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Report of the Annual Meeting

## On the Nature of the Distinction between the French and the English in Canada: An Anthropological Inquiry

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ON THE NATURE OF THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE  
FRENCH AND THE ENGLISH IN CANADA:  
AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL INQUIRY

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ANTHROPOLOGICAL investigations have long since revealed the frequency with which the names used by primitive tribes to designate themselves are, on being translated, found to mean "the people" in the sense that the users are the only "true" or "real" people and that their neighbours are scarcely to be regarded as fully qualified members of the human species. Although divine authority has not always been claimed in support of this view, the virtual universality of the conception of the chosen people, in some form or other, is generally recognized. Readers of Green and Freeman will recall the inherent virtues which they attributed to the so-called "Anglo-Saxon" element in the British population, whatever that element may be. Although the distressing history of the spurious ideas of race and racial superiority, from Gobineau through Houston Stuart Chamberlain to Hitler, has long been recognized for what it is worth, and has within the last few years been exposed in widely circulated books and pamphlets,<sup>1</sup> it is astonishing how much confusion reigns and how doggedly popular misconceptions of the subject persist. Barring catastrophes, shocking to think of, it is always easier to go on thinking in the habitual wrong-headed way. It conserves energy, and perhaps a general recognition of the truth would be repugnant to those self-regarding emotions that give collective coherence to large masses of men.

These misconceptions concerning the nature of race and nationality, and of the relationship between them, are not merely of academic interest. They underlie persistent mass attitudes and serve as either the springs of action, or the verbal ammunition directed against some group which is primarily an object of attack for economic or ideological reasons, far removed from that group's alleged inherent inferiority or undesirability. If these misconceptions underlie semitism, they also underlie anti-semitism. They serve to fortify the suspicions and hatred of one group for another. They nourish and add flesh to the delusions of the more virulent "racists" of Ontario and Quebec.

That the average citizen who has not made a special study of the subject often confuses the effects of nature and nurture in attributing certain mental endowment and temperament to particular racial stocks is perhaps not surprising in view of the fact that even scholars of eminence appear to have done so. Professor Trevelyan suggests that the sources of Shakespeare's poetic genius may be sought in the fact that he sprang from an area that was near an old borderland of Welsh and Saxon conflict. How "wild Celtic fancy" could be regarded as a cultural endowment as late as the sixteenth century, and in England at that, is hard to conceive. It is evident however that this is not how Professor Trevelyan thinks of the influence as having been handed down, for he speculates on the possible

<sup>1</sup>For example, Julian Huxley, *Race' in Europe* (Oxford Pamphlets on World Affairs, no. 5, Oxford, 1929); and Ruth Benedict and Gene Weltfish, *The Races of Mankind* (Public Affairs Pamphlet, no. 85, 1943).

influence of the inheritance of Celtic "blood" upon the English temper.<sup>2</sup> We know well enough that blood is not inherited, and that even if it were, there would be no reason to suppose that it bore any relationship whatsoever to either intelligence or temperament. The statement is all the more inadmissible when it is remembered that there is not and never has been any such thing as Celtic blood. Although the four distinct blood groups recognized by scientists appear to have a somewhat uneven distribution, most populations seem to have some representation from each group. Nevertheless, the fact has not yet been proved to have any significance in distinguishing between racial stocks or nationalities, for the differences in blood type do not appear to be co-ordinated with other variations in physical characteristics.<sup>3</sup> To include them among the factors that may distinguish one type of mentality from another would be quite fanciful in the light of present knowledge of the subject. As for the Celts, they may or may not have possessed so high a degree of physical uniformity as to be regarded as racially distinctive. That problem is quite irrelevant, however, for the term properly denotes a group of peoples who spoke languages which were variants of a discernible linguistic stock, and about whom there has clustered, owing to the contingencies of historic circumstance, certain cultural traits which, by association with particular peoples and the languages which they spoke, have also become commonly identified as Celtic. It is clear from the context that Professor Trevelyan does not employ the term "Celtic blood" figuratively to mean culture in accordance with common usage, but is speculating as to the reality of the biological transmission of mental and emotional characteristics throughout long periods of time. Such speculation is without scientific foundation.

