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RACE AND LIBERTY : THE HISTORICAL IDEAS OF SIR JOHN GEORGE BOURINOT

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Late nineteenth century Canadian imperialism was a form of nationalism, and as with all ideologies of nationalism one of its most potent ingredients was a cohesive, and sometimes mythological, view of the past. Like all nationalist historiography — whether it be Garneau on French Canada, Bancroft on the United States or Treitschke on Germany — this imperialist interpretation of the Canadian past is less important for the facts it reports than the assumptions which organized them, far more interesting for the concept of national mission it expresses, and the national image it seeks to convey. This imperialist conception of Canadian history was the product of many publicists and amateur historians. One of the most sophisticated of these was John George Bourinot who, unlike such pedestrian contemporaries as Kingsford, was fully aware of the work of British and American historians and was responsive to the intellectual assumptions that appeared in their writings. Though it cannot be said that all Canadian imperialists held every single postulate about the past articulated by Bourinot, his outlook nevertheless reflected their convictions that the central thread of Canadian history was the progress of self-government toward full freedom in an imperial union, that the motive force of this process was "racial capacity", and that the Canadian constitutional system was immensely superior to that of the neighbouring Republic. What follows then is an analysis of Bourinot's historical ideas in terms of his imperial sentiment, and an examination of the way in which some of the leading ideas of German, British and American scholars that he accepted were subtly transformed by applying them in a Canadian context.

Like many other Canadians who felt a deep emotional attachment to the imperial connection, Bourinot was born in the Maritimes, at Sydney, Cape Breton, in 1837. Whenever he was mistaken for a French Canadian he would protest emphatically that "I am not a bit of a French Canadian, but solidly English. I speak French, but as a matter of education." His father, a Huguenot of Norman descent, a graduate of Caen University, had emigrated to Nova Scotia from the Channel Island of Jersey, had served both as vice-counsel for France in Canada and as a representative of Cape Breton in the Nova Scotia assembly, until he was appointed to the Dominion Senate in 1867. Bourinot's mother was the daugther of the jurist, Chief Justice John George Marshall of loyalist lineage, a prolific pamphleteer and an earnest advocate of Victorian causes of improvement; he delivered over six hundred lectures in Britain on the temperance

question, and in 1849 had accompanied Richard Cobden to the World's Peace Congress in Paris. It was undoubtedly from his father-in-law that Bourinot communicated his own penchant for pamphleteering, his interest in constitutional history, and his pride in the United Empire Loyalist origins of British Canada.[1]

After receiving his Bachelor of Arts degree from Trinity University in Toronto in 1857, Bourinot became a reporter for the Nova Scotia Assembly; in 1860 he founded, and until 1867, edited, the *Halifax Evening Reporter*, a Conservative, pro-Confederation paper. In 1868 he followed his father to the Dominion Senate as short-hand reporter, but he found the salary insufficient for launching his sons on their careers. In 1872 he wrote to Alexander Campbell, postmaster general and manager of patronage in the Macdonald cabinet, explaining the deficiencies of his income and asking for a position for his son Wilmot, who, he said, was dull at school but bright in business. "This is the first appeal of the kind I have ever made since I have been in the Senate." It is not certain what happened to Wilmot, but in the next year Bourinot himself was appointed to the more lucrative post of assistant clerk of the Commons, and in 1880 he was made Chief Clerk, a position he held until his death in 1902. It was Sir Alexander Campbell also who in 1888 urged upon Lord Lansdowne that Bourinot deserved some order of distinction from Her Majesty's Government — implying, perhaps, the value of the Nova Scotian's writings for the cause of Canadian patriotism.[2]

A visitor to the Commons in 1894 described him as a balding, cleanshaven, robust, man who wore "that indespensible, unsatisfactory British adjunct, an eyeglass", sitting at the end of the long baise-covered table between the Government and Opposition benches, always ready to advise the Speaker on points of procedure, or the government on the constitutional issues raised by the Jesuit Estates Bill or the Manitoba Schools Act. The chairs in his library, wrote a reporter, had depths that corresponded to the thoughts one should think in them. On his shelves reposed not only the standard authorities on the British constitution, but also a large collection of books and documents on the early voyages of exploration; the popular nineteenth century historians,Macaulay, Fiske, Parkman, Green and Lecky, as well as sixteen volumes of Herbert Spencer, and Isaac Taylor's, *The Origin of the Aryans* (1889); all indicative that Bourinot's interest in political institutions transcended a professional

1 *Public Archives of Nova Scotia, Sir J. G. Bourinot Collection*, scrapbook No 3, unidentified clipping (1889). R. Maclean of St. Francis-Xavier University located this reference for me; J. G. Bourinot, "The Late Judge Marshall: or the record of an earnest life", *Canadian Monthly and National Review IV* (May 1880), p. 520; Madge Macbeth, "A Great Canadian: Sir John Bourinot", *Dalhousie Review* XXXIV (Summer, 1954), pp. 173-180.

