

SETTLING ACCOUNTS WITH THE LOYALISTS

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READERS of history seldom consider what an unfair advantage they have over those who were occupied with making it. They look back from superior heights, calculate how one stepped to another, and wonder why the chief actors could not have used a little foresight, or at least common sense. When Jonathan Sewall, for instance, brilliant Attorney-General of Massachusetts, pooh-poohed his friend John Adams's speech about the die being now cast as they walked together on the Great Hill at Portland, did he have any idea where his obstinacy would lead him? Or when that Archibald, Ebenezer Cutler, inn-keeper and pedlar, who had cautiously resolved to be neutral in a turbulent time, slipped out one night to secure for himself a supply of tea while it was to be had, had he no premonition of the series of adventures which would befall? Of the violent resentment roused in him by a masked mob, who relieved him of his tea and burnt it, turning him into a rabid Royalist, with a price set on his capture, and such crimes as calling the signers of the non-consumption agreement "damned fools" to answer for?

It seems odd that so few of those conservative and prosperous citizens, who felt constrained for various reasons to support the established institutions, could read any serious omen in the darkening skies preceding 1775. But it is easy to be far-sighted when everything is well over. They had no intuition then to warn them of what was coming, or of its disastrous effect on their own lives. And one thing, certainly, neither party could have been expected to foresee,—the way in which an absurdly heated political quarrel between neighbours could affect the destiny of a handful of scattered frontier settlements to the north, and, through them, that vast coast to coast territory known later as the Dominion of Canada.

It is a diversion of our day to twist history inside out and upside down, and among other tricks, to imagine the might-have-beens; but to consider Canada if the Royalists, or Loyalists, had never left home, is asking too much. To begin with, looking at the situation with the impartiality which distance should but does not always give, one might think that it was the only thing

which could have happened. The proscription and banishment Acts were cruel, though not quite so cruel as the British expulsion of the Acadians some thirty years before, because the latter, as a whole, offered more passive resistance. The confiscation Acts seem unnecessarily vindictive (more so than the burning of the French cottages, for many of those people were able to return and occupy their lands again, unmolested), but so are all the exigencies of war viewed remotely by non-combatants. It appears likely that the victorious colonists had all they could do to get on their feet and assimilate their dearly bought independence, without being hampered by the daily opposition and rancour of a lot of defeated Tories.

Everyone knows how futile it would be to try to enter into any understanding of the Canadian people without going back to that summer of 1783 when a fleet of crowded British transports landed some 30,000 ragged, shivering refugees on the rocky shores of Nova Scotia—that count exclusive of those who had come previously, or who had made their way across the northern borders into what was Upper and Lower Canada. Those outlaws, for the most part destitute, who knelt and kissed the “dear ground” out of gratitude for its protection when they landed, and cursed it for many a long year afterward, left an impact not only on the localities where they struggled to rebuild their homes, but, because of the peculiar way in which the straggling provinces of the Dominion are knit together, throughout all Canada.

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The descendants of those who were forced, some by sheer idealism, more by partizanship or pressure of circumstances, to eat the King's bread in a strange land, have carried the principles and characteristics of the United Empire Loyalists to the most remote settlements in the country, and wielded an influence quite out of proportion to their numbers. Every little while some zealous son of the Maritime Provinces compiles a fresh list of college presidents, provincial governors, judges and other nationally prominent figures, who hail from his little corner of the country. And it will be a strange thing if the family tree of everyone of these influential citizens cannot boast at least one Loyalist root. In spite of the tide of emigration which has poured into the Dominion since, the stamp of the Loyalist remains indelibly marked. Canada would not be Canada if Alexander Hamilton had invited the King's men to keep their possessions, close their mouths and stay in peace at home.

In order to understand the circumstances of this Loyalist domination, one must see the sparsely settled, sea-girt territory which received the largest and most influential contingent. Some of the deported Acadians had returned, but the marks of French occupation had been pretty thoroughly erased from Nova Scotia, and there had been no attempt at any sort of culture. Halifax and Saint John were straggling villages in 1783. A group of Germans were huddled together at Lunenburg. There were poverty-stricken settlements of Highland Scotch and Yorkshiremen, and a sprinkling of the descendants of the Pilgrims from Cape Cod and Nantucket along the shores.

These inhabited sections were almost completely segregated because of the lack of any land highways, and their individual traits, still distinct, were then strongly marked. The "old-comers" were a stern-lipped pious folk ("bow-and-arrow breed" the newcomers dubbed them in scorn), disciplined by hardship, who would have had more in common with the rebels left behind than the gently nurtured refugees. The fact that they had, in many cases, given help and sympathy, openly, to the Revolutionists, did not add to the general harmony. Any idea of the flotsam cast up on those widely separated bays and inlets ever being fused into an organic whole must have seemed anything but probable. The Loyalists, scattering over the country, were the first unifying influence. They were the leaven which transformed the character of the lump.

