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# Presidential Address

Mason Wade

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# PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS*

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Quand la Société Historique du Canada fait un pèlerinage à Vancouver pour tenir ses grandes assises annuelles, je crois qu'il faut reconnaître d'abord le caractère biculturel de cette assemblée. Car la Société Historique, tout comme le Canada lui-même, est foncièrement bilingue et biculturelle par ancienne tradition. Le « Grand Old Man » de l'histoire du Canada, le professeur George Mackinnon Wrong, était un habitant de La Malbaie aussi bien qu'un citoyen de Toronto, et son livre le mieux connu reste *The Rise and Fall of New France.* Son œuvre depuis 1897, comme directeur de la *Review of Historical Publications Relating to Canada,* a été continuée par la Société Historique, fondée en 1922 par Lawrence J. Burpee et Marius Barbeau, son premier président et son premier secrétaire. Notre Société était l'enfant de la Historic Landmarks Association, elle-même fondée en 1907 par la deuxième section de la Société Royale du Canada, une autre société biculturelle avec une tendance occasionnelle aux « Deux Solitudes ». La Société Historique, qui est l'association nationale de tous les historiens du Canada, a été bilingue depuis sa fondation, et les travaux présentés à ses séances annuelles peuvent être écrits, lus, et publiés en l'une ou l'autre des deux langues officielles du Canada.

Même quand les influences indues américaines, qui passionnent les Canadiens de nos jours tout comme les influences indues cléricales ont passionné une autre époque, se manifestent dans un président américain de la Société, il faut bien que cette belle tradition soit continuée. Car, en tout cas, si je reste un maudit *Bastonnais* réfractaire après vingt-cinq ans de préoccupation avec l'histoire du Canada, mes intérêts professionnels principaux sont les relations entre les *Canadians* et les Canadiens, et les relations entre le Canada et les États-Unis. Les deux comportent les questions du bilinguisme et du biculturalisme. Mais ces questions relèvent de la compétence de la Commission Laurendeau-Dunton, qui a fait un stage à Vancouver dernièrement, et de peur que l'on ne m'accuse d'une « intervention injustifiée » dans les affaires qui sont présentement *sub judice,* je me propose de parler des relations canado-américaines, et non des relations entre les *Canadians* et les Canadiens. Et pour consoler la minorité monolingue, si par hasard il en reste une dans une société savante canadienne à l'heure présente et dans une assemblée dans la province de la « Colombie Canadienne », je me propose de parler dans ma

* *A View from the South,* read before the Canadian Historical Association, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C., June 10, 1965.

langue natale, après cet hommage très maladroit à Sa Majesté la langue française. Quel soulagement pour vous ... et pour moi.

It was twenty-two years ago that I first had the pleasure of attending an annual meeting of this association, and just twenty-one years ago that I first had the honor, which reduced me to fear and trembling, of reading a paper, an interim report on my researches in French Canada. In my beginning was my end, for that paper was titled, in classic academic style, "Some Aspects of the Relations of French Canada with the United States", a topic which is still of considerable concern to me. But since then my interest in Canadian history, which was first aroused, like Professor Wrong's, by the life and works of Francis Parkman, another *maudit Bastonnais*, has broadened out. Of course I found it impossible to carry out my brash ambition of picking up the story of French Canada where Parkman left it and carrying it down to the present, without studying English Canada as well. This has proved an equally rewarding experience. But because I remain an unreconstructed Little New Englander, despite the fact that I have had at least one foot in Canada since 1940 and beginning next fall will have both in London, Ontario, I am still concerned with Canadian-American relations. At the risk of putting one foot in my mouth, I have chosen as the title of my talk tonight "A View from the South," using for perhaps the last time my visitor's hunting license. This title, I may say for the benefit of colleagues who do not believe, as I do, that history includes literature, was suggested by Robertson Davies' book, *A Voice from the Attic*, which recorded Canadian comments on doings to the south. Now it is well known that the favorite Canadian sport, after hockey and contemplating the national navel, is taking a dim view of the States. Perhaps I have been long enough preoccupied with Canada to have acquired something of the Canadian willingness to tell other people what to do about their problems. In any case, since this traditional willingness has been remarkably evident of late — the sidewalks in front of the Toronto and Montreal American Consulates must be wearing out from repeated demonstrations and sitdowns by determined Canadian backseat drivers of the North American Juggernaut — I thought it might be appropriate, under the unusual circumstances of a damned Yankee making a presidential address to the CHA, to return the compliment and sound my barbaric Yankee yawp in an American view of some problems of Canadian history today. Canadians have demonstrated that they are good at dishing it out; I hope that they are also able to take it.

