

“Self-Respect and Hopefulness”: The Webbs in the Canadian West

GEORGE FEAVER

Late on a hot summer night in mid-July 1911, a fatigued Sidney and Beatrice Webb signed the guest register at the Royal Alexandra Hotel in Winnipeg, and retired to their rooms. The day had ended none too soon for the usually imperturbable Sidney. At home in London the chief architect of the Fabian Society's standard tactic of “permeation,” or patience in politics, he was on the verge of forgetting to practise what he had for so long preached. Sidney Webb was nothing if not a literal-minded man (he found pleasure in reading *Kelley's London Directory* or perusing railway time-tables), and he recorded the reason that he had concluded his day in such an impatient mood in a diary the Webbs kept of their Canadian tour.¹ “We reached Winnipeg late at night,” he wrote, “and scrambled out of the station in the dark — only to find that the CPR hotel entrance was at the other end of the platform, the last door, not marked by any lighted sign or prominent notice board as to its being the Hotel Entrance.” The circumstances of the Webbs' arrival at Winnipeg were not unique. Only the day before, encountering similar difficulty in finding their hotel at Port Arthur, Sidney had rendered his frustration the basis of a grand sociological generalization. “We noted here,” he had observed, “a typical instance of what we call the Canadian lack of explicitness, or failure to realise that what is known to the local inhabitant has nevertheless to be told to the stranger . . . We have seen this piece of unconscious and suicidal[ly] naive self-conceit again and again. . . .”

¹ *Passfield Papers (PP)*, British Library of Political and Economic Science, London School of Economics, Section I, 2. *Diary of Beatrice Webb*, vol. 29, 26 June-7 August 1911. The original is contained on seventy-four folio sheets. Of these twenty-six are in Beatrice's hand, the remainder in Sidney's. In this paper, material quoted in the text which has no footnote reference is taken from this diary. In “The Webbs in Canada: Fabian Pilgrims on the Canadian Frontier,” *Canadian Historical Review*, no. 3 (September 1977): 263-76, I have set out a more general overview of the diary for the entire course of the Canadian tour. And in a more recent essay, “The Webbs as Pilgrims,” *Encounter*, 50, no. 3 (March 1978): 23-32, I have attempted to show the relationship of the Webbs' travel diaries to the continuing development of their ideological outlook.

Celebrated in England as prominent socialist publicists and founders of the London School of Economics, the Webbs had come to the threshold of the Canadian west virtually unnoticed, after a long, dusty day in the train. Since their arrival in Canada, disembarking at Quebec City on June 26, they had stopped over at Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto, meeting with businessmen, civil servants, editors and academics — and ahead of them lay a further fortnight in western Canada as “the firm of Webb,” en route from England to the Far East on their second world tour, made their way to the Pacific coast. That their passage across the country was undertaken in conditions of comparative anonymity was partly by design. Drained by an exhausting regimen of book-writing and a propaganda campaign on behalf of their recently concluded *Minority Report* on the Poor Law, the socialist partners had left home eager for a quiet sojourn in Canada, with time to rebuild their energies for the heavier touristic demands they felt awaited them in Asia. Partly, too, the provincialism of the young Dominion may be said to have contributed its share to the achievement of their wished-for respite from the public gaze. The Winnipeg newspaper, it seems, had little real idea who the visiting Britons were in noting, perfunctorily (and erroneously, as far as Sidney’s name was concerned), on its “Society” page the day after their departure from Winnipeg that “Mr. Stanley Webb, the noted political economist, and his wife, who have been guests at the Royal Alexandra for the past few days, [have] left for the coast.”²

Sidney’s frustration with the Canadian “lack of explicitness” aside, the Webbs were glad to have arrived finally in western Canada. In the east, they had found the cities disappointingly emptied of the “‘upper professional’ stratum” they might normally have wished to interview. Ottawa was especially quiet. “We have nothing to say about Ottawa,” Sidney wrote, “the Governor General, all the Ministers, the Legislature, and even the Librarian of the Parliamentary Library were away.” Politically, the reason the capital resembled a ghost town was that the Prime Minister was in England at the coronation celebrations, and the Conservative leader, Mr. Borden, taking advantage of Laurier’s absence, was conducting a three-week political reconnaissance of the west, in the critical run-up to the September 1911 “Reciprocity” election. The newspapers everywhere the Webbs went were full of stories and pictures of the coronation of George V and Queen Mary, a Canadian favourite being a photograph of Laurier in an open state carriage accompanied by his Australian

² *Winnipeg Telegram*, 15 July 1911, p. 6.

counterpart, Mr. Fisher. "EIGHT THOUSAND CANADIANS AT THE CORONATION," the banner headline announced in Ottawa while the Webbs were there, adding, in a quaint subhead, that "Sir Donald Mann Rather Liked the Gorgeousness of It."³

Another reason the eastern cities had seemed depopulated was that in the summer of 1911 they were sweltering through a severe heat wave. Those who could do so escaped to the cooler countryside; others, less fortunate, sought respite by camping out in their thousands in city parks. "An unparalleled tropical heat," reported Sidney, with unusual hyperbole, to Bernard Shaw.⁴ Forest fires raged out of control in northern woods, the most spectacular being in the Temiskaming region of Ontario, where in the second week of July the city of Cochrane was destroyed with the loss of hundred of lives, a natural tragedy characterized in the press as rivalling the great San Francisco earthquake of 1906. The Webbs had been understandably relieved during their stay at Montreal to accept a kind invitation proffered by Professor C. W. Colby of McGill University's History Department to spend three days at his summer camp on Lake Memphremagog, near the Vermont border in the Eastern Townships. "We were glad to have this view of 'camping'," the visitors later wrote in the diary about their pleasant introduction to the great Canadian summer pastime. "The lake was dotted with these 'camps,' really summer cottages of every grade . . . where people played at being simple for several months of the year and which were shut up in the winter." The Webbs, who thought the setting "like Windermere on a much larger scale," simply "leant back and enjoyed it — bathing, canoeing, and going [on] trips in the motor boat."