2 *Ontario Archives, Sir Alexander Campbell Papers*, J. G. Bourinot to Campbell, January 29, 1872; Lansdowne to Campbell, March 22, 1888.

concern with procedural points, indicative too of the intellectual roots of his own view of history.[3]

It was perhaps because he did much of his writing in the midst of the proceedings in the Commons that his style was often slip-shod and unclear. When Bourinot was appointed secretary of the Royal Society of Canada in 1882, the lawyer-journalist Nicholas Flood Davin, examined the sentence constructions of one of the new secretary's works and in a vitriolic pamphlet pronounced him a "literary fraud", "a man not fit to be a common school teacher, setting up as a literary leader", and suggested that after his name be appended the title M.Q.E., Murderer of Queen's English. The Royal Society as an institution was not popular with *The Globe* which called it "a mutual admiration society of nincompoops" or with Goldwin Smith who declared himself opposed to closed corporations of all kinds and objected to the state supporting "effusions of the bi-lingual Canadian muse". Though even more sympathetic observers like G. M. Grant thought the literary and historical section to be in "a condition anaemia", the annual meetings and publications of the Society did provide an outlet for works of an historical character. Bourinot supervised the details of its administration, edited nineteen volumes of its transactions, and in these volumes published many papers, two of which were remarkable for their time; one on the intellectual development of the Canadian people, and the other a comparative treatment of the political institutions of what he called the "Teutonic races".[4]

His intellectual interests were varied and his writings voluminous. He was at the centre of literary effort in late Victorian Canada and his home on Cooper Street was often the meeting place of such literati as Archibald Lampman, William Wilfred Campbell, and Gilbert Parker. He accommodated Goldwin Smith when that sage came to inspect the Parliamentary Library and he advised Lady Aberdeen on the spectacular historical ball she staged in 1896. During the summers when Parliament was not in session, Bourinot delivered public lectures on the constitution at Toronto, Johns Hopkins and Harvard Universities. His writings, which appeared in such journals as *Blackwood's* and the *Quarterly Review*, the *Magazine of American History* and reports of the American historical Association, the *Canadian Monthly* and the *Week*, ranged from incursions into the local

[3] *The Week* XI (June 29, 1894) pp. 739-40; *Catalogue of the Library of the Late Sir John Bourinot, K.C.M.G.* (n.p.,n.d.) Bourinot's was undoubtedly one of the finest libraries in late Victorian Canada. He was an assiduous collector of published documents, pamphlets, fugutive literature of all kinds, and particularly rare Americana, some of the items cataloguing hundreds of dollars. When he died, his library was offered for sale to the Canadian government but the Laurier administration was not interested: it was subsequently sold to American dealers, and it was for this purpose that the inventory of his library — so useful for anyone interested in his thought — was made.

[4] N. Flood Davin, *The Secretary of the Royal Society, A Literary Fraud* (Ottawa, 1882); W. S. McNutt, *Days of Lorne* (Fredericton, 1955), p. 139; *The Week*, I (May 29, 1884), p. 403 and VIII (June 12, 1891), p. 445.

history of the Ottawa Valley and his native Cape Breton, to an analysis of Canada's intellectual strength and weaknesses; from a manual of procedural usage for the House of Commons and a handbook of rules for general meetings, to specialized monographs on local government, Canadian federalism, and comparative politics; from semi-popular magazine articles on place-names to a biography of Lord Elgin and texts on Canadian government. One of his last pieces was an enthusiastic introduction to Alfred Thayer Mahan's study of the South African War.

Bourinot was the first Canadian to sit on the council of the American Historical Association, he held honorary degrees from five Canadian universities, and when he received the Order of St. Michael and St. George in 1890, he was the third Canadian to be so honored for literary merit. A year after his death he was described as "undoubtedly the most popular historian that Canada has yet produced".[5]

What made Bourinot's works so popular to his contemporaries was precisely that quality for which a later generation would condemn him. This was not so much his infrequent employment of documentary evidence, or the fact that he was not a professional, but that he was hopelessly "colonial in outlook",[6] that is, he saw no incompatibility between a viable Canadian nationalism and a closer union of the British Empire. He was an enthusiastic member of the Imperial Federation League, a corresponding secretary of the Royal Colonial Institute and a close friend of Imperialists like Sir Frederick Young in Britain and Colonel Denison in Canada. The central burden of much of his historical work was aimed at demonstrating that the tendency toward imperial consolidation was inherent in the logic of Canadian history.

Bourinot's imperialism was a nebulous and emotional concept rooted and shaped by the sea-ward orientation of his native province and the tenacious tradition of the United Empire Loyalists, and it perhaps owed a good deal to the natural reaction of a sensitive mind to the frustrations and circumscribed confines that a backwoods community imposed upon political and cultural life. He looked forward to the time "when a Canadian will have as potent a voice in imperial affairs as a dweller in Kent or Devon",[7] and he argued that an imperial union would obliterate the colonial mentality, lift Canada out of a slough of provincialism and sordid politics, and, that by widening their responsibility and area of duty, such a federation would elevate the character of the people and draw forth high statesmanship. In 1880 he wrote that the national aspirations of Canadians

[5] Norman Peterson, "Political History Since Confederation", *Canadian Magazine* XXI (June, 1903), p. 114.

[6] W. N. Sage, "Where Stands Canadian History?" Canadian Historical Association *Report* (1945), p. 6.

