

James Eayrs

The Diplomatic Eye

Nova Scotia is a haven for practitioners as well as analysts of Canadian foreign policy. It would be not just possible, it would be entirely in order to write the history of our external affairs around the careers of sons and daughters of this Province. You would be leaving something out, but only sordid parts.

Sir Robert Borden, of course, whose career moves on a majestic trajectory from Grand Pré to Versailles. Loring Christie of Amherst — Borden's right-hand man and intellect, our wartime minister at Washington. Charles Ritchie — born only half-a-mile away — who has seen it all and knows it all and has told it all in undiplomatic diaries from which several of my examples will be drawn. Margaret Meagher, also of Halifax, and Arthur Andrew of Pictou, who as our ambassadors to Sweden and heirs of what Canada's diplomatic estate had by then become were able, respectively, to begin and to conclude those negotiations that led to our new relationship with China. (Of our present Secretary of State for External Affairs, hailing from Cape Breton, it is too soon to write.)

The name of the Nova Scotian which will serve to get me to my subject is however none of the foregoing. I have in mind W.S. Fielding of Halifax, who ends his political career as Minister of Finance in the Mackenzie King cabinet from 1921 to 1925.

Fielding's influence on foreign policy decision-making was negative. He was against opening a Canadian legation in Washington. He was against it for every reason imaginable, which he stated in writing to the Prime Minister. It was unnecessary. The British embassy could as before handle Canada's affairs. Ministers from Ottawa could go to Washington as needed. A Canadian representative at Washington would be "almost

entirely ornamental". For Canada so to exercise the right of legation would lead to the break-up of the British Empire. And, anyway, why Washington? Why not New York, "with a dignified office in a prominent part of the city"? Finally, it would cost too much. "For men in official life", Fielding wrote in his memorandum's coda,

Washington is probably the most expensive city in the world. If we are to have at Washington a representative of high rank, who is to compete in the social field with the representatives of European countries, he ought to have salary and allowance beyond what the Canadian people will be willing to pay.¹

I ask myself this question: Why did Fielding think this way about an idea whose time had plainly come? (Our Legation was duly opened a year after his retirement.) What caused this astigmatism in his vision, this blurring in his diplomatic eye?

I can't answer that question because I don't know what kind of fellow Fielding was. I don't know anything about his temperament, about his personality, about what made him tick. But I know that to analyze a foreign policy decision this is what you need to know.

And you need to know the ideology, as distinct from personality. Here I am more informed. Fielding was a Nova Scotian, a Haligonian. A Nova Scotian first, a Canadian only second. Indeed, a Canadian third, who would state publicly (to his prime minister's acute embarrassment) that "Canada is not a nation, Canada cannot be a nation".² His roots were in Halifax, from which Washington appeared remote. If a Canadian representative there must be, why not a commissioner in New York, indeed? Better still, a commissioner in Boston? But best of all, no commissioner at all. Fielding's roots were in Halifax, and — as Charles Ritchie reminds us —

the Halifax of those days...looked back to its past as a garrison town and a base for the Royal Navy... [Its] devotion to Crown and Empire was a romantic fidelity....³

So there's the ideology. What more do we need to know? We need to know his position in the government, for where you stand depends on where you sit. Fielding was Minister of Finance, and we need search no more. Ministers of finance have ever since looked askance at opening up new missions. Asked in 1960 whether he would like a mission in Baghdad, the Secretary of State for External Affairs replied that he

would, and others, too. But, added Mr. Howard Green, "I always run foul of the Treasury Board".⁴

Poor old Fielding. I don't want to ridicule. His case provides this lecture with the only structure that it's got, for it will contend that the clarity of foreign policy vision, the sharpness of the diplomatic eye, is the result of three properties of gaze: (1) awareness of self and ability to correct for idiosyncrasy; (2) awareness of ideology and ability to correct for bias; (3) awareness of bureaucratic malfunctions and ability to carry out repairs.

II

Now we are ready for a (more or less) controlled experiment.

