

HIGH COLONIALISM IN CANADA

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THERE ARE CANADIANS who regard our colonial beginnings with distaste and who consider filial gratitude from a young culture to an older one as sentimental at best and at worst degrading. I should like to advocate an entirely opposite view.

An examination of literary and critical writings in Canada between, say, 1870 and 1920 reveals a widespread belief in the value of continuing tradition to a nation beginning its independent course. The limits of this paper allow me to refer only to work in English. How deep Quebec's colonial roots reached down has recently been shown in W. J. Eccles' penetrating study, *Canada under Louis XIV*.

High colonial aspirations looked forward to political freedom but did not seek instantaneous total independence. Even the act of founding a new nation was in fact compatible with concern for tradition and loyalty to the Crown. Graeme Mercer Adam, editor of the *Canadian Monthly* and ardent nationalist, writes in 1872: "It is possible that the hour of Canadian nationality may be drawing near. If so, let us prepare to found the nation, not in ingratitude but in truth and honour." Truth and honour are words not much in current use but in this remote context they stir the heart, as Sidney said of the ballad of Chevy Chase.

In contending for the reality of a high colonial culture in Canada, let us quickly look for the image of it in the works of two poets, a novelist, an anthologist, a periodical editor and the compiler of a school reader. My examples are necessarily brief but not, I hope, inconclusive. A single stanza of Blake or Burns, a single paragraph of Addison or Arnold, may give us an insight into the man and his outlook on the world. Is not this also true of Canadian writers? The old notion of touchstones still has its uses.

Among high colonial poets, Roberts and Lampman are, I think, the most impressive: the first for his historical, representative and seminal qualities, the second for the intrinsic æsthetic quality of his verse. Let us confine ourselves for the moment to landscape; Roberts and Lampman are in the forefront of those who have tried to compose the Canadian scene. There is, of course, no landscape until we look at it. We choose what to regard and from what point of view, at what time and in what context. We import our own emphases, emotions and criteria. Roberts and Lampman proffer their help in this operation.

Could we reopen Roberts' *Orion*? You recall how Lampman was enchanted by the poem, like Keats looking into Chapman's Homer. I never walk up between Trinity College and the Royal Ontario Museum without seeing Lampman's shadowy form a little ahead, the small square volume of *Orion* in his hand and his heart full of rapture, that Canada at last had its own poetry. *Orion*, he said, "written by a Canadian, by a young man, one of ourselves . . . was like a voice from some new paradise of art, calling us to be up and doing." He was about nineteen at the time and Roberts a year or so older.

The actual texture of descriptive passages in the poem is of great interest.

Where the slow swirls were swallowed in the tide,
Some stone-throws from the stream's mouth, there the sward
Stretched thick and starry from the ridge's foot
Down to the waves' wet limits, scattering off
Across the red sand level stunted tufts
Of yellow beach-grass, whose brown panicles
Wore garlands of blown foam. Amidst the slope
Three sacred laurels drooped their dark-green boughs
About a high-piled altar. There the king,
Ænopion, to whose sceptre bowed with awe
The people dwellers in the steep-shored Chios,
Stood praying westward.

Now it is clear that King Ænopion, for all his vineyards and olive-groves (elsewhere described in the poem), his sacred laurels and his altar, is furnished with a New Brunswick beach. The thick sward down to the tidal limit, the red earth: I need not labour the point. You recall how the old photographers put their clients before a backdrop of distant castellation framed in flowery meadows, the hither edge of which neatly accommodated itself to the fur rug underfoot.

Let us see how, in a more subtle way, Lampman himself works, how in a poem like "April" Canada and Keats combine. If we listen to such lines as these:

Pale season, watcher in unvexed suspense,
Still priestess of the patient middle day. . . .
Dreaming of summer and fruit-laden mirth.
 . . . the brown bees
Murmur faint dreams of summer harvestries.
The faces of sweet flowers, and easeful dreams. . . .

we hear the echo, line after line, of well known harmonies from the great odes of Keats:

Dance, and Provencal song, and sun-burnt mirth.
For Summer has o'er-brimmed their clammy cells.
I have been half in love with easeful death.

In the midst of these recollections, the authentic Canadian scene nevertheless appears:

The old year's cloaking of brown leaves, that bind
The forest floor-ways, plated close and true —
The last love's labour of the autumn wind —
Is broken with curled flower buds white and blue
In all the matted hollows, and speared through
With thousand serpent-spotted blades up-sprung,
Yet bloomless, of the slender adder-tongue.

