

Report of the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Historical Association Rapport de l'assemblée annuelle de la Société historique du Canada

Report of the Annual Meeting

Presidential Address

W. L. Morton

Volume 39, numéro 1, 1960

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/300422ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/300422ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0317-0594 (imprimé)

1712-9095 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce document

Morton, W. L. (1960). Presidential Address. *Report of the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Historical Association / Rapport de l'assemblée annuelle de la Société historique du Canada*, 39(1), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.7202/300422ar>

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS *

W. L. MORTON

University of Manitoba

I

Relevance, for the purposes of this paper, may be understood to mean the relations between the history of Canada and the histories of other communities. It also means the orientation given to Canadian history by the interaction of those relations with the environment and historical development of Canada. How those relations and that orientation are defined will in turn suggest the interpretation of Canadian history embodied in a work approaching completion. Relevance, finally, means what universal or philosophic significance belongs to the Canadian historical experience.

By Canadian history also is to be understood one history, not one French and one British, but the entire history of all Canada. There are not two histories, but one history, as there are not two Canadas, or any greater number, but one only. Nor are there two ways of life,¹ but one common response to land and history expressed in many strong variants of the one, it is true, but still one in central substance. The reason for this is that the history of Canada after 1760 is only a continuation and extension of the history of Canada before 1760. There is but one narrative line in Canadian history.

The argument of this paper is equally simple. It is that the relevance of Canadian history takes its rise in the relations and orientations which result from four permanent factors in that history. These are a northern character, a historical dependence, a monarchical government and a committed national destiny, committed, that is, to special relations with other states.

II

The northern character springs not only from geographical location, but from ancient origins in the northern and maritime frontier of Europe. That frontier extends from Norway by Scotland and the North Atlantic islands to Greenland and Canada. Within that area from mediaeval to modern times there is discernible a frontier of European culture developing across the northern latitudes in which

* *The Relevance of Canadian History*, read before the Canadian Historical Association, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, June 11, 1960.

¹ A. R. M. Lower, "Two Ways of Life: the Primary Antithesis of Canadian Life", *Report of Canadian Historical Association*, 1943.

the forward movement was largely by sea. It was not a Turnerian frontier, but it was a frontier in every sense, and it was this frontier which began the exploitation and settlement of Canada. Many of its characteristics survive in Canada to this day, and presumably will continue to do so indefinitely.

The historical characteristics of this northern and maritime frontier are clear and definite. The most evident was that of coastal and riverine settlement. The largely Precambrian geology of the region afforded few extensive or fertile plains. The shelves in the fjords, the estuaries of seasonal rivers, the terraces around bays, these were the foothold and the baseland the northern frontier afforded to settlement. Even the Laurentian trench in America simply raised the foothold to continental proportions but did not change its character. Moreover, the maritime character of the frontier tended to settlement by the sea, even when extension of the economy inland was possible.

The settlements sometimes consisted of small port towns, but the characteristic mode was the family farmstead. This was the centre of a complex of arable land, pasture, fuel land and hunting ground much more delicate in its relationships than those of a farmstead in a more favourable climate and a more fertile soil. Land near the stead yielded vegetable and cereal foods, if climate permitted. The outfields and hill pastures gave pasture and hay. The adjoining forests or bogs furnished firewood or peat. The summer was a season of sowing, herding and gathering in, the winter a season of concentration in house and byre, of relaxation or rationing according to the summer's yield.

The winter was also the season of hunting, whether for food or fur. The northern frontiersman in this penetrated the wilderness and used it to supplement the returns of the farmstead. The dependence of any one farmstead or settlement on the hunt varied from place to place, but hunting as a seasonal occupation was always one characteristic of the northern frontier.

Fishing was equally a supplementary occupation to a degree also varying with locality. It too furnished an addition to the diet, and even forage for the cattle. The run of the fish in the rivers was seasonal, and curing by smoking or drying made fish, for example, the eel fishery of the St. Lawrence, an indispensable part of the diet of the northerner. The sea fisheries were summer fisheries, but tended to equal cattle raising in importance, to take the men away for the season and thus to demand co-operative effort and specialization. They might also yield a staple for trade.