There was an old saying: "God sifted England to get the seed for the planting of the American Colonies." The Loyalists and their descendants modestly adapted it: "God sifted the American Colonies to get the seed for the planting of Canada." There were common people among the *emigres*, but we hear little of them in the Atlantic provinces. The bulk of those who came there, we are told, represented the old colonial aristocracy—two hundred graduates of Harvard College and an equal number from other colleges, judges, doctors, lawyers, all sorts of distinguished men with their families. Some managed to bring their household goods, their slaves, and even their homes shipped in sections. The majority were less fortunate; but as soon as they could shed their rags and apply the King's allowance to providing a roof over their heads, those who survived the indescribable hardships of deportation and settlement began to look around and see how they could remake the wilderness into something resembling their beloved homeland.

They could have wasted no time, for, in addition to the prodigious tasks of clearing land and building, they had succeeded,

inside of a year, in having the unwieldy province of Nova Scotia divided. Echoes of some opposition from the old inhabitants come down to us, over the creating of a new province merely to provide scope for the strangers' talents; but the latter had their way. The first Governor of New Brunswick was Thomas Carleton, a Colonel in the King's army. Jonathan Odell, a chaplain, was rewarded for his vitriolic poetry during the war by being made Provincial Secretary. George D. Ludlow, of New York, was the first Chief Justice. Two members of the first council were pre-Loyalists. The rest of the political plums were given mostly to Massachusetts men, and Boston culture was well implanted in the new province.

An account of a Government ball given a few years later suggests that the officials knew how to carry off their new honours. The affair is described as "an elegant display of taste and fashion." The Governor "by his affability diffused a general ease and gaiety through the whole company." His wife appeared in "an elegant gown of tea-colored satin with a white satin petticoat trimmed in shades of embroidered silk, her hair dressed in light curls and ornamented with a pearl pin with a white satin bandeau, with *Vive le Roi* elegantly embroidered on it, etc." Judge Saunders's wife, who helped to open the ball, was in "court uniform, a rich dress, the body and train of ermine satin, with a cape trimming of Van Dyke points richly embroidered in silver, an elegant gold muslin petticoat with a sash of the same", and so on, through a long paragraph. No doubt the other Loyalist ladies were quite as gorgeously adorned. Even Boston in its grandest period could hardly have eclipsed their splendour.

Not all the exiles could be so fortunate as to have a new province to organize. Those who landed in Shelburne may have been well occupied with planning their dream city which, for a short time, was fourth in size on the continent, before its population pathetically dribbled away. Those who went to Halifax were hard to keep down. We find, among others, Sampson Salter Blowers, Hutchinson addresser and Harvard graduate, made Chief Justice of the province, and the Rev Charles Inglis, Rector of Trinity Church, New York, the first bishop of the colonies. John Howe, who had brought along the printing-press of the *Boston News Letter*, started a newspaper that existed continuously till 1870, and established a literary journal, a monthly, with the formidable title: *The Nova Scotia Magazine and Comprehensive Review of Literature, Politics and News*. He became King's Printer for the province, Post-master-General, and father of one of Nova Scotia's Governors and her greatest statesman, the brilliant Joe Howe.

In Ontario, though the exiles were fewer in numbers and became merged into the stream of immigration which flowed into the province soon after their arrival from the old countries, the story is similar. Twenty-three of the twenty-six members in the first House of Assembly were Loyalists. The latter figured largely in the Family Compact, which for years held a monopoly of all important offices, and set back the clock of progress. It was useless for pre-Loyalists there or anywhere to grumble. The newcomers were too competent, too long accustomed to power, to take back seats. They began to found Grammar Schools and Colleges. They considered highways and public improvements. Before long they had put a different complexion on that "ill-thriven, hard-visaged brat", as Burke had described Nova Scotia when England, with no great enthusiasm, accepted the possession.

In the meantime the loyal exiles, who had prayed during the war for Washington's downfall, kept on hoping that the renegades, who were trying to knead the enfeebled rebel colonies into the shape of a republic without the help of so many Harvard and Yale graduates and scions of old families, would find the task too much for them, and come begging to be taken back under the wing of the motherland. Some such hope was a necessity with many of them. Though they painted their surroundings in rosy colours in their letters home, they were dissatisfied and desperately unhappy. In Prince Edward Island, where land conditions, because of outside ownership, were intolerable, they existed for years as a community bound together by a common hatred.