Only the sacred tradition that your president is entitled to voice his views without immediate rebuttal relieves me of a trepidation almost as marked as upon the occasion of my first trial of arms in this association's arena. That was in 1944, a year, the elders will remember, when Canadians of both varieties were notably bloody-minded. I trust

that my observations, offered in good part and because I have in Quaker terms a concern about Canada, will not rouse you this evening to an equivalent pitch of feeling. I have noted through the years that American visitors have made a remarkable though little remarked contribution to Canadian unity by producing a common Canadian front in reaction to their observations on Canada and things Canadian. One good reason for teaching Canadian literature as well as Canadian history in American universities is that such visitors might be more wary if they were familiar with William Kirby's immortal lines :

Now Uncle Jonathan be wise
And of yourselves take care, Sir
For each Canadian loudly cries,
"Invade us if you dare," Sir

The next few lines are particularly moving to one who has spent the last ten years on the American side of the Niagara Peninsula, and has frequently had occasion to fight his way through the roadblocks provided by a megalopolitan culture on the Canadian side, in order to pay pious pilgrimage to the Holy City of Toronto. That good city is, if nothing else, at least the jumping-off point for upstate New Yorkers who wish to penetrate to the deeper mysteries of Ottawa and Montreal. Kirby goes on to warn the Yankee invader :

The spirits of our Wolfe and Brock
Do still around us hover,
And still we stand on Queenston's Rock
To drive those Yankees over.

It has also been my sad experience, during these past ten years in the Canadian missions of upstate New York, that the Six Nations are still "loyal" (i.e., in British pay), for if they are not squatting on the New York Thruway (or rather I should say the Thomas E. Dewey Thruway, a name as little used as the more fitting Macdonald-Cartier Freeway), or proposing to take over the State of Vermont, they exhibit all their old wiliness through their front organization, Mohawk Airlines, in preventing the white man's passage to or from Toronto. Like Colonel C. P. Stacey, I reject unequivocably the idea that the border has ever been undefended. Aside from such natural obstacles as the Great Lakes, and such human ones as the hordes of Canadian and American customs and immigration officers, the continuing Pontiac's Conspiracy of the undaunted Red Men, and the lemming-like rush of our compatriots to one country or the other upon a weekend or a holiday, there is the hard evidence provided by James Eayrs' admirable book, *In Defence of Canada.* Under the provisions of Defence Scheme No. 1, drafted in 1920-21 by Colonel J. Sutherland "Buster" Brown, the Canadian General Staff's one-man "thinking directorate," in his own perhaps overly generous phrase, the armed forces of the Dominion were instructed that the principal external threat to the security of Canada lay in the possibility of invasion

by the United States. In 1927 "Buster" Brown wrote in defense of this thesis :

> I have studied the United States and the United States' citizens since I was a youth, and I flatter myself that I know something about them. I am firmly convinced that it is from no humanitarian point of view that the United States has not had wars with Great Britain.[1]

Canada, needless to say, was an integral part of Britain for Colonel Brown. The General Officers Commanding the various Canadian military districts showed a commendable zeal for undertaking observation and reconnaissance trips to their future battlefields south of the border. For "Buster" Brown cherished the traditional strategical doctrine that attack is the best defense, and he laid it down that immediately upon the outbreak of war Canadian "Flying Columns" should be dispatched to occupy Seattle and Portland, Minneapolis and St. Paul; and to establish bridgeheads on the Niagara, St. Clair, Detroit, and St. Mary's frontiers. The orders for Quebec Command were to "take the offensive on both sides of the Adirondack Mountains with a view of converging . . . in the vicinity of Albany, New York", while Maritime Command was to "make an offensive into the State of Maine."[2] The inclusion of these vacations objectives of thousands of Canadians may have explained the generals' enthusiasm for summer reconnaissance in depth, which had to be restrained by the Chief of General Staff on the grounds of policy as well as expense.

I do not propose to devote further attention to "Buster" Brown's nightmares, tempting topic though they are, but merely to use them as an introduction to my main thesis, which is the same I advanced at the 1944 meeting of this association : "Knowledge knows no boundaries; and the histories of Canada and the United States are so intricately interwoven that one cannot reasonably be discussed without the other, although as C. P. Stacey has remarked, 'Canadian writers have sometimes bent to the task with laudable determination,' and American all too frequently display an appalling ignorance of their neighbor."[3] Since 1944 I have learned a great deal more Canadian history and read almost everything written b yAmericans about Canada without having my faith in these propositions shaken in the slightest respect. Indeed it has only been strengthened by the flowering of Canadian historiography and by the development of increased American interest in Canada since that time.