Back in the city, with temperatures continuing at record highs, they had decided to cut as short as possible the remainder of their stay in the east. Beatrice wrote to her sister Mary Playne after a one day visit to Toronto (where they went "by night to escape the heat") that their plan was "to make our dash Westward . . . it is very hot & I think we shall get out of the Eastern towns as soon as we can."⁵ Their further itinerary had subsequently brought them, following a forty-hour steamship voyage across Lakes Huron and Superior, first to Port Arthur, and then beyond by rail to Winnipeg. At first they had thought this leg of their Canadian journey

³ *Ottawa Free Press*, 4 July 1911. Perhaps understandably, Sir Donald, the railway magnate, came back from the coronation "a staunch Imperialist."

⁴ *George Bernard Shaw Papers*, British Museum, Add. 50553, ff. 90-92, 29 October 1911.

⁵ *PP*, II, 4.e. (18), 26 June 1911.

scenically rather uninteresting, "except for the passage of the narrow strait between the two lakes and the Sault St. Marie Canal." But as the weather became gradually "bearable on this shady deck," their spirits had revived. Regaining her usual, rather intimidating composure, Beatrice noted pluckily of the heat, in writing shortly to another sister, that "we seem to feel it less [than] the Canadians themselves."⁶ By then, too, Sidney, the Fabian Society's corporeal encyclopedia of facts and figures, had rebounded enough to have uncovered the interesting fact in their tour book that they were traversing the most frequented waterway in the world, "taken annually by five times as many vessels and by twice as much tonnage, as the Suez Canal."

Finally arrived in Winnipeg, the Webbs decided to use the prairie city as their jumping-off place for a sort of holidaying sociologists' gambol across the pioneering west. In preparation, they stripped themselves of all their luggage except two small handbags, sending their trunks and other items directly to Victoria to await their arrival. They looked forward eagerly to the adventure of the two weeks which lay ahead and in the outcome they were not to be disappointed. In western Canada, indeed, they would experience "the pleasantest episodes of our Canadian journey . . . staying at Ranches & Mountain Hotels, & enjoying ourselves watching the life of the settlers on the Prairies & the fruit valleys, & observing the glories of the Canadian Rockies."⁷

Once rested, the Webbs spent three days at Winnipeg — "very pleasantly filled up by repeated motor drives about the charming residence streets" in motor-cabs, "which every hospitable Winnipegian insists on driving you about in as a great luxury, which they are on this side." Only one household (a bank clerk's, the socialists noted sardonically) "had the courage" to invite them to dinner. Their host, a nephew of Colonel James Biggar, then of the Dominion Militia, whom they had met in Ottawa, served them "an excellent plain meal, with a temporary servant," and he and his new wife impressed them as "simple, unpretentious, excellent young people." John Bruce Walker, the other Winnipegger to appear in the diary, struck them in rather a different light. The "breezy, optimistic, energetic" Federal Immigration Superintendent showed the Webbs around his Arrivals Depot and described the way in which he looked after the enormous stream of immigrants cleared there on their way to pioneering lives in the west (since March, the newspapers estimated in early July,

⁶ *PP*, II, 4.e. (19), 9 July 1911.

⁷ *PP*, II, 4.e. (20), 27 July 1911; II, 4.e. (23), 12 August 1911.

the CPR had brought out over 110,000 new arrivals).⁸ Proudly paternalistic about his job, Walker "would admit scarcely any failures." But later, when he had left them, the social reformers took it upon themselves to observe the arrival of a trainload of fresh immigrants, and "were not impressed with the way they were looked after. They were left to struggle their way to the Immigration Depot, with the usual lack of explicitness — and apparently only those went thither who chose to do so — some went at once out into the waiting room and the street." Sidney, like most social scientists enamoured of a pet hypothesis, seemed to find evidence of his "lack of explicitness" generalization wherever he turned.

Winnipeg struck the Webbs as "a city of highly selected business men — men who had deliberately settled there as the place where most money could be made in real estate, store keeping, as well as in the professions." It was "not provincial — it was essentially cosmopolitan — a gateway between the East and the West — and a resting-place for men of all races." It was at Winnipeg that the Britons first experienced the sensation of being really in the west: "There was an 'open air' feeling about the city — as if the people felt themselves actually on the prairie, and the giant grain elevators breaking the line of the horizon of Prairie seem the material manifestation of this union of city life with the surrounding thousands of miles of half-cultivated land with its beyond of unbroken and untrodden prairie."

From Winnipeg, the Webbs continued on by train to stay at the 3,000-acre wheat farm, near Pense, Saskatchewan, of Gerald Spring-Rice, the brother of an English acquaintance.⁹ Spring-Rice had been one of the earliest settlers in the area. Beginning with a wooden "shack" on the bare prairie, he had over twenty-five years steadily built up his property, so that the Spring-Rice homestead (to which the local station-master motored the Fabians), now a picturesque gabled cottage surrounded by delightful vegetable and flower gardens and framed by low-lying shrub-

⁸ *Montreal Daily Star*, 4 July 1911.

⁹ Gerald Spring-Rice was the younger brother of the distinguished British diplomatist Sir Cecil Spring-Rice, British Ambassador at Washington in succession to James Bryce, 1912-18. In Stephen Gwynn (ed.), *The Letters and Friendships of Sir Cecil Spring-Rice*, vol. I, (London: 1929), p. 46, there is a brief account of Sir Cecil's visit to Gerald's ranch at Pense in 1886, shortly after his brother had emigrated. It would appear to corroborate the Webbs' account of the casualness of the place. "You couldn't have jollier companions," the Old Etonian wrote home. "The only thing I don't like is sleeping in a bed with someone else, and I got out of that by sleeping on the floor in the kitchen." Gerald Spring-Rice was nearly 50 when the Great War broke out a few years after the Webbs' visit, but insisted on active service in the Canadian army; he was killed in France in May 1916.

bery, was the apparent social centre of gravity in the neighbourhood. When the Webbs arrived, they found the Spring-Rices "directing 'the Sports' — an annual picnic of all the settlers round about them — with their wives and families and their teamsters and labourers."

