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A NINETEENTH-CENTURY COLD WAR

IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY Great Britain and the United States waged something of a "cold war" for the minds and bodies of men, with Canada as the principal stake. From 1817 to 1871, Canadian-American relations, if such a term may be permitted, were marked by a Canadian and British fear of an American invasion and an American disdain for the institution of monarchy that the United States hoped to displace by its own doctrines, doctrines that Tory England sometimes included when referring to "Red Republicanism," a term usually reserved for revolutionary France.

By 1850 Britain was giving up hope of maintaining physical parity with the United States in North America and was turning to purely diplomatic means of counteracting American growth. She concluded the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty of 1850 in an effort to neutralize Central America, and in 1854 something of a *détente*, designed both to halt the race for dominance in North America and to aid the united Canadas to maintain a British balance of power on the continent, was achieved through a reciprocity treaty. This treaty represented Great Britain's first experiment in reciprocal trade between one of her colonies and an independent and rival nation. By 1860 an apparent *rapprochement* had taken place between Great Britain and the United States, but this was of a sentimental nature, based on the mystical concept of a common heritage and language, on the comparative lack of tension that had prevailed for six years, and on the normal feeling of semi-good will that may arise when a few years of peace have abated a period of hostility.

The Dominion of Canada was created in 1867 as a by-product, at least in part of the American Civil War of 1861-65. These years mark the maximum period of tension during the "cold war." The Civil War had exacerbated the old problem and with the defeat of the South the chance for a British balance of power on the continent had been lost forever. In 1871 Britain recognized this and, by a sweeping treaty, cleared away most of the remaining points of dispute with the United States.

ushering in a period of true peace. In the same year, her final withdrawal of troops from Canada marked her renunciation of all pretence to maintaining a balance of power.

In recent years American scholars, and the American public as well, have shown an increased interest in the Civil War. During these same years Canadian historians have shone the light of research ever more intently into the formative years of the Dominion, almost demonstrating an obsession with Confederation. It is right that it should be so, for in the decade of the 1860's both the United States and Canada were born, the former anew, the latter afresh. And it was the interactions and reactions of each upon the other, and both upon Great Britain, which made possible the creation of both nations and the resolving of the nineteenth century's "cold war." The period subsequent to the Civil War illustrates, not Canada's noted rôle as interpreter between Great Britain and the United States, or her rôle as a linch-pin in a North Atlantic Triangle, but her rôle as pinpricker of a growing Anglo-American harmony. From 1867 onward almost all major Anglo-American disputes were over affairs Canadian. While it is true that Canada aided harmony by being a convenient stalking horse for Britain, she also managed to stir up disputes as well, in part because of her inferiority complex expressed through the natural aggressiveness of a people in search of a sense of nationality, in part because of a quiet but real fear of the "Yankee," and in part because of her own expansionist drives to the west.

Also in recent years two world wars and a Korean "police action" have led historians to re-examine the question of the inevitability of war. Interest in the Civil War has revived because it, like the crisis of the 1950's, seemed to be a case study in conflict between two moral positions, both within their contexts "right," both claiming to correctly represent the trend of history. The "irrepressible conflict" school of historians argues that when controversy transcends economic, political, social, and constitutional limits and becomes a question of "right *vs.* wrong," conflict must result, for compromise is impossible. Had Britain chosen to aid the revolting Southern states, had she chosen even actively to encourage the dissolution of the United States in order to make her position more secure, as Russian collapse on the other side of the Iron Curtain is encouraged today, the United States might well have been destroyed. Another conflict of apparently uncompromisable "rights" was looming, and many people in England firmly believed that the democratic evil would have to be strangled before it destroyed the world, just as many today believe that communism must be destroyed. In some respects the United States was to England in 1861 what Russia is to the United States today. Yet here one "irrepressible conflict"

was avoided while another raged, as the principles of British neutrality and international law were tested and subjected to fire through Canadian interests.

Canadian history may be viewed in terms of three all-pervading imponderable influences by which the nation has been moulded: (1) the hard facts of its economic existence, shaped by the Pre-Cambrian Shield which limited its westward expansion, its climate, and the international economy of the St. Lawrence River which, as D. G. Creighton and H. A. Innis have pointed out, was breaking down by 1850; (2) the racial and religious strife which Orange Canada West and Catholic Canada East set against each other, which A. R. M. Lower has treated so well; and (3) Canada's negative reactions to the United States, as R. G. Trotter and Chester Martin have shown. Much of Canadian history may be viewed in terms of negative response to Canada's American neighbour. From the influx of United Empire Loyalists, forced once again to wrest a living from the unyielding earth, came a legacy of hatred which, while decidedly tempered with the sentimentalism of a common heritage, remained potent throughout the century, even when expressed in a sense of superiority rather than in hate. America's constant and evident desire to obtain Canada, to rescue the Canadians from the monarchy whether they desired liberation or not, shown by the War of 1812 and the aftermath of the rebellions of 1837, created an attitude of fear and antipathy that made it impossible for the average Canadian, still British-born or British-oriented, to react favorably toward the United States. The Civil War and the threat of invasion which followed it produced Confederation in Canada and nationhood in America. Later, it was partly in order to deal with the United States satisfactorily that Canada gained her diplomatic independence as well.