In November 1955, the foreign minister of Canada spent an hour or so in the company of the president of Egypt, in Cairo. Here are L.B. Pearson's impressions of Colonel Nasser, as reported to Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent:

I found Colonel Nasser quite as impressive and attractive a personality as I had been told he was. He is certainly plain and blunt in words, but friendly and modest in manner. He gives an impression of sincerity and strength, without any trace of arrogance or self-assertion....⁵

Less than a year later, another statesman from another country of the Commonwealth (one of the so-called "Old Dominions" to boot) likewise had a talk with the Egyptian president in Cairo. Here are Sir Robert Menzies' impressions of Colonel Nasser, as reported to Prime Minister Sir Anthony Eden:

I was told that Nasser was a man of great personal charm who might beguile me into believing something foreign to my own thought. This is not so...[S]o far from being charming he is rather *gauche*, with some irritating mannerisms, such as rolling his eyes up to the ceiling when he is talking with you and producing a quick, quite evanescent grin when he can think of nothing else to do. I would say that he was a man of considerable but immature intelligence. He lacks training or experience in many of the things he is dealing with and is, therefore awkward with them...His logic does not travel very far....⁶

Could the prime minister of Australia and the foreign minister of Canada have been talking with the same person?

It is possible that Menzies and Pearson caught Nasser in different moods at different times. I doubt that. Statesmen in their interviews do not come across like that. I do not think we are dealing with moods of

the moment. I think we are dealing with diplomatic optics – the same statesman viewed from divergent angles of vision.

That Pearson offers so much more charitable an assessment (not necessarily more accurate: that is neither here nor there) than does Menzies is due in the first instance to their different personalities. Pearson's – warm, generous, outgoing – is the product of life in the happy manse. (By his parents, "Mike" tells us in his memoirs, he is "doubly and deeply blessed", they bring him "nothing but joy and thanksgiving". "Home was always warm and secure". "I was fortunate in being able to adjust easily, and make new friends". College "was full of happy activity". "Hockey also gave me many good times". "I had the normal young man's interest in girls".⁷) I know as little of Menzies' childhood as I do of Fielding's, but I know that the Australian grew up to be an arrogant bloke – an arrogant bastard is how many of his fellow-countrymen referred to him – who did not suffer fools gladly and took more than most people do for fools. "Arrogance" is not the adjective that leaps to mind when you think of Pearson. "Diffidence" fits better. "He was hesitant to judge people", Peter Newman has observed of him, "and consequently not perceptive about their weaknesses, preferring to like everybody until he had been given plenty of reason to think otherwise".⁸ A British appraisal is identical: "Pearson was too kind a man to delineate personalities or situations with...sharpness... [He] lacks the spice of malice".⁹ And a fellow-diplomat, an Australian, writes of his colleague's "unusual sweetness of nature", which he considers to have been more of a liability than an asset for Pearson's statecraft: "It always took me by surprise that a man as intelligent as Pearson had so little feel for the realities of Asia or Africa".¹⁰

There is more to this than personality, and what is more is ideology – one's way of looking at the world, conditioned by national character as well as by one's own.

What Menzies made of the President of Egypt was what many if not most Australians of that time would have made of him. Here was just another gypso, a wily oriental gentleman, a wog similar in disposition to if more exalted in rank than those creatures of the bazaar who swarmed aboard the Anzac troopships passing through Port Said in two of Australia's wars to sell their samovars and rugs, skilled, it may be, in negotiation, indeed a slippery bargainer, but not to be taken seriously,

above all not to be relied upon. You don't trust a bloody gyppo, do you? What have bloody diggers got to do with bloody gyppos – except to put them down?

Australian national character – angular, assertive, confident of self – juts forth like Ayr's Rock against the outback landscape.¹¹ Ours is less distinct.

What can we say of Canadian national character that will contribute anything of value to that endless seminar on our identity in which the typical participant is the nationalist who says his favourite CBC programme is what used to be called the Dominion Observatory Official Time Signal?