On closer inspection, the visitors discovered that the homestead "combined charm and slovenliness in quite an original way." Beatrice, in normal life the hostess of a celebrated London Embankment *salon*, was struck by the contrast between the out-of-doors charm of the ranch and the confusion and dirt inside the house, which was "full of old boots, shoes, leggings, of disused implements, of tins and cans of potted food — no bath and very scanty arrangements for washing" — this, she observed with puzzlement, despite the presence of three maids and eight farm hands. She concluded that the untidiness must derive from the Spring-Rices' sense of their duty to "rough it," giving as her reason the observation that Gerald Spring-Rice was "always in his shirt with his sleeves rolled up above the elbow — except on Sundays when he put his coat on, however hot it was!" The social atmosphere of the little prairie community, Beatrice noted approvingly in a letter to Kate Courtney, was decidedly egalitarian: the ranchers were "a delightfully open-hearted lot, all calling each other by their Christian names & without distinctions between the 'hands' and the settlers — except that the hands were served first by the settler's wife, as 'they had had their breakfast first'."¹⁰

There were long discussions with Spring-Rice, an unwitting specimen destined for inclusion in the Webbian gallery of Canadian types. Beatrice thought him, beneath the rough-and-ready settler's manner, an attractive, cultivated man, despite the fact that he "retained all the old Whig opinions of his set in England." The Webbs liked his optimism about western Canada and its political and social democracy. Beatrice confessed, too, that as an Englishwoman she found it "encouraging" to reflect that the national origins of this "natural Patriarch" of the little community of settlers drawn from all parts of Canada, America and the Old World were British. She pronounced him "the best type of English Pioneer, a curious combination of the country gentleman and the working farmer, the capitalist entrepreneur and the official of a working-class Co-operative Society." The account Spring-Rice gave his guests of "the friendliness of the settlers to each other — their co-operation in the use of machinery, of telephones, of water, and the general good fellowship of the 'Coolie'" made a deep impression on them. The sense of sharing, of the spirit of

¹⁰ *PP*, II, 4.e. (20), 27 July 1911.

social equality and community purpose, combined with the “peculiar charm” of “a land which gives beautiful mystic distances, and the perfect circle of a horizon melting into the soft sky tone,” appealed especially to Beatrice’s romantic imagination.

After the Spring-Rices’, there was a night at Regina, a go-ahead prairie town that had “taken itself seriously.” They found there a fine parliament building, a large park and broad streets stretching out confidently into the prairie. The great stone bank, the elevators, the churches, schools and municipal buildings were “all on a big scale, which gives the little town an air of overwhelming self-respect.” The diary entry continues with the striking observation that “self-respect and hopefulness is the note of all the Western Canadian cities.” Regina, like other prairie towns they had passed through, seemed “a sort of Club House” for the male settlers, who came away from their ranches to spend Sundays in town. Beatrice wondered, in such an obviously male-dominant culture, about “the inevitable woman, and how she is dealt with?” Elsewhere, she referred pointedly to the special hardships for women on the prairie, noting the “sensational stories” they had heard of women not uncommonly going mad under the strain of “perpetual physical toil and constant loneliness.”¹¹

The westward itinerary beyond Regina called for four days at Banff and Lake Louise. In common with most others who first visit the Canadian Rockies, the Webbs were moved by the “extraordinarily varied . . . combinations of snow-clad mountains, rocks, rivers & lakes.” Beatrice judged the region “a wonderful expanse of beautiful scenery — no where quite so magnificent as our European Alps — but with a remoteness and wilderness which makes it in some ways superior.” Whether “the inflowing American tourist” would destroy the serenity and uniqueness of this wilderness paradise seemed to Mrs. Webb, who seldom missed an opportunity to point up the faults of Americans, a question of immediate concern. “The American tourist has taken possession,” she wrote in a magisterial diary entry, “and different varieties of the American twang, different kinds of American booming commonplace, resound right through CPR Hotels and sleeping cars.” The Fabians soon discovered that the Americans were not the sole menace to be encountered in the mountains during a Canadian summer. Leaving the “stuffy and noisy” train after a twelve-hour journey to Sicamous Junction, they found themselves “enveloped in a cloud of mosquitoes.” Respite from their relentless attacks meant replacing a natural by a man-made misery — “a hot night at the Hotel listening to

¹¹ *PP*, II, 4.e. (23), 12 August 1911.

the CPR freight trains thundering through and the insistent bellow of the engines as they shunted to and fro."

Consolation came with the Webbs' arrival, after a further train and steamer trip to the Okanagan Valley, at the Somerset Aikins' fruit farm at Naramata, British Columbia. Mrs. Aikins, the sister of Professor Colby, had insisted that, though she herself would be away, the English travellers must stop over there on their way to the coast, so as to observe at first hand the most famous of B.C.'s fruit farming districts. Their stay at Naramata was to prove one of the highlights of the Canadian tour. Sidney, always prosaic, liked it, according to his wife, because "at last he had enough fruit!" The sources of Beatrice's own attraction seem, as usual, to have been more complex. More than one commentator on the personality of Beatrice Webb has noted the sense of unfulfilled religious yearning that runs throughout her manuscript diaries and letters. At Pense, Saskatchewan, the "mystic distances" had appealed to this spiritual side; and similarly, at Naramata, the more serious-minded of the partners found that "nature was quite weirdly beautiful — especially in the evening lights." Certainly there was something in the atmosphere of the place that appealed to the creative energies of Mrs. Aikins' son, Carroll Aikins. In years to come, this remarkable figure would construct Italianate gardens and extensive stone walls, create a thriving theatre atop the orchard packing-house (the Indians were apparently the best audience: "They were just fascinated. You could hear the intake of their breath," according to a surviving resident of the area), and build, eventually, a stately home magnificently sited beside the lake, which remains to this day a striking local showcase.¹² Naramata appears, too, to have had something to do with the unusual direction, in frontier Canada, of Aikins' psychic energies. A romantic and visionary, he published a few years after the Webbs' stay at Naramata a volume of religiously oriented poems; more significantly, he and his wife shared an intense interest in theosophy and the study of Oriental philosophy, which culminated in his translation of George Grimm's *Buddhist Wisdom: The Mystery of the Self*.

