

# ON CANADA

*Wyndham Lewis*

**T**HERE AREN'T ENOUGH PEOPLE in it, that's what's the matter with Canada." How often have I heard that complaint from Canadians of all classes — Canada's long thin body wants swelling out, until it is something more than a mere elongated northern fringe to the United States. Such is the general feeling.

Well, the moment this war is ended a tide of immigration will flow westward from Europe. Canada if it wants to can be filled up full to its scuppers — if it thinks it can handle that many people. Mere filling up is not enough, however. The requisite number of peacetime passengers to make its giant trans-continental railroad system a success, or the volume of hardy labour to open up its bush and operate its remotest mines, is not the only thing required by a great state. It needs something else, beyond mere human volume. It will want more Bantings, Lauriers, Tom Thompsons, and Longfellows.

Canada has a wonderful chance just now to do a bit of filling up of the selective and qualitative kind; the kind of replenishment a cultural eugenicist would aim at, were he commissioned, not to bulk out, but to jack-up, the national stock. *Now* is the fluid time, when a lot of rare and high-grade material is going begging. All manner of firstclass brains, displaced by the human earthquake, are roaming around, as if they were disembodied. How like ghosts they look, some of them, how like ghosts they *feel*, at times. But what is their misfortune is other people's opportunity. They *could* be given a body, tools might be placed in their hands. They would be ghosts, it would be discovered, that in the long run immeasurably repaid those who offered them hospitality.

Hospitality! There is a great human word, that once exercised a magical compulsion over men. The stranger within the gates was to be fairly and pleasantly

treated, such treatment increasing the credit of the host as well as being something due to the notion of the brotherhood of man.

That the Canadian is less hospitably inclined than others no one would believe, for — experience of such hospitality apart — why should he be? It is inhuman to be inhospitable, and there is nothing inhuman about John Canuck. Americans, as a whole, are even proverbially hospitable. But Canada is a newer country than the States. And the trouble about a “new” country is that everybody in it is almost a stranger himself — at two or three generations removed, anyhow. He is so near to the time when his father, or grandfather, first set foot where he is at present established, that the notion of a *stranger* doesn't mean as much to him as it does elsewhere. He is apt to complain on the one hand that there are not enough people in the country, and yet to look upon a new face when it turns up as an intruder. It is a queer, though understandable, inconsistency.

In this connection it is interesting to note — and it confirms the view I have just expressed as to the cause of this phenomenon — that a Canadian who came to Canada as a boy is apt to be much more xenophobic than a five-generation Canadian; the latter being as a rule very tolerant and liberal in his treatment of the newcomer. Many people I personally have met here who have proved troublesome have been people who were not Canadian-born. There is even a marked difference between those who have been here since childhood and those who are more recent arrivals. Whereas those who have been here only five or six years — they are really problems for the war-transients. Sometimes they are little monsters of exclusiveness. I am really afraid of them, and give them a wide berth!

Because of the war great numbers of people have been displaced, many uprooted. They have either been violently displaced, like the Jewish scientists and business executives expelled in the Hitlerite persecutions, or they have been self-displaced, for business, health, or other reasons. Obviously, a persecutory government takes action against its victims in order of their importance; an individual of great talent, initiative and influence is savagely dealt with, whereas an individual of no great consequence is left alone. That is why so many uncommonly gifted people are drifting about, of those violently displaced, both Jewish and non-Jewish.

**I**N THE CATEGORY of what I have called the “self-displaced” I, for instance, am to be counted. My case is, I dare to say, typical of that class of voluntary displacement. In the last war I was a soldier. I could not be that

in this war, and the particular calling I followed, that of artist and writer, was susceptible to an extreme degree to any great disturbance. Already by the time of the Munich crisis — when it became plain to everybody (however laggard in believing it) that the lunatic militarist who stepped into the Kaiser's shoes was bent on a second European war — my income began to shrink. War itself would shoot to pieces my modest personal economy. So I headed for America, where, I believed, I might pursue my work with some prospect of success.

