

# LORD BRYCE'S ESTIMATE OF CANADA

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EVERY Canadian who has an opportunity of reading Lord Bryce's recent book, *Modern Democracies*, must turn with special interest to that section of it in which Canada is scrutinized, commended and warned. To see ourselves as others see us is wholesome both for individuals and for nations. It is of exceptional value when the candid critic is one who knows a great deal, whose mind is richly stored with materials for a comparative estimate, who is thus saved from either expecting anywhere the impossible or resting content anywhere with less than the attainable best, whose charity is proportioned to his knowledge, and whose abounding good will robs every unfavorable judgment of its sting. It would be hard to name a writer upon Canadian affairs in whom these qualifications are more happily blended than in Lord Bryce. In him the highest intellectual discipline of the learned class in England has been supplemented and reinforced by a long career in the practical administration of affairs. The political problems of our own continent riveted his attention a generation ago, and his book entitled *The American Commonwealth* has long remained one of the three or four best treatises extant upon the Government of the United States. Since then his period of service as British Ambassador at Washington brought him into close personal contact with those institutions which he had already studied from a distance, and we may be sure that to the mind of the British representative in America, Canadian interests must have been unceasingly present. That such official opportunities of examining our own national position would be used to the best advantage no one who knows Lord Bryce's intellectual habits could doubt, and the reflections he has given us in the present volume are perhaps more instructive than even the best we have had from him before. They are the outcome of a long life spent in the public service by one whose eyes were always open and whose mind was always hospitable to new truth.

There are special reasons, too, quite apart from his duties as

Ambassador to Washington, which intensified Lord Bryce's interest in Canada. Some of these he has now set before us. What concerns him in his recent book is the manifold phases of democratic government wherever such government is found, and he points out that our country exhibits a curious—almost unique—blend of the old world with the new. Whilst in economic and social conditions Canada is akin to the United States, she has closely followed the English model in political forms, traditions, and usages. This provides a test case, by which we may examine the capacity of British institutions to adapt themselves to a novel environment; and after so long a trial we should be able to judge whether these are in an adequate degree elastic, modifiable, susceptible of such change as will not destroy but rather more fully express the spirit which originally created them.

Lord Bryce has many a compliment for Canadian habits and conditions of life. With obvious references to other races that are less highly favoured, he congratulates us upon having our lot cast in a country where there is room for everyone for generations to come, where the ground is cumbered by few grievances yet unredressed, where resentment has no memory of ancient wrongs to feed itself upon, and where the worker is engulfed in "no slough of despondent misery." He would divide our people into "the rich and the less rich", for he feels that in Canada "one can hardly talk of the poor." These natural advantages he finds accompanied by some excellent features of Canadian temperament. On the whole there is good feeling between employers and wage-earners, and the bitterness of labour strife—so acute elsewhere—is little heard of except where masses of foreign immigrants to great cities like Montreal or Winnipeg have brought with them from distracted Europe the recollections and assumptions of the Class-War. Communist or Syndicalist doctrines are less popular among the poorest in Canada than among the corresponding folk in Australia or France. Lord Bryce notices that there is the utmost respect for courts of justice, and that lynch law is all but unknown. The "heavy artillery of vituperation" is indeed discharged at election times, but the proceedings of Parliament are orderly, there is little personal acrimony between leaders, and "that kindly *bonhommie* which is characteristic of Canadians generally, maintains itself even in the political arena." This most salutary state of things our author attributes in part to "the excellent institution of the Canadian Clubs." He regards these as of real service in bringing together men of different parties for friendly and non-partisan intercourse, so that over a lunch or a dinner table they may be

from time to time reminded that they are Canadians first and Liberals or Conservatives afterwards.

An appreciative word is spoken about our educational agencies, and about the general level of civic capacity. We are told that three or four of our universities are in the same front rank as the best nine or ten in Great Britain or the best twenty in the United States. In Ontario, the Maritime Provinces, and the Western Provinces Lord Bryce finds the schools both abundant and efficient, but he finds, too, that in the rural districts they are "rather too parsimoniously managed." Many a country teacher will think that this last phrase embodies too lenient a criticism, and teachers in the city will object to the implied suggestion that their own pay is adequate. One wonders whether our author wrote so because he has passed away from the lower House in which the language of denunciation is often fierce, and has acquired in the Gilded Chamber the restrained speech of the Lords, whose strongest epithet of blame is said to be the word "inconvenient." He can recall no rural population, except that of Switzerland, which is better qualified than ours for the duties of citizenship, or which has proved itself more ready to discharge them. Our press he thinks ably conducted, our people sound, and "haters of corruption in whatever form it appears." <sup>1</sup>Demagogism, which is supposed to be the special curse of democracies, has had singularly little vogue.