In the warm noon the south wind creeps and cools,
Where the red-budded stems of maples throw
Still tangled etchings on the amber pools,
Quite silent now, forgetful of the slow
Drip of the taps, the troughs, and trampled snow.

But even here, among the Ontario sugar maples, there is heard the clear echo of a known ode of Keats:

Or by a cider-press, with patient look,
Thou watchest the last oozings, hours by hours.

It is both surprising and delightful to see how, in another familiar poem, "At the Ferry", Matthew Arnold is in attendance. To look again at some detached passages:

But under all to one quiet tune,
 A spirit in cool depths withdrawn,
With logs, and dust, and wrack bestrewn,
 The stately river journeys on.

Faint films of smoke that curl and wreathe;
 And upward with the like desire
The vast grey church that seems to breathe
 In heaven with its dreaming spire.

And still my thought goes on, and yields
 New vision and new joy to me,
Far peopled hills, and ancient fields,
 And cities by the crested sea.

Beyond the tumult of the mills,
 And all the city's sound and strife,
Beyond the waste, beyond the hills,
 I look far out and dream of life.

Arnold is with us, joining in, line after line :

But the majestic river floated on. . . .
And that sweet City, with her dreaming spires.
Roam on! the light we sought is shining still.
Then through the great town's harsh heart-wearying roar,
Let in thy voice a whisper often come,
To chase fatigue and fear. . . .

But, again, the authentic Canadian scene appears, this time as an old sawmill, and we hear the saw, engaging a log, change its tone :

At moments from the distant glare
 The murmur of a railway steals,
Round yonder jutting points the air
 Is beaten with the puff of wheels;
And here at hand an open mill,
 Strong clamour at perpetual drive,
With changing chant, now hoarse, now shrill
 Keeps dinning like a mighty hive.

Lampman, then, in a subtle and quiet masterly way, is using the viewpoint and technique of Keats (with whom he had a secret natural affinity), and Arnold,

and others in the English poetic tradition in order to interpret the Canadian scene. What helps us to identify it as high colonialism is that it is done consciously and with great delight.

Our concern is at the moment with the literary image of high colonialism but a passing reference to painting may be allowed. In our National Gallery hangs a painting by Lucius O'Brien, called "Sunrise on the Saguenay". O'Brien was born in Canada, the son of an army officer. He attended Upper Canada College, found a patron in the Marquis of Lorne and became President of the Royal Canadian Academy. The amateur who enjoys his picture, knowing nothing of the immediate influences on his style, can nevertheless enter pretty fully into O'Brien's sensibility. Across those calm waters and through those rising mists can be seen the smiling wraiths of many traditions. The fallen pine in the foreground barely conceals Salvator Rosa. It is a romantic view, giving a chance to every device of aerial perspective. The immense cliffs flanking the bay loom out of cloud with towering grandeur. Here is the real substance of the Canadian scene, harmonized by a carefully chosen atmosphere. The Saguenay "doth like a garment wear/The beauty of the morning. . . ." Not only harmonized, the scene is humanized, by the addition of a vessel in the offing, ready to sail, and in the middle distance a small craft near which a boat is being rowed. The human scale is preserved, against the stupendous background; this width of water and height of wooded cliff are neither strange nor inimical; they invite the viewer, like the landscape openings in "L'Allegro". I personally enjoy this picture, as a record of high colonial sensibility, because it brings traditional techniques to the service of an undistorted record of a locus classicus of Canadian scenery and because it breathes a cheerful confidence in man's ability to live in this our landscape. It is not in any sense a dull or superficial performance; it achieves assurance and serenity without forcing or falsifying the *donné* of the locale; it is a picture which the Marquis of Lorne, whose own portrait was painted by Millais, must have enjoyed, and the Canadian who cannot enjoy it today must be either totally insensitive or else in total rebellion against the past or else possessed by horrid antagonisms which vent themselves on whatever they encounter.

THE UNIQUE FLAVOUR of a wine derives not only from its datable vintage but also from the location of the vineyard, sometimes within very narrow limits. Charles Gordon (hereinafter referred to as Ralph Connor) was

born within a few months of Lampman and knew the Ottawa River with the same loving familiarity. "A perfume and a wintry chill," wrote Lampman, "Breathe from the yellow lumber piles". It is a world familiar to the man from Glengarry.

