood has suggested that cultural development takes place in the following order of procedure. First, there comes the change in the material culture of the day, secondly in the economic organization, third a change in other social organization, fourth, changes in the mores. This rule however, can scarcely be applied to the culture of the Maritimes, inasmuch as all four of these instances are inextricably blended in the same period and in addition various national streams of emigration arise side by side and almost simultaneously in this colonial child of the Empire. Hence as a preliminary we must consider these various national streams issuing from a European background and blended under entirely new conditions in the lands across the seas.

The first cultural problems in the Maritimes lay in dealing with transplanted groups. Of course the primary group in point of time was the French settler, who had been so long in occupation before the coming of the first permanent British settlers. They had not only presumed a natural proprietorship of the soil, but had developed a new type of life in their own environment. Kingsford in his History of Canada suggests that at the beginning of the seventeenth century there were three parties in France, the papal party, the zealous protestants, and the patriots, and each of these three parties gave its impress to French rule in Canada. But it is no exaggeration of terms to call Champlain the real founder of Canada. He studied the

(1) J. K. Folsom. "Culture and Social Progress."

resources of this new land and entered into friendly relations with the Indians of his trading area. He encouraged cultivation of the soil, partly because he loved to see things growing, but more especially because he desired the colonies' independence. And when, more than a hundred years after, Canada was conquered by the British, the limits of the country as a political community had not been extended. A national sentiment had been quickened, and there was every evidence of a high destiny being established.

Unfortunately for the French settlers, the policy of the Court was militaristic rather than commercial. It resulted in French settlement being so far flung, extending along the St. Lawrence and down the Mississippi rivers, in such fashion that there was little hope of its being defended against the consolidated attacks of the British, and as a consequence it was broken up about the middle of the eighteenth century. While the French settlements were mere trading posts, the Atlantic coast could boast of ordered towns and commerce, and a definite civilization had been established. Parkman characterizes the two settlements in the following manner, "It was unity confronting division, energy confronting apathy, military centralization opposed to industrial democracy."² In Nova Scotia they even sacrificed what trading and farming interests they had to their imperial policy. Louisburg and Halifax, Beausjour and Fort Lawrence, Fort St. John and Annapolis, all formed part of the long battle line in the half century of conflict which ensued before the issue was finally decided.

In the Maritimes, however, as in so many other cultures, the warlike and peaceful elements managed to subsist together. There was an Acadia within Acadia,—the one a land of military conflict, the other of peaceful agricultural pursuits. Brebner says the country might be conveniently divided at the river St. John. "The eastern and southern shores of the Bay of Fundy were the home of peaceful farmers. The country between the St. John and the frontier settlements of New England was the field for the fur trade and the scene of the terrible warfare which involved the Indians in the rivalries of the Europeans."³ The French were usually the aggressors in these conflicts and very often the adventurous population on the farm lands were drawn into this vortex, but for the most part the Acadians were a peaceful people.

(2) Francis Parkman. "Half Century of Conflict."

(3) J. B. Brebner. "New England's Outpost."

This was the citizenship Governor Lawrence had to wrestle with when in the Seven Years War the Acadians came to the parting of the ways and in 1755 the order was given for their expulsion. Doubtless there were faults on both sides but to the New Englanders the issue seemed inevitable for it was they rather than the Home Authorities who carried out the actual deportation. And the reason for this was not far to seek. For, in this area, two great ideals were being tried out, in new surroundings,—one in New France and the other in New England. The movement which resulted in New France led to the most intimate relations between church and state, whereas in New England it issued finally in their complete dissociation. Hence the lines of demarcation between these two factions were very clearly drawn. The Puritan insisted upon individual freedom of thought and personal participation in government, while the Frenchman sought to emphasize obedience to tradition, ecclesiastical authority, and paternal rule. The French preferred the absolution of Richelieu to the excess of republicanism seen in Massachusetts, so their leaders refused all attempts at popular government. As a result, says a certain writer, "The French Canadian remained a Frenchman in a much closer sense than the American colonial remained an Englishman."⁴