Professor Toynbee does not appear to have taken the same view in his search for the origins of Egyptian civilization. Having exposed the fallacy of concomitant variations in physical and psychical characteristics with masterful irony directed against modern western racists, in what must stand as one of the finest pieces of writing on the subject, he goes on to observe that the creative contributions of more than one racial stock are necessary to the genesis of civilizations.<sup>4</sup> The unwary reader might suppose that what Professor Toynbee is asserting is that the mental and emotional endowment required for cultural advancement must derive from a mingling of racial stocks through miscegenation and the consequent production of a superior biological type. A closer reading, however, surely will reveal that what he intends is that there must be a mingling, not necessarily of races, but of the cultural features that they bear with them in migration, and that these cultures become creative in the moment of contact through interaction and mutual stimulation. Although the fusion of cultural strains into a richer and more vital amalgam would no doubt be hastened by the greater intimacy resulting from intermarriage between members of the converging peoples, yet the production of a hybrid physical type is incidental and irrelevant, since the association of a particular racial structure with a particular mentality is fortuitous and does not stand in the relation of cause and effect. For, as Dr. Jenness argued so convincingly some years ago,

<sup>2</sup>G. M. Trevelyan, *History of England* (London, New York, 1932), 45.

<sup>3</sup>J. S. Huxley and A. C. Haddon, *We Europeans, A Survey of "Racial" Problems* (New York and London, 1936), 100.

<sup>4</sup>Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History* (London, 1934), I, 240.

the degree of cultural advancement of any given people, and the style and content of their culture, are not in any way related to their physique by virtue of its relative purity or as the product of racial mixture.<sup>5</sup> Culture has its own dynamic, and cultural phenomena are sufficiently explained in their own terms. Advancement in the stages of civilization has been enjoyed by those people who have been situated at strategic crossroads and have thus been in a position to receive and react to the fertilizing waves of cultural influence that have flowed in upon them from several quarters, shattering the pattern of use and wont, setting old attitudes and old techniques at naught, issuing successive challenges to their ingenuity and at the same time augmenting and refining their capacity to respond creatively and effect novel integrations on ever and ever higher levels as long as the process remains undisturbed. There comes a time when such people become a "world in themselves," when, as it were, the pot "comes to a boil" and they begin to give back more than they receive. It seems likely that in some such way as this, cultural nuclei were often formed from which subsequently emanations have been carried outwards to peripheral areas. By contrast those peoples whose lot has been cast in isolated places have remained backward. These processes, as well as the type of culture existing in any area, are to be defined and explained in terms of the complex interactions within the cultural environment, and between it and the physical environment, and are entirely irrespective of the racial features of the people involved, except in so far as people may be influenced to approve or disapprove of certain physical types in their social relations in which case cultural processes will be modified thereby.

The foregoing observations may serve as a sketch of the larger setting within which the question of the nature of the distinction between the French and the English in Canada may be considered. We have been speaking of culture in the sense in which it was defined by Tylor, as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." We have employed the term "race" in its biological sense as a hereditary subdivision of the species *homo sapiens*, corresponding to a breed in domestic animals, or, in Professor Ginsberg's words as "a group of individuals who, within given limits of variation, possess in common a combination of hereditary traits sufficient to mark them off from other groups."<sup>6</sup> He adds that if they are to be used as criteria of race, traits must be hereditary and remain relatively constant despite changes in the environment, and that they must be common to a fairly large group. It is to be inferred that he is referring to physical and not to mental traits.

We are now in a position to apply our criteria to the problem in hand, as to the terms in which the two major Canadian peoples are to be distinguished from each other. Our submission is simply that the differences between them as French and as English are not differences of racial inheritance but of cultural acquisition, have not arisen as a result of a biological diversity, are not in any way a reflection of unlike blood, but on the contrary are no more and no less than very limited differences between the cultural traits and configurations that they have acquired through the

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<sup>5</sup>Diamond Jenness, *The Indian Background of Canadian History* (Bull. no. 86, Anthropological Series no. 21, National Museum of Canada, Ottawa, 1937).