Although his book was projected, and its materials were in great part brought together, a good many years ago, Lord Bryce has been at pains to make it so far as possible up to date. He refers in the section on Canada to such recent developments as the Farmers' Party and the Association of Western Grain-Growers. But that some details have escaped even his vigilant eye is made clear when he surprises us with the statement that legislators in Ottawa receive only 2,500 dollars for their annual services! In dealing with the personnel of Parliament he notes the preponderance of lawyers,— "smaller than in Congress, and rather lower than in the British House of Commons." He has been told by some survivor of bygone times that in ability the average is lower than it was forty years ago, in the days of Macdonald, Mackenzie, and Edward Blake. Lord Bryce himself judges that "in every Canadian Cabinet there are two or three men equal to the average of a Cabinet in London or Washington." The Provincial Legislatures he thinks purer than those of most American States.

<sup>1</sup> Speaking of the scandals in American public administration which followed the Civil War, Lord Bryce says: "However, things slowly improved, and the republic conscience became as sensitive as it is now in New Zealand, and was in England from 1832 till 1914." One wonders what change he means to suggest in England after the last named date.

He tells us, however, of certain cases in which legislation has virtually extinguished private property without compensating the losers,—a thing forbidden to a State Legislature in the United States,—and that the courts have held such a law, however objectionable, to be within legal acceptance. But he notes that “to the adjustment of Labour disputes Canada has made one of the best contributions of recent years in an Act prescribing enquiry and delay when strikes are threatened.”

He has made a study, too, of the way in which a Canadian elector appears to decide upon the rival claims of candidates. The grievances of which our author has chiefly heard in travelling through the rural districts relate to the tariff and its effect in raising the price of manufactured goods, or to the undue power of great railroads and great companies in influencing legislation and controlling facilities for transport of crops. He observes that Catholic sentiment on the one hand, and anti-Roman bitterness on the other often disturb those decisions which the elector would otherwise reach in seeking to promote his strictly material interests. He thinks that party allegiance is still the primary motive with most, but in a passage which will endear him to the heart of Prohibitionists Lord Bryce exults in recording how public opinion took hold of the problem about the sale of intoxicants, and “did not wait for party politicians to trifle with it.”

There is a good deal in this section of the book about Quebec, and about the problem of racial blending in Canada. The writer regards religion—and not race—as the great dividing principle. The *habitant*, so far as he is still French at all, belongs to a France of the eighteenth rather than of the twentieth century, for he will have nothing to do with the radicalism and as little with the anti-clericalism which now prevail so strongly in the land of his ancestors. Lord Bryce thinks that during the last century the Roman priesthood has exercised a greater political influence in Quebec than in any other part of the world. But he points out that the party system, which in other respects he finds open so often to censure, has in this field a beneficial effect. It cuts across the lines of racial and religious difference, introducing another principle of division as a counteractive. On the issues which it raises English speakers are not seldom in agreement with French speakers, and Protestants with Catholics, so that each political party is composed of two elements, neither of which can afford to offend or alienate the other. The system has thus “associative as well as disruptive power.” With all its faults, the separating of the two races into provinces, so that each is dominant within its own sphere, seems

to Lord Bryce to have produced the highest degree of contentment and harmony which circumstances permitted, and he sees in this a signal proof of the insight shown by the framers of the British North America Act.

A suggestive and a very re-assuring estimate is offered of the relations between Canada and her great southern neighbor, a subject upon which this critic can speak with exceptional authority. He points out that the "Annexationism" of forty years ago has quite died away as a policy on our side of the line, while "only a few belated and unthinking persons in the United States" still cherish the thought of it. Our neighbors have almost ceased even to display that patronizing air by which Canadians were at one time offended. "Sensible men in both countries recognize the many reasons which make it better for each nation that it should continue to develop itself in its own fashion, upon its own historic lines, in cordial friendship with the other." The tariff no longer troubles; boundary questions have been settled; methods of arbitration have been provided to adjust controversy over water rights and railway transport.