Perhaps the commonest charge against the Acadian French, says Brebner," was that they were lazy, too fond of holidays and frolics, unenterprising in their agriculture and dairying. The Acadians could get twenty bushels of wheat an acre and cultivation did not take one third of their time. Their cattle roamed in natural meadows, their orchards yielded remarkable apples, pears, plums, and cherries and small fruits grew luxuriantly."⁵ Small wonder then that the Acadians were devoted to the arts of peace rather than warfare.

And so the question of social control emerged and was speedily dealt with by the New Englanders. The first suggestion of a general removal came from the Huguenot, Paul Mascaron, in his "Description of Nova Scotia." "Here he is reported as saying, "It would be therefore necessary for the interest of Great Britain that the French inhabitants may not be tolerated any longer in their non-allegiance, for which it is requisite that a sufficient force be allowed to make them comply with the terms prescribed them, which force ought to be at least six hundred men to be divided into the several parts already inhabited by the French and Indians, and might be at the same

(4) James Douglas. "Quebec in the Seventeenth Century*," p. 229.

(5) J. B. Brebner. "New England's Outpost."

time a cover to the British inhabitants who would come to settle in the room of the French."⁶

This policy quite coincided with that of Shirley, Governor of Massachusetts, who had a plan of his own for peopling the territory vacated by the French. In this he suggested taking over the marshlands from the Acadians and removing them to uncultivated uplands which they should receive in exchange. There was also a proposal for the encouragement of proselytism by bounties. Then realizing that English settlers would not remain in a colony where there was no civil government, he drew up a plan, modelled on Massachusetts and forwarded it to the British Government.⁷

There was thus a definite line of cleavage in the policy of control, not merely between French and English, but also between England and New England, for both in religious and military matters the policy of the latter was far more aggressive than the former. This is all the more surprising in view of the fact that the Test and Corporation acts were still in force in the Old Land as well as in the Province of Nova Scotia, so that the Acadians were barred by their religion from assuming political duties of a legal or regular sort. Yet in England there was a disposition to tolerate these French Roman Catholics, while the slogan of the Puritans of New England was "No compromise."

The immediate occasion of the Expulsion, however, was not political policy but military necessity, coloured somewhat by ecclesiastical interference. In broad outline Brebner has thus described it. "After 1748 the French were back in Louisbourg again, and in Quebec and Paris they were planning how they might reconquer Acadie and debating vigorously the probable value to them of the Acadians in such an effort. Next year Halifax was to rise in counterpoise to Louisbourg, but, as well, LeLoutre was to return to America. . . to harass and annoy with his Indians, not only the new settlers on the east coast, but the disinterested Acadians as well."

It thus became necessary to meet force with force, and unfortunately for the Acadians the man who had chiefly to do with the direction of British policy, Governor Lawrence, had approached them from the military angle. Shortly after his appointment as Governor he made the following declaration to the Lords of Trade. "I have ordered new deputies to be elected, and sent hither immediately, and am determined to bring the Inhabitants to a compliance, or rid the Province of

(6) N. S. Archives I, p. 43.

(7) Public Archives of Canada. Appendix N.

such perfidious subjects. Your Lordships will see our proceedings in this case at large, as soon as it is possible to prepare the minutes of Council."⁸

On receiving political appointment Lawrence began at once to formulate plans for the disposal of the Acadians and in December 1754 we find Shirley acknowledging certain proposals for driving the French of Canada out of Nova Scotia. Needless to say Shirley did not hesitate to approve them. He writes, "I came to a determination to co-operate with you in the most vigorous manner for effecting the important service within your own Government which your Honour may depend upon my prosecuting to the extent of my power."⁹