There has been an immense development of Canadian nationalism since 1945, and along with a new emphasis on the French as well as the British traditions, there has been a new effort to distinguish the Canadian experience from the American one. If some French Canadians would

1 J. Eayrs, *In Defence of Canada* (Toronto, 1964), 71.
2 *Ibid.*, 324-5, 328.
3 CHA *Report*, 1944, 16.

like to separate Quebec from Canada, there are also English Canadians who would like to separate Canada from North America. Since pressures upon Canada in the postwar world from Britain have been negligible and from France virtually non-existent until recently, while the looming presence of the United States has become more pervasive in Canadian life, there has developed an almost hysterical preoccupation with resisting American influences. In February 1957 Professor F. H. Underhill, that sapient elder statesman of Canadian history, was moved to remark :

> ... there is a periodicity of about twenty to thirty years in these anti-American crises of our Canadian history. About once every twenty or thirty years the fever rises in our blood, we gird up our loins under the leadership of some inspiring prophet-saviour, and once again we save ourselves from the United States. Today in the 1950's the twenty-thirty years' period has come round again, and there is more anti-American speech-making and editorializing in Canada than I have ever known in my lifetime. We are waiting for the prophet-saviour to emerge.[4]

The wait was not a long one. A prophet promptly emerged with the requisite vision of how salvation was to be achieved. Professor Underhill had once more demonstrated the Oxford-trained historian's double-threat expertise in political science as well as in his own discipline. Or perhaps it is Toronto's new tradition of political-mindedness, rather than Oxford's old one, which was responsible for Professor Underhill's intuition that the bonfires were about to be lit once more on the border which has never lacked rhetorical defenders.

Now as a Yankee, damned or not, who has spent approximately half his time in Canada since 1940 and has been almost wholly concerned with Canada over that quarter century, I have had ample opportunity to become calloused about anti-Americanism. I accept as dogma Professor Underhill's observation that "the Canadian is the original, the most perfect, and the ideal anti-American in the mind of God"; and I am familiar with the historical reasons why this should be so. Two American attempts to conquer Canada by force of arms, "two quite threatening and prolonged encouragements of filibustering against Canada, and an intermittent barrage of annexationist invitations, threats, and other devices lasting almost two hundred years,[5] do not inevitably provide the basis of good neighborliness or good will. But I remain thin-skinned after all these years about what seems to me a wrongheaded Canadian tendency to ignore or minimize the American element in Canadian history, in order to argue the thesis that Canadians are North Americans with a difference and with a separate identity. I have no quarrel with this thesis itself, but I do question the arguments which have sometimes been used to support it. For I am convinced that if there had not been a

[4] F. H. Underhill, *In Search of Canadian Liberalism* (Toronto, 1960), 258.
[5] J. B. Brebner, *Canada: A Modern History* (Ann Arbor, 1960), ix.

United States it would have been necessary for Canadians to invent one, since resistance to the American presence is the central thread of Canadian history from the early days of the French period right down to the present. Anti-Americanism is the one thing that French and English Canadians have always had in common; the will to remain Canadian has always prevailed over quarrels within the family, although each group has upon occasion used the threat of joining the States as a possible solution of acute frustration.

I have recently illustrated this thesis with chapter and verse in an essay intended to provide the historical background for a symposium on the present state of the relationship between Canada and the United States.* I do not propose to resume it in detail tonight, though I am prepared to argue with one eminent Canadian historian who criticized my "most unreflecting and unprofessional insistance on the 'artificiality' of the Canadian state," and then pronounced this judgment :

> This is absurd. Canada is far less artificial than the United States, a country that crosses two mountain ranges and a vast desert, that was re-united by civil war, and has since rested on the subordination of one race of its citizens to one another.[6]

The author of these observations must be given to jet travel over the mountain ranges through which I have just come by train; must have forgotten Palliser's Triangle and the tundra; must have forgotten 1837 and 1869-70 and 1885; and must have renounced reading the Canadian press since 1960, as well as one large area of Canadian history.

The classic tradition of these gatherings is hard papers on hard chairs; if the University of British Columbia has been hospitable enough to remove one element from the formula, I do not propose to retain the other and add a further ingredient of hard blows. I should like, however, to make a brief survey of contemporary historiography in order to show how far my notion of the importance of the American factor has been accepted or rejected by leading contemporary Canadian historians.