[7] J. G. Bourinot, *The Study of Political Science in Canadian Universities, a paper read before the Royal Society of Canada and Trinity University, Toronto, in May 1889* (Montreal, 1889), p. 8.

could only be realized, not in isolation from the parent state, but in "more intimate connection, which will elevate them above the humble, subordinate part they now play, and give them their true rank in that noble theatre of action which the Empire at large should offer to all its sons".[8]

This was, of course, Joseph Howe's ideal of imperial service and in the 1890's Bourinot was to laud the Nova Scotian as the prophet of the new imperialism. But when in 1866 Howe had originally proposed his scheme for the reorganization of the Empire, to be accomplished by admitting colonial representatives to the Imperial Parliament — a proposal then intended as an alternative to the federation of the British North American colonies — Bourinot had labelled it "quack medicine", compared it to John Locke's utopian constitution for the Carolinas, and objected that in such a union colonial representatives would always be outnumbered and that such representation would be impractical as long as each individual colony retained a separate government. But even in 1866 Bourinot did not exclude the possibility of such an imperial union; instead he argued that the indispensable "first step" in that direction must be "a Federation of all the Provinces. If they were ever to have any influence at all in [an Imperial] Parliament, a political combination must first exist between them".[9] Without such a preliminary local union, an imperial federation would result in pure "political Bedlam". Thus Bourinot regarded Confederation of the individual British North American colonies as a necessary precondition for the larger imperial union.

Though Bourinot was a master of constitutional history, it is ironic that he never proposed a concrete plan of union, a plan for which all its critics clamored, and not a few of its proponents produced. He was aware of both the technical difficulties involved and the indifference of the public, and he believed that a reorganization of the empire would come in much the same way as had Confederation in 1867, not proceeded by a plethora of constitutional schemes, but as a response to some "great national emergency" and the awareness of the fragility and insecurity of the basis upon which the Empire rested. "The union of the provinces", he wrote "at times afforded a fruitful theme of discussion in the press, and even in Parliament, but it never assumed a practical shape until the political difficulties of Canada forced her public men into the consideration of a national idea. So it may be with this question of the Federation of Great Britain and her dependencies."[10] Moreover, so convinced was he that the tendency toward ever larger political units was an inevitable product of

[8] J. G. Bourinot, "The National Development of Canada", *Canadian Monthly* IV (March, 1880), p. 337.

[9] J. G. Bourinot, *Confederation of the Provinces of British North America Re-published from the "Halifax Evening Reporter" of the 10th, 13th, and 17th November, 1866* (Halifax, 1866), p. 6.

[10] J. G. Bourinot, *The National Development of Canada, A paper Read at the Royal Colonial Institute, January 20, 1880* (London, 1880), p. 20.

social evolution, and that the dynamic agency which motivated this progress was the political capacity of the Anglo-Saxon race, that he sometimes talked of imperial federation in deterministic terms. Finally, the specific mechanism by which this union would be achieved was not Bourinot's main concern. His major contribution to the imperialist argument was to demonstrate that the movement for imperial consolidation was not something thrust upon Canada from the outside, but that it logically emerged out of all her previous development.

II

Bourinot's interest in history was aroused and sustained by the requirements of his profession, and by the increasing attention that Canadians in the late nineteenth century were devoting to their past. "Of late," an observer noted in 1888, "it would appear that a taste and demand for Canadian historical matter have been on the increase," and, the historian J. C. Dent thought that despite formidable obstacles and much mediocre achievement, the "best literary efforts of the Canadian mind . . . have been made in the department of history."[11]

Inextricably related to this interest in history in general was a heightened awareness of the significance of Canadian constitutional history in particular. Bourinot himself hit upon the explanation for the appearance of many volumes on Canadian government. "In history," he wrote, "Canadians have always shown some strength, and perhaps this was to be expected in view of the fact that political and historical literature — such works as Hamilton's "Federalist" or Todd's "Parliamentary Government" — naturally engages the attention of active intellects in a new country at a time when its institutions have to be moulded, and it is necessary to collect precedents and principles from the storehouse of the past for the assistance of the present."[12] In its narrowest meaning, this need for understanding and codifying the unwritten procedures of the British parliamentary system, in order to apply them to the Canadian federal state, accounted for the appearance of Alpheus Todd's *Parliamentary Government in England* (1867, 1869), which Sir William Anson described as the fullest and most serviceable work on the subject,[13] and Bourinot's own *Parliamentary Procedure and Practice* (1884). Beyond this severely practical demand, there was the intellectual curiosity sparked by a constitution which combined the monarchical and federal principles, and which might provide the model for an imperial federation, or a solution to the Irish home rule issue. Moreover, not a few of the books on the Canadian

[11] *The Dominion Illustrated* I (August, 1888), p. 78; J. C. Dent, *The Last Forty Years: Canada Since the Union of 1841* (Toronto, 1881), vol. II, p. 558.

[12] J. G. Bourinot, *Our Intellectual Strength and Weakness* (Montreal, 1893), p. 18.

[13] Henry J. Morgan, "Dr. Alpheus Todd and Canadian Constitutional History", *The Week* X (October 13, 1893), pp. 1095-96.

system of government that appeared in the 1880's and 1890's were motivated by a propagandistic and didactic purpose. A rationalization for the position of the Ontario government on the provincial rights issue was made by S. J. Watson, the Librarian of the Parliament of Ontario, in *The Powers of Canadian Parliaments* (1880) which attempted to show that the provincial assemblies were not mere "municipal councils" as Fennings Taylor had described them in his *Are Legislatures Parliaments?* (1879). It was necessary also to promote the understanding of the constitution in order to teach the "duties and responsibilities of Canadian citizens", as Bourinot put it in his widely used text, *How Canada is Governed*, first published in 1895 and in its twelfth revised edition in 1928.