After a few years, when some of the hard feelings on both sides had worn down, many of the outlaws, broken in fortune and spirit, put their pride in their pockets and made their way home to end their days with their own people. They were so eager to leave, we hear, that when a chance passage offered they left homes, furniture, dishes all standing, and hurried to the boat. More would have gone if they had had any means of support when they got there. Those who remained had a new cause for resentment. They lashed their departing countrymen mercilessly for "forgetting the favours they had received from the Government" and "meanly skulking into the United States" to eat humble pie.

Neither the exaltation of a noble sacrifice, nor the task of planting a new Boston in the rock-ribbed wilderness, could be always sustaining. And there were many who never saw Parrrtown or Fredericton, the new capital, after landing. Some of the most genteel of the old families drew lots in the backwoods, where they were dependent on the rude, illiterate old-comers for companionship

and often the very necessities of life. After the first excitement of settlement and organization relaxed a little, it is not surprising to hear that the exiles fell into a kind of hopeless lethargy.

These unfortunate people have been regarded in various ways. By the patriots of the struggling infant republic they were execrated for years as boot-lickers of royalty, bull-necked Tories, who, underestimating the strength of the move for freedom, had cautiously supported what they took for the winning side. Loyal imperialists have seen them as noble idealists, who, with nothing to hope for from the Crown, were prepared to face the most brutal mob violence, insults, loss of fortune and exile, rather than yield to the destructive forces that menaced law and order.

Even in the regions which became their peculiar stamping-ground, sentiment varies. It is true that the Loyalists have become a cult. To be a U. E. L. carries greater spiritual distinction than to be a D. A. R. across the line. But even in the Atlantic provinces, where our founders are most highly venerated, there are a few who dare to hold the opinion that freedom of thought and the advancement of knowledge might possibly have been furthered without the Loyalists and their institutions. Members of the younger generation can be found who, when asked (it is polite conversation) whether they are of Loyalist descent, will answer promptly and savagely: "Thank God, *no!*"

It has taken us all these years to reach a proper distance from which to appraise Loyalist characteristics without bias on either side. Prudence, doubtless, was the motive in some; but idealism was there too. Hot-headed partizanship, which is a human and not altogether contemptible weakness, drove many into exile. But what would seem to be the outstanding quality, which can be traced wherever we find the Loyalist footprints, is what is commonly known as pride. The largest part of the *emigres*, or the element which exercised the most influence, was pre-eminently aristocratic.

They were the exemplary citizens, patrons of the arts, in a day when gentlemen were gentlemen and social gulfs were wide and deep. They were the conservative leaders who, though they found the rude contacts of town meetings offensive to their taste, and condescended to notice the rabble only on election days, gave the country balance and steadiness. They had been brought up to believe, to quote one of them, "that the lower, illiterate classes, narrow-minded and illiberal all over the world, have too much influence." It was their pride, more than apathy or shortsightedness, which would not, until too late, allow them to take seriously a movement represented by such men as John Hancock and that

notorious atheist Tom Paine, and supported by roughs and rustics. They cherished a theory, advanced sometimes to-day, that envy is the basis of democracy. They never allowed their children to forget that all but eight or nine of the seventy men who signed the Declaration of Independence were deeply in debt, or stood to benefit in some way by the change.

Dignity was something more essentially important than the independence for which the Sons of Liberty were so desperately fighting. Independence, for the Loyalists, meant "the severance of those ties of which a colonist ought to be proudest." Colonel Chandler, graduate of Yale College and ranked thirteenth in his class in dignity of family (according to the pleasing custom of his time), wrote from Nova Scotia: "I wish her (my country) to support a dignified character: that can only be done by dignified actions, one of which is punctual adherence to Publick Faith and Virtue." New England, straining for refinement, had gone so far that when the unprecedented events of 1774 came, its leading exponents were not exactly to blame because they could not violate their dearest traditions and keep step.

There was a more troublesome element, politically, among the refugees, largely disbanded soldiers and artisans, who went to Ontario. Jealous of what had been done for their compatriots in Nova Scotia, they clamorously petitioned the Governor and the august Throne itself, till they got what they wanted. They had hardly settled down before they were drawn into a violent struggle for responsible government which ended in rebellion. But down in the real stronghold of the Tory exiles, things moved slowly and decorously. Life was coloured by the sparsity and austerity of New England. Loyalty had come, in a decade or two, to mean supporting existing conditions, right or wrong. Royal prerogative had a sweet sound, and democracy was something coarse and vulgar. The important thing was to keep the lamp of culture burning. Boston gentility and Boston erudition were pallid beside the real thing in Halifax and Saint John. The Source had been taken up bodily and transplanted, like the Royal Coat of Arms from the Old State House, Boston, which has hung, since the Revolution, in Trinity Church, Saint John.