It was once remarked of our most remarkable prime minister that “Mr. King never quite got it into his head during his economic studies at Toronto and Harvard that our civilization is dominated by carnivorous animals”.¹² Mackenzie King refused to believe it – partly because he was Mackenzie King, partly because he was Canadian.

Carnivorous animals, according to a celebrated critic, don't belong in the bestiary of our Dominion. Northrop Frye, beating about the bush garden for some clue to the Canadian identity, emerges – breathing hard – with what he considers an appropriate symbol. It is a painting by Edward Hicks – an American, no matter. Here is Frye's description of its scene:

..[I]n the background is a treaty between the Indians and the Quaker settlers under Penn. In the foreground is a group of animals – lions, tigers, bears, oxen – illustrating the prophecy of Isaiah about the recovery of innocence in nature...They stare past us with a serenity that transcends consciousness....

“This mood”, Frye tells us, “is closer to the haunting vision of a serenity that is both human and natural which we have been trying to identify as the Canadian tradition”. And he concludes: “If we had to characterize a distinctive emphasis in that tradition, we might call it the quest for the peaceable kingdom”.¹³

Is Canadian national character more accepting, more trusting, more tolerant, more gentle, than Australian national character? Less assertive, less strident, less xenophobic? I can't prove it, but I believe it. So, it would seem, does an Australian. W.R. Crocker, after a stint as high commissioner in Ottawa, came to the conclusion that “Canadians are characterized by sobriety, moderateness, efficiency and lack of rhetoric... There is no flamboyance...”¹⁴

III

The diplomatic eye is affected by the personality of the beholder and by the ideological environment. It is affected as well by bureaucratic malfunctions which, if not corrected for distortions, will blur the image, impair governmental vision. Types of malfunctioning abound: I will concentrate on three.

Consider first what I shall call the distortions produced by format and ambience.

Where do those who run the Royal Navy meet to decide what they should do? In the Admiralty Board room at Whitehall.

From this elegant sanctum with its ticking grandfather clock, successive generations of naval chiefs, civil and seagoing, have presided for two centuries and a half over the fortunes of the Fleet, from the age of sail, through the days of steam, to the present epoch of nuclear power.... No room in any other Whitehall department has served for so long as the fountainhead of power....

The whole room is a museum of naval memorabilia. Above the fireplace is a wind dial still in perfect order whose quivering needle once advised if the wind stood fair for France in the days when it mattered....

The table and chairs date from 1788, the clock from 1697, the panelling from 1720.... There are framed documents by Pepys, Tennyson's original manuscript of *The Fleet*, and Theodore Roosevelt's disgusted injunction to America in 1917: "Let us not owe our shameful safety to the British Fleet. Let us do our own fighting"....¹³

In such a room, in such an ambience, it is decided how the Fleet is to be equipped, deployed and serve the British state.

A new kind of warship is on the drawing-board — the "through-deck cruiser" of the *Invincible* class, a cross between a cruiser and an aircraft carrier which could provide the Navy with its air arm in the form of the Harrier vertical takeoff fighter. It costs a lot of money.

I do not say that it is impossible to argue in the Admiralty Board Room that plans to build such a warship should be scrapped in favour of a fleet of small patrol craft designed to protect British North Sea oil rigs against terrorist attack. I only say that the ambience of the Admiralty Board Room serves to inhibit such an argument, even to silence it.

At Whitehall, decision-makers may be dazzled by the aura of history; at the White House, by the aura of technological efficiency. "Every-

thing about the place suggests power and order”, writes a member of its press corps. “The scores of security guards, the fleets of limousines and airplanes, the reams of cables coming in daily from all over the world, the banks of the most efficient secretaries in town, the consoles of telephones and other communications, the manicured gardens, the meticulously decorated offices..”¹⁶ How in such a place could anything go wrong? So Arthur Schlesinger Jr. must have wondered as the President and his advisers plotted what seemed to him a project destined for disaster. He was one of them. Why didn’t he voice his doubts? “I can only explain my failure to do more than raise a few timid questions”, Schlesinger confesses in his memoirs of the Kennedy presidency,

by reporting that one’s impulse to blow the whistle on this nonsense was simply undone by the circumstances of the occasion. It is one thing, for a special assistant like myself, to talk frankly in private to a president; and another for a college professor, fresh to government, to interpose his unassisted judgment in open meeting against such august figures as the Secretaries of State and Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff.¹⁷