But perhaps the most potent force which motivated the publication of books and countless popular articles on the constitution during the late 1880's and early 1890's was the necessity to combat the arguments of the annexationists by demonstrating that the British system of responsible, cabinet government was a superior and more efficient guardian of liberty than the godless, mobocracy of the American Republic. In an address to the Imperial Federation League in Toronto, in 1890, one imperialist pointed out that "if on a comparison of the two systems we find good reason to consider that the British system . . . is far preferable to that of our neighbours, a valuable weapon for Canadian use is added to the armoury of the Federation league," and, he concluded rhetorically: "Will Canada, as a part of that Empire, consent to exchange that perfected system of Parliamentary Government, which . . . she has received from the hands of Great Britain, for a system which, on the testimony of Americans themselves, is so full of serious drawbacks, and is so convenient to the organizers of the caucus, the convention, and the machine, to the lobbyist, the intriguer and the demagogue?" [14] For the imperialist, the catalogue of evils flowing from Republican government not only undermined annexationist sentiment; it also deepened the emotional attachment to the Empire which bestowed upon Canada a superior system.

The idea that the American system of government was less democratic, less efficient and more prone to corruption and disruption, than the Canadian British system, formed one of the most often recurring themes in nationalist and imperialist rhetoric, and constituted one of the most persistent components of the image that Canadians had of the United States. In his political science Bourinot imparted to this idea scholarly rationalization and versimilitude. He was one of the first Canadian political scientists to detail the exact differences between the two constitutional systems, and to demonstraate "the English character of Canadian institutions", an identity he discovered in the permanent tenure of civil

[14] A. H. F. Lefroy, *The British versus The American System of National Government, being a paper read before the Toronto branch of the Imperial Federation League on Thursday, December 18th, 1890* (Toronto, 1891), pp. 7, 41.

servants, the independence of the judges, the municipal system, the Commons' control over finance, and the entire corpus of unwritten usages.[15] Bourinot was able to make these contrasts in a convincing fashion partly because he drew upon the authoritative works of the Englishman Walter Bagehot and the American Woodrow Wilson, whose *Congressional Government* (1887) and *The State* (1889) lamented the division of authority in the Congressional system and admired the flexibility of cabinet government; partly because he tended to contrast the ideal operations of the British system with the sordid realities of American politics as revealed, for example, in Bryce's *The American Commonwealth* (1888); and partly because he satisfied an ingrained Canadian prejudice apparently confirmed by the many American reform movements in the post Civil War period which were aimed at cleansing and democratizing the conduct of politics. Thus, in an article succinctly entitled, "Why Canadians do not favor annexation", Bourinot could flatly assert that their determination to remain British was due to the knowledge that they enjoyed a superior frame of government.[16]

III

While the motivation of Bourinot's historical work derived from these Canadian conditions, what raised him above the amateur chroniclers of his day was his awareness of contemporaneous developments in historical thought in Europe and America. The decades after 1870 witnessed a radical change in the organization of historical studies, refinements in methodology, and in the articulation of guiding ideas which were to shape such studies for two generations. The agents of this change, whose works Bourinot admired and imitated, were Edward Augustus Freeman, Regius Professor at Oxford, and two of his disciples in the United States, Herbert Baxter Adams of Johns Hopkins and John Burgess of Columbia University. Drawing upon German scholarship, accepting "race" as a causal factor in history, deeply influenced by both the methods of comparative philology and the successful search for "laws" of evolution of the physical sciences, these men and their numerous students revolutionized the study of the development of political institutions. For them, history was essentially devoted to tracing the development of democratic government from its ultimate representation in the United States and Britain to its germinal origins in the folkmoot of the primitive Saxon forest. The influence of the exponents of this new political science

[15] J. G. Bourinot, "Canada and the United States, A Study in Comparative Politics", *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science I* (July, 1890), pp. 1-25; "Canada and the United States from the Historical Points of View", *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1890.*

[16] J. G. Bourinot, "Why Canadians do not favor annexation", *The Forum* (May, 1895), Clipping in University of Toronto Archives.

upon Bourinot is important because it shaped his interpretation of Canadian history. He himself attributed his interest in local government to the Johns Hopkins school; he published two monographs under Adams' auspices; he owned nearly all the publications of these scholars; [17] and his footnotes are peppered with references to them, voluble testimony of his debt and the derivation of his ideas.

One of the assumptions which Bourinot, and other Canadian constitutional historians like William Houston, librarian of the Ontario Legislature, shared with this school, was the idea that history was past politics. "The nature of History and Political Science" said Bourinot, determined their ultimate relation, if not their necessary co-ordination. *History is past politics and politics is present history.* History is, primarily, the experience of man in organized societies or so-called states. Political science is the application of this historical experience to the existing problems of an ever progressive society." [18] The second assumption of this school was that the examination of the past was to be conducted in a scientific spirit and with scientific purpose. "It is the part of chemistry," Houston elaborated, "to explain phenomena of compound bodies, of geology to explain the facts of the earth's crust, of biology to explain the phenomena of life. So it is the part of political science to explain the facts and phenomena of organized society." Its method, he added, is similar to that of the physical sciences. "The facts of political society have to be analysed, classified, and made the basis of generalizations, just as the facts of the physical world are. The method by which political principles are reached from political facts is the inductive method." [19] For Bourinot, one of the most elemental themes of Canadian history, analogous to a scientific "law", was the evolution out of colonial status toward a fuller freedom in an imperial association. In addition to its overwhelming focus on political organisms, and its scientific flavor, the new school of political science, itself heavily influenced by the ideas of Darwinian evolution, stressed the continuity and gradual development of institutions. "It is in History as it is in Geology," explained William Ashley of the University of Toronto: "thirty or forty years ago geological changes were explained as the results of great cataclysms, great catastrophes, which suddenly destroyed one condition of things and created another. Now most geologists are inclined to regard such changes as exceedingly gradual and protracted. In somewhat the same way, history is coming to be regarded not as made up of a number