The Lords of Trade, however, were not so enthusiastic on the side of Lawrence as Shirley and the New Englanders proved to be. They warned the former to be cautious and though they maintained that the inhabitants had no right but upon condition of taking the oath of allegiance, they still declared, "great caution ought to be used to avoid giving alarm and creating such a difference in their minds as might induce them to quit the Province, and by their numbers add strength to the other French provinces."¹⁰

Thus it was plainly to be seen that the stress of the times precluded further compromise. But it would be obviously unfair to suppose that the troops appointed for the purpose of expulsion were moved by any mercenary spirit in their undertaking. John Winslow, commander of the New England troops, is described by Doyle as "a humane man to whom the task of eviction was a distasteful one. But compassion with the victim is quite compatible with a belief in the need for severity and so it seems to have been in Winslow's case."¹¹

Even after the Expulsion had become a fact, having been carried out in the summer of 1755, the British Government had written recommending that Governor Lawrence "use the greatest caution and assure such of them as may be trusted, especially upon their taking the oaths to His Majesty and the Government that they may remain in the quiet possession of their settlements, under proper regulations."¹²

It has been suggested that the Expulsion was nothing but a "land grab" on the part of New Englanders, associated with the Governor and Council of the Province. The surveys made at

(8) N. S. Archives, I, p. 260.

(9) Nova Scotia Documents, I, p. 389.

(10) Arthur B. Doughty, "The Acadian Exiles," p. 91.

(11) J. A. Doyle, "The Colonies Under the House of Hanover."

(12) Nova Scotia Documents I, 279.

the instance of the Governor of Massachusetts, in the years preceding the Expulsion, had pretty well established the fact that the Acadians occupied the choicest portion of the Province and they were already too numerous in those parts to dispossess. There is, however, not the slightest evidence to support this theory. Governor Lawrence, writing regarding plans for the removal of the Acadians, says, "When the French inhabitants are removed, you will give orders that no persons presume to take possession of any of the lands, until a plan of the whole has been laid before me and terms of encouragement to English settlers are deliberately formed and made public."¹³

The subsequent settlement of the Acadian lands should dispose of any such assumption on the part of the historian. In order that the New England agents might satisfy themselves regarding the Minas lands, the Council sent them in an armed vessel to visit the places along the Bay of Fundy, proposed for settlement. It was probably in the month of May when the party sailed, the orchards were in their earliest budding, the dykes were beginning to grow green, the rich uplands were waiting for the plough, and the result was as might naturally be expected, when the tour of inspection was over. It is recorded, "The agents were so well pleased that when they again reached Halifax the four Connecticut men, who represented 330 of their fellow countrymen at once entered into an agreement with the Council to settle a township of Minas."¹⁴

This transaction led to others. Another township at Canard consisting of 10,000 acres was to be settled by one hundred and fifty families. Then came agents from Connecticut with others from Rhode Island requesting a third township on the north side of the Avon River, where they promised to settle 50 families in 1759 and 50 more in 1760. Thus without undue haste and in perfectly regular order, were the lands vacated by the Acadians assigned to New England settlers. And so, in this fashion ends the first act in the struggle for control in this Acadian area.

But beside these early French colonists, we find on the south shore of the Bay of Fundy and around Minas Basin, Scotch-Irish folk who came to this new land by way of the New England States. The County of Pictou was settled by people from Scotland who came out in the ship "Hector." Cape Breton and Prince Edward Island received their quota from the Islands and Highlands of Scotland. Halifax was, to begin with, an English

(13) Nova Scotia Documents I, p. 270.

(14) A. W. H. Eaton. "History of Kings County," p. 63.

colony with a sprinkling of New England trades people. Lunenburg was founded by emigrants from the Palatines and Swiss refugees, while New Brunswick became the home of many United Empire Loyalists.