Foreign offices — and the White House has been America’s foreign office for as long as the State Department can remember — are like computers: “Garbage in, garbage out”. Too often it is “Garbage in”. What can the non-specialist say when format gets the better of reality? “He can say” — so a former U.S. assistant secretary of state has testified—

He can say that, despite reports from the field, he believes that the revelations about the CIA’s intrusions have had a much more serious impact abroad than the reports suggest. He can say that, despite all the careful analyses of the progress of “nation-building” in Vietnam, he expects that nationalism is growing in the country as a reaction to the American presence. But what can he produce to support these suggestions? Only his own judgment of how human beings are likely to react, only what he thinks is common sense. Against him are the briefcases crammed with reports, the stacks of paper on the table, the graphs upon the wall — the visible products of much money, much work, much faith...¹⁸

IV

The late R.H.S. Crossman became a member of the British Labour government in 1964 and kept a record of his experiences there. One of his most vivid recollections is his sense of being held captive by his own bureaucracy. “My Minister’s room is like a padded cell”, he tells us,

“and in certain ways I am like a person who is suddenly certified a lunatic and put safely into this great, vast room, cut off from real life and surrounded by male and female trained nurses and attendants. When I am in a good mood they occasionally allow an ordinary human being to come and visit me; but they make sure I behave right, and that the other person behaves right; and they know how to handle me”.¹⁹ And again: “There I sit, insulated from the world, with things and people presented to me in the way the Ministry wishes to present them”.²⁰

Bureaucracy’s instinct to protect its ministers arises from a mix of motives.

One motive is laudable, at least. It is bureaucracy’s genuine concern for the decision-maker: the concern of a nursemaid for a child, a trainer for a boxer, an agent for a pop star. All are solicitous of their charges’ health, time, peace of mind, which it is their duty to enhance. So it is as between bureaucrat and decision-maker. The minister comes and goes, a bird of passage, a babe in the woods, a waif in the jungle. The seasoned bureaucrat will know his way around that jungle, will want to shield his minister from its vultures and its reptiles.

But the seasoned bureaucrat will also want to protect himself. After all, if the decision-maker had access to outsiders – kitchen cabinets and cronies – he might come to value their advice more highly than the seasoned bureaucrat’s. Hence the tension which subsists between the special advisor – a Henry Kissinger, an Ivan Head – and the foreign service officer. Hence the emphasis on in-house reading. “Minister, I thought you might find it worthwhile to glance at this dispatch from Smithers in Moscow”. “Minister, the report from Rouleau in Brussels is particularly rewarding this week”. It is never – years of toiling in the archives of diplomacy permit me to be dogmatic on this point – it is never: “Minister, there is an intensely interesting article in the *Dalhousie Review* which I wish you would find time to read over the weekend”. Or hardly ever.

The bureaucrat is nurse-maid, the bureaucrat is power-jockey. The bureaucrat is also technocrat. The bureaucrat as technocrat takes a disparaging view of those whom he advises. He has this feeling that he could do it better than they can – run the country, run the world. He has this feeling that they could not be doing it much worse.