Many of the qualities of a cold war were present in 1861. Some Britishers and some Canadians, in uneven degree, tended to regard the United States as the stronghold of a vast, obviously working, but still degrading and levelling democratic dogma which should be controlled in order to make the world safe for true progress rooted in "the democracy of responsible interests." As Russia is today, to some the United States was an obviously immoral, grasping, untrustworthy nation arming herself with new and powerful weapons, possibly undefeatable in all-out war. The United States might strike at any time, almost without warning, and although she often spoke of not taking territory by aggression, Canadians were wont to point to Mexico. Canada was, throughout its history, a negation of the revolutionary process while the United States was the affirmation, and in the Civil War came the culmination of both, the United States having to prove the success of her revolution by bloodshed and Canada forced, through fear more than deadlock, to prove the success of its own evolution. Other elements of a cold war also were present: the British diplomats

feared a drift toward war among the people; they feared that clumsy American diplomacy might cause a general conflict which was unwanted by both sides, and although they realized that internal problems in the United States dictated international peace to that distracted nation, they also feared that leaders grasping for additional power, as the American Secretary of State, William H. Seward, was thought to be, might plunge the nation into war in order to gain or preserve that power. Here Canada was vaguely similar to Formosa, a floating island likely to fall into the American orbit, always exposed to invasion, a dangerous Achilles heel which many Englishmen felt it unwise to fight for when and if necessary, populated by people thought by some to be loyal only because it was in their interest to be so, a people not willing to fight for their own cause as demonstrated by their failure to pass militia bills which would have provided for their own defence. Joseph Howe, one-time premier of Nova Scotia, even saw Americans as brain washers and propagandists who stooped to germ warfare, while vast prison camps, the suspension of civil liberties, and an intense conformity bred of militarism and dictatorship seemed apparent to many who read of the events of Lincoln's administration. That these visions were more apparent than real is beside the point.

Two other "rights" seemed in conflict: the British interpretation of neutrality, the placing of law at the pinnacle of mankind, as opposed to the American certainty that there was no neutrality when a war was being waged against two great evils, subversion of the union and black slavery. A war to make men holy, a war to make men free, was not a war in which a truly Christian nation was neutral, the North said; those not with the North were, by virtue of being in the neutralist camp, against it.

But as the Civil War was fought out in the United States it was fought out in Canada as well, congressional versus parliamentary government being debated at length from 1864 until 1867. The result was the distinctly Canadian, yet American, product of a strong central government in which the residual powers were vested, thus to avoid civil war. The period was complicated further by a rising Ontarian expansionism, for it is in this light that both Confederation and the westward movement in Canada must be viewed: Canada West reaching in both directions to clasp to herself both ends of the continent to forge a single nation. Canada was born as she had been conceived, in fear. It was the putting of this fear to practical use which not only created the state but which made it endure.

Canada was undefendable. The British army recognized this fact in two elaborate reports drawn up during the American Civil War. One might argue with some cause that it was this very undefendable position of Canada that saved her in

1865, when the Civil War ended, for Canada's lack of any means of stopping an American invasion led the war-weary troops of the North to argue, as the politicians did, that Canada would soon, in any event, drop into American hands by sheer gravity. Men like Seward, of the "ripe-fruit" group of expansionists, certain that all of British North America soon would be ripe for plucking, urged patience. Had a large British force been present, a nation in turmoil, having just asserted her rule once again while losing her president, with a great army of Irish Fenians and with a confused leader, might well have decided to find a *casus belli* in the presence of an armed frontier.