Comparing the Canadian scheme of government with that of the United States, Lord Bryce notes that at first sight our own seems to be the less democratic, but that in one fundamental respect it is the more so. On the one hand the power of the people is not here so frequently invoked, we do not elect our judges by popular suffrage, and we have no officer chosen by a plebiscite who wields the enormous authority of the American President. We are content with the periodical election of representatives to a Legislature. On the other hand, our Legislatures are not fettered by any of those limits which both Federal and State Constitutions prescribe. Canadians, too, are less concerned about abstract principles, less given to the adoration of words and phrases like "liberty", equality""; "sovereignty of the People", than are either the Americans or the French. This is not because they value such ideals less. It simply means that such lip-service to the ideals is not here "a self-assertive, obstructive, gesticulative part of the national consciousness." The principles and formulae of popular government are taken for granted rather than dwelt upon, and the question at issue in a contest is, as a rule, that of the quickest, surest way to a desired result rather than the theoretic justifying of the result itself. Party Organization is looser than in the United States. We have never had anything really comparable to the "Spoils System," nor has the pressure of great interests and party machines upon our Legislatures ever roused such resent-

ment as to cause an agitation like that in many American States for the Initiative and the Referendum.

Lord Bryce's eulogy is all the more significant because it is not prompted, like so many encomiums which Canada has of late received, by mere effusive gratitude for war service. He at least did not require the spectacle of the last six years to make him realize for the first time the great qualities of our Canadian people. Throughout his book there are only occasional references to the struggle that began in 1914. Although in such passages he speaks with warmth and even with passion, he reminds us that the world-transforming events of the war are still too recent and that their ultimate effect is still too uncertain, to serve as material for scientific inference in social theory. These are often being used, indeed, as a plausible basis for political guess-work, but it is not guess-work that Lord Bryce aims to set before us. The Canada which he tries to estimate is not just the Canada of our own day, but the great democratic commonwealth that has been tried and tested during the half-century since Confederation.

One has the more confidence too in his judgement because what he has given us is by no means all praise. Lord Bryce has many a mordant comment to offer upon our national foibles. Here, he tells us,—as among the English-speaking peoples generally—there is a love of political strife so strong as to be able to dispense with political doctrines. "Party seems to exist for its own sake. In Canada ideas are not needed to make parties, for these can live by heredity, and, like the Guelfs and Ghibellines of mediaeval Italy, by memories of past combats." Someone has told him, and he quotes it as a thing "believed", that few elections would stand if either party pressed the law against its opponents. He thinks it probable that of corruption among Canadian legislators there is less than is alleged, but more than is ever proved. He mentions as a lapse from civic virtue "the receipt of pecuniary inducements at election times," and rather invidiously specifies Ontario as a place where this habit is not infrequent. But he adds that it is just as prevalent in Ohio, on the other side of Lake Erie, and one may guess that he could have quoted a good many other parallels with equal truth. The atmosphere of two or three of our Provincial Legislatures is, he says, "unwholesome", and they "enjoy a permanently low reputation"—like the Irish lady about whom her son said that she enjoyed very bad health. In the state of Canadian feeling towards Ministries and Legislatures Lord Bryce discerns an unmistakable *malaise*, a dissatisfaction and uneasiness because "something is wrong," even though those

who complain are not prepared to say just where the cause lies. The charge that he most frequently heard was that of opportunism.

Again, our critic has to deplore in Canada what he deplored long ago in the United States, namely the reluctance of the best qualified men to enter upon a political career. Some of the reasons by which he explained this unfortunate feature of American experience may be recapitulated, for they have their application to Canada as well. There is not, as in England, a hereditary class born with the tradition and almost with the instinct for disinterested public leadership. The principle *Noblesse oblige* does not operate at all, and, if its perversions are wanting, so are its benefits. Resentment against class privilege and passion against religious inequalities—two agents which have been extraordinarily potent in calling forth the genius of reform elsewhere—are happily without objects by which they might be aroused. The division between Federal and State or Provincial Legislatures has the effect of reducing the talent which is drawn to each. Theoretically, every man should go where his own work lies, but in practice the result is not a double gain so much as a double loss. The lowered importance which such separation gives to each branch of government deters that large and able class whose motives are partly public spirit and partly private ambition, a class with whose services in our imperfect society we can ill afford to dispense. Moreover, so many other fields are open, fields of adventure and of promise in business life, fields not yet over-crowded but alluring enough through the very magnitude of the scale on which things are done, where the opportunity of organising talent is great and its rewards are dazzling.