Within the profession of diplomacy this feeling swells into a festering grievance and is productive of what George Kennan identifies as its attitude of "weary scepticism". What diplomats are wearily sceptical about is the capacity of politicians to attend effectively to affairs of state. Politicians are consumed by the affairs of politics, by their desire to keep the drive alive — their drive for power and glory, which is not at all the same thing as the orderly management of inter-state relations. "Cabinet ministers frequently show marked disinclination to cross the Atlantic or Channel", one old Foreign Office hand notes disapprovingly, "unless the wicket is easy and there are runs to be made. In unfavourable circumstances, when the wicket is sticky and the ball is turning, they are happy to leave the ambassador alone to face the bowling".²¹

Publicly, diplomats refer with only the faintest trace of irony to those whom they call their "masters". Privately, they are less deferential. "Self-seeking, incompetent nincompoops!" (It is a permanent secretary of the Foreign Office, no less, who thus fulminates against his "masters".) "How I *hate* members of Parliament! They embody everything that my training has taught me to eschew — ambition, prejudice, dishonesty...."²²

This is no momentary outburst, rather a show of irritation which reveals a deep-seated hostility between these two varieties of public servant. That hostility, when first identified, was perceived to reside chiefly on the legislative side of the relationship. "The administrator is regarded as the usurping rival of the legislator", an American scholar observed twenty years ago, "and sometimes as an actual obstruction to the realization of the people's will. General laws, when implemented in detail by administrators, often work hardships on particular constituents. The legislator is often unable to persuade the administrator to remove that hardship. In many cases the derogation of his power and status which this implies is unhappily felt by the legislator, and animosity against particular administrators and against the executive branch and bureaucracy in general is fostered".²³ In the United States, such animosity was directed with especial virulence against the overseas bureaucracy — the American foreign service, which has not yet fully recovered from the ensuing purge — for reasons brilliantly illuminated by Professor Shils.

Within the United States Government, the State Department, more than any other part, was the habitat of the upper classes of the Eastern seaboard. Its quasi-British snobbery had always been the object of contempt and distrust, its gentility of manners brought it the accusations of being staffed by “cooky-pushers”, “striped pants boys”, and homosexuals.

The State Department also drew the animosity of the American xenophobes from the very nature of the task assigned to it. Its task was to manage American foreign relations. The xenophobes did not like America to have foreign relations.... The xenophobes’ conception of foreign policy was the avoidance of foreign relations....²⁴

But this legislative animosity for diplomats engaged in the un-American activity of foreign policy was, had legislators only known it, fully reciprocated on the administrative side. “The professional diplomat is often possessed by a congenital aversion to the phenomenon of domestic-political competition”, George Kennan has confessed. “He sees it, everywhere, as a seething cauldron in which there rises to the surface, by the law of averages, a certain mutation of the human species. And while this mutation differs somewhat in every country, depending on the nature and tradition of government, the diplomatist takes a dim view of it everywhere. Too often, it appears to him as the distillation of all that in human nature which is most extroverted, most thick-skinned, most pushing, most preoccupied with the present, least given to a sense of historical proportion, least inclined to be animated by any deeper and more subtle philosophy of human affairs, and – by that same token – least inclined to look deeply into the realities of international life....”²⁵

Holding politicians in such low repute, diplomats tend not to tell them all they know. What they tell them is not the truth as it may appear to them – reality as it may be perceived by them – but only that portion of the truth – only that aspect of reality – which they consider that politicians, with all their limitations, are fitted to receive from them. Here is how Kennan conceived his duty as the ambassador of the president of the United States – the duty of “attempting to transmit to one’s own government the unwelcome image of the outside world – but always, mark you, in discreet, moderate doses, bearing in mind...that the truth about external reality will never be wholly compatible with those internal ideological fictions which the national state engenders and by which it lives”.²⁶

“The unwelcome image of the outside world”. Charles Ritchie has revealed how our High Commissioner in the United Kingdom during the Second World War tried to alter “the truth about external reality”, attempted to prevent the government of Canada from learning about the starker kinds of British social forces. “I am ashamed of the despatches we sent to Ottawa”, Ritchie recorded in 1941.