For armed the frontier was, although not enough to be an irritant. The unarmed frontier is but a myth of rather wistful historians who argue that the world is getting better and better. As C. P. Stacey has demonstrated, the frontier was armed, for British troops were within sixty miles of it at all times, and the forts not only remained but continued to be built throughout the period between the Rush-Bagot and the Washington Treaties: in 1819, in the 1830's, the 1840's, and the 1860's. The United States had more than the permitted tonnage of armed vessels on the Great Lakes during a portion of this time, and sixteen rail lines ran to the frontier by which troops could be rushed northward from any one of six forts located within an hour of the border. During the Civil War a few Britishers even had thought of a preventive war to prevent total war—a limited war, fought to the rear of the North, which would assure Southern independence and a weakened North. This idea was not championed by men of responsible judgment, but neither was the other extreme, a continentalism in which Canada gave up all real independence in an economic merger with the United States, a partnership in which Canada would be a very junior partner indeed, a *zollverein* or German-modeled customs union. Instead, two highly divergent regions, in some ways less alike than they were similar to their American neighbors, the Maritimes and the united Canadas, joined together in the face of a common danger which was felt for them by their Colonial Office, and, as do the NATO nations, presented a single front to the potential invader.

In Europe the danger of war during the 1860's also was great, and Britain could not afford a war on two fronts. She chose to attempt to avoid war on either front. In April, 1861, the Tepitz conferences failed and Austria and Prussia clearly were at odds thereafter. That summer trouble over Poland arose once again, with Russia trying to bolster Prussia as a bulwark against the West. By September, 1862, Bismarck was in power, and in October of that year Thouvenel, the French Foreign Minister, was removed and Lhouyn de Drouys was appointed in his place. In January, 1863, Austria and Prussia invaded Schleswig, already having obtained Hol-

stein, and Britain, although pledged to support Denmark, chose not to aid her, arguing that Denmark was holding both provinces against their will. In June Prussia marched into Jutland, and in July Britain determined not to aid Denmark at all. The British historian A. J. P. Taylor says that Britain isolated herself from Europe because of the danger of war in North America, but the opposite may equally be true: that she isolated herself from North America following the pessimistic defence reports for the British provinces, to leave Canada virtually to its own defence because of the greater danger in Europe.

Austria and Prussia fell out in 1865. In April Abraham Lincoln's death not only rapidly changed the tense situation in North America but also killed a growing plan on the part of a few Northern senators, led by Senator Stewart of Nevada, to attack Canada at the end of the war as an aid to Fenianism. As a result Canada gained a respite. By 1871 Britain surrendered her efforts to maintain any semblance of a balance of power and won a triumph through an apparent diplomatic defeat, for once Canada obviously was ripe the United States felt no need to pluck her. During the same months the British North American Provinces joined in Confederation, an event produced in part by a British change of policy in December, 1864, a change from promoting a regional union to approving a continental union in the face of the American danger. Although most Canadian leaders knew that they had little to fear from American annexationists directly after the Civil War, they used this fear as a "bogy" to press through their own imperially-blessed expansionism.

It was during the Civil War that the North Atlantic Triangle of the United States, Great Britain, and Canada actually was begun, for Canadian affairs became increasingly important in a policy-making way. Lincoln realized that Anglo-American harmony was essential to permanent American security, while the British realized that Canadian-American harmony was essential to British security in Europe. As the result, a series of treaties which became increasingly tri-partite helped to round off the points of difference in the triangle. The practical working out of the border of peace took place on this side of the Atlantic between two peoples who already had fought each other twice. The actual war danger in North America and the actual solving of the problem was through the force of events here, not in London. Throughout the Civil War there were constant rumours of war, and many of the Canadian people, at least, often appeared to be convinced that war would come. The fact that it did not is the single most important link in the forging of the peaceful border which today, unlike a century ago, truly can be considered an enduring one.

Thus, the decade of the 1860's was a time of maximum tension during the building of a myth, of the dissipation of a cold war; a time when Britain was forced to abandon one balance of power for another, later to be rooted in a Commonwealth concept that partially arose from a Dominion that began during this decade; a time when two peoples, standing on the verge of a potential war, showed that peace can be preserved and that even sounding brass has its useful purposes. As a Canadian journalist wrote in the 1860's, Canada had learned to live with "a war in anticipation." In the final analysis Canadian-American interaction and its effect on Anglo-American relations built a characteristically Canadian nationhood through Canada's conscious striving to prevent Americanization rather than through any conscious effort to promote Canadianization.

As the noted historian and diplomat, H. L. Keenleyside, once pointed out, "nowhere in the world is there a more obvious example of the fallacy of the Marxian interpretation of history. In North America every circumstance—geography, economics, social trends—pointed to the inevitability of the absorption of the smaller state by the greater." But human nature, the rush of events, skilful diplomacy, and international interaction, altered the course of North American history. This alteration was made during the period when the "urge to retaliation" on both sides of the frontier was strong enough to crystallize divergent views and policies. Canada is today a "great small nation" for having been tempered by a "cold war."