Lampman, as we have seen, employs a mechanism of apprehension and expression derived from English poetry to encompass and record the Canadian scene. Connor, greatly aided by memories of childhood, projects with triumphant ease the perfect image of a Scottish colony. Glengarry, the most easterly of the Ontario counties, is peopled by Scots, not only from the patronymic Glengarry district just north of Pitlochry but from the Highlands and Islands generally. *The Man from Glengarry* embodies a whole ethos which takes in region, race and religion. The Ontario forest is made to serve this ethos by transformation into a magic, enclosed world as filled with absorption and emanation as Grimm's Schwarzwald. It opens to disclose a scene of woodcutters and children, of giants and gentle princesses, of perils and deliverances. "The solid forests of Glengarry have vanished", begins Connor's preface, but in another sense they are as enduring as Sherwood or Arden.

The perfection of the colonial spirit in this Scottish Presbyterian community is shown by its refusal to adulterate the heritage. French, English, Irish, Americans and at least one Mexican appear, together with some account of Methodists, Baptists, Roman Catholics and atheists. These are not despised or rejected; they simply cannot meet the Scottish standards. If an Englishman has his leg crushed in the fury of a communal barn-raising, it gives an opportunity for the skill of a Scottish medical student. If Methodists unwisely agree to a public debate on theology, they retire after the Presbyterian minister's first denunciation. This question of an element of comedy in the high colonial record, of a mild absurdity so endearing that it must be the product of a retrospect upon what has been well loved, — this we must return to before leaving the subject.

The Canadian West is a good touchstone for true high colonialism. Connor shows us his hero making a speech in New Westminster at a moment when there is a wave of resentment against Confederation. "It was Ranald's speech, everyone said, that turned the tide. His calm logic made clear the folly of even considering separation; his knowledge of, and his unbounded faith in, the resources of the province, and more than all, his impassioned picturing of the future of the great Dominion reaching from ocean to ocean, knit together by ties of common interest, and a common loyalty that would become more vividly real when the provinces had been brought more closely together by the promised railway. 'Send him

East', cried a voice. 'Yes, yes, that's it. Send him to Ottawa to John A. It's the same clan!'

The neatness with which the novelist links moral and political issues, expands the ethos of Glengarry to cover and preserve the entire community, and leaves us indebted to Scottish virtue for our very existence is beyond all praise. Added posthumously to Connor's autobiography is the line from Bunyan, "The trumpets sounded for him on the other side!" It is my belief that these were, in fact, bag-pipes.

THE MOST EXPLICIT SPOKESMAN for high colonialism I have yet encountered is W. D. Lighthall, chiefly memorable as the editor of an anthology, *Songs of the Great Dominion*, which first appeared in 1889. Lighthall was then about thirty-two years of age, a lawyer living in Montreal. His introduction affects this reader, at least, as some Renaissance cartographical view, in perspective, of an Italian ducal city beside its rolling river, Apennines in the background, the four winds blowing vitality upon it from the cardinal points and a band of angels with their trumpets spreading wide its fame.

Lighthall's sentences have the true heroic quality of rhetoric; what sounds like hyperbole has a direct relation to fact. He speaks of Canada as having in her hands the solution of those problems of Empire which concern every true Briton, "proud and careful of the acquisitions of British discovery and conquest".

She is Imperial in herself, we sons of her think, as the number, the extent and the lavish natural wealth of her Provinces, each not less than some empire of Europe, rise in our minds; as we picture her coasts and gulfs and kingdoms and islands, on the Atlantic on one side, and the Pacific on the other; her four-thousand-mile panorama of noble rivers, wild forests, ocean-like priaries; her towering snow-capped Rockies waking to the tints of sunrise in the West; in the East her hoary Laurentians, oldest of hills. She has by far the richest extent of fisheries, forests, wheat lands, and fur regions in the world; some of the greatest public works; some of the loftiest mountain-ranges, the vastest rivers, the healthiest and most beautifully varied seasons. . . . In losing the United States, Britain lost the *smaller* half of her American possessions: — the Colony of the Maple Leaf is about as large as Europe.

"But what," Lighthall continues, "would material resources be without a corresponding greatness in man?" He finds it in a concept of loyalty. The French in

Quebec are loyal to their own imperial tradition. The Loyalists withdrawing from the rebel Colonies have accomplished "the noblest epic migration the world has ever seen: — more loftily epic than the retirement of Pius Æneas from Ilium. . . . 'Why did you come here?' was asked of one of the first settlers of St. John, New Brunswick, a man whose life was without a stain; — 'Why did you come here, when you and your associates were almost certain to endure the sufferings and absolute want of shelter and food which you have narrated?' '*Why did we come here?*' replied he, with emotion which brought tears: — '*For our loyalty.*'"

If greatness is equated to loyalty, we must ask, Loyalty to what or to whom? The primary answer is, of course, to the Crown, but for Lighthall this has immense and all encompassing implications, like Tennyson's concept of loyalty to Arthur. Lighthall's expansion of British loyalty does not stop at the level of Canadian patriotism but broadens out to take in the world. The Empire will last only if it upholds an ideal that men will suffer and die for and "such an Ideal — worthy of long and patient endeavour — may be found in broad-minded advance toward the voluntary Federation of Mankind." It is difficult to match Lighthall for a buoyant, fresh, engaging confidence in our future; for the candour of his idealism; for the breadth of his historic and geographic grasp; for the clarity of his crystallization of high colonial faith and hope.