They give an officialese picture of England at war without conveying any sense of the crosscurrent. Above all, they leave out any picture of the social changes stirring just under the surface. Mr. Massey does not want the Government at home to glimpse these abysses lest they should be disturbed in their belief that they are fighting for the survival of political democracy, liberal ideas and humane individualism.... He thinks that anything that disturbs this set-piece might weaken the war effort and distract our will....²⁷

V

Lawrence Durrell, who used to be a diplomat, tells a story about the diplomatic corps in Belgrade turning out in all its finery for a gala party on the Queen's Birthday. The British ambassador had caused a raft to be constructed for the occasion, and at the height of the ensuing revelry the raft accidentally slipped its moorings and edged from shore. “The lighted raft hung like a fire-fly on the smooth surface of the river and then slowly began to move downstream in the calm night air, the candles fluttering softly, the band playing, and the corps dancing or smoking or gossiping, thoroughly at peace”.²⁸ It was an enchanted moment, and the ambassador was congratulating himself upon his social triumph when he realized — the sweat starting on his forehead as he did so — that only a few miles downstream the Sava river met the swiftly flowing Danube forming by their confluence a whirlpool into the vortex of which the accredited representatives of forty states — together with their ladies — were being inexorably drawn.

It is all too easy for the foreign representative to lose himself, if not in the vortex of a whirlpool, in the giddy swirl of diplomatic life. He sees too much of the culture of the corps, not enough of the culture of the country on whose changes and development it is his duty to report.

Here is a portrait of the British minister in Athens during the 1930s, Sir Sydney Waterlow, drawn by one of his junior associates who referred to the Minister, as was the wont of the Legation, as “His Majesty's Monster”. The portrait is not, perhaps, dispassionately drawn:

As I passed by the window on the far side of his desk, I could not help over-hearing the final paragraph of the despatch he was dictating in stentorian tones. "What, er, are the Greek politicians thinking about. Question mark. Semi-colon. Nothing very much. Full stop. Here I am surrounded by a crowd of non-entities. In short, I am professionally isolated. Full stop. I have the honour to be, etc."...²⁹

The writer of this passage, himself a life-long diplomat, insists that "Waterlow has no counterpart in modern times". If by that he means that the more angular eccentrics in the public service are these days flattened out one way or another, he may well be right. But the Waterlow mentality, if not personality, may still be found.

In the early 1960s, the British foreign service was undergoing one of its periodic self-examinations, and various inspectorates descended on missions overseas to find out what was going on. One team visited the British high commission in New Delhi. "The British compound", one of its members has since recorded,

had its own supplies of electricity and water, a shop, a hospital, tennis courts and other recreational facilities. The whole staff, with the exception of the High Commissioner and about one other, lived inside this huge compound.... I met one member of the staff who had just been told by the doctor that he was suffering from dysentery. I expressed sympathy. He replied, "It can't be dysentery for I haven't been outside the compound for five months".

"This would suggest", the visitor comments dryly, "a degree of apartheid not achieved during the heights of the British *raj*".³⁰

Charles Ritchie, undiplomatic diarist, paints a vivid portrait of a diplomat who gives himself over entirely to the culture of the corps to an extent at which he is oblivious to any other — either that of the country in which he has been posted or that of the country he has been sent to represent. The former happens to be the United States, the latter Australia — but these might just as well have been Afghanistan and Zanzibar:

His blue, candid eyes, his silver hair, his ruddy cheek, his kindly, wholesome air all announce the fair-minded man of good digestion... He is so nice — why then does one feel stealing over one a faint disgust at the man?... His house is in excellent taste, his dinners are not fussy but well cooked, suitable for a manly bachelor, his guests are sensibly chosen, the conversation is cheery and pleasant. On his shelves are Foreign Office reports, official war histories, biographies and the novels of Galsworthy. In his garden are crocuses planted by an ambassadress. In the mirror in his neat, manly dressing-room are stuck dozens of invitation cards from those who appreciate his jolly niceness. He is too shrewd and dignified to let the cat out of the bag, but it is for these

invitations that he lives. They are wife and children to him. The man of the world with his silver-clasped evening cloak, his signed picture of the Duke of Gloucester on the drawing-room mantelpiece, his brandy in old glasses. The Australian without an Australian accent.³¹