[17] *Catalogue of the Library of the Late Sir John Bourinot, K.C.M.G.* (n.p., n.d.).

[18] J. G. Bourinot, *The Study of Political Science in Canadian Universities*, p. 6. Bourinot is quoting H. B. Adams.

[19] W. Houston, "The relation between political science and practical politics," *Proceedings of the (Royal) Canadian Institute*, third series, vol. VI (1887-8) (Toronto, 1889), p. 41.

of decisive strokes by a series of great men, . . . or of a number of great charters or constitutions, but as a slow growth and development." [20]

The most important single idea that Bourinot took over from the new political science was Freeman's concept of "comparative politics" and the racial theory which underpinned it. For the purposes of comparative politics, Freeman pointed out, "a political constitution is a specimen to be studied, classified, and labelled" just as an animal is so treated by the biologist. "We have to note the likenesses, striking and unexpected as those likenesses often are, between the political constitutions of remote times and places; and we have, as far as we can, to classify our specimens according to the probable causes of these likenesses." [21] The idea that political institutions could be so classified, derived from the methods of comparative philology and comparative mythology that were developed in Germany in the early years of the nineteenth century. Just as the philologists and mythologists had discovered common words and myths in the languages and religions of several diverse peoples, and postulated an original Indo-European race to explain these similarities, so comparative politics sought to explain the presence in different areas of similar political institutions and it did so by postulating the existence of a primitive "Aryan race" from whose elemental political formations these variations were derived. [22] Thus, the many likenesses in the political institutions of the primitive Greeks, Romans and Teutons, which cannot be explained as direct transmission of examples, or, simply as identical responses to similar problems, can, argued Freeman, be accounted for by assuming that in their original home the Aryans had developed elementary political forms such as the tribal assemblies; that the race was dispersed and broken up into separate "nations", Romans, Greeks and Teutons; that in each of these nations which contained the "seeds" of liberty as a racial inheritance there occurred a recapitulation of their original institutional life; and that it is this common racial feature which explains the presence of similar governmental forms in different places at different times. The Teutonic race, a part of the hypothetical Aryan race to which the Saxons and Normans belonged, found its best expression in England. Of all the European nations, continued Freeman, "our own is, beyond all doubt, the one which can claim for its political institutions the most unbroken descent from the primitive Teutonic stock." [23] While Germany itself was conquered by the despotism of Rome, the seeds of Teutonic liberty were transplanted to England by the early invasions, and in time were carried across the Atlantic to New England — and Canada. In summary, this "germ theory" of institutional development

[20] W. J. Ashley, *Nine Lectures on the Earlier Constitutional History of Canada, Delivered before the University of Toronto in Easter Term, 1889* (Toronto, 1889), pp. 13-14.

[21] E. A. Freeman, *Comparative Politics* (London, 1873), p. 23.

[22] *Ibid.*, pp. 1-36.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 45.

which dominated the thinking of American historians in the late nineteenth century, [24] assumed that the capacity for self-government was a racial attribute, and that it was the racial factor which provided the continuity in the evolution of representative government from the primitive assemblies of the Teutonic tribes in northern Germany, to the folkmoots of the Saxons in England, and to the New England townmeetings in America.

While it was from Freeman and Adams that Bourinot derived this theory, it should be noted that its intellectual origins go far back into the eighteenth century, and that a generation before the political scientists applied it in the 1880's, a group of American romantic historians — Prescott, Bancroft, Motley and Parkman — had displayed this interest in finding the germs of Western liberty in the customs of the Teutonic tribes and in the Anglo-Saxon towns. [25]

Bourinot drew upon the whole range of the literature of the Teutonic school to demonstrate the operation in Canada of the germ theory. While this idea was the basic assumption behind most of his discussions of government, it is most explicitly stated in his three lectures, *Canadian Studies in Comparative Politics* (1890). The origins of parliament, whether in England or Canada, he wrote, "must be sought in the early assemblies of our English ancestors, who were Teutons or Germans who came from the sea-coast of northern Germany and of Denmark." [26] As a Canadian however, Bourinot especially emphasized that the French Canadians, "like the English Canadians, can trace their history back to times when the Teutonic people, the noblest offspring of the Aryan family of nations, conquered the original Celtic inhabitants of Gaul and Britain." Originally one northern, Aryan people, the Teutons in Gaul and the Teutons in Britain followed two very different evolutions. In Britain they laid the foundations of the language, common law, "capacity for self-government" and "the spirit of liberty". In Gaul, however, the Teuton was absorbed by the people he conquered, and the Roman code and Roman tongue were forced upon him. Thus, originally the two races which were destined to make Canada were one, but while in France the local institutions of freedom were destroyed by Roman influence and the centralizing activities of the monarchy, in England the Teutons "had succeeded by the time the great English emigration to New England took place. . . in developing from the free institutions of their Teutonic ancestors a parlimentary system." [27]

[24] Thomas F. Grosset, *Race The History of an Idea in America* (Southern Methodist University Press, Dallas, 1963), p. 110; Michael Kraus, *A History of American History* (New York, 1937), p. 338.