His limitations are also apparent, especially the one he shares with Ralph Connor, an inability to see the actual ideals of French Canadians in full perspective. It is, in the circumstances, venial. Connor can get as far as a cordial symbolic reconciliation between leaders of opposed gangs of Scottish and French or Irish loggers. Lighthall can produce a finely turned exemplary tale, *The Young Seigneur*, extolling the virtues of the habitant and of those of his countrymen who combine the old heroic qualities of authority with progressive ideas, and begging the French in Quebec to provide front-rank leadership for the whole country. But that is as far as they can go, in the closing years of the nineteenth century. We cannot ask more of them; their sin is one of omission rather than commission. For the latter we must await the report on Bilingualism and Biculturalism.

WE MUST INCLUDE IN OUR SURVEY a quick glance at some pages of *Rose-Belford's Canadian Monthly*, Volume I, published in 1878. It succeeded the *Canadian Monthly and National Review* which had just ceased publication and it retained the same remarkable editor, Graeme Mercer Adam.

Rose Belford rescued the operation and it went on into the 1880's. I have always seen her as a striking and for some reason dark-haired girl, with financial resources of her own, a taste in literature ranging from Homer and Horace to Wilkie Collins, a charmingly forthright manner, and — somewhat literally I admit — with a red rose in her raven tresses. Although further research revealed that these virtues, on the cultural side at least, appertained rather to Mr. Rose and Mr. Belford, two publishers who jointly supported the journal, the image of my own Rose Belford is still with me, more living than, say, Kathleen ni Houlihan or Laura Secord.

From this volume I choose one article, entitled "Canadian Nationality", by William Norris, of Toronto. Norris believed that Canada might shortly sever the "slight link" binding her to Britain and the prospect did not trouble him.

It, therefore, behoves all true Canadians to be prepared for whatever may occur. There is but little to be done. A Governor elected every seven years by both our houses of Parliament, the appointment of a small diplomatic body, and the adoption of a flag are all that is needful. Surely, a people who have an independent and final Supreme Court is equal to this. The flag may cause some difficulty, but not necessarily. We have the colours already — it is only necessary to place them. The red first, representing Englishmen and Scotchmen; the white, representing the French who first colonized Quebec and the French-Canadian people who now inhabit it; and the green, though questioned by some, is acknowledged by all to represent the Irish. These colours, placed vertically, with the Union in the upper corner as now, would make a good Canadian flag and attract the regard of a majority of the people who inhabit the Dominion. The green, especially, would be worth 100,000 men to the Dominion in case of any difficulty with our neighbours, and would effectually Canadianize the Irish.

Norris foresaw, also, the disintegration of the United States and the thought afforded him considerable satisfaction.

Already she shows signs of dissolution. . . . A hot-bed progress among alien and half-assimilated people will surely accelerate the end. They are in a dilemma either horn of which is fatal. They must either submit to the mob and the commune, and see their cities blaze as they did three years ago, or to a standing army and a general who will destroy their institutions and make himself dictator. In either event, disintegration is sure to follow. As power steps from the disorganized grasp of the United States, it will fall to Canada as her natural right, making her the first nation on this continent, as she is now the second. United closely, as we shall be from the Atlantic to the Pacific by a common nationality, our country will go on, increasing from age to age in wealth, in power and in glory; and it may not be too much of a stretch of the imagination to think, that as it is the latest

developed portion of a new world . . . it may be the country where a last great, and fully developed humanity may find its fitting habitation and abode.

Norris was not an altogether accurate prophet but he did put his finger on two problems that today trouble every thoughtful American; he did foresee in Canada independence, national growth and, as a condition for these, the need for unity; and he knew that we should have vertical red and white segments in our new flag. Like Lighthall he can rise into rhetoric without losing contact with the firm ground of fact and, again like Lighthall, he envisages wealth, power and glory in the context of a humane ideal. That he is genuinely high colonial in his suppositions one further sentence will demonstrate. "And, lastly, we shall have the good will of England and possibly her guarantee for our independence, as she guarantees that of Belgium, in starting our national career."