<sup>6</sup>Morris Ginsberg, *Sociology* (London, 1934), 56.

social interaction of mind and mind, and through which their common psychic endowment as human beings finds a degree of expression and fulfilment. This means that the terms French and English denote acquired mental variations, and do not denote, either significant or relevant variations in physique, or inherited differences in mentality. One man is not born to think in a certain way because his headshape is dolichocephalic, and another man differently because he is brachycephalic. No man is born to think in a particular way at all, or if he is, that way may not be labelled either French or English; and no man ever had or ever will have dolichocephalic thoughts. A man may think in a way that can be described as English; but if he does he has learned to think that way through his social contacts with persons of English culture in some of its various manifestations. His doing so is thus a cultural and not a biological phenomenon.

One would anticipate an inquiry at this point as to whether it is here contended that the average of the physique of people of French culture was exactly similar to the norm about which persons of English culture vary with respect to racial traits. An answer to this question as to whether the English and French Canadians are racially diverse may be approached first by making some observations on the racial composition of European peoples.

It is a well-known fact that there is a greater physical resemblance between the Germans of the Rhineland and the neighbouring French than there is between those same Germans and their fellow nationals in eastern Germany who resemble the Poles more closely than they resemble the western Germans. In addition to this racial diversity between east and west in Germany, it is also a well-known fact that the racial composition of Europe is characterized roughly by broad belts running east and west so that the dominant variation is between north and south. Consequently the people in the southern part of France resemble those of south Germany more than they do their own compatriots in northern France. There is considerable racial diversity in France and it is quite inaccurate to speak of a French race. The same thing may be said of England.

The populations of both places are racially mixed as are all populations, but is the same mixture to be found in France as in England? We are told that of the three so-called basic races of Europe the English exhibit more Mediterranean and Nordic traits whereas the populations of France appear to have more of the Alpine ingredient than do those of England.

It is perhaps premature to speculate on the significance of Boas's investigations into the alleged changes wrought in the anatomical structure of certain European stocks resulting from their migration to the new environment of the United States, and on the implications of the possible racial variations in the behaviour of the endocrine glands or as a result of them, which may also, if true, be reactive to environmental conditions and changes. But if there is anything in these contentions it would simply mean that racial characteristics are less stable than ethnologists have hitherto supposed. It might also add weight to the supposition that the so-called primary European races, the Alpine, Mediterranean, and Nordic, are not and never have been races at all, but are simply ideal types invented by man in his attempt to establish frames of reference with which to gauge variations in physique. If this were so we might still seek for a comparison between the norms for England and France, but we would now

employ such a label as Alpine not with the idea that it designates a race that once inhabited a part of France, but only as a convenient way of describing a tendency towards stockiness in combination with dark-hairedness and round-headedness. We might thus be no nearer than we were before to determining the historic affinity between the peoples of England and France whether in Europe or in North America.

Even if we shift our attention for a moment from racial groupings to those identifiable by tribal and linguistic designations, we may not be in a much better position to determine precise distinctions. But we can be reasonably sure that the affinity between Gaul and Britain, Saxon and Frank, Dane and Norman was not remote, racially mixed as these peoples must have been. The prehistoric peoples in these areas were not as distinct as night is from day,<sup>7</sup> and later migrations brought Huguenots into England and Celts to Brittany, to mention only two noteworthy movements of peoples. It is therefore not surprising that there are many individuals in France who resemble individuals in England far more closely in physique than they do their own compatriots. The same statement can be made with confidence about French and English Canada, in spite of the selective process involved in migration to North America.