Another Ritchie portrait – this not of an individual diplomat but of the corps itself (or what has been left of it by the ravages of wartime London):

Dined at the St. James's Club among the remnants of the Diplomatic Corps. It was pleasant for a change to be back among the *chères collègues* – not an atmosphere in which ideas are encouraged, certainly, but of anecdote, amiability, and polite enquiries about “so and so who was at Teheran or Washington at the same time I was”. A feeling of complicity in belonging to a class or craft which has its own mysteries – although the initiates know these to be trivial...³²

“So and so who was at Teheran or Washington...” Or Tokyo or Ouagadougou. What does it matter? André Malraux, as de Gaulle's minister of culture, visited New Delhi where he met and talked with Turkey's ambassador to India. They reminisced about Paul Claudel. M. Ostrorog recalled that when, in Paris, he had told the French poet and diplomat about his posting to India, Claudel responded by saying that it would hold no interest whatsoever. Malraux replied: “He said that to me too.... He used to play at writing French haikus. But he also used to play at giving eggs to his friends and writing on the shell, ‘With the author's compliments’, signed ‘Ducky’”. To which Ostrorog said:

Such are the little jokes of the diplomatic corps. Nevertheless I think that assertion of his was, partly at least, a reflection of what I might call the foreign service point of view. Our jobs take us from one end of the world to the other. And we can feel a profound difference between a Zen drawing and a Cézanne, but not between our colleagues. The diplomatic corps is a sort of International; you know those cocktail parties. Apart from a few conventions, diplomacy is the same everywhere. And I would have had to take more conventions into account with Stalin, and probably with Hitler, than here. Our experience is probably applicable to every form of action...³³

What we are dealing with here is more than professional solidarity. It goes beyond the clique and chit-chat generated when doctors, lawyers, bankers, get together. The camaraderie of the diplomatic corps is pitched at a level so intense that it may be described as a quest for consolation. “I have received nothing but kindness in my humble sphere from members of the Foreign Service, in every conceivable grade, and in their company I have spent some of the happiest days of my life”.³⁴

This need for the consoling companionship of the corps – to which a grateful reference is *de rigueur* in almost every diplomatic memoir – is as acute as it is because of the peculiar *milieu* in which the diplomat must work and with which he is required to deal. That *milieu* is the *milieu* of world politics – refractory, ruthless, harsh and stark.

Such a *milieu* produces stress in those required to subsist within it. The diplomat does what he can to keep stress under cover, above all under control. But sometimes stress breaks through the veneer of poise and cool.

Here are three confessions: Canadian, American, British.

The Canadian – Marcel Cadieux – alludes enigmatically to “a certain tenseness, an uneasiness, which can be occasionally glimpsed beneath the unruffled exterior of the diplomat”.³⁵

The American – George Kennan – describes the diplomatic life as a “thankless, disillusioning, and physically exhausting profession”.³⁶

The key confession is the British confession. The British are justly renowned for keeping a stiff upper lip. But when that goes, it really goes. William Strang was a relatively low level British foreign service officer when, in the summer of 1939, he was sent to the Soviet Union to see if some kind of Anglo-Soviet front might yet be formed to head off the rising threat of Nazi Germany’s bid for conquest. He travelled by ship – slow boat to Leningrad. By the time he arrived, the Soviet government had signed the Nazi-Soviet Pact.

Did the memory of that futile mission return to haunt him when, years later, as Lord Strang and a former head of the Foreign Service, he came to write his memoirs? These contain, at any rate, a most undiplomatic passage.

The thirst for world domination, the belief that it can be attained, and the abandonment of all moral restraint in the attempt to achieve it [are] part of the environment in which the Foreign Service Officer lives and works, and it is small wonder if he has sometimes been distressed and revolted by it...