In contrast with the meagre domestic amenities at the Spring-Rices', the Webbs were clearly delighted with the elegantly appointed bungalow which awaited their arrival at Naramata. "We found ourselves," Beatrice enthused,

with bath room and easy chairs, books and writing materials, even cigarettes — a quite excellent man-servant who served sumptuous meals and talked to

¹² The fullest treatment is Betty Clough's recent "Carroll Aikins," *Proceedings of the Okanagan Historical Society*, 1978, pp. 116-22.

us confidentially — altogether a veritable paradise for two hot and dusty travellers. The countryside had quite extraordinary charms and in the evening light, the Prairie and the Mountains, the pine and sage brush and the weird forms of the bare stone and earth cliffs, became almost magical in its strange beauty.

“How delightful,” the diary entry goes on, “would we be on the Sunday — the anniversary of our marriage — with time to write letters, browse among the books, and take in all the charm of the valley!” But the following day was to prove itself “an odd experience.” As the Webbs awaited eight o’clock breakfast, two unannounced callers — “a strange, dwarf-like man with a shy-looking young working man” — drove up, made their way to the doorstep, and greeted the disconcerted Fabians as “comrades!” At Winnipeg, Carroll Aikins had told them about a colourful, if slightly mottoid “character,” who was the chemist of the town across the lake, and prided himself on being the only Socialist in the valley. Aikins had said he would arrange for him to call on the Webbs while they were at Naramata; in retrospect, they wished they had then politely but firmly conveyed the impression that they would prefer to be left to their own devices. Mr. J. W. S. (“Jack”) Logie, the founder of the Summerland Drug Company, had been an unsuccessful contestant in the Socialist cause in several B.C. provincial elections.¹³ He introduced his companion as an English-born elementary school teacher who, suffering from phthisis, had come out to western Canada for his health.

Sidney and Beatrice thought they had been favoured with a morning call, so invited the two to join them for breakfast. The eagerness with which they accepted was a harbinger of events yet to transpire. It was to be a long day. The two admiring intruders stayed to lunch, and then to tea — and then, talking on, to dinner. Enjoying themselves, as evidently they were in such distinguished company, and oblivious of their effect on their captive hosts, they eventually announced they were staying the night! “It was rather a terrible affliction,” Beatrice wrote resignedly the next day, of these uninvited celebrants of their wedding anniversary.

Logie, a self-styled Marxian Socialist, seemed to them “a good sort of fellow”; but though well read, he was “hopelessly impractical.” He was keen to the point of tedium to tell the Webbs all there was to know about

¹³ “Early Medical Services in the Okanagan Valley,” *Proceedings of the Okanagan Historical Society*, 1948, p. 132. For the general background to early socialism in B.C., see A. R. McCormack, “The Emergence of the Socialist Movement in British Columbia,” *BC Studies*, no. 21 (Spring 1974), pp. 3-27, and Walter Young, “Ideology, Personality, and the Origin of the CCF in British Columbia,” *BC Studies*, no. 32 (Winter 1976-77), pp. 139-62.

the Canadian socialist movement, and only too eager to provide them with manifestoes and copies of various Canadian socialist newspapers. And he was also full of questions about England and the Labour Party, which the travellers, virtual prisoners in their elegant little bungalow, had no alternative but to entertain. As the day wore on, the elementary school teacher revealed himself to be bitter and abusive of everything Canadian — “the most hopeless type of colonist, with no physical strength and great intellectual pretensions without intellectual capacity.” Intensive exposure left the Webbs with the impression that both of their new acquaintances were “misfits of a pronounced type.”

Their introduction to this admittedly limited sample of Canadian socialists, indeed, led the partners to wonder aloud whether *all* socialists in Canada were bound to be misfits:

How can you hope for a socialist party in a country where every man of ordinary health and capacity is a successful speculator in land values! Such socialists as there are, are of the Impossibilist Sect — talking loudly of ‘class consciousness’ and ‘revolution’, intensely dogmatic and intolerant Marxists refusing to recognise anyone as a socialist who does not believe in catastrophic revolution.

Canada, the wealthy Beatrice concluded the diary entry, on a note of snobbish condescension, was “the most depressing of countries for anyone who is *nothing* but a Socialist”!

With the morning departure of the “too friendly Socialists,” the Webbs had a quiet hour or two before being driven down to a hotel by the lake-shore to make the acquaintance of an entirely different local personality — a real Canadian land promoter, a Mr. Robinson, the exuberant founder of the neighbouring fruit settlements of Naramata, Summerland and Peachland, an “easy, agreeable boomster,” who was a sort of “general capitalist of the place.” John Moore Robinson, known affectionately as “J.M.,” was another instance of a Naramata figure who, like Carroll Aikins, combined unusual physical and psychic energies. Robinson had been a school teacher, newspaper proprietor, provincial politician and general entrepreneur in Manitoba, before coming to the Okanagan on a ruinous mining speculation that had “cleaned him out.” For thirty years before coming to B.C. he had been interested in spiritualism as much as capitalism, and when he came to the Okanagan, drawn by the lure of gold, he had included among the officers of his mining company a clairvoyant, a Mr. Anderson — to no avail. Robinson, indeed, claimed to have gotten the name “Naramata” through the mediumship of Mrs. J. M. Gillespie, a prominent lecturer and medium of the American Spiritualist

