

*Lloyd M. Scott*

## THE ENGLISH GENTLEFOLK IN THE BACKWOODS OF CANADA

Canadians!—as long as you remain true to yourselves and her, what foreign invader could ever dare to plant a hostile flag upon that rock-defended height, or set his foot upon a fortress rendered impregnable by the hand of Nature? United in friendship, loyalty and love, what wonders may you not achieve? to what an enormous altitude of wealth and importance may you not arrive? What elements of future greatness and prosperity encircle you on every side! Never yield up those solid advantages to become an humble dependant on the great republic—wait patiently, loyally, lovingly upon the illustrious parent from whom you sprang, and by whom you have been fostered into life and political importance; in the fulness of time she will proclaim your childhood past, and bid you stand up in your strength, a free Canadian people!<sup>1</sup>

These are the hopes for the future of Canada and its people evoked by the English immigrant's first vision of the new land. In 1832, J. Dunbar Moodie, a British Army officer retired on half pay, accepted a grant of 400 acres near Peterborough in Upper Canada, and brought his wife and child more than three thousand miles to begin a new life.

Mrs. Moodie explains that emigration was a matter of necessity, especially for the sons and daughters of educated but impoverished families. "Practical people of the world" too often hurled slighting remarks at the poor gentleman, who knew that lack of wealth was all that separated him. On the other hand, many without the inducement of free land were misled by illusory propaganda about the advantages of Canada, circulated by unscrupulous land companies. With England far behind, and no one there to welcome them, they found the New World strange and forbidding.<sup>2</sup> Travel into the woods was difficult and tedious, and as they began the struggle with the wilderness, exhausted and with their savings depleted, their hopes turned to disappointment and bitterness.

The history of the British in Canada reaches back to the surrender of the fortress of Quebec in 1759. The Treaty of Paris, 1763, ended the Seven Years War

and permanently expelled French colonial interest in Canada. The record must also include the explorations of trappers and fur traders whose memoirs describe the earliest conquests of the frontier. The immigration of thousands of loyal British subjects from the American colonies after the Revolutionary War not only strengthened Britain's position in Canada but permanently influenced Canadian thinking.

The next most important chapter was the great wave of settlers from the British Isles at the close of the Napoleonic Wars, settlers who may be divided roughly into two groups. The majority were of peasant or labouring stock who became important in later years as their social consciousness increased, and a few were relatively well-educated members of the upper middle class.<sup>3</sup> In many cases, their role was not entirely of their own choosing, but was comparable to that of military garrisons established to assure the loyalty of frontier populations to the mother country.<sup>4</sup> Like the Loyalists, the latter group was strongly attached to England and also brought to Canada that solid conservatism which has been largely responsible for the tradition of respect for law and order characteristic of Canadian nationalism.

The genteel class also made substantial contributions to our early cultural development. The memoirs of Mrs. Moodie and her sister, Mrs. Traill—daughters of a well-to-do Suffolk family—represent the finest products of the immigrant writers. Both had published books before coming to Canada and both contributed prose, verse, and autobiographical sketches to *The Literary Garland* in Montreal.<sup>5</sup> Both wrote hoping to deter others from making like sacrifices in the backwoods, but their homely style and powers of characterization and description have earned them a far different and more enduring place in Canadian letters than such a narrow purpose would suggest. The two books on which their reputations chiefly rest are now regarded as classic accounts of pioneer life.

The English gentlefolk were sons and daughters of clergymen, soldiers, school-teachers, government officials, and businessmen; their education and environment had acquainted them with the arts and letters and given them a degree of refinement. Frontier life fostered little or no class distinction because survival depended upon mutual aid among neighbours, but people like the Moodies and the Traills did not forget themselves. "There is no difference in the flesh and blood; but education makes a difference in the mind and manners, and until these can assimilate, it is better to keep apart."<sup>6</sup> While this apt distinction typifies their general attitude, it is also a measure of their frustrating existence: circumstances precluded any such separation. Communities in which they might have assumed responsibility were too distant; there were no cultural activities in which to take part; in most places there

was not even a school or a church. Correspondence remained their chief means of self-expression and creativity. This narrow life explains much of their pettiness and, in particular, accounts for their patronizing attitude toward inferiors.