This attitude did not, curiously, involve the Atlantic provinces in an early struggle for free schools. Education was a luxury not for the masses. Those who wanted it must expect to pay for it. Culture being, unfortunately, dependent on more than will-power for nurture, the New England brand, with a scarcity of books, schools or leisure to cultivate the arts, began to disappear. But

although it practically died the slow, painful death of starvation, something closely related to it survived—a refinement which may be found in surprising places to-day. Men and women in bleak fishing villages, or isolated prairie shacks, read the classics, love poetry, sing the old songs, and actually find books and magazines a substitute for automobiles and radio. These people quixotically steer their children away from the money-making jobs, and urge them, at any sacrifice, to get a liberal education.

A good many traits that colour the Canadian scene may be traced back to the King's men. It is partly due to their high moral influence that the Dominion is held up as an example of a law-abiding country. Crime has never been quite the menacing problem it is in some places because justice, modelled like all Loyalist institutions, is swift and severe. But there is one inheritance, unquestionably reflected in Canadian personality, which is seldom acknowledged or considered—the deep embitterment of our Loyalist fathers. They came, the cat's paw of fate, to a country which had been batted back and forth so often between European powers that it had lost hope of ever having a fixed national status. They planted their roots in a soil still wet with the tears of the deported Acadians, bringing their own heartbreak and the thought of their homes and fair cultivated fields occupied, in triumph, in many cases, by their personal enemies. They deliberately left us a heritage of refinement. They could not prevent it being salted with the tears of sorrow and bitterness.

The memory of their fathers being tarred and feathered and robbed of their property, the traditions of the voyage on those overloaded transports, and the unspeakable hardships of that first interminable winter, were enough to turn them, in their children's eyes, to sainted martyrs in a holy cause. What is dearly bought is dearly valued. This background may explain why our country, which seems very English to Americans and very much Americanized to the English, should reveal streaks of an intensely patriotic, even nationalistic spirit. In proportion as they had suffered for it, the Crown and everything pertaining to it were the more to be cherished by the exiles. So the refinement they left, though a very precious legacy, was bred of an intensified colonialism.

It has been a mild boast that Canada, as far as literacy was concerned, began where many countries were content to leave off. This was not altogether an advantage. Since few of the refugees were able to rebuild their fortunes, and many died in poverty, progress was necessarily reversed. The Eastern provinces formed the habit of looking backward, not forward, to the age of gold.

To-day they are ghost-ridden. The present generation can never achieve significance or reality, can never expect to be more than vague, shadowy figures against the colourful background of the past.

Canada has been, in a way, almost as much as the Chinese, under the domination of her honorable ancestors. They overshadow every phase of our national life, but particularly the arts. Having the glorious example of its noble forebears everlastingly dinned into youth does not seem the best way to beget creative energy. The most talented of our children, fired by early examples of zeal in holding the fort of culture against the Philistines, have grown up to become educators (often eminent ones) of other people's children. They show less inclination to strike out and make patterns of their own. When they do turn to the arts, it is more often to follow safe paths tracked out by others. Canadian painters, particularly the Group of Seven, have been a notable exception: but it is significant that they went, mostly, to the far unsettled north-land, that was least hampered of any region by genteel tradition, for their inspiration.

Canadian literature has suffered from refinement being made a fetish in our country. It seems impossible to break with the romantic past. That past, we know, is a rich mine of ore, but no one so far seems to have uncovered the real metal. The stirring early days have never come to life. Even Willa Cather could make the old French period no more than a beautiful, softly faded tapestry. And when our native writers depict present day Canada, that invisible, heavy hand of their forefathers who sided with the nice people is almost invariably on their work.

Except in very few cases, our critics have no reason to lose any sleep over what is described as "the preoccupation of modern writers with the poor people." Realism can never seriously invade our books because we seem to shy at certain aspects of life. There may never be a truly Canadian literature till we forget our blue blood and get back, unashamed, to our crudest beginnings, to the part of our past that was not so heroically preserved and handed down as tradition. It may mean digging up some incorrigibly human ancestors, thorough-going blackguards perhaps, who signed their names, much as it pains us to admit it, with an X; who were clothed, not so long ago either, in home-woven wool coloured with the famous and malodorous "blue dye"; and who found it difficult to see the picturesque side to a poverty that meant existing for a whole winter on eels, or digging up potatoes that had been planted to keep their children alive. When we can forget the highly cultivated

branches of our family tree and stop posing—putting our best foot forward—in order to live up to these precious ghosts, we may be at the beginning of some sort of growth.

Canada is still a young and sparsely settled country. Some day, when the new stream of blood which has flowed in, of recent years, from outside, has had time to merge with the old, it may dare to be its unpretentious self in the face of these shades. Then they will retire to their proper places, and leave the centre of the stage to us who are living.