The process of interaction between the two regions which were later to become two countries sharing North America north of the Rio Grande began soon after the continent took form. Certain natural north-south relationships were created by the geological revolutions which reared up the mountain ramparts on North America's western and eastern shores, and intruded the Shield between eastern and western Canada. Glaciation began the export of Canadian natural resources to the United States, scouring the Shield and leaving most of its topsoil in the north-central United States. The drainage systems which emerged after the Ice Age favored the United States over Canada; for the upper

[6] W. L. Morton, *Winnipeg Free Press*, November 28, 1964.

course of the St. Lawrence-Great Lakes waterway was barred by numerous natural obstacles which have only recently been overcome, while its mouth, like that of the great Hudson Bay drainage system, was blocked by ice for part of the year. The Mackenzie led only to a frozen sea, and the disputed mouth of the Columbia in the end fell to the Americans, though its headwaters are now to be jointly used, after even longer disputes. The Americans were blessed by nature with the easy, ice-free Hudson-Mohawk and Mississippi entrances to the heart of the continent. Geographers and geologists, unlike historians, have always found it difficult to treat Canada and the United States as two separate entities, for in their terms of reference the "Siamese Twin" relationship, as my historical father-in-God, Bartlet Brebner, described it, is incontrovertible.

There were continental conflicts even before the Europeans came, for tribal wars had arrayed the scattered Algonkian peoples of the northeast against the closely united Huron-Iroquois, whose "Manifest Destiny" led them to expansion northward and eastward from their original home south of the Great Lakes. In the Arctic regions there was another forecast of things to come in the conflict between the Esquimos and the northern Indians. East-west versus north-south trade wars developed with the coming of the Europeans, whose search first for fish and then for fur soon involved them in inter-imperial conflicts for a monopoly of the fur trade of the continent. The highly organized cartel became characteristic of the North American economy, but it was always threatened by ragged free enterprise, to the dismay of the London and Paris monopolists. Trade was the mainspring of the long series of Anglo-French conflicts, for colonial interests were often in conflict even when imperial ones were not. But it is interesting to note that intercolonial trade also showed a persistent tendency to develop in flat defiance of the mercantilist theories of both Britain and France, and a continental economy evolved despite the deepening imperial rivalry for control of the continent. Even the fiery Governor Dongan of New York, who thought it intolerable that "all landes a Frencheman walks over in America must be French," found it convenient to wink at illegal trade between Albany and Montreal. The American Hundred Years War, which culminated in the Battle of the Plains and the subsequent surrender of New France after the gallant last-ditch French victory of Sainte-Foy, left a legacy of bitterness against *les maudits Bastonnais* as well as against *les maudits Anglais*. After their long struggle against the overwhelming Anglo-American odds, the French Canadians, abandoned by their mother country to the mercy of their traditional enemies, developed a state-of-siege mentality and a preoccupation with survival which have perhaps become the heritage of all Canadians today. For minorities tend to have similar reactions, whether they are large or small.

If the roots of French-Canadian separatism can be traced back to 1760 and the close of what most French-Canadian historians regard as

their Golden Age, an analogous English-Canadian separatism began to develop immediately after the American Revolution. Professor Lower has written :

> ... Canada is the child of the Revolution : many of its people are Americans who did not break the tie with England, and they feel more than any others the tragedy of the cleavage. They are the children of divorced parents, and they know the bitterness of a broken home. In the heart of the Canadian of English speech there will be found, if he will confess it — one profound spiritual wound, the division in the race, the American Revolution.[7]

If you find this fanciful, I can cite the case of a New Brunswicker who for many years at these annual meetings greeted me with the earnest query : "Well, Wade, do you see any new signs of American willingness to rejoin the Empire?"

For Professor Creighton, too, 1783 marks the dismemberment of the first British Empire, "which virtually destroyed the natural development of British North America forever,"[8] a conclusion as gloomy as Guy Frégault's judgement that at the conquest French-Canadian society saw its "structure demolished and never properly restored."[9] Both these views, like Professor George M. Grant's recent lament for the British North America that in his eyes became engulfed in "the homogenized culture of the American Empire" between 1937 and 1963, seem to me to reflect a persistent colonialism. To my mind, Professor Morton is on sounder ground, when he writes :

> British America was the residue of two bids for supremacy in America, one lost by France to Britain and the American colonies, one lost by Britain to the United States and France. Canada had survived the last trial of strength in 1812 and the Monroe Doctrine registered the fact that supremacy in America rested with the United States.[10]