[25] David Levin, *History as Romantic Art* (New York, 1963), Chapter IV.

[26] J. G. Bourinot, *How Canada is Governed* (Toronto, 1895), p. 57.

[27] J. G. Bourinot, *Canadian Studies in Comparative Politics* (Montreal, 1890), pp. 3, 4, 7, 8.

The same dichotomy in the development that separated the Teutons in England and the Teutons in Gaul appeared on the North American continent, for both the seeds of liberty and the institutions of despotism were transferred there. "Whilst the people of New England," Bourinot pointed out, "were discussing their affairs in the fullest manner in their township meetings, the French Canadian was ignorant of the very meaning of the great heritage of local government peculiar to the Teutonic races." [28] And because liberty was the major impetus to social progress, its absence implied "complete social and political stagnation." The history of Canada before 1760, he wrote, "will not give any evidence of political, economic, or intellectual development under the influence of French dominion, but it is interesting to the student of comparative politics on account of the comparison which it enables us to make between the absolution of old France... and the political freedom which has been a consequence of the supremacy of England." [29]

Viewing the Anglo-French wars in Parkman's terms, as a struggle between Liberty and Absolutism, it was inevitable that Bourinot should also see the conquest as a happy calamity. "What seemed to them the greatest possible misfortune that could befall a people," he wrote of the French Canadians of 1760, "was, in the end, a national blessing in disguise." [30] Under the "invigorating inspiration of those political representative institutions, which followed the supremacy of England in Canada, the French Canadians... learned, at last, to appreciate the advantages of being permitted to manage their own affairs." [31] The significance of this interpretation of the conquest, which, incidentally, Bourinot shared with Parkman, Kingsford and many others was not merely that British supremacy brought the institutions of liberty to Canada. To this well-worn theme Bourinot added a novel twist : assuming that the French Canadians were originally of the same racial Teutonic group as the English, endowed with the same racial instincts for self-government, and assuming that their political development had been repressed under the domination of the French monarchy, the conquest simply destroyed these shackles and allowed their innate capacities full development. Because they both shared these primordial racial instincts their political evolution after the Conquest was identical. "In its political development French Canada has been, and is, as essentially English as the purely English sections of the Dominion." [32] In Bourinot's mind,

[28] (J. G. Bourinot), "Canada: its National Development and Destiny", *The Quarterly Review*, 169 (July, 1889), p. 15. This contrast is made in more detail in Bourinot's "Local Government in Canada an Historical Study" (*Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science*, ed. H. B. Adams), Fifth series, V-VI (Baltimore, 1887), Lecture I.

[29] J. G. Bourinot, *Canada Under British Rule 1760-1900* (Cambridge, 1900), p. 3.

[30] *Canadian Studies in Comparative Politics*, p. 16.

[31] "Local Government in Canada", p. 66.

[32] *Canadian Studies in Comparative Politics*, p. 21.

then, the Teutonic germ theory provided a useful instrument for underlining what he thought to be an essential aspect of national unity.

There are other reasons why Bourinot accepted this theory and incorporated it into his work. The fact that it was widely held by academic historians imparted to it an air of professional respectability which was important to a man who was not trained as a professional historian. The theory, moreover, seemed to rest upon the authoritative idea of evolution and was identified with the exactitude of the physical sciences. This made it attractive to Bourinot who had drunk deeply of the wine of Herbert Spencer, and who measured the intellectual backwardness of the French Canadians by the fact that they did not read Tyndall, Huxley or Darwin.[33] Moreover, a theory of historical development which so heavily emphasized "race" seemed to have particular relevance to the struggles and conflicts within late Victorian Canada.

The Teutonic origins theory moreover buttressed the imperialist and nationalist aspects of Bourinot's history. It is no accident that Goldwin Smith, the most forceful critic of both imperialism and Canadian nationalism, should be irritated by Bourinot and the other "Ottawa pundits" who he thought were creating unneeded mystery by their interpretation of a Constitution scarcely thirty years old and which lacked "the heritage of constitutional precedent and tradition."[34] By tracing the origins of the Canadian constitution back to the assemblies of the Teutonic tribes, Bourinot imparted to that constitution a venerable antiquity which in itself was satisfying to national pride. Certainly it is significant too that the theory emphasized the transmission and transplantation of institutions, that for Freeman it underlined the idea of "the unity of history", and that for Adams it represented a way of stressing the continuity of British and American history.[35] For Bourinot it provided a perfect instrument for describing the deep historical connection between Canada and Britain. It implied also that it was racial capacity which constituted the dynamic motive force impelling a closer union of the empire, and it suggested, from the experience of Switzerland and Germany, that within a federal framework the Teutonic germs reach their highest development.

Finally, Bourinot employed the theory to describe what many of his contemporaries regarded as an undesirable development within the

[33] J. G. Bourinot, "French Canada" (n.p., n.d.), Unidentified clipping in the University of Toronto Archives.