At this point it might be well to consider why some of these people emigrated to the colonies. In his book "The Social Life of Scotland" H. G. Graham estimates that during the years between 1760 and 1783 no fewer than 30,000 Highlanders emigrated in despair. Though the tide of emigration was partially stopped during the American War, except to Canada, when peace was restored the crowds swarmed to the ships to cross the Atlantic, for their distress drove them to seek a home in a more hospitable land. Another writer speaking of the "Clearances" says, "War and its consequences laid the foundation of the evil complained of. Great Britain with her immense naval and military establishments, being in a great measure shut out from foreign supplies, and a state of hostility or non-intercourse with all Europe and North America, almost all the necessaries of life had to be drawn from our own soil. . . . Hence also, all the speculations to get rid of the human inhabitants of the highlands, and replace them with cattle and sheep for the English market."¹⁵ Others owed their transfer to a new land to Lord Selkirk who provided the means for settlement to a large colony emigrating to the Maritimes. For some years he had been observing how throughout the highlands great clearances were formed for the breeding of sheep. Human beings were being evicted and sheep became the 'devourers of men.' Accordingly Lord Selkirk decided as a servant of the public, to use his wealth and influence for the social and economic welfare of the people. Hence there began a movement, fraught with far-reaching consequences, which in process of time was destined to develop in a cultural growth of a new order. Thus Graham describes it, "In course of time those who went across the Atlantic to colonies in the western continent, where they found a more genial settlement and a more fertile land, sent home news of their prosperity, and kindled to join them and share in their good fortune beyond the seas. By these means their countrymen were incited to accept the message, like that of Ulysses, "Come my friends, 'tis not too late to seek a newer world."¹⁶

The settlement of the Maritimes seems to have synchronized with an attempt on the part of the Home Government to establish a more co-ordinated control over the colonies. The Board

(15) Alexander McKenzie. "The History of the Highland Clearances," p. 6.

(16) H. G. Graham. "Social Life of Scotland," p. 227.

of Trade commented that "the laws and constitutions of Your Majesty's colonies are copied from those of Great Britain but fall short of them in many particulars" and the Government of Massachusetts was particularly disapproved inasmuch as too great a power having been lodged in their Assembly that Province is likely "to continue in great disorder and on all occasions affect too great an independence of the Mother Kingdom."¹⁷ For this reason the movement to incorporate Nova Scotia in an expanding New England was formally checked. Instead the Board approved the Constitution of Virginia as a model for Nova Scotia, inasmuch as "the King took the government into his own hands and settled such laws and constitutions in that Province as were agreeable to those of this Kingdom."

This repressive movement on the part of the Home Government worked fairly well until after the Expulsion, but with the coming of colonists both from the Motherland and also from New England the situation changed materially. Instead of docile and ignorant Acadians the authorities had to deal with men who knew and now clamoured for "the rights of Englishmen." New England merchants knew their rights and when they were snubbed or ignored they usually wrote to England, engaging a spokesman there. Conflicts arose between English and Yankee attitudes toward law and judicial procedure and there were frequent appeals to the Old Land to set things right. Accordingly after Nova Scotia had secured a legislative Assembly the first eighteen acts were sent to England for approval and the reply of the Board is significant. They remarked, "We observe in general, that most of these laws, where they differ from the Laws of England, are taken chiefly from acts of the Province of Massachusetts Bay." And so it became more and more apparent that new conditions on the American frontier, and new needs of the governed, had developed a new political mind, which thought in channels unfamiliar to the English legal expert

Here however a difference may be noted between Nova Scotia and New England, with regard to the relative powers of the Home Parliament and a colonial legislature. The very fact that the New England colonists had been experimenting with colonial government during all the years that the "mother of Parliaments" had been increasing in prestige, undoubtedly led them to discount this fact, while in a comparatively new colony like Nova Scotia, this prestige scored its highest. This accounted in large part, no doubt, for the difference in assertiveness of

(17) J. B. Brebner. "New England's Outpost," p. 72.

the two groups. And fortunately for the Empire a sense of compromise, which has developed in the Old Land but was entirely lacking in New England, was still strong in the minds of the colonists recently settled in Nova Scotia. And in addition to that their experience with colonial government had not yet convinced them that the Home Parliament was as ineffective as the New Englanders would make it out to be.