In many unconscious revelations of personality, they echo the mannerisms of their class. Mrs. Moodie is surprised to learn that the titles of "Sir" and "Madam" are "very rarely applied by the lower orders." On meeting Americans for the first time, Mrs. Traill dryly remarks, "The only peculiarities I observed in them were a certain nasal twang in speaking, and some few odd phrases; but these were only used by the lower class, who 'guess' and 'calculate' a little more than we do."<sup>7</sup> And John Howison, in his *Sketches of Upper Canada*, observes that it needs only a matter of hours for labourers to acquire "those absurd notions of independence and equality, which are so deeply engrafted in the minds of the lower individuals of the American nation. On accosting two Scotsmen . . . instead of pulling off their hats, as they had invariably done before on similar occasions, they merely nodded to me with easy familiarity. I addressed them by their Christian names . . ."<sup>8</sup> Even Mrs. Moodie is not above the aristocratic pastime of making fun of such "ultra-republicanism." In time, however, she makes a remarkable discovery:

Why they treated our claims to their respect with marked insult and rudeness, I never could satisfactorily determine . . . until I found that this insolence was more generally practised by the low, uneducated emigrants from Britain, who better understood your claims to their civility, than by the natives themselves. Then I discovered the secret.

The unnatural restraint which society imposes on these people at home forces them to treat their more fortunate brethren with a servile deference which is repugnant to their feelings, and is thrust upon them by the dependent circumstances in which they are placed. This homage to rank and education is not sincere . . . and [the first freedom looses] upon their superiors the long-locked-up hatred of their hearts.<sup>9</sup>

The gentlefolk reflect their middle-class thinking in yet another way. They repeatedly denounce materialistic values and espouse honest poverty, at the same time that they use wealth as a criterion of success and are condescending toward the poor. The combination of idealism and a commercial instinct are a more familiar paradox today among people less altruistic. They make an unholy mixture in Mrs. Moodie's remark: "Honest poverty is encouraged, not despised, in Canada. Few of her prosperous men have risen from obscurity to affluence without going through the mill, and therefore have a fellow-feeling for those who are struggling to gain the first rung of the ladder."<sup>10</sup> Honest poverty is a respectable state, therefore, as it

is the apprenticeship for material success. Mrs. Traill supports this view by stating that those who are among the best suited for emigration are those who have the capacity to make money.<sup>11</sup> Yet their seemingly hypocritical views are easily explained. These are very naive people: the plain living and high thinking that they too frequently advocate are noble but exacting ideals. Moreover, they are very proud people, and their pride compels them to rationalize their impoverished existence.

It is believed that much of *Roughing It in the Bush* was written some years after the Moodies' arrival in Canada, yet there is less evidence of romanticizing the past than one might expect. In fact, most of the descriptions of the early struggles and privations are severely restrained. Some passages, however, are so vivid as to retain the immediacy of the experience. Mrs. Moodie records the following impressions when she first sees her land and home:

. . . the rain began to fall in torrents . . . the baby cried, and I drew my summer shawl as closely round as possible . . . Just then, the carriage turned into a narrow, steep path, overhung with lofty woods, and . . . brought us to a rocky upland clearing . . . surrounded on all sides by the dark forest.

"I guess," quoth our Yankee driver, "that at the bottom of this 'ere swell you'll find yourself *to hum*;" and . . . pointed to a miserable hut, at the bottom of a deep descent. . . .

I was perfectly bewildered—I could only stare at the place, with my eyes swimming in tears . . . .

Without, pouring rain; within, a fireless hearth; a room with but one window, and that containing only one whole pane of glass; not an article of furniture to be seen, save an old painted pine-wood cradle, which had been left there by some freak of fortune . . . .