The fisheries, it may be supposed, were the origin of the sea faring that made possible both the migration of the frontier across

the north Atlantic and also the amount of trading which took place between it and the central lands of the European metropolis. Certain it is that the northern frontier was much more a maritime than a land frontier, a character which to a curious degree Canada retains even yet, and which will increase again as arctic navigation develops. The pioneers of that frontier were not long hunters or the *voortrekkers*, but fishermen seeking new fishing grounds, seamen-farmers in quest of new island pastures, Viking voyagers who sought in new lands whatever fell to them of plunder, trade or homestead.²

The northern and maritime frontier had its own northern economy with characteristics equally explicit. It was an extensive and a gathering economy, dependent on new lands, new seaways and the transport the seas and rivers afforded. It required a base of arable soil and habitable climate for the farmstead settlements. The farmstead was a highly self-subsistent unit, but it was the base of an economy which as a whole was an exchange economy to a high degree. The surplus staples of fish, fur and timber, with exotics like arctic ivory and oil, falcons and Polar bears, earned the funds with which to buy the metals, the cereals, the church goods and the luxuries the northern settlements needed or desired. Some of the traffic was inter-regional; it was, for example, its timber that made Vinland of primary interest to the Greenlanders.

That the Canadian economy historically has been an economy of this kind requires no demonstration. The great staple trades have been extensive, in-gathering trades. The population which carried them on lived in and worked from relatively narrow bases of good land in the sea inlets and river valleys; most of Canada is simply a hinterland extensively exploited from the soil base of the St. Lawrence and Saskatchewan valleys, and from the delta of the Fraser. The Canadian economy has also largely bought its external supplies by the sale of surplus staples.

The first discovery and early exploration of the lands which were finally to be united in Canada were the outcome of the advance westward of the northern and maritime frontier of Europe and the extension of the northern economy to America. These discoveries and the first occupation of Canadian shores were made by way of the northern approach. Somehow, by methods yet only guessed at, the Viking frontiersmen, the Bristol traders and Norman fishermen, made their way across the North Atlantic. Their sea skill and navigational science was so far developed that they could use the brief and uncertain easterlies of late spring and early summer which blow as the belt of the westerlies shifts north with summer to make their

² A. W. Brogger, *Norse Emigrants* (Oxford, 1929).

way across by a northern route.³ They did not, like the Spaniards and the Elizabethan English, use the long but certain southern route of the trade winds. The discovery and occupation of Canada was separate and distinct from the discovery and occupation of the Americas.

Nor was it the result of high-pitched, scientific exploration aimed at the trade of Asia. It was the outcome of the piecemeal ventures of Norse seamen farmers probing the northern seas for new harbours and fisheries, new hay meadows and timber stands. The process is scantily documented. Government archives record it scarcely at all; it can now be understood and comprehended only by an understanding of the character of the northern frontier and economy, an understanding which is as bold an extension of the hints of the sagas as were the original voyages themselves.

The evidence, however, is slowly accumulating to suggest that between the last connections with Greenland and the voyages of the Bristol seamen there was no break in sea knowledge or experience.⁴ The Bristol men, with the knowledge of the Azoreans and, presumably, of the Normans and Bretons, were taking over the western half of the old Norse sea empire, and were being caught in the westward tug of the northern frontier. It is scarcely to be doubted that their own efforts would have discovered the Newfoundland fisheries if John Cabot and Henry VII had not imposed on their limited and practical efforts the scientific concepts of the Italian navigators and the first imperial impulse of Tudor England. In any event, the outcome was the same. Asia was not discovered, nor was the English empire founded in the fifteenth century, but the Newfoundland fishery of the English west country, and of Normandy and Brittany, was in being by the opening of the sixteenth.