Among these causes which he noted as active in the United States the last is emphasised as still more important in Canada, for the motive of personal advantage which stimulates so many adroit party workers in the great Republic is hardly felt among ourselves. "The places to be won are too few to enter into the mind of the average private citizen",—a fact which surely has its good side as well as its bad. Perhaps a more striking and instructive suggestion which the author makes is upon the inadequacy of the British Parliamentary system to bring out just that sort of public leaders which the Canadian situation calls for. What is needed here, he points out, is neither that eloquence in debate nor those arts of political intrigue which the Legislature of an old country tends to develop. For Canada's greatest problem is of a type that is not likely to be solved except by men of gifts very different from these. That in which, according to Lord Bryce, we

have most seriously failed is, in devising the right method to conserve our natural resources, so that forests and minerals may be turned to the best account, individual speculators prevented from preying upon the national wealth, and the "unearned increment" secured for the benefit of the people as a whole. Men with the requisite species of business aptitude are rather unlikely to shine in the parliamentary forum. "Canadian politicians have not, any more than those of Australia and the United States, searched for such men, and taken pains to stock the public service with them."

But, while our critic has thus shown a keen eye for many of our imperfections, and a perfect readiness to speak his mind about them, there is probably much in his praise of Canada which Canadians will suspect to be kindly exaggeration. This attitude of self-censure Lord Bryce would no doubt commend as an excellent sign that we are on the right track. There will be an interrogative raising of many a reader's eye-brow at the statement that in Ontario, the Maritime Provinces, and the Western Provinces almost no illiteracy exists except among the new arrivals from Europe. Some will ask whether it is really true that every native English-speaking Canadian is educated, reads at least one newspaper, and as a rule takes intelligent interest in public affairs, national and local. Is it wholly so that the chief aim in municipal elections is to find the best men of the neighborhood, and that national politics are not allowed to bias such a choice? And do the Canadian Clubs, admirable as they were in their inception, really execute that great, harmonizing work which this book ascribes to them? Let us hope so, even although it is hard to suppress a doubt. At all events let the Executives of Canadian Clubs, when they see this account of what they are supposed to be doing, rouse themselves from their lethargy, and endeavour to make the compliment more easily defensible by the time the next edition of this book appears.

Again, many will regard it as unfortunate that so little is said about those Canadian questions which have arisen as an outcome of the Great War. Omitting a few phrases and a few sentences, Lord Bryce might have published this part of his book in June 1914, and it may be urged that in a sense which far transcends that of the calendar such a fact is enough to make any treatise on political science sadly antiquated. The author might indeed reply with great force that it is far too soon to judge with any confidence how the recent upheaval will in the end affect the fortunes of Canadian democracy. At the same time one would have welcomed even the conjectures of so sagacious a mind about the probable issue, for example, of Union Government, about the new *status*

of Canada as a signatory to the Peace Treaty, or about those problems of imperial re-organization that the London Conference of last month was summoned to consider.

It is of interest to notice how, seventy years ago, a great Scottish man of letters raised one profound question by which Lord Bryce is now exercised,—the question whether democracy may be expected to succeed better or to fail worse in a new country than in an old. Thomas Carlyle's method both of forming and of expressing his opinions was all his own. In *Latter Day Pamphlets* we have neither that cautious avoidance of the over-statement, nor that patient amassing of facts and testing of hypotheses by closely sifted experience of which Lord Bryce has given us so notable a pattern. The Chelsea prophet would no doubt have dismissed such a work as *Modern Democracies* with a contemptuous shrug, perhaps with a mordant epigram about "the burrowing and tunnelling beaver intellects." But, if he had nothing of the exactness of science, that old prophet had much of the intuition of genius, and it may serve some purpose to recall what he said.

In 1850 Carlyle protested against the constant citing of America as proof that democracy is a huge success. What was good in the government of the United States had, he maintained, been transplanted thither from monarchic England, and it was by the tradition which the first colonists had taken with them, rather than by their crude experiments in framing a new scheme for themselves, that they had so far prospered. "Their Constitution, such as it may be, was made here, not there; went over with them from the Old Puritan English workshop ready-made." They had taken with them above all the English "reverence for the Constable's Staff", which was assuredly not the outcome of a democratic temper of mind.