The rain poured in at the open door, beat in at the shattered window, and dropped upon our heads from the holes in the roof. The wind blew keenly through a thousand apertures in the log walls . . . . I fortunately spied the door lying among some old boards at the back of the house, and Moodie immediately commenced fitting it to its place. This, once accomplished, was a great addition to our comfort. We then nailed a piece of white cloth entirely over the broken window, which, without diminishing the light, kept out the rain.<sup>12</sup>

They began clearing by hand to prepare for crops and hurried to ready the cabin for approaching winter, but they had never done such work before and the physical strain was at times too much for them. They were also very poor businessmen. Exploited repeatedly by supposed friends who borrowed utensils, clothing, and food and never returned them, they rationalized by saying, "Those who go a-borrowing, go a-sorrowing." Sensitive and critical as they were, they failed at

first to realize that many of their neighbours were little better than animals who could not have been civilized without generations of conditioning.

The winter brought threats of death more real than they had ever imagined. Undernourished and poorly protected from the cold, they were prey to the ague, influenza, and pneumonia. Starvation, only a myth before, became a very real enemy in the wilderness. But an even greater enemy was their isolation— isolation from help and from people of their own kind. Mrs. Anna Jameson, the wife of Ontario's first Vice-Chancellor of the Court of Equity, who lived and travelled in Southern Ontario during 1837, reflects on one of her trips into the woods: "We passed by a forest lately consumed by fire, and I asked why, in clearing the woods, they did not leave groups of the finest trees, or even single trees, here and there, to embellish the country? But it seems that this is impossible—for the trees thus left standing, when deprived of the shelter and society to which they have been accustomed, uniformly perish—which I thought very natural."<sup>13</sup> The analogy aptly points up the courage of people like the Moodies. And it is easy to see how the record of their survival has become one of the most compelling stories in the country's history.

The Canadian rebellions of 1837 gave the English immigrants of all classes in Upper and Lower Canada an opportunity to reaffirm their loyalty to the British Constitution and the new Queen, Victoria; and the re-establishment in Toronto of the British Constitutional Society, begun in 1812, drew the colony still closer to the Crown. Mrs. Moodie's patriotic poem, "The Oath of the Canadian Volunteers," fittingly begins, "Huzza for England!—May she claim / Our fond devotion ever."<sup>14</sup>

When word reached them that subversive American activities threatened the annexation of Canada, they rallied immediately. Although its fanatical leadership spelled almost certain defeat, the "unnatural rebellion" was put down because they "responded to the imperative call of duty," and because they believed that God was on their side. Such loyalty is the more remarkable since the earlier political broils did not disturb the peace of the backwoods. In fact, the remote settlers were profoundly ignorant even of the way in which the province was governed.

The Canadian forces took the initiative in at least one important action. The capture of the American steamer, the "Caroline", which was fired and sent over Niagara Falls, aroused angry protests, especially from the government of New York. In Mrs. Traill's judgment, however, it was entirely "justifiable". Her remarks about Samuel Lount suggest the typical English view that the leaders of the insurrection were sadly in error. "[He] appears, by all we can learn, to have been a misguided, but in his general character an amiable man." And her regret at the death of

Colonel Van Egmont shows the same certainty, the same single-mindedness: "... it is supposed that mortification and chagrin hastened his death. What had a man of his age to do with aiding a rebellion so uncalled for as that of Mackenzie? Had it been in defense of his country or against the oppression of a tyrannical Sovereign that the white-haired man girded his sword upon his thigh, we would have venerated the feeling that had prompted him to go forth, but such a motive did not, and could not, have actuated him."<sup>15</sup>

In a brief reference to the rebellions, Mr. Desmond Pacey says that the agitation of the peasant labouring class was largely responsible for the outbreak,<sup>16</sup> and this view leads to an important conclusion. The revolt of the "lower orders" in Upper Canada drew sharp and permanent lines of separation between the two major classes. Furthermore, in opposing the French and the English Canadians in the lower province, the rebellion put down the last bid for French rule in Canada. Moreover, the war more firmly established the nation's sovereignty in the minds of Americans as well as those of her own people.