This, then, is the first orientation of Canadian historiography. Canadian history is not a parody of American, as Canada is not a second rate United States, still less a United States that failed. Canadian history is rather an important chapter in a distinct and even an unique human endeavour, the civilization of the northern and arctic lands. From its deepest origins and remotest beginnings, Canadian history has been separate and distinct in America. The existence of large areas of common experience and territorial overlap no one would deny. History is neither neat nor categorical; it defines by what is central, not by what is peripheral. And because of this separate origin in the northern frontier, economy and approach, Canadian life to this day is marked by a northern quality, the strong

³ D. W. Waters, *The Art of Navigation in England in Elizabethan and Early Stuart Times* (London, 1958), p. 577.

⁴ Vilhjalmur Stefansson, *North West to Fortune* (New York, 1958).

seasonal rhythm which still governs even academic sessions; the wilderness venture now sublimated for most of us to the summer holiday or the autumn shoot; the greatest of joys, the return from the lonely savagery of the wilderness to the peace of the home; the puritanical restraint which masks the psychological tensions set up by the contrast of wilderness roughness and home discipline. The line which marks off the frontier from the farmstead, the wilderness from the baseland, the hinterland from the metropolis, runs through every Canadian psyche.

III

We come now to the second factor, that of dependence, of the external ties and background of Canadian history. Canada throughout its history has in varying degrees been dependent economically, strategically and politically. The northern economy, for example, was self-subsistent only at the base. Even there it was not necessarily so, as the extinction of the Greenland colonies grimly demonstrated, and as the plight of the prairie provinces in the 1930's re-emphasized. As a whole, however, the northern economy was a highly dependent one. It was a hinterland economy dependent on the sale of a few basic staples and a few exotics in a metropolitan market.

That is, the whole culture of the northern and maritime frontier, to succeed as well as survive, required from outside a high religion, a great literature and the best available science and technology to overcome its inherent limitations. Those very limitations of climate and of material and human resources made the frontier dependent on a metropolitan culture for those essentials. The alternatives were extinction or complete adaptation to the lowest level of survival in northern conditions. Was not the basic difference between the north European and the Eskimo that the former had a central and metropolitan economy and culture on which to draw, while the latter had none until very recent times and lived in a wholly and wonderfully self-subsistent culture? ⁵

The northern economy, then, was a dependent one, both for the markets which absorbed its staples and exotics, and for the supply of the needs of mind and body which raised life on the northern frontier above the level of subsistence and enabled it to produce in Iceland the literature of the sagas and in modern Canada the political fabric which unites the technology of a highly civilized and indus-

⁵ And is not the extraordinary readiness with which the Eskimo adopts the techniques and implements of modern culture an indication of how necessary such a metropolitan culture is for a life of more than survival in arctic conditions? Surely contemporary anthropology has no more fascinating study than that of the fusion of the Eskimo culture with that of the Canadian frontier which is proceeding in the far north today. One may hope that Canada is at last giving those wonderful people the central base they lacked for so many unrecorded centuries.

trialized baseland with the exploitation of the resources of a harsh and enormous hinterland.

IV

If the northern and maritime frontier had been economically dependent, it has been even more so strategically. Down to the fifteenth century it was defended more by remoteness and poverty than power. Its own population and resources were too slight for the task of defence. The decline of Danish sea power and the rise of the Hanseatic League left it entirely defenceless, as the English raids on Iceland in the fifteenth century revealed. And with the development of the ocean-going sailing ship in the same century, the northern frontier became explicitly dependent on sea power. "Empire of the North Atlantic" would be naval empire.

It was not, however, until the end of the seventeenth century, when the use of naval power became systematic after the Dutch conquest of the Spanish power at sea and the balance of power in Europe was extended to include the Americas, that the northern frontier in its Canadian extension actually came into the strategic pattern of European empire. The capture of Port Royal in 1710 and the Hill-Walker expedition against Quebec in 1711, though a failure, may be taken as marking the beginning of the operation of European strategy through sea power upon the northern frontier.