Our final reference, which I will make as succinct as possible, is to a school reader published in Toronto in 1901 and in use, at least as late as 1916, in high school classes in Victoria. It was a magnificent assemblage of great names, going back to Plato and coming down to Macdonald and Laurier. It had a range of material from Thomas à Kempis to Oliver Wendell Holmes. It dealt with the death of Socrates and with the Union Jack. It introduced one to the Ancient Mariner and to the Canadian Song Sparrow. In an appendix, the unnamed editor explained what he was attempting. The five and a half pages of small type cannot be summarized, they are so thronged with implications. But may I quote a few of the closing sentences, concerning his choice of patriotic pieces?

Tennyson's "Hands all Round" belongs to the period of the revolution which left Napoleon III Emperor of France. The line "We likewise have our evil things" suggests comparison with Kipling's "Recessional", which was written on the occasion of Queen Victoria's Jubilee in 1897. The first two stanzas will be found in fac-simile on p.8 of this anthology; the remaining three are as follows . . .

He then quotes them, to their conclusion, "For frantic boast and foolish word,
Thy mercy on Thy people, Lord!" and he continues,

If "that man's the best cosmopolite who loves his native country best", this group of selections should, in the hands of intelligent and patriotic teachers, prove an effective means of inculcating incidentally a spirit of rational patriotism. Its most striking characteristic is the absence of the glorification so common in this kind of literature.

The last group is intended to bring pointedly into view the magnanimous spirit in which, during the past two and a half centuries, Great Britain has dealt with her colonies, especially in the way of conceding to them — "frankly" as Mr. Gladstone says — the right to manage their own domestic affairs. The latest outcome

of this policy is the formation of the "Commonwealth of Australia" in imitation of the "Dominion of Canada"; neither Canadians nor Australians would have taken part in the war in South Africa but for their belief that it would speedily lead to the establishment of a similar nationality there.

So we pass from Plato to à Kempis, to Tennyson and Mr. Gladstone, to Canadian volunteers in South Africa and to loving one's native country best, without frantic boast or foolish word. It is literature and appreciated as such, but it is also life and as such to be lived. It has the unmistakable accent of greatness, for all its simplicity, like Arthur among his knights though many of them in richer arms than he. It is Canadian colonialism in its high and palmy days.

What creates the æsthetic effect of organic unity in this ideology of high colonialism? It is the power of imagination to project a vision of Canada having its own logic and consistency. As in a time of miserable civil strife Milton could see England as a giant roused from sleep, or as Blake, among the dark mines and mills could view the rising walls of Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land, so *mutatis mutandis* these Canadians attained a vision of their own country. In historical fact there were grave doubts and dangerous dissensions. In the pageant presented by Lighthall or Connor, these are performers of the anti-masque, soon driven into the wings by personifications of faith, hope and loyalty.

Appreciation and some laughter often mingle in a retrospect of colonial Canada. "Truth and honour", "the trumpets sounded for him", "a life without a stain": is it that we can no longer believe in such possibilities? Or do we smile as we would at a photograph of grandparents? Such outmoded clothes and conscious character; yet essential to our own existence and remembered with affection. This laughter can be salutary, self-revealing, free from denigration.

The end of high colonialism may conveniently be placed at the beginning of this century's third decade. Canadian veterans of the First World War had just returned; the *Canadian Forum* commenced publication in 1920; the old *University Magazine* ended the next year. Yet it goes without saying that high colonial emotions were not instantly extinguished in 1921. A few years ago there arose in my own home a slight problem of identification as the name of one Louis St. Laurent came up in conversation with my mother. St. Laurent is the prime minister, my wife explained. But my mother, who had not set foot in England for thirty years, replied very simply, "Winston Churchill will always be my prime minister."

In conclusion, here are eight lines of Lampman. They are sapphics; we know from one of his letters they pleased him. They show the chain of connection from

Sappho, to the metrical practice of English schoolboys, to Trinity College in Toronto and to the flowers of the Ottawa countryside which Lampman loved. And they tell us that, in spite of change and decay, the fragrance of what has once been loved remains.

Brief the span is, counting the years of mortals,
Strange and sad; it passes, and then the bright earth,
Careless mother, gleaming with gold and azure,
 Lovely with blossoms —
Shining white anemones, mixed with roses,
Daisies mild-eyed, grasses and honeyed clover,
You and me, and all of us, met and equal
 Softly shall cover.

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