To the casual reader the gentlefolk manifest the worst kind of self-righteous bigotry. They damn the indolence, wrong-headedness, and "sins of the peasants," and even denounce the Catholic and evangelical faiths: "... we shrank from the rude, coarse familiarity of the uneducated people among whom we were thrown. . . . The semi-barbarous Yankee squatters . . . detested us, and with them we could have no feeling in common. We could neither lie nor cheat in our dealings with them; and they despised us for our ignorance in trading and our want of smartness." In a vein typical of her moralizing, Mrs. Moodie instructs a neighbour: "Swearing is a dreadful vice,' said I, 'and, wicked as it is in the mouth of a grown-up person, it is perfectly shocking in a child; it painfully tells he has been brought up without the fear of God.'" But she laughs good-naturedly at the delightful response: "'Pooh! pooh! that's all cant; there is no harm in a few oaths, and I cannot drive oxen and horses without swearing. I dare say that you can swear too, when you are riled, but you are too cunning to let us hear you.'"<sup>17</sup> She disposes summarily of Catholics, but not without charity: "Reason never raises a doubt to shake the oneness of their faith. They receive it on the credit of their priests, and their credulity is as boundless as their ignorance. . . . I cannot but respect their child-like trust, and the reverence they feel for their spiritual teachers; nor could I ever bring myself to believe that a conscientious Catholic was in any danger of rejection from the final bar."<sup>18</sup>

The Reverend William Fraser of the Anglican Church wittily derides the proceedings of a Methodist meeting:

The manner in which the exercises were conducted and the exhibition of feeling real or pretended reminded me forcibly of the account which the inspired penman gives of the worshippers of Baal. We first had a sermon in which neither sense nor connection were much observed. . . . After bawling for nearly an hour the first orator concluded when a second sprung up on his legs, and appeared determined that he should not be outdone by the first. Possessed of a voice set to a pretty high key and of a pulmonary capacity of no ordinary description his scream absolutely terrified. And I greatly felt apprehensions for the safety of the functions of his life.

Later, two or three of the preachers and a considerable number of the people engaged in prayer at the top of their voices . . . . I observed one man in particular who got within the altar and who continued in a perfectly screaming tone to vociferate for fully an hour if not more. A little old woman too, I observed who made a ludicrous exhibition of her devotions . . . . After a little time two of the preachers travelled among the audiences to examine into their experiences . . . <sup>19</sup>

In contrast to these ecclesiastical attentions, the Church of England in Canada was notoriously remiss in its obligations to the settlers. In his sociological study of the period, Mr. S. D. Clark notes that the rapid increase after 1820 of rural adherents, in Upper Canada, to the Anglican church, as well as the greater number of backwoods settlements, exposed the inadequacies of that church's policies and methods. It is true that life in these remote places emphasized the ruthlessness of materialistic forces; the struggle to gain a livelihood became uppermost. Yet the success of the evangelical sects confirmed the need that many people felt to join in religious worship. Clark concludes: "Where the neglect of religious habits occurred among the population, therefore, the reason would seem to lie largely in the failure of the Church of England to adapt itself to the conditions of pioneer society."<sup>20</sup> The theology of the Anglicans, which we can readily infer from the following remark of Mrs. Moodie's, makes the church's position even more hypocritical: "I endeavoured, as well as I was able, to explain to her the nature of the soul, its endless duration, and the responsibility to God for the actions done in the flesh; its natural depravity and need of a saviour; urging her, in the gentlest manner, to lose no time in obtaining forgiveness of her sins, through the atoning blood of Christ."<sup>21</sup>

It is unjust, however, to form an opinion of the English gentfolk solely from such evidence. The system of values which emerges from a closer study of their struggles in the western wilderness, gives, I believe, a different picture, and may be examined under the following headings: first, their doctrine of work; second, what has been variously, and sometimes loosely, called "the English mind," or "the indomitable English spirit;" and third, their deification of nature.