The result was, because French sea power had declined relatively to the British since 1692, that New France had to develop a holding policy and count on victory in Europe to regulate the Euramerican balance. This was the significance of the fortification of Louisbourg, of the Richelieu entry and the line of the Lakes after 1713. That policy was successful, despite the loss of Louisbourg, in the war of 1744-1748. In 1747-1749, however, the Marquis de la Galissonnière made the holding policy a dynamic one by the advance to the Ohio, and so provoked the war of 1754-1760. The British counter by Pitt, of using the Prussian alliance to hold in Europe, released the naval and military power of England and its colonies to destroy French power in America.⁶ Canada then became wholly dependent on British sea power, if indeed one may refer to Canada when for the first and only time the northern frontier was politically united with the developing agricultural and industrial power to the south.

That transient union was broken in part by the Quebec Act, in part by the American War of Independence. The Anglo-American empire had failed to absorb the northern frontier with its primitive economy and Indian tribes, and the break-up of the empire in America was preliminary to the larger disruption caused by American inde-

⁶ Except for the French fishery in Newfoundland.

pendence. Canada and Nova Scotia, however, were held by British sea power and British garrisons, and their leading elements were convinced in the course of the war that their political and economic interests accorded with the colonies' strategic dependence on the United Kingdom. Both factors were of course re-enforced by the coming of the loyalist refugees. The sea power of Britain was the decisive factor in the survival of Canada, but it did not operate alone. Conscious and deliberate choice by Canadians and Nova Scotians made their survival a complex historical process by which the northern community resumed its identity in the North Atlantic system.

The situation after 1783 of course remained fluid and uncertain. The areas of overlap in the maritime region and the west continued to vex Canadian-American relations and to nurse the hopes of fur traders, soldiers and loyalists that the decision of 1783 might be reversed. The war of 1812, though caused by the issues of neutral rights and right of search, was transmuted into a war to end that uncertainty. The apparently indecisive struggle did do so, because it demonstrated how British sea power balanced American land power. Canada and the maritime colonies remained part of the northern economy and strategically dependent on Britain. The new balance was registered in the boundary convention of 1818, which confirmed that of 1783 and carried the partition of the continent to the Rockies. In 1846 the work was completed by the Oregon Treaty, which divided the agricultural lands and sea ports of Oregon from the fur trade wilderness which was to become British Columbia. The defence of this frontier by the successive building of the Rideau Canal, the fortification of Kingston and even the temporary stationing of troops in Red River, revealed how firmly a part of British policy was the defence of Canada and the retention of a strategic check on the United States. Until the rise of the iron warship, the timber of the northern frontier, whether in the Baltic or on the St. John and the St. Lawrence, was a necessary element in British sea power.

That change and the emergence of the United States from the Civil War as a great military power, followed by the reorganization of the European balance around a united Germany, began the decline of British power in America. Despite Confederation and the maintenance of the British bases at Halifax and Esquimalt, Canadian military strength by no means rose in correspondence with the decline of British power. The fact was registered by the little remembered Venezuelan crisis of 1896, which provoked a flurried Canadian attempt at defence⁷ and led to what a Canadian scholar has tactfully called "the rise of Anglo-American friendship",⁸ otherwise, the final with-

⁷ G. F. S. Stanley, *Canada's Soldiers, 1634-1912* (Toronto, 1960), pp. 274-75.

⁸ Lionel Gelber, *The Rise of Anglo-American Friendship: a Study in World Politics* (London, 1938).

drawal of British power from America. The surrender of British rights in an isthmian canal, and Roosevelt's humiliation of Canada in the Alaskan Boundary award, recorded the new distribution of power. Canada, as Laurier remarked to Lord Dundonald, was henceforth defended by the Monroe doctrine.⁹ Canadian dependence had taken a new, an American form.

The dependence was by no means complete, nor was it ever to prevent Canada as a member of the Empire from making war abroad. The situation did, however, make it clear that the resources of the northern economy had proved insufficient to create a military power of significant stature except in alliance with one or other of the great powers. What had been accomplished, however, had been the transformation of dependence into free association and free alliance by the development of national self-government in the Empire and America.