Church. Mrs. Gillespie, on Robinson's account, had put him in psychic contact with a Sioux chief, one "Big Moose," who dearly loved his wife, a beauty with "the smile of Manitou," named "Naramattah." Robinson insisted that the name he had finally chosen for the new community had thus come to him "over the ether, by wireless as it were." He confessed that he had originally leant towards calling the fruit settlement "Brighton Beach."¹⁴

Bouncing back from his mining disaster, and struck by the under-exploited potential of the region for fruit farming on otherwise arid "benchland" which could be rendered fertile by systematic irrigation, Robinson had interested the CPR and other capital sources in the enterprise, formed development and water companies, and guaranteed ample water supplies by the construction of "an elaborate system of wooden trough aqueducts," which carried water to the valley from the hills. He promoted the construction of pleasant hotels by the lake, and sold off land in ten- and twenty-acre plots, sometimes to working farmers, but also to wealthy men from the coast, from Winnipeg and even the eastern cities, who wanted to retire, or were in failing health, or had relatives to place. Beatrice noted in the diary that "he described himself as 'handpicking' his people, choosing just the men he thought would give character and amenity to the place." He was a born salesman, and he sold fruit lots to Sir Thomas Shaughnessy, to Sir Edmund Osler the financier, to Sir Edward Clouston, the president of the Bank of Montreal, to Count Dentice, to Senator Kirkhoffer, to Hon. William Hespeler and other influentials — "he selling them the land, often planting the trees for them and running the place until they were ready to come." Small wonder that the imperious Beatrice Webb should have found the combination of spirit and will so appealing. "This promoter," she elaborated in a letter to a London friend that makes Robinson's technique sound like a Canadian game of applied Monopoly,

was the Chairman of the Land Company, of the Irrigation Company, of the Electric Light Company, of the Telephone Company. As fast as he 'settled' in one corner of the Okanagan he got it made into a Municipality and persuaded the Municipality to buy him out, taking his capital to the next best site in the Valley. He really was not a bad type of the risk capitalist opening up the country. He was working in close combination with the great Canadian Pacific Railway.

¹⁴ There is a sketch of Robinson in F. W. Andrew, "Peachland, Summerland, and Naramata," in *Proceedings of the Okanagan Historical Society*, 1955, pp. 62-72.

His capitalist empire at Naramata already well established, Robinson's thoughts had apparently turned to succession. Beatrice noted shrewdly that he had four or five sons "educated at Toronto University, to be respectively the doctor, lawyer, the engineer, etc. of the settlements." There were also "three or four daughters, less intelligent, and without much education, brought up to do nothing but amuse themselves — he had a petrol launch, a houseboat, etc." In politics, Robinson declared himself a Conservative who admired MacBride's anti-Reciprocity views. Yet the Webbs' interrogation revealed that he professed the most progressive opinions in the abstract, even claiming to agree in theory with Logie's Socialism — "which he in no way understood." Sidney, whose pedestrian vision of municipal socialism has often been caricatured as amounting to the political theory of main drains, felt it was to his credit that Robinson had at least "got his Municipality of Summerland to municipalise the electricity and the drinking-water supply."

Robinson drove the Britons among the fruit orchards in his motor car, and, always the promoter, took them to tea "at the best house, a really charming and costly bungalow, in a beautiful garden; luxuriously furnished in excellent taste." Their host, a Mr. Robert Agur, had been manager for western Canada of the giant Massey-Harris agricultural implement firm. Threatened with ill health, he had sold out and purchased one of Robinson's fruit farms, and since coming to Naramata, he had built it up "to a high pitch of fertility and amenity regardless of cost." Might Sidney have had in mind an unflattering comparison with the misanthropic school teacher they had met the day before, in noting of Agur that "he had quite regained his health — by physical exercise in the open air (he had just been building stone wall with his own hands)"? At any rate, the Webbs formed an instant liking of Agur, who reminded them "physically of Charles Booth, and mentally of Sir Hugh Bell."¹⁵ He seemed, in their opinion, to possess the "refinement and moderation of opinion" typical of the best type of Canadian capitalist.

That evening they were driven some seven miles through orchards along the "benchlands" above the lake, to Penticton, where they planned to sleep aboard the steamer that would carry them up the lake to Vernon. The view they pronounced "impressive," the moreso as the gloaming

¹⁵ Charles Booth (1840-1916), British shipowner, manufacturer and sponsor of the multi-volume classic *Life and Labour of the People of London*, 1891-1903. Booth's wife, Mary Macaulay, was Beatrice (Potter) Webb's cousin, and it was working as an assistant on the *Life and Labour* that the future Mrs. Webb had her beginning as a social investigator. Sir Hugh Bell (1844-1931), was a Tyneside coal and iron baron, given, with his wife Frances, to the promotion of social causes.

turned slowly to dark and they had a clear view of one of the hills across the lake alight with a spreading forest fire, said to have been started a week earlier when a tree had been struck by lightning. It was not the sort of sight the two denizens of central London were likely ever to have seen before.