Both *The Backwoods of Canada* and *Roughing It in the Bush* are powerful testimonies to the "industrious and ever-to-be-honoured sons of honest labour":

The Great Father of the souls and bodies of men knows the arm which wholesome labour from infancy has made strong, the nerves which have become iron by patient endurance, by exposure to weather, coarse fare and rude shelter; and He chooses such to send forth into the forest to hew out the rough paths for the advance of civilization. These men become wealthy and prosperous, and form the bones and sinews of a great and rising country. Their labour is wealth, not exhaustion; it produces independence and content, not homesickness and despair.<sup>22</sup>

This view of work draws attention to a curious paradox, an apparent denial of their family and social background. They speak more like the Puritan middle class than the Anglican landed gentry who were accustomed to servants doing the menial labour. The explanation appears to be simple necessity. James Moodie, for example, was the youngest of several sons, and there was little or nothing left of the patrimony for him. He was forced to seek self-support. The rationalization of their status, however, is not bitter as we might expect. Mrs. Moodie's praise of work is sincere; she believes that labour is wealth and that it gives full independence and lasting content.

It has been said that the purpose of the British Empire is to give all men within its bounds an English mind. While a definition of this "English mind" is difficult, it would have to include snobbery, stubbornness, and courage, traits abundantly illustrated in the writing of a century ago.

We learn from the memoirs and letters of the thirties and forties that "vice, drunkenness, gambling and sins of the flesh abound." Reports are virtually unanimous. Opportunistic traders are accused of cultivating the Indian's taste for fire-water and of exploiting his commercial naivete. Rivalries between nationalities are common: the Irish are most often blamed for outbreaks of violence and crime. In the forties, temperance societies and reform leagues began actively campaigning. Pleas for law and orders always spoke of sins against God and the church, and of course decried the obstruction of Canada's growth.

The gentlefolk, on the other hand, sought reform by a different expedient: they simply did not countenance evil. Theirs was a typical English reserve, the knack of raising the eyebrows and preserving an impenetrable dignity. It is as though the Englishman quietly resigned himself to the task of introducing civilization to a barbaric people entirely by example. In this role he may appear rather supercilious, but behind this behaviour lies a recognition of inherent class differences which hark back to the medieval ideal that every man must have a master, and to



the theory of social control exemplified by the guild system. "It [the craft guild] embodied in its regulation a whole social system, into which the individual was completely absorbed by the force of public opinion and the pressure of moral and social conventions."<sup>23</sup> Apprentices and journeymen were subject to the will of the masters and wardens, who were subject to the civil authorities, and so on. The monarch was answerable only to God.

It was fitting for Alexander McLachlan, a mechanic's son who had emigrated from Scotland, to voice the opinion that "Jack's as Good as his Master." However, Mrs. Moodie's view of democracy was hardheaded and realistic: "Perfect, unadulterated republicanism, is a beautiful but fallacious chimera which never has existed upon the earth, and which . . . we are told never will exist in heaven."<sup>24</sup>

The following conversation aptly illustrates Mr. and Mrs. Traill's remarkable self-assurance and acute awareness of social status. The arguments put forth on the latter question are strengthened by keen wit and incisive logic:

We were rather entertained by the behaviour of a young Scotchman, the engineer of the steamer, on my husband addressing him with reference to the management of the engine. His manners were surly, and almost insolent. He scrupulously avoided the least approach to courtesy or outward respect; nay he even went so far as to seat himself on the bench close beside me, and observed that "among the many advantages this country offered to men like him, he did not reckon it the least of them that he was not obliged to take off his hat when he spoke to 'people' (meaning persons of our degree), or address them by any other title than their name; besides he could go and take his seat beside any gentleman or lady either, and think himself to the full as good as them."