[34] *A Selection from Goldwin Smith's Correspondence*, (ed.) Arnold Haultain (Toronto, n.d.), Smith to J. S. Willison, May 9, 1895, p. 281.

[35] See for example, H. B. Adams to Daniel Coit Gilman, July 3, 1882, in "Historical Scholarship in the United States, 1876-1901; As Revealed in the Correspondence of Herbert B. Adams", (ed.) W. Stull Holt, *Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science*, Series LVI, number 4 (Baltimore, 1938), p. 551.

United States. The idea that the capacity for self-government was a unique attribute of the northern Teutonic peoples drove many American historians into an attitude of hostility toward the immigrants from southeastern Europe who were entering the United States in increasing numbers during the 1880's. It was maintained by scholars like Adams that these immigrants were innately incapable of participating in the conduct of democratic government, that the increase in their numbers as revealed in the census of 1890 represented a threat to the Anglo-Saxon leadership of the nation, and that the incidents of violence like the Haymarket affair and corruption of local government were due to their influence. It is no accident that John Fiske, the most enthusiastic popularizer of the Teutonic cult, should become president of the Immigration Restriction League, or that the assumptions of the Teutonic school should provide the staple of its propaganda.[36] Thus when Goldwin Smith suggested that the consanguinity of British Canadians and Americans provided the basis for continental union, the stock Canadian reply was that the United States was no longer an "Anglo-Saxon country". It was a great country, said John A. Macdonald in 1890, but "it will have its vicissitudes and revolutions... Look at the mass of foreign ignorance and vice which has flooded that country with socialism, atheism and all other isms".[37] The Canadian population, Bourinot added, was "free from those dangerous elements which have come into the United States with such rapidity of late years".[38] Thus Canada not only enjoyed a superior system of government, but in addition did not have to deal with inferior races incapable of governing themselves.

IV

There was finally one general concept or framework into which Bourinot fitted the facts of Canadian history. This was the idea that Canadian development was fundamentally the history of "progress", that its central theme was a progressive movement out of a complete colonial status toward self-government. It took a century", he wrote,

> "to bring about the changes that placed Canada in the semi-independent position she now occupies, but as we review the past we can see that there was ever an undercurrent steadily moving in the direction of political freedom. Politicians might wrangle and commit the most serious mistakes; governments in England and Canada might misunderstand public sentiment in the Colony, and endeavor to stem the stream of progress, but the movement was ever onward and the destiny that watches

[36] Edward N. Saveth, *American Historians and European Immigrants 1875-1925* (New York, 1948), Chapter I; Barbara M. Solomon, *Ancestors and Immigrants* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), Chapter IV.

[37] *The Empire*, October 2, 1890.

[38] *How Canada Is Governed*, p. 284.

over peoples as well as individuals was shaping our ends, and, happily, for our good." [39]

This Whiggish conception of Canadian history as constitutional progress was sustained by the objective advances made toward self-government during the nineteenth century, but this fact alone does not explain why this historical theme should become enveloped in religious language. This emphasis derived in part from nineteenth-century nationalism which meant national self-determination : the movement toward Canadian autonomy became so intertwined with the growth of Canadian national feeling as to be almost indistinguishable from it. [40] A good deal of nineteenth-century historiography was simply the chronicle of the progress of liberty, whether expressed in the certitudes of Macaulay, the romantic prose of Parkman, or the "scientific" terminology of the Teutonic origins school. And for Bourinot the idea of the progressive development of liberty seemed analagous to the purposeful progress of evolution in nature. Indeed, the process by which Canada achieved self-government was referred to as "Nature's methods of evolution." [41]

For Bourinot, Canadian history was not only the inevitable progress of liberty : the dynamic engine of progress was "struggle". It was not simply that in objective terms there had been a struggle for responsible government, but that for him struggle was in itself a moral good. The very process of struggle stimulated the energies of the people, and elevated their character, as Herbert Spencer said it would, by promoting the development of the Victorian virtues of self-help, "self-reliance and self-confidence". [42]

Struggle was always a war of principles. The very principle of self-government seemed to Bourinot to have a causal power of its own. Confederation he thought was the "effect" of responsible government. There had of course been "political difficulties" under the Union, "but looking deeper into the cause of the movement that led to the federal union, we can see that the effect of responsible government had been to stimulate a higher class of statesmanship, and to prepare the public mind for a wider sphere of political action." [43]

[39] J. G. Bourinot, "Federal Government in Canada" (*Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science*, ed. H. B. Adams), Seventh Series, X, XI, XII (Baltimore, 1889), p. 27.

[40] W. S. Wallace, *The Growth of Canadian National Feeling* (Toronto, 1927), p. 11.

[41] *Public Archives of Canada, G. M. Grant Papers*, box 25, clipping from (Toronto) *Daily Star*, July 13, 1901.

[42] J. G. Bourinot, "The National Sentiment in Canada", *University Quarterly Review* (First Quarter, 1890), p. 6.

[43] J. G. Bourinot, "Responsible Government in Canada", *Maple Leaves: Being the Papers Read Before the National Club of Toronto at the "National Evenings", During the Winter of 1890-91* (Toronto, 1891), p. 74.