If there are any racial differences as between the English-speaking and the French-speaking populations they are very slight. It may be that certain physical types are more commonly found in the area where English is spoken than where French is the prevailing language, or that the average tendencies towards certain types of physique are not exactly the same in the two populations. They are not exactly alike in any two selected populations. They are not alike as between Rivière du Loup and Chicoutimi, or as between Moose Jaw and Regina. And yet these facts, even if recognized by the people themselves, would not make the people of Rivière du Loup regard themselves as any more or any less truly French than the people of Chicoutimi, nor would they develop a sense of distinctive nationality on the bases of such recognition. If it were claimed that the English exhibited a stronger tendency towards blondness than the French, the same might conceivably be said of Hamilton as compared with Toronto, but we could only add that the difference, if such exists, would be totally lacking in significance. If all other marks of identification were lacking how could a pathologist decide from the physical characteristics alone whether a body recovered from the St. Lawrence River at Montreal were that of an English or a French person? What, one might well ask, does an English Canadian look like? We cannot answer that question. Many varieties are found among English Canadians, and much the same varieties are found in French Canada. If there were a general notion among the English that the French Canadians were overwhelmingly brunette, how would they account for the frequency with which blue-eyed and flaxen-haired children may be observed on the roadways of Les Escoumins, Baie Milles Vaches, and the Saguenay villages, to mention only a remote and isolated part of the Province of Quebec. We may conclude therefore that much the same range of variation is found among both peoples, that it is impossible to identify an individual with absolute certainty from his racial features alone as belonging to either one or the other group, while admitting at the same time that certain physical types may be found more frequently among the

<sup>7</sup>R. Munro, *Prehistoric Britain* (London, n.d.), 228.

English than among the French, or that the tendency towards certain physical characteristics may be found more pronounced and more widely diffused in the one than in the other.

But when we have said this we have said very little, for we cannot claim that any very slight differences in average tendency that there may be are of any greater significance as a basis for distinction between French and English than are the slight racial differences between any two English-Canadian communities, which means that they are no real bases at all. Such differences as there are between the French and the English are national, not racial, cultural and acquired, not inherited. It is conceivable that there might be a people possessing a high degree of racial uniformity, as among themselves, and a considerable divergence in appearance between themselves and their neighbours, the recognition of which might form an ingredient of their sense of distinctive nationality. But no such uniformity within, nor marked divergence between, the French and the English may be said to exist. Such differences as exist are popularly exaggerated and are generally misconstrued as meaning an inherited difference in mentality as between the two. There is no predisposition of a child born to English-speaking parents to speak English also. The child could as easily acquire any other language as English, in the way that all languages are acquired. That child could be taken at birth and reared in a French-Canadian household, and it would be just as truly a French Canadian as any other child, because it would acquire from its social environment those traits which would make it a French Canadian in the way in which all French Canadians come to be what they are. The reverse procedure would be exactly the same.

The complete lack of significance of the racial factor as a mark of distinctiveness between the French-Canadian and English-Canadian nationalities may be accepted more readily than the view that these groups are not to be divided from each other on the basis of hereditary temperamental differences. The question of the nature and method of transmission of temperament is an important but vexing one, since much scientific investigation remains to be carried out before positive statements can be made. Nevertheless what seem to the writer to be rational inferences may be drawn from what is now known or hypothetical, and we may profitably apply our surmises to the question which we have here been considering.

We should mention also the claims that have been made in recent years for what is in fact a new kind of climatic determinism and which must be received with definite and specific reservations. Even if we accepted the view that temperament varies between groups for physiological reasons derived from the character of diet, and in the last analysis because of climatically determined soil constituents, we should still be inclined to reject Lieutenant Commander J. R. de la H. Marett's explanation in physiological terms of such cultural differences as may distinguish one nationality from another.<sup>8</sup> At best the theory would require that the given population, whose temperament was to be explained, should be socially undifferentiated, immobile over a long period of time, uniform in its dietary habits, completely dependent for its subsistence upon its immediate environment, and

<sup>8</sup>J. R. de la H. Marett, *Race, Sex and Environment, A Study of Mineral Deficiency in Human Evolution* (London, 1936). The theory is summarized by T. K. Penniman in *A Hundred Years of Anthropology* (New York, 1936), 258-63.