"Very likely," I replied, hardly able to refrain from laughing at this sally; "but I doubt you greatly overrate the advantages of such privileges, for you cannot oblige the lady or gentleman to entertain the same opinion of your qualifications, or to remain seated beside you unless it pleases them to do so." With these words I rose up and left the independent gentleman evidently a little confounded at the manoeuvre; however, he soon recovered his self-possession, and continued swinging the axe he held in his hand, and said, "It is no crime, I guess, being born a poor man."

"None in the world," replied my husband; "a man's birth is not of his own choosing. A man can no more help being born poor than rich; neither is it the fault of a gentleman being born of parents who occupy a higher station in society than his neighbour. I hope you will allow this?"

The Scotchman was obliged to yield a reluctant affirmative to the latter position, but concluded with again repeating his satisfaction at not being obliged in this country to take off his hat, or speak with respect to "gentlemen," as they styled themselves.

"No one, my friend, could have obliged you to be well mannered at home any more than in Canada. Surely you could have kept your hat on your head if you had been so disposed; no gentleman would have knocked it off, I am sure."

"As to the boasted advantages of rude manners in Caanda, I should think something of it if it benefited you the least, or put one extra dollar in your pocket; but I have my doubts if it has that profitable effect."

"There is a comfort, I guess, in considering oneself equal to a gentleman," said the man.

"Particularly if you could induce the gentleman to think the same." This was a point that seemed rather to disconcert our candidate for equality, who commenced whistling and kicking his heels with redoubled energy.

"Now," said his tormentor, "you have explained your notions of Canadian independence; be so good as to explain the machinery of your engine, with which you seem very well acquainted."

The man eyed my husband for a minute, half sulking, half pleased at the implied compliment on his skill, and, walking off to the engine, discussed the management of it with considerable fluency, and from that time treated us with perfect respect. He was evidently struck with my husband's reply to his question, put in a most discourteous tone, "Pray, what makes a gentleman: I'll thank you to answer me that?" "Good manners and good education," was the reply. "A rich man or a high-born man, if he is rude, ill-mannered, and ignorant, is no more a gentleman than yourself."

This put the matter on a different footing, and the engineer had the good sense to perceive that rude familiarity did not constitute a gentleman.<sup>25</sup>

Turning now to their view of nature, we find that although the battle against the wilderness is fierce and apparently endless, they continue to see in their enemy the face of God, the abiding loveliness of his spirit. And in waging "war against the forest with fire and steel," man undergoes a test and learns the unalterable laws of the Creator. Nineteenth-century literature and philosophy are prolific in their interpretations of nature. Carlyle finds in it the foundations of ethics and a guide in defining a personal code of conduct. Wordsworth and Ruskin optimistically deify nature as the physical embodiment of God's great love for man. Steeped in this romantic tradition, no amount of hardship could shake the belief of the gentlefolk that living in accordance with natural law was living a good life. Reverend E. H. Dewart expresses the divinity of nature in these lines:

That while I muse upon these glorious works,  
And mark the tokens of thy presence here,  
I may behold Thyself, and find in Thee  
My Strength, my Light, my everlasting Friend.<sup>26</sup>

And Reverend Anson Green rebukes behaviour which insults nature: "... but still there are thousands who are not ashamed to brawl in our streets and stagger

in the presence of the sun!"<sup>27</sup> The sincerity and moving realism are unmistakable in the following passage from Mrs. Moodie:

The moonlight was bright as day, the air warm and balmy; and the aromatic resinous smell exuded by the heat from the balm-of-gilead and the pine-trees of the forest, added greatly to our sense of enjoyment as we floated by scenes so wild and lonely—isles that assumed a mysterious look and character in that witching hour. In moments like these I ceased to regret my separation from my native land, and, filled with the love of Nature, my heart forgot for the time the love of home. The very spirit of peace seemed to brood over the waters which were broken into a thousand ripples of light by every breeze that stirred the rice blossoms, or whispered through the shivering aspen-trees. The far-off roar of the rapids, softened by distance, and the long mournful cry of the night owl, alone broke the silence of the night. Amid these lonely wilds the soul draws nearer to God, and is filled to overflowing by the overwhelming sense of His presence.<sup>28</sup>