In the morning they departed on their ninety-mile trip up the lake. It was a lovely day and the steamer stopped here and there to pick up passengers and to load and unload freight. On the wharf at Kelowna they had a hasty interview with Mr. and Mrs. Charles Kerr, two transported Fabians whom they had telephoned ahead to say they would be passing through. They were pleased to find the young Scots lawyer and fellow socialist "evidently prospering" in the Canadian west. Doubtless, too, the meeting had the benefit of providing a welcome and reassuring contrast with the one they had suffered through with that other set of Canadian socialists, Logie and Co., only two days before. At Vernon, where they had four hours to wait for their connecting train, they were pleased to learn on arrival that the ever-enterprising Jack Robinson had asked his local branch manager of the Bank of Montreal to telephone his counterpart at Vernon that they were coming. As it happened, Sir Edward Clouston, the bank's president, had already sent a blanket request to all the western branch managers to be helpful to them, a gesture which the Webbs (who, their socialism notwithstanding, liked to travel comfortably) thought very agreeable. As a result, they were met at the boat by a Mr. McEldie, the local newspaper editor, and an English schoolmaster from Victoria, who together motored them to meet the manager of the Vernon branch of the Bank of Montreal. He in turn despatched them to Coldstream, Lord Aberdeen's huge ranch nearby,¹⁶ where the assistant manager showed them around and offered a simple lunch. They thought him "a simple-minded English[man] of the non-commissioned type," retired from the North West Mounted Police. The farm, they found, was run "purely as a profit-making concern on strict business principles, employing some hundreds of unmarried men during the summer, and dismissing them all

¹⁶ Lord Aberdeen's ranch features in a minor way in Sir Joseph Pope's account of the ineptitude of the Mackenzie-Bowell government and Aberdeen's faults as Governor-General in the 1890s: "At one period . . . I remember it was almost impossible to get public business transacted at Ottawa. The session sat late. As soon as Parliament rose, the Ministers scattered. Weeks passed without a Treasury Board being held. When at last a necessary quorum was obtained, the Governor-General had gone out to his country place in the mountains of British Columbia, and the papers had to be sent out after him. The place took fire, and the Treasury Minutes, while lying there awaiting the vice-regal approval were consumed." Maurice Pope (ed.), *Public Servant, The Memoirs of Sir Joseph Pope*, (Toronto: 1960), pp. 104-05.

each autumn (they were believed to go 'logging').” As at Naramata, the farm depended upon ample supplies of irrigation water, and the Webbs were told that Lord Aberdeen brought it in by canal from the neighbouring mountains, on which, they recorded in the diary, “he was said to have acquired from the B.C. Government the timber rights, the water rights, the mineral rights, etc., but not the ownership.” Though rushed, the sociologists had time to note down the presence of “large squads of Chinese and Japanese” unskilled workers, “who were kept apart from the Europeans and from each other, each having its own ‘camp’ (or wooden houses).” The Japanese, as Sidney tried to explain (not very convincingly) in describing the details of the local wage structure, “were said to be far more intelligent than the Chinese, and therefore able to do better and more varied work; but to be less docile and more apt to combine.” These diverse qualities, he inferred, were reflected in the higher Japanese wage rate of \$1.85 per day, as compared with \$1.75 for the Chinese! The English, Canadian and American hands, he added, did all the “superior work” of various kinds — “carpentering, driving the teams, etc.” — and were paid, in addition to full board and lodging, between \$30 and \$50 a month.

From Vernon the Webbs returned by train to Sicamous, changed into the Imperial Limited, and continued on to Vancouver. They thought the Pacific coast port a bustling contrast with the rugged serenity of the vast wilderness through which they had passed to reach it. “Bright and clean and exceedingly prosperous,” they were told that, though started only twenty-eight years before, the brash young city of some 160,000 inhabitants was doubling its population every decade.¹⁷ Stanley Park seemed to them an exceedingly far-sighted act of the earliest of the city’s civic leaders, with its “really very fine trees, and views, and popular bathing beaches and picnic places.” Downtown they saw “the usual big lawyers and capitalists” (unfortunately the diary does not give names), and were entertained, as they put it, at “the usual ‘Country Club’.” And while in Vancouver they ran into an old acquaintance from London, the Reverend Dr. Alfred Garvie, principal of a Presbyterian College in the Imperial capital and a social activist, who was in Canada on a lecture tour. Garvie

¹⁷ My colleague Professor Paul Tennant assures me that “the population of Vancouver in 1911 was 100,401 (they must have been thinking of the region); the city began 25 years earlier; and was not doubling every decade by that time.” One can only suppose that the Webbs were reporting what the local boosters told them — early practice, as it were, for the technique they used with their Russian Intourist guides in the early 1930s, when they were gathering materials on the spot for their embarrassingly panegyric *Soviet Communism, A New Civilisation?* (2 vols.) (London: 1935), subsequent editions without the question mark.

deplored “the universal materialism of Canada,” complaining that “even the ministers were mixed up in real estate speculation.” He told Sidney that one of the most popular of them had opened a real estate office in Vancouver, “so that he might serve his congregation in this world as in the next”! The Webbs would have approved of the high moral tone of the remarks Garvie addressed to a banquet of the young men of Vancouver’s Congregational churches:

When I came to Vancouver, I was told there were no slums in this city. I made an excursion only yesterday in order to satisfy myself on this point. I found that Vancouver did possess slums and that it had buildings it ought to be ashamed of. When I arrived here I thought I had at last reached a city that seemed as fair as God could make it. But I can not go back to the Old Country now and say that I found Vancouver a fair city. You have Stanley Park, but what provision have you made in the centre of your city? If you are going to erect these large buildings, what are you going to do for lung room, as it were? You have an unrivalled situation and unequalled possibilities, but is this city to be a disappointment to man and an insult to God?¹⁸

Some things, as they say, never change; and sentiments very closely akin to those of the Reverend Dr. Garvie in 1911, stripped perhaps of their theological references, might be voiced at any of the sessions of the present-day Vancouver city council.