To work in such an environment would hardly have been tolerable had it not been...for the companionship, in times good and bad, which colleagues in the Foreign Service afford to each other....³⁷

And there, I think, we have it. The diplomatic eye is in the final resort glazed by dread and horror. The diplomat – to paraphrase Edward Gibbon only ever so slightly – is the registrar “of the crimes, follies and

misfortunes of mankind". No wonder the eye of the diplomat is glazed. It is as Kennan says. "He has seen them too much. He knows them too well".³⁸

Footnotes

- x A revised version of the Dorothy J. Killam Memorial Lecture delivered at Dalhousie University, March 26, 1976.
1. W.S. Fielding, "Canadian Representation in the United States", 24 April 1923, Mackenzie King Papers.
 2. Quoted in R. MacGregor Dawson, *William Lyon Mackenzie King: A Political Biography*, I, 1874-1923 (Toronto, 1958), 328.
 3. Charles Ritchie, *The Siren Years: A Canadian Diplomat Abroad 1937-1945* (Toronto, 1974), 3.
 4. Canada, House of Commons *Debates*, 15 July 1960, 6377.
 5. Quoted in *Mike: The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson*, 2, 1948-1957 (Toronto, 1973), 220-1.
 6. Quoted in *The Memoirs of the Rt. Hon. Sir Anthony Eden: Full Circle* (London, 1960), 471.
 7. *Mike: The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson*, 1, 1897-1948 (Toronto, 1972), 6-18.
 8. Peter C. Newman, *The Distemper of Our Times* (Toronto, 1968), 286-7.
 9. Alastair Buchan, "Canadian Trouble Shooter", *The Observer*, 19 May 1974.
 10. W.R. Crocker, *Australian Ambassador: International Relations at First Hand* (Melbourne, 1971), 26.
 11. See Peter Coleman (ed.), *Australian Civilization: A Symposium* (Melbourne, 1962), J.D.B. Miller, *Australia* (London, 1966) and, perhaps above all, K.S. Inglis, "The Anzac Tradition", *Meanjin Quarterly* (Melbourne), XXIV, 1, 1965, for insights into the vexed concept of national character in its Australian setting.
 12. Frank H. Underhill, "The Close of an Era: Twenty-five years of Mr. Mackenzie King", *Canadian Forum*, XXIV, September 1944, 125.
 13. Northrop Frye, *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* (Toronto, 1971), 249.
 14. Crocker, *op. cit.*, 25.
 15. Henry Stanhope, "Navy's Heart of Oak", *The Times*, 30 September 1975.
 16. John Herbers, "President's Staff: A Different Viewpoint", *New York Times*, 12 November 1973.
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 19. Richard Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister*, I, *Minister of Housing*, 1964-66 (London, 1975), 21.
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 21. Charles Mott-Radclyffe, *Foreign Body in the Eye: A Memoir of the Foreign Service Old and New* (London, 1975), 282.
 22. David Dilks (ed.), *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, 1938-1945* (London, 1971), 721.
 23. Edward A. Shils, *The Torment of Secrecy: The Background and Consequences of American Security Policies* (London, 1956), 112-13.
 24. *Ibid.*, 85.
 25. George F. Kennan, "History and Diplomacy as Viewed by a Diplomatist", in Stephen D. Kertesz and M.A. Fitzsimons (eds.), *Diplomacy in a Changing World* (Notre Dame, 1959), 106.

26. *Ibid.*, 107-8.
27. Ritchie, *op. cit.*, 86.
28. Lawrence Durrell, *Esprit de Corps: Sketches from Diplomatic Life* (London, 1957), 81.
29. Mott-Radclyffe, *op. cit.*, 2, 7.
30. *Ibid.*, 270.
31. Ritchie, *op. cit.*, 17-18.
32. *Ibid.*, 145-6.
33. Andre Malraux, *Anti-Memoirs* (New York, 1968), 243.
34. Mott-Radclyffe, *op. cit.*, 285.
35. Marcel Cadieux, *The Canadian Diplomat: An Essay in Definition* (Toronto, 1963), 110.
36. Kennan, *op. cit.*, 101.
37. Lord Strang, *At Home and Abroad* (London, 1956), 305.
38. Kennan, *op. cit.*, 108.