Bourinot was able to emphasize the casual power of principles because he disregarded environmental conditions. He wrote, it is true of "the free atmosphere of this continent," and described seigneurial tenure as "foreign to the free spirit of American civilization," [44] but fundamentally he regarded Canadian history as a simple repetition, albeit on a diminutive scale, of British history. This is why he never isolated responsible government as a distinctive Canadian achievement.

Moreover, for Bourinot and Canadian imperialists like Parkin and Leacock there was as much inevitability and logic about the progress from colonial status to an imperial consolidation, as men like Ewart were to find in the evolution toward autonomous nationhood. But while the ends envisaged were totally different, Bourinot's imperialist interpretation of Canadian history and the liberal nationalist interpretation, were remarkably similar. For that liberal interpretation was composed of two interwoven themes : one was the progressive evolution of liberty in Canada and its culmination in the full responsibility of autonomous nationhood; the other was the environmentalist arguments that explained this process. The liberal nationalist history carried over the whole complex of notions about the inevitability of the progress of liberty which Bourinot had used to buttress the argument for imperial federation. But while the liberal nationalists wanted to document Canada's uniqueness and distinctiveness, and, if anything, identify it with the American experience, Bourinot sought to demonstrate the unity and identity of British and Canadian experience. With this important qualification in mind, it might be said the much maligned Whig view of the Canadian past was not invented by the autonomists of the 1920's like Skelton and Dafœ but by the imperialists of the 1880's like Parkin and Bourinot.

V

In assumptions and in intent, then, Bourinot's historical work was imperialistic. By detailing the elements of superiority of the Canadian-British constitution over that of the Republic, he countered the annexationist argument and deepened the emotional attachment to the Empire. By setting Canadian development into the framework of the Teutonic origins theory, he demonstrated the continuity of British and Canadian history. And by emphasizing that the ever progressive extension of Canadian freedom could be satisfied only within an imperial union, he suggested how inextricably that conclusion was a logical outcome of her evolution.

An attitude so firmly rooted in the imperialist frame of mind, however, was bound either to come under attack, or to be tacitly rejected. The usefulness of his work and the validity of his attitude were undermined by two developments. One was the increasing emphasis that

[44] "Federal Government in Canada," pp. 13, 23-24.

Canadian historians, particularly in the years after the first world war, were to place on the role of environment in shaping institutions. It was a former student of Herbert Adams at Johns Hopkins, who revolted against the teaching of his instructor and started the attack on the Teutonic school. "Too exclusive attention has been paid by institutional students to the Germanic origins," wrote Frederick Jackson Turner in his celebrated paper of 1893, "too little to the American factor." [45] The central focus of the history of the United States was the American, not the Teutonic, forest. The impact of this environmentalist concept of American history was felt most profoundly in the isolationist 1920's, for just as Anglophiles Adams and Burgess overemphasized the historical continuity of British and American institutions, so the followers of Turner exaggerated the differences. And just as Bourinot had seized upon the germ theory and constructed his imperialist history around it, so Canadian historians of an anti-imperial and isolationist turn of mind eagerly accepted frontier environmentalism to support isolationist Dominion autonomy.

The second factor which deprived Bourinot's work of its relevence was implicit in the first — the rejection of racism. As early as 1891, a Canadian critic deplored the tendency to explain political developments by assigning innate aptitudes to certain races. Differences in the capacity for self-government, he pointed out, "can be largely, if not wholly, accounted for by the events of history apart altogether from racial differences." [46] Anthropological scholarship progressively undermined the scientific assumptions behind racism, and political events served to discredit the idea of the Teutonic origin of Anglo-American freedom. In 1919 G.M. Wrong noted the irony involved in attributing the origins of liberal institutions to Germany. And, as late as 1941, the Harvard constitutionalist, C.H. McIlwain told the Canadian Political Science Association that "we have all been brought up on the notion of Germanic freedom as almost the sole source of all our modern freedoms," and he advised that "recent events" made this view untenable. "[I]f our culture or our liberty is Germanic", he asked "why then should Germany herself, the supposed home of liberty, be now its greatest foe ?" [47]

Bourinot's historical outlook suffered the same fate as the theory upon which it was based and the political cause which it was designed to reinforce. But by a strange paradox, his attitude, divorced from the crude biological analogies and a specious racism, is much closer to what

[45] "The Significance of the Frontier in American History", *Frontier and Section Selected Essays of Frederick Jackson Turner,* (ed.) R. A. Billington (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1961), p. 39.

[46] Unsigned review of John W. Burgess, *Political Science and Comparative Constitutional Law* (Boston, 1890), in *The Week* VIII (July 24, 1891), p. 546.

[47] C. H. McIlwain, "Constitutional History and the Present Crisis of Constitutionalism", *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* VII (May, 1941), pp. 147-153.

contemporary Canadian historians believe than the assumption that our institutions sprung from the virgin soil of America. The Teutonic origins thesis is now as implausable as the simplistic environmentalism and fanatical anti-imperialism that replaced it, but in the end, Bourinot's outlook is still a valid and vital one. For though he viewed the past through distorted lenses, he was at least looking in the right direction, and he knew, two generations before the historians of the north Atlantic civilization school were to accept it as an axiom, that the Canadian political and constitutional system descended from Britain, that the imperial connection, though not totally beneficient, was nonetheless the matrix in which Canadian liberty was born and nourished, and that environment alone never was, and never could be, a genuinely creative force.