Trade rivalries also caused friction between the Motherland and the colonies, although here again there was a different attitude between New England and Nova Scotia. Consulting the Archives we find that "as the colonies grew they began to be regarded as a source of wealth to the Mother Country. And at the same time that bounties were given them for raising commodities desired by England, restrictions were placed upon American trade."¹⁸ It was precisely at this point that the differing attitudes of Nova Scotia and New England on the trade question may be distinguished. For those commodities on which bounties were granted were the products the northern colonies could supply, while the manufactured goods, in which the New England colonists were now beginning to be serious competitors of the Old Land, were scarcely worth considering as far as Nova Scotia was concerned.

During the imperialistic regime of Pitt as Prime Minister, naval supplies became a substantial source of profit in Nova Scotia and during the Revolution it naturally increased rather than diminished. Hence the urge toward supporting the Home Land in the struggle, from the commercial point of view at any rate, was considerable.

In the matter of the Stamp Act also there was a noticeable difference in the attitude of the northern colonies and their New England neighbours. In New England there was a rifling of stamp-collectors' houses, and documents were burned, while in Nova Scotia the Stamp Act was received without a murmur. For the deep obligation of the colonists in this part of the king's domain to the imperial forces and the generous land settlement of the government after the Expulsion, took the edge off any spirit of resistance which might have developed, and therefore stamped documents were freely used in Nova Scotia.

Thus the question of self-interest had very largely to do with settling the issue both in New England and in Nova Scotia, though with differing results in each case. In Nova Scotia, the decision though hesitant at first, came strongly to be in favour

(18) C. H. Van Tyne. "The American Revolution," p. 7.

of the Empire, while in New England any hesitancy at the beginning was soon turned into a strong aversion to the Mother Land and all concerned. Finally Americans came to believe "that the development of their country had reached a point where it would be hampered by further overseas regulations, and that America must be free to exploit her resources to her own exclusive advantage, stipulating that such economic freedom would be possible only with political independence."¹⁹ Accordingly when the time for perfecting an answer to the problem of control arrived, these people were led into one camp, while the New Englanders or the majority of them, were in another.

Following the war another development which widened the breach between New England and Nova Scotia was the coming of the United Empire Loyalists. Wallace estimates that "the immigration of 1783 had trebled the population of Nova Scotia at one stroke, and that no less than 10,000 people settled on the north side of the Bay of Fundy."²⁰ In the following year this area was set apart as a new province, called New Brunswick, and known as a Loyalist Province along with Ontario, which was also settled from across the border.

This distribution of immigrants had a decided political effect in the country. With their coming there appeared a new force in provincial politics, namely that of independent judgment. The forces of reform were being led by Joseph Howe, "who like other leaders of the Liberals was of Loyalist descent. His father was John Howe of Boston, who embarked for Halifax with the British army at the evacuation and became postmaster general of the Province."²¹

These Loyalists were imperialists but with a flair for political rights. They were the radicals who led the fight for responsible institutions in this pioneering community and it is no exaggeration to say, that had it not been for their leadership "family compact" government would have prevailed in this Province much longer than it did. With a temerity which often amazed even their own friends they assailed the abuses of the existing order of government, often arousing opposition that would have silenced forever the common man. In this fashion did these liberals make steady progress and effect changes, which at the outset they themselves did not deem possible.

(19) V. L. Parrington. "The Colonial Mind," Vol. I, p. 185.

(20) W. S. Wallace. "The United Empire Loyalists."

(21) Lorenzo Sabine. "Loyalists and the American Revolution."

(This is the first of two articles devoted to an interpretation of Old Country background in the development of the Maritime Provinces.—Ed.).