Moreover, in his view, the fact that their country was new, undeveloped, with vast resources waiting to be tapped, made political problems of less importance and skill in solving them less urgent. Such was precisely the field in which governing, whether good or bad, made least difference, for there was ample room for all kinds of people, and far more depended upon individual initiative than upon all that government could do or could forbear. Carlyle insisted with much force that in the early period of the United States, with "half a world of untilled land," populations that respected the constable could live almost *without* government, but that some day America too would have to "strain its energies and crack its sinews in thousand-fold wrestle with the Pythons and mud-demons." His point seems to have been that, just as town-planning may be

neglected without obvious disaster when there is only a house here and there, but becomes more and more vital as the space fills up, and we then deplore the easy-going indifference which prevented our looking ahead, so in a developing State carelessness about government brings increased danger with the lapse of time. The real trial of democracy in the United States was, he felt, yet to come, and it would prove harder, not easier, as the waste places were filled, and rule of thumb had to be supplemented by that scientific ordering which he thought the very contradiction of democratic equality. He puts this in a truly Carlylean outburst:

Cease to brag to me of America, and its model institutions and constitutions. To men in their sleep there is nothing granted in this world: nothing, or as good as nothing, to men that sit idly caucusing and ballot-boxing on the graves of their heroic ancestors, saying "It is well, it is well!" Corn and bacon are granted; not a very sublime boon, on such conditions; a boon, moreover, which on such conditions cannot last! . . . My friend, brag not yet of our American cousins! Their quantity of cotton, dollars, industry, and resources I believe to be almost unspeakable; but I can by no means worship the like of these.

So many of Carlyle's dark forecasts about democracy have been disproved that his critics just at present tend to attach less value to his social speculation than it really deserves. His emphasis upon the value of the inherited British tradition for the upbuilding of the United States—and of course still more for that of Canada—is fully corroborated by what Lord Bryce has to say. To what, our present critic asks, must we ascribe the splendid freedom of our people from those faults so characteristic of some democracies,—the spirit of license, the contempt of authority, the negligence in enforcing laws? Whence comes the strength of our executive, the efficiency of our police, the rigour of criminal justice, the habit of obedience to law? He answers that we owe this in great part to the custom formed by our ancestors under governments that were then monarchical in fact as well as in name. For, while it is true that special strength belongs to those laws which are of a people's own making, there is strength too in the sentiment formed when authority was invested with an awe and a sacredness which have now departed, but whose practical effect long outlives the belief or even the superstitions that first consolidated it.

Lord Bryce, however, seems to dissent strongly from that other view of Carlyle that the most favourable period—or at least the period least unfavorable—to democratic success is in the *youth* of a new nation. It is to Canada's youth that he traces most of

her faults; it is in her growing maturity that he expects to see these corrected; and it is from democratic forces themselves that he looks for the correction to come. An undeveloped land has many political temptations from which an old land is free. Its centres are scattered over vast areas, among which the means of communication have to be gradually formed. The elements of its population are drawn from the most varied quarters, and it takes time to bring these into harmonious mutual understanding. Rival demands for assistance from public funds, struggles for favour out of the public purse by representatives of districts far removed from the seat of government, the lack for a long time of a trained and capable Civil Service, in a word the *slow integration* of a people in which there are so many different factors to be integrated, must make the task of democracy not less but very much more severe in the new world than in the old. The dishonest, who like the poor are always with us, are hardest to watch where the rewards of individual dishonesty are amplest and the machinery of watching has to be created. But for all this we may hope that time will be the cure, and we are cheered by the knowledge that the cure is, by comparison with the past, seen to be already well advanced. The public conscience may well become quicker and more effective in its action "when the pace of material growth slackens, when temptations are less insistent, and men cease to palliate the peccadilloes of those who are "developing the resources of the country'."

There is, no doubt, much in Lord Bryce's estimate, as there would be in any such estimate which could be offered, to provoke controversy regarding the degree in which it is right or wrong. But in provoking controversy he also provokes thought, and there is no higher function which a literary man can fulfil. The gratitude of all Canadians is due to this veteran publicist for so discriminating a vindication of their high achievement in the democratic progress of the world. And gratitude is due, perhaps, still more for the service he has done in pointing out, with all frankness but also in all friendliness, wherein Canada has progress yet to make, wherein she can improve upon her own past, wherein she can learn from the scrutiny of other nations. Lord Bryce bids us look forward with radiant optimism to the future of our young country, which has inherited so many of the dignities from the old land that is our mother, but whose native strength is still the strength of youth. Whether our festive song is *The Maple Leaf* or *O Canada, mon pays, mes amours*, he would bid us take pride in the Dominion which English and French have co-operated in building up, and so rise to the duties of our common citizenship that those

who come after us will have reason to feel prouder still. Whence can we draw a finer inspiration than from that considered judgment with which so well qualified a critic sums up his review? Here are the closing words:

Canada is well prepared by the character of her people, by their intelligence and their law-abiding habits, to face whatever problems the future may bring, finding remedies for such defects as have disclosed themselves in her government, and making her material prosperity the basis of a pacific and enlightened civilization.