In reality, however, reverence for nature did not lead them to seek a "natural" system of laws within which their lives might be enriched. For example, they did not see man as a microcosm, corresponding to the external world as a geographer's globe does to the earth. Mrs. Moodie is a keen observer of natural beauty, and this capacity helped her to survive the loneliness of her forest life, but her admiration is sentimental, not philosophical. The "order" in their lives, as we have seen, is merely the reflection of the fixed social hierarchy of England with which they had grown up. They could not compromise the class lines which separated Jack from his master. Indeed, the sentiments of this powerful minority have become, to a large extent, the mood and temper of a nation, and have been influential in shaping Canada's own social structure.

Pioneer life in Upper Canada was not all hardship and disappointment. The odd characters that often popped up and the rare social occasions provided diversion. One of Mrs. Moodie's characterizations which demonstrates her novelist's art is that of John Monaghan:

A strange, wild-looking lad, barefooted, and with no other covering to his head than the thick, matted locks of raven blackness that hung like a cloud over his swarthy, sunburnt visage, burst into the room.

"Where do you come from, and what is your business here? You must be aware that this is a very late hour to take a house by storm in this way," said Moodie.

"Thru' for you, sir. But necessity knows no law; and the condition you see me in must plade for me. First, thin, sir, I come from the township of D———, and want a masher; and next to that, bedad! I want something to ate. As I'm alive, and 'tis a thousand pities that I'm alive at all, at all, for shure God Almighty

never made sich a misfortunate crather afore nor since—I have had nothing to put into my head since I ran away from my ould mather, Mr. F——, yesterday at noon. Money I have none, sir; the divil a cent. I have neither a shoe to my foot nor a hat to my head, and if you refuse to shelter me the night, I must be contint to perish in the snow, for I have not a frind in the wide wurld.

“I’m a poor foundling from the Belfast Asylum, shoved out by the mother that bore me, upon the wide wurld, long before I knew that I was in it. As I was too young to speak for myself intirely, she put me into a basket, wid a label round my neck, to tell the folks that my name was John Monaghan. This was all I ever got from my parents; and who or what they were, I never knew, not I, for they never claimed me, bad cess to them. But I’ve no doubt it’s a fine illigant gintleman he was, and herself a handsome rich young lady, who dared not own me for fear of affronting the rich gintry, her father and mother. Poor folk, sir, are never ashamed of their children; ’tis all the threasure they have, sir; but my parents were ashamed of me and they thrust me out to the stranger and the hard bread of dependence.”<sup>29</sup>

Delighted by his wit and good humour, the Moodies happily took him in, and John became their faithful and beloved servant.

Logging bees commonly turned into social occasions, but even more fun and far less destructive of property were bush weddings. Such incidents as the following quickly banished homesickness:

The wedding party duly assembled at the church. At the door the bride-elect was met by a former lover, who prevailed upon her to marry *him* instead of his rival. They made the matter known to the clergyman. The bride’s sister was there acting as bridesmaid, and the clergyman thinking it a pity that the poor crest-fallen bridegroom, that was to have been, should leave the church under such disconsolate circumstances, boldly proposed to him to offer his hand and what remained of his heart, unbroken, to the pretty bridesmaid. The young Irishman, nothing loath at such a public opportunity of showing his indifference and contempt for the slight that had been put upon him, professed his readiness to take the younger sister of his false love. After a few blushes and some few faint denials, the girl gave consent, and all parties left the church in excellent spirits and high humor.<sup>30</sup>