entirely cut off from cultural contacts. If any people were ever so situated they must have lived out their narrow lives in a time not far removed from the dawn of the human race. Their area of distribution would conceivably have been in a large measure ecological, and their culture closely conditioned by the ecological factor. But not completely so, for the status of humanity postulates social communication (that is to say, the interaction of minds through the medium of language) and thus the existence of primary diffusion within the group, making for cultural elaboration transcending the dictates of the physical environment. The operation of physiological determinants would thus be limited on even the most primitive cultural levels. As the transcendence of such dictates by modern advanced cultures, with their technological mastery of the physical world, is so much the greater, no such conditions as those adumbrated by the climatic determinists can be accepted in explanation of the difference in temperament between modern nationalities. Even if these conditions were applicable to modern populations there would be no reason to suppose that the ecological area of a distinctive temperament would at all coincide with the area inhabited by a particular nationality. Furthermore the cultural distinction between modern nationalities is uninfluenced by the fact that they sometimes live in practically identical climatic conditions. A further objection is grounded in the fact that, with rapid and efficient transportation, large numbers of people now vary their habitat, and even if they remain where they are most of the time, they draw the constituents of their diet from many different climatic regions. The French and English Canadians of Montreal or Ottawa will both habitually eat oranges from California, drink coffee from Brazil, and even sometimes consume butter from New Zealand.

Before raising the most serious objection to this climatic theory, it might be well to dispose of the idea that the French and English Canadians are distinguished, as such, by inherited temperamental differences. We may begin by admitting that individual differences in intelligence and temperament obviously exist, and that to a limited extent they are certainly transmitted in family lines. But it is a far cry from this to the contention that whole nations have norms of inherited temperamental factors that diverge from each other.<sup>9</sup> A moment's reflection will reveal that such inherited mental differences cannot be attributed to a numerous population, whether that population constitutes a nationality or not. Instead of one nationality being, metaphorically, all of one colour, and the other being all of another colour, we would suggest that many and similar colours pepper each of the national areas in about equal measure. Just as there are fat men and thin men, in varying degrees, everywhere, so temperamental types probably have much the same frequency in every population, as far as the inherited element is concerned. The merging of lineages through intermarriage would certainly occur with greater frequency within one than between two nationalities, and with the passage of time the hereditary element in temperament might be expected to become more uniformly distributed throughout the population of a particular nationality, but to use this as an argument for a distinctive national temperament stemming from hereditary factors would be dangerous in view of the probability that the range of variations in temperament as between the two nationalities would appear to be much the same, with the types occurring with equal frequency in both peoples.

<sup>9</sup>Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (London, 1935), 15.



Our argument is here hypothetical but we are not indulging in sheer speculation since the results of research appear to point towards the conclusion we have suggested. For although we have been speaking of temperamental or, more broadly, personality types as though they existed in fact, they are really abstractions in the sense that a pure racial type is an abstraction. No individual is truly representative of any of the ideal types, and there is support for the inference that the same assortment of hereditary elements possess the same frequency regardless of differences in language and social tradition. The concomitant variation of temperament with racial traits remains to be proved. The attempt to link Kretschmer's constitutional types with particular races has not succeeded, and it is thought that all of them are found in every population.<sup>10</sup> Hence it may be said that nationalities, even if one allows for a possible clumping in some localities, would also appear to possess them all in much the same measure. Finally we cannot surmise what effects the blending of lineages through intermarriage would have upon temperament. There appears to be no evidence that it produces a levelling out in the population, since the characters may react in such a way as to produce perpetual differences as marked and varied as were the originals.

We may now state the most serious objection to both the environmentalist theory and that purporting to explain such temperamental characteristics as rapidity and intensity of response to stimuli, aggressiveness, sense of humour, and the like in physiological terms. If carried too far they leave little or no room for the operations of the cultural environment. Temperament is actually compounded of the interaction of physiological and cultural processes, and that the latter are not negligible could be proved from a host of examples, among which is the fact that worry sometimes causes gastric ulcers. The cultural processes react upon the physiological, and temperament is in large part a product of the social environment. It is itself to some extent an aspect of culture played upon and developed by other cultural aspects. It is acquired by man in the course of his responses, not to the physical environment alone but also to the cultural configuration of the group in which he becomes a member. Although generalizations are difficult to make in such cases, we would expect temperamental differences to be more marked as between occupational groups in the highly differentiated society of modern Canada than we would between the French and English inhabitants of the country. In so far as temperament is an aspect of culture we are ready to agree that temperamental differences may exist as a cultural diversity exists, but this is no more than saying that the French and English represent partially diverse variants of the Western European cultural complex as modified by habituation to new world conditions. The difference between them is acquired and not inherited.