On their last evening in Vancouver, the Webbs made a point of looking up a fellow first-class passenger from their Atlantic crossing on the *Corsica*, a Miss Lecky.¹⁹ The experience provided them with another insight into the newly-arrived Canadian immigrant’s way of life. They found her settled in a little flat in North Vancouver, “in what seemed to be a working class quarter.” The lodgings were small and humble in appointment, “but with a magnificent view across the Bay on one side and towards the mountains on the other.” She had already married her young man, “a nice, respectable young Irishman earning a salary from an Insurance Co. (not the equal of his wife, I should say, but a kindly pleasant fellow).” Plainly delighted at the reunion with her ship-board companions, the former Miss Lecky offered “her best tea and tobacco,” and displayed the remains of the “large trousseau of the useless, conventional type” (as Beatrice put it)

¹⁸ *Vancouver Daily Province*, 4 August 1911, p. 32. “Another problem you have to face — and I might be treading on someone’s corns,” he went on, identifying a major social problem in the young city while somehow missing the real point, “but . . . are you going to bring these Hindoos, Japanese and Chinese here and make them hewers of wood and drawers of water, and not give them your Christianity?”

¹⁹ *Montreal Daily Star*, 28 June 1911, provides a list of the twenty-three First Class passengers in the *Corsica*, just arrived at Quebec City from Liverpool, including, in addition to the Webbs, “Miss V. G. Lecky, Miss E. M. Lecky.”

that she had had sent out from Britain, only to find "a good deal of the china broken [and the] jewellery and silver abstracted."

The Webbs had planned on four complete days in Victoria, "resting, repacking our trunks, getting washing done, and generally 'taking breath' before assaulting the Pacific." But unbeknownst to them, an American acquaintance they had seen at Montreal, Professor Charles Zueblin,²⁰ had arranged a banquet in the Webbs' honour in Seattle, so that they might meet leaders of the electoral reform movement who had been instrumental in pressing for the adoption of the referendum, initiative and recall in the American states of the Pacific Northwest. Disinclined to go, the Fabians did so only after "various frantic 'phones and telegrams," and after "a Committee of two [which] turned out to be a tall, pleasant able woman with her little girl whom she had brought as companion on the long five hour sail" was despatched to Victoria to fetch them. "Five hours sail . . . chatting with our energetic captor, and we found ourselves hustled through the customs, motored through the streets of Seattle, and at last seated in a crowded room, in the place of honour, with 100 expectant faces (two-thirds women) placidly sitting before the empty glasses and coffee cups of the after-dinner talk."

Listening to the speeches which followed, they were struck by the extent to which, beneath the surface of "the same medley of ideas, the same jargon of 'liberty and equality' which we had known 12 years ago," they consisted of "a denunciation of American government — stories of 'Graft' — objection to 'divided responsibility' — a sort of wail of despair — and in conclusion a panegyric of the British Constitution and its responsible Cabinet." This "restless discontent" of their American hosts towards their native political institutions, and the general contentment most Canadians they had met seemed to feel towards theirs, the Webbs concluded, "does not foreshadow annexation of Canada by the U.S.!"

Impressed by the extent of grass-roots reformation south of the border, the Webbs were nonetheless sceptical of the efficacy of the recall, gathering that its effect had been to render Oregon and Washington "in a state of perpetual political turmoil." Beatrice noted lightheartedly that since its adoption every mayor of Seattle had been recalled before the end of his term, one because he was an Englishman, another because he was corrupt

²⁰ Professor Charles Zueblin (1866-1924), author of *American Municipal Progress*, 1916. The Webbs first met him in London during the 1890s, and saw him again in Chicago during their 1898 world tour. See D. A. Shannon (ed.), *Beatrice Webb's American Diary, 1898* (Madison, Wis.: 1963) — where at pp. xii-xiii the editor, incidentally, notes the Webbian antipathy to things American alluded to earlier in this paper.

though able — and in all likelihood the present one would be too, “because though absolutely honest he is stupid and tactless.” Seattle seemed to them provincial compared to San Francisco, which they had visited on their earlier 1898 U.S. tour, while impressing upon the casual visitor an air of being somehow in advance of the east. Certainly the locals were hugely proud of their city, “with its broad streets, brilliant lights, and pleasant residential quarters.” On the evidence of the banquet they had attended, it seemed the one thing Seattle’s citizenry “objected to and intended to upset was the American Constitution! They of the West knew better than that!”

Rather to their dismay, the Webbs found they were to be accompanied back on their five-hour sail by another two-person delegation of these earnest Seattle electoral reformers. Sidney was a little peeved from the outset of the return, having “had to submit to interrogatories as to age, birthplace, height, weight, colour of eyes, of hair, occupation, address, ‘nearest friend’, when last in U.S., etc.” put to him by an officious U.S. immigration official. He was irritated as much as anything by the fact that no one had warned them of the procedure in advance — “part of the characteristic lack of explicitness,” he muttered, like a broken record. One of the Webbs’ companions, a lady medical doctor, Dr. Cora Smith Eaton, was a leading figure in the women’s enfranchisement movement in the northwest, and they thought her pleasant enough, if “without any kind of intellectual standard.” The other, a Mr. King, secretary of the Direct Legislation League of the U.S., they could scarcely abide, “with his ugly and vulgar face — his rasping voice and his endless jocular anecdotes.” They spent most of the journey trying to escape him, an inevitably futile exercise aboard ship. “He kept his arguments and his figures like the samples of the commercial traveller,” Beatrice recalled, with measured irritancy, “and pushed them with the same insistence and obliviousness of any other requirements of human nature. He was a dogmatic atheist, a republican, a universal and uniform equality man — denouncing the present American Government whilst believing in all the bad metaphysics upon which it is based.” It was a little like an American version of Logie and Co. all over again, and Beatrice concluded her description of the episode on a sarcastic note: “We entertained them to lunch at our hotel in Victoria and then excused ourselves with other appointments. I think Mr. King thought we did not quite appreciate the extraordinary chance of another three hours talk with him before the return boat to Seattle.” Small wonder that she described Puget Sound as “somewhat monotonous”!