Professor Morton, following Professor S. D. Clark, points out that there were two internal continental struggles involved as well : first, the Americans' struggle in 1775-76 for the unity of the Anglo-American empire, their effort to incorporate with the other American colonies Quebec, Nova Scotia, and the Indian frontier, thus offsetting the divisiveness of the Proclamation of 1763 and the Quebec Act; and second, the Loyalists' effort to undo the division of 1783 and restore the continental empire of 1763. Simcoe expected that many Americans would be attracted to Upper Canada, as indeed they still are. But the preponderant neutrality of the *Québecois* and of the "neutral Yankees" of Nova Scotia doomed the first endeavour; the second was a lost cause from the beginning,

7 A. R. M. Lower, *Colony to Nation* (Toronto, 1964), 60.
8 Donald Creighton, Dominion of the North (Toronto, 1957), 166.
9 Guy Frégault, *La Guerre de la conquête* (Montréal, 1955), 458.
10 W. L. Morton, *The Canadian Identity* (Madison, 1961), 30.

for revolutions are rarely reversed, and the American Revolution was a continuing one. Though the War of 1812 confirmed the division forever, it ended in a stalemate and the Peace of Ghent, the "peace that passeth understanding," restored the *status quo ante.* The postwar settlements by international joint commissions, which became the standard procedure for the determination of Canadian-American disputes, laid the real basis for the enduring partition of North America north of the Rio Grande between two countries.

Since this is an after-dinner speech on Canadian-American relations, I must honor tradition by mentioning the undefended frontier, that hardy and persistent myth, which was *not* established by the Rush-Bagot Agreement. Two generations of rumors of war after 1815 saw the most intensive period of fortification of the border, until the Treaty of Washington (1871) settled the outstanding differences between the North American neighbors. Massive masonry along the border, now the delight of tourists, reminds us that war was not unthinkable, but a very present and recurrent danger during much of the nineteenth century. There were border raids and "troublutions" in abundance to keep alive the old Loyalist heritage of fear and suspicion of the United States, and there was ample evidence of Yankee plots to take over Canada in the inflamed oratory of Manifest Destiny. But the commercial advantages of reciprocal trade or commercial union were to have more appeal to scheming Yankees than appeals to "Let's go and capture Canaday, for we've nothing else to do," in the immortal words of the Fenian marching song. No doubt greatly to the disappointment of patriotic Canadians, doggedly prepared to shoulder their economic muskets to repel the Yankee, there never seemed to be a majority in Congress for these schemes in which economic forces were to achieve what force of arms had failed to do. Ever since 1911, when Canada had the profound pleasure of rejecting a reciprocity plan which the United States had finally proposed, after a long series of unsuccessful Canadian pilgrimages to Washington in search of commercial agreements, there has never been serious question of commercial union, though Canadian politicians still find it possible from time to time to take a leaf from the matchless Sir John A. Macdonald's book and make capital of the "'veiled treason' which attempts by sordid means and mercenary motives to lure our people from their allegiance." Yet it is consoling to be desired, even if one is determined to resist advances, and there is some historical evidence to support John Hay's observation that Canada has had a certain tendency to behave like a "married flirt" in the North Atlantic Triangle.

It is a temptation to dwell further upon the period between Confederation and 1911 when the Canadian-American relationship was finally becoming stabilized in a fashion which permitted the emergence of good

there is an American thread in the Canadian pattern which is quite as important as the British and French threads. There is also, of course, an important Canadian thread in the American pattern, which is too often ignored by both Canadians and Americans. I recognize that there are also other traditions which have contributed to the making of Canada, and that Canada is now neither predominantly British, French, or American, but another amalgam of minorities like the United States in terms of people, though notably unlike it in maintaining the ideal of cultural dualism rather of a single culture to which all assimilate. I would suggest that the task of Canadian historians today is not only to continue to link the once separate histories of two peoples who have jointly made a nation, but also to shed new light on the north-south continental relationship, which since 1940 has become immensely more important than the traditional transatlantic ones. And if the colleagues have energy to spare, they might do worse than to study how the role of other common elements in the Canadian and American patterns has differed in the two countries, for such study promises to shed much light on how Canadians and Americans remain distinct and seperate, despite all the forces of a common geographical environment, a common intellectual heritage from Europe, a partially common history in North America, and a largely common economy. Like it or not, we are different varieties of the North American, recognized as such by European, Asian, and African, who find the Canadian emphasis upon our differences somewhat puzzling, when we have so much more in common. Their bewilderment might not be so great, if they were familiar with the French-Canadian translation of Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself," which concludes :

> Je résiste à tout mieux qu'à ma propre diversité.[13]

[13] R. Dion-Lévesque, *Walt Whitman* (Montréal, 1933).