Mrs. Traill passed along much advice to help, but chiefly to discourage, the prospective settler. Her sister believed that her book would be a success if it deterred one intended immigrant.<sup>31</sup> Yet as their visit stretched into years, and their labours were finally rewarded, the vision of hope was renewed: “Canada is the land of hope; here everything is new; everything going forward.”<sup>32</sup> And Mrs. Moodie writes the following tribute to her foster country twenty years after her arrival in the New World:

Dear foster-mother, on whose ample breast,  
 The hungry still find food, the weary rest;  
 The child of want that treads thy happy shore  
 Shall feel the grasp of poverty no more;  
 His honest toil meet recompense can claim,  
 And freedom bless him with a freeman's name<sup>33</sup>

Both of these immigrant writers were unconsciously answering Canada's need for a literature, a need of which they often spoke: "Here there are no historical associations, no legendary tales of those that came before us."<sup>34</sup> Of course, Susanna Moodie and Catharine Traill were not conscious artists; they possessed no great genius. Nevertheless their keen observations, their insight into human problems and, perhaps most important of all, their frank self-portraits, have bequeathed us a valuable historical perspective.

## NOTES

1. Susanna Moodie, *Roughing It in the Bush* (Toronto, 1913), pp. 42-3.
2. To help settlers locate their property and to offer advice, numerous immigration aid societies were established in the Canadas. The first was in operation at Quebec in 1832. These stations not only lightened the burden of the immigration service, but also smoothed the way for settlers entering the woods. See Frances Morehouse, "Canadian Migration in the Forties," *The Canadian Historical Review*, IX (December, 1928), p. 316.
3. Desmond Pacey, *Creative Writing in Canada* (Toronto, 1952), p. 21.
4. S. D. Clark, *The Social Development of Canada* (Toronto, 1942), p. 5.
5. Pacey, p. 23.
6. *Roughing It*, p. 263.
7. Catharine Parr Traill, *The Backwoods of Canada* (Toronto, 1929), p. 102.
8. John Howison, *Sketches of Upper Canada* (London, 1821), pp. 46-7.
9. *Roughing It*, pp. 246-7.
10. *Roughing It*, p. 10.
11. *Backwoods*, p. 184.
12. *Roughing It*, pp. 110-13.
13. Anna Jameson, *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada* (Toronto, 1943), p. 29.
14. *Roughing It*, p. 472.
15. *Backwoods*, pp. 340-1.
16. Pacey, p. 21.
17. *Roughing It*, pp. 245-6; p. 170.
18. Susanna Moodie, *Life in the Clearings Versus the Bush* (New York, 1853), pp. 20-1.
19. Clark, pp. 295-6.
20. Clark, pp. 216-17.

21. *Roughing It*, p. 200.
22. *Roughing It*, xix.
23. Ephraim Lipson, *Economic History of England*, Vol. I: *The Middle Ages* (London, 1926), p. 296.
24. *Life in the Clearings*, p. 70.
25. *Backwoods*, pp. 103-6.
26. Edward Dewart, "The Falls of Niagara," *Selections from Canadian Poets*, ed. Edward Dewart (Montreal, 1864), p. 140.
27. *Clark*, p. 253.
28. *Roughing It*, p. 375.
29. *Roughing It*, pp. 180-4.
30. *Backwoods*, p. 343.
31. Earlier, another kind of warning system had been set up. Many Britishers who had settled in the United States stormed the British consulate in New York seeking return passages, when in 1819 the boom times ended. The consul, James Buchanan, the brother of A. C. Buchanan, the British emigrant agent at Quebec, viewed the matter this way: "Let the distress be an object lesson to those who contemplated leaving the protection of the British government and let that government show its paternalism by forwarding the stranded expatriates to the colonies where they should have gone in the first place." This plan was accordingly followed. See Hansen and Brebner, *The Mingling of the Canadian and American Peoples* (New Haven, 1940), p. 100.
32. *Backwoods*, p. 261.
33. *Life in the Clearings*, v.
34. *Backwoods*, p. 163.