The Seattle interlude considerably shortened the Webbs' touristic stay at Victoria. Yet of all the Canadian cities they visited — perhaps appropriately so in view of Victoria's ingrained proclivity for things British — they achieved their greatest press coverage there. "INTELLECTUAL DUO CALLS AT VICTORIA: Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Webb Call In At The Last West While Touring The Country," ran the headline of an extensive story in the local paper, which noted among other things that

yesterday brought two very distinguished though perfectly unobtrusive visitors to the city of Victoria in the persons of Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Webb, who are known throughout the length and breadth of Great Britain for their untiring energies upon the solution and betterment of social conditions. Generally-speaking, a man is distinguished on account of his wife's money or beauty, and a woman on account of her husband's brains or money; seldom is it that they are both persons whose individual right to distinction is indisputable and above the suggestion of reproach or coalition. Yet that is the type of distinction which marks these English visitors who yesterday landed in Victoria for a short sojourn.²¹

It was all quite a contrast with their Vancouver coverage, where there was a brief mention of them in the "Social and Personal" column and they were quite upstaged by a more compelling front-page story: "JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER VISITS VANCOUVER: Noted Millionaire Left Quietly At Noon Today On Special Train."²²

²¹ *Victoria Times*, 1 August 1911.

²² *Vancouver Daily Province*, 27 July 1911, p. 5; 5 August 1911. If there was little interest in the Webbs in the Vancouver press then, there would appear to be a closer connection today. In "A family reunion that proves blood does run thicker than grasshoppers or hail," *Maclean's*, July 1979, the *Vancouver Sun's* Allan Fotheringham, describing a huge reunion of his relatives recently at Rouleau, Saskatchewan, says of his own family tree that "there was, on one side, the Webbs, from Bromyard, Herefordshire, supposedly related to the Webbs, Sidney and Beatrice, of Fabian socialist fame." Now, Sidney Webb was notoriously reticent about his own family tree. But we do know that he and Beatrice remained childless, and that neither his brother Charles nor his younger sister Ada married. As Norman MacKenzie, editor of the recently published *The Letters of Sidney and Beatrice Webb* (3 vols.) (Cambridge: 1978), writes: "There is a suggestion that there was a missing elder sister. According to Ada Webb this first-born child was called Minnie and she died young of scarlet fever. Against this must be put the claim of the Canadian descendants of a Mary Elizabeth Webb that she was the sister of Sidney Webb, though no documentation has yet been found to support this assertion or the implication that she was separated from her family as a result of a domestic scandal. There are some fragments of evidence which make it impossible to dismiss the claim out of hand, although they are not sufficient to permit anything more than speculation." Vol. 1, p. 72. At any rate, in the *Passfield Papers*, "Correspondence," II, 4.0, ff. 1-216, there are items from "Webb, Mary of Vancouver" and "Mrs. G. H. Brown" of Ontario, the latter including photographs of two Canadian airmen claimed to be Canadian grand-nephews of Sidney. Should "Froth" happen across this note, he may not like what he sees; he has at least the consolation of not having read it in Doug Collins' column first.

Victoria, like Vancouver, the Webbs found booming, "after standing nearly still for a quarter of a century." Its prosperity was due, they surmised, to the ever-growing volume of Pacific trade, and to the product of the fruit orchards on the low land facing the Gulf of Georgia. While there the Webbs saw a couple of provincial ministers and civil servants (who again, alas, remain unnamed in the diary), interviewed the local engineering superintendent of the Canadian Northern Railway, and went for a drive in the nearby mountains in a rather grand motor car normally reserved, Sidney noted with evident satisfaction, for the exclusive use of provincial government ministers. That they saw more trees than people led them rapidly to the conclusion that Vancouver Island must be still virtually unsettled outside of the environs of Victoria. "A very few miles from the city takes one into untouched forest covering all the country," the diary records, "and intersected only by a rough road here and there."

The brevity of the Webbs' diary entry for Victoria suggests that the socialist couple's thoughts had already turned, during their short stay there, to the imminence of their long Pacific voyage aboard the Nippon Line's 6,000-ton *Inama Maru*, bound for Yokahama. In the thick forests of Vancouver Island they had arrived at the westernmost edge of North American civilization and at the end of their short sojourn in western Canada. "I like the native-born Canadians," Beatrice wrote home from Vancouver, "they are so tall & straight & resourceful — full of 'anticipations'."²³ Aboard ship, in a diary entry headed "On the Pacific, August 7 1911," she provided further evidence of the success of their passage across the Canadian west:

We have sailed away from Canada and our impressions are beginning to crystalise. I have a vision of a country of extraordinary beauty and charm — of snow mountains, torrents, lakes, forests of beautiful trees, valleys and plains of lovely verdure and sweet-smelling flowers, rolling prairies with wonderful skies and soft circling distances, and together with all these charms, the fertile earth, the water power, the variety of minerals that make its vast expanse a veritable wonderland of possible wealth.

The famous Fabians, much of whose colourful and controversial career in British political and intellectual life still lay ahead of them, had been and gone, content to have been barely noticed by the larger Canadian public. Canada, and especially the Canadian west, had made a larger impression on the Webbs than they had on Canada.²⁴ In the "self-respect

²³ *PP*, II, 4.e. (20), 27 July 1911.

²⁴ I do not mean to suggest that the ideas of the Fabian Socialists, so closely linked with the name of the Webbs, had no impact on the Canadian left. For two Canadian

and hopefulness” of the new western cities, in the “beautiful mystic distances” and “soft circling horizons” of the pioneering frontier landscape, the peripatetic socialists had found “a tonic to tired nerves and pessimistic moods.”

assessments of the Fabians, see F. H. Underhill, “Fabians and Fabianism,” *Canadian Forum* 26, no. 303 (April 1946), and W. Cox and H. S. Gordon, “The Early Fabians: Economists and Reformers,” *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 17 (August 1951). As Walter Young observes, in his *The Anatomy of a Party: The National CCF, 1932-61* (Toronto: 1969), pp. 288-89: “The image of the party was forged on the anvil of prairie radicalism from iron supplied by Fabian intellectuals.”