Two years ago this coming fall I moved up here to Canada from the States, and am a great authority upon all matters connected with the "transient" in an American community, especially the "war-transient". All problems of adjustment I know from A to Z. I would qualify to be the "Dr. Anthony" of the Adjustee. There is nothing I do not know about these painful questions, and this accumulated wisdom I shall one day embody in a book, such as Maxim Gorki might have written — the author of "Creatures who once were men."

To begin with, "transience," — at least a temporary residence, a very prolonged visit, such as war conditions may entail — is not understood by the native of a new country. Either (as he sees it) you come there to stop — to citizenize yourself — or else only for the most fleeting visit. A real warmth of welcome never extends from Sunday to Sunday. A week is the maximum life span of that ephemeral, the visitor." It is a hectic life, but like all hectic things, it is short.

It is rather as if Miss America were a young lady who was prepared to kill you with love for two or three days; if you then made your escape well and good; otherwise her manner would suddenly grow chaste and stern and you would be expected to engage yourself for ever. To be *a year* in America and not to want to be a citizen is a situation no American ever yet has understood, nor ever will. There is something wanton about it — something morally objectionable. The French are not like that, now. You can reside in France all your life: the Frenchman perfectly understands that, it never occurs to him you want to be *a Frenchman*. You couldn't be, except in name, anyway, for Frenchmen of course are born, not made.

There are many Adjustees naturally who are not mere war-transients; who are indeed most anxious to become Permanents as soon as possible. All, in their probationary period, however, are exposed to the same experience, and at first Transients and Nontransients are grouped together.

Quite the first thing that the refugee, evacuee, war-transient, or what not, feels in war time, is gratitude to these peaceably minded people, so like himself in many respects, for taking him in. He or she often has landed from a ship which

has been blacked out for weeks, sailing through seas at night that seemed seething with submarines — each blow from a big wave sending the heart up into the throat. Stepping ashore, that heart is full of thankfulness. Then next the exotic sense will play its part. The novel scene interests and pleases. The people are *new* people: and what is new is always nice.

After that the refugee, evacuee — the transient or non-transient — becomes an Adjustee. He discovers that he (to abbreviate the genders, though this goes for *she* too) is a member of a new class: that his classification does not consist in his being a doctor, artist, economist, but in being a person-who-does-not-belong. There is no use blinking the fact that this is not a pleasant discovery. It leaves no bitterness, or should not do so. But as most of these people are in flight from rabid nationalism, it is a kind of disagreeable reminder of that upon which they believed they had turned their backs forever.

In the longer settled countries nothing of this kind would occur (though many other things would occur that were not necessarily nice). There this same individual would *belong* more at once — for he would, for purposes of classification, belong among men and women of his particular calling. His nationality would matter less than his trade or profession. But in a new country — at all events in Canada — what he *does* is overshadowed by what he *is* until such time as he shall have qualified by long residence to be regarded otherwise. Identified thus by his national status and geographical position, he is apt to feel a little like a floating island that has somehow got into the mouth of the St. Lawrence and become a mild traffic problem. He feels a thing and not a person. He feels excluded — he feels *dead*. And the people he associates with are naturally those in his own class — slightly defunct, not quite *there*, like himself. It is a grim company.

Perhaps I ought, by the way, to make it clear at this point that I have no beef myself; as an artist I found my way to other artists. Real whole-time artists do not abound in Canada. Of those Mr. Alex Jackson is the acknowledged chieftain. By that chieftain, in his picturesque Toronto headquarters, I was accorded a royal welcome. He received me, coming from a foreign milieu, like a brother. He has shown me every courtesy, and with the greatest friendliness helped me on my sometimes perilous way. Never have I had more profoundly the sensation that it *did* mean something to be a workman of that sort, one of those who have become known for making pictures: enjoying a direct fraternity with another, wherever he happens to live; as all carpenters or garment workers have. In a word, Jackson has demonstrated that for him there is only *one* art, though there are many nations. Far too many nations, some of us think, for the world is clut-

tered up with stupid frontiers — and we seem more and more to pass from one of these compartments into another at our peril. “Demain — ça sera le genre humain!” Alex Jackson, who is a great Canadian, definitely belongs to the “genre humain” of the revolutionary song.