The disentanglement and clarification of the basic human categories of race, language, and culture is one of the major contributions of the science of anthropology. There was a time when it was thought that there was an organic relationship between the shape of a man's skull and the language he spoke, instead, as is now clearly realized, of an association which is really fortuitous. It was like saying that a green apple tastes green when there is no such thing as a green taste. Although language is replete with such metaphors it is essentially the language of poetry, not the language of

<sup>10</sup>Ginsberg, *Sociology*, 75; Otto Klineberg, *Race Differences* (New York, 1935), 61.

science. As Confucius said, only social confusion and disorder can be expected to result from not calling things by their right names. To speak of an English race is to employ a cultural adjective to describe a physical noun. The effect is almost as meaningless as to reverse the order and use a physical adjective to qualify a cultural noun. The absurdity of speaking of a blue-eyed language or of a dolichocephalic religion is evident enough. As Professor Kroeber wrote a quarter of a century ago, it represents a confusion between the organic and the superorganic, between inherited and acquired characteristics.<sup>11</sup> Nor is it a harmless confusion, for it attributes to nature what is in reality a product of society. The widespread belief that the French and the English in Canada are distinguished from each other as are two breeds of domestic animals imposes a barrier where none in reality exists. From attributing to nature the distinction between the two peoples, it is only a step to the belief that intimacy between them is contrary to divine ordinance. The eradication of such notions should lead to an improvement of the mutual relations of the French and the English in Canada. It would represent a victory of science and rational inference from ascertained facts over the prejudice to which selfishness and ignorance give rise. One could go further than the Spanish ambassador to the court of Louis XIV, and say that, as far as a barrier in nature is concerned, the Pyrenees never did exist.

#### DISCUSSION

*Mr. Lower* asked whether the smallness of the group, say 5,000 only, from which the French Canadians had all descended, could have limited the characteristics of the present French Canadians.

*Mr. Spragge* suggested that the original group of French Canadians were pretty diverse in types. *Mr. Wade* agreed with this statement.

*Mr. Brebner* also supported the same view and added the suggestion that a sufficient variety of genes would be present in the original 5,000 to cause great diversity today.

*Mr. Tucker* asked whether any physical and mental measurements had been taken of French-Canadian and English-Canadian groups.

*Mr. Bailey* replied that as far as he knew none had been taken.

*Mr. Trotter* asked about the information supplied by the Canadian census on various races. Had there been any investigation on the basis of the statistics given there?

*Mr. Lower* said that "race" was used spuriously by the government, for instance what did "Irish" and "Scottish" mean?

*Mr. Wade* said that Canadian immigration officials were very race-conscious but refused to admit "American" as a race. Similarly the United States authorities did not recognize "Canadian" as a race, only English or French.

*Mr. Spragge* asked *Mr. Bailey* whether he believed that Canada could be unified by a national system of education.

*Mr. Bailey* replied that that was a very big question which he would not like to answer on the spur of the moment as there were so many factors involved. Cultural traits could be affected by education but there were two

<sup>11</sup>A. L. Kroeber, *Anthropology* (New York, 1923), 57.

very different cultural traditions in Canada, and it had to be borne in mind that although culture was by definition acquired, and not inherited, cultural traits were sometimes very resistant to change, and might easily become more so in reacting to an attempt to change them.

*Mr. Talman* suggested that *Mr. Bailey* had really given the answer to *Mr. Spragge's* question in his paper. The formation of characteristics starts much earlier in the life of an individual than is reached by any systematical education.