No, this article is not a beef: the rigours of my own “transience” have been mitigated by two or three people who it is true are exceptional people, but all the same are Canadians. I should be sorry to have a beef against a country which produced such sterling timber as Alex Jackson. This article is a minor bit of friendly advice to the Canadian, which I am able to offer him not because I am more intelligent or “smart” than he is, but simply because I have been in a situation he has never been in. Consequently I know about a few things of which he can have no knowledge. And these are things that matter an awful lot, ultimately, to Canada.

**A** NATION, like a woman, has to make itself attractive, if it is going to *attract*. And it must attract, in order to grow and increase. To stop drably and dowdily at home and tell the rest of the world to go hang is no way to live. If a nation wants to repel, rather than attract, it only has to neglect its social equipment and throw away its manners. But no modern nation can afford, any more than a modern woman, to neglect those arts and graces that advertise it, and make people seek its company.

Now, greatly daring — but from the very friendliest motives — I am whispering a few things in Canada’s pretty ear. For what is written here will not go beyond the frontier of Canada. I am saying that Canada should give more care to making itself agreeable and gracious, in its intercourse with strangers. For this new country needs — paradoxical as that may sound — new blood. All new countries do.

Quite one of nature’s oddest laws is that a *new* country has to keep on renewing itself and getting in more and more new blood: else in a surprisingly short time it grows just as stuffy and routine-ridden as an old country. Only its laxity has not got that mellow charm that excuses the stuffiness of the older lands.

One feels that in “Upper Canada” — Anglosaxon Canada — there is a sort of pride in being repellent, rather than attractive, to the stranger within-the-gate. What the Canadian of these parts tells you is that the social organism to which he belongs is “snooty”: or, he will say, “more English than the English.” And he seems in an odd way pleased about it. This, I submit, is short-sighted. “Toronto

the Beautiful”, as Mr. Mitch Hepburn calls it, should forget about being English. It could with great advantage take a leaf out of its far more attractive French sister Montreal’s book, and get a wrinkle or two from “Little old New York.”

But the problem of being attractive has never been present to Canadians, I think, because of the great isolation in which they have lived. And the isolation of Ontario has in the nature of things been greater even than that of French Canada. Yet if Canada is ever to blossom out into a sizeable country its middle — centred in Toronto and Winnipeg — is just as important as its extremities. It would be no use at all to [be] all Gallic charm at one end, and all titanic Western beauty at the other, while remaining smug, drab and snooty in the middle. Canada is unpopulated, and I think that Canada should face up to the fact that there are reasons for this. For instance, it is cold: then it is most of it covered with bush. People have to [be] lured into it to some extent: and Canadian social attractiveness should be almost five times as great as that of California, according to all the rules. It is very great; I am not saying it isn’t. But it will have to make a further effort.

Although every Canadian will agree that Canada is underpopulated, what they would be apt to argue is that numbers is its only requirement, thank you — when you talk about all this brilliance that is going begging. It has quite enough valuable or showy citizens as it is! But a new country has to *import* its Shakespeares and Newtons, as it imports the choicer wines. As to Einstein, the present-day Newton, the United States has got hold of him, I am afraid. Then Canada should hold out for a Leibnitz.

I do not mention business talent for that is found everywhere. Indeed, Canada *exports* business talent, as can be seen in the case of Lord Beaverbrook and Sir James Dunn. It does not need to import anything of that kind. Far more political talent has been exported by Canada than has ever come into it. It provided England with a notable Prime Minister — Bonar Law. And in Medicine Canada has in Banting an international star of the first magnitude. Business talent and political talent sprout up in a new soil better than in an old one, if anything. Yet there *are* ways in which Canada could profit by a discriminating import policy — a careful grafting.