V

The factors of economic and strategic dependence were until the end of the nineteenth century also expressed in terms of political dependence. The French exploitation of the fisheries and the fur trade, with the zeal of French missionaries and an intermittent interest in a trade route to the Far East, had led to the development of the French empire in America. On the private commerce of the fishery and the fur trade, with their need of defence and regulation, the French Crown imposed its own interests in the conversion of the native people and the colonization of Acadia and Canada. Underlying these interests was the strategic purpose of establishing in New France a base for commerce with the new lands and, if possible, with the Far East.

This partnership of royal power with the northern economy was often an uneasy and a fretful one, as when the *coureurs de bois* after 1672 defied the royal policy of limiting the fur trade and carried their enterprise westward. Yet in the end the two were reconciled in the imperial purpose after 1700, when France began to use its northern base and its continental spread to confine the English colonies to the seaboard.¹⁰ The primitive northern economy had penetrated the continent by the great river systems, as the Swedish Vikings had Russia, and the rivers, the canoes, the fur trader and the Indians were the means used to check the advance of the English settlers. The union of the primitive and the sophisticated, of war and trade, of small means and ranging enterprise which characterized

⁹ Stanley, *Canada's Soldiers*, p. 294.

¹⁰ How serious this purpose was is revealed by the annual payments made by the French Crown for the government and defence of New France from 1661 to 1760.

the northern culture, was never better exemplified than in Canadian captains like Iberville, or in the French empire in America in the eighteenth century.

The first British empire had developed similar characteristics in the north. The Hudson's Bay Company was the outcome, and a continuation of, the search for the North-West Passage. It too needed metropolitan protection, and only escaped absorption into the French empire by Marlborough's victories in Europe. On the New York frontier in the days of William Johnson the English developed the same alliance with the Indian and the northern economy of the fur trade that the French had done. And in Nova Scotia the same factors of colonial dependence and imperial purpose produced Halifax. When the British empire in America broke up in the War of Independence, it was in part because the differences between the old northern empire of France and the old colonies of England had not been reconciled. And when the disruption was complete, the union of northern dependence with imperial strategy ensured that Nova Scotia and Canada, the northern elements of the fishery and the fur trade should remain within the British Empire.

British America had the same northern character as French America, a base for the fisheries and the fur trade, for trade by the St. Lawrence with the continental interior, and for naval power and North-West exploration. How true this was is apparent if a glance is taken at what Imperial policy actually did in British North America between 1783 and 1871. It paid a considerable part of the costs of government of the colonies from that date until well into the nineteenth century. It regulated their external commerce, to the benefit of both empire and colonies until 1846. It ensured, and largely paid for their defence down to 1871, fighting one considerable war on their behalf and preparing to fight two others. To the naval base of Halifax on the east coast it added that of Esquimalt on the west. From 1818 to 1854 it employed Franklin and his fellow explorers in the same scientific exploration that under Cook's genius had led to the opening of the Pacific and the colonization of Australia and New Zealand. At the same time it halted Russia in Alaska by diplomacy, and forestalled it in the arctic archipelago¹¹ by the great feats of naval exploration of Parry, McClintock and Rae. By so doing, it laid the groundwork for the Canadian occupation and development of the Arctic. Finally, Imperial policy was a major element in Confederation, not only in ensuring its achievement, but also in delivering to it, as to a new metropolitan base, the whole of the north-western and arctic hinterland. By this stroke, the northern

¹¹ L. P. Kirwan, *A History of Polar Exploration* (New York, 1959), pp. 77-78.

and maritime frontier of the empire of the North Atlantic became a northern and a continental one in the Dominion of Canada.

The new Dominion was meant to be a new nation. Yet its northern character, the limitation imposed by its situation and climate meant that in fact the new nation was to remain still dependent on other states, the United Kingdom and the United States, for capital, technology and defence. The continued support of the United Kingdom was needed to discourage the intermittent continental stirrings of the United States. American engineers were needed to build Canadian railways, and British capital to finance them. Anything like instant and full blown independence was neither possible nor desirable. The two factors of national aspiration and external support were slowly reconciled by the gradual transformation of continued dependence in a free association which ensured the needed support while affording the desired independence. The character of Canada's association with both the Commonwealth and the United States is thus the outcome of its historical development as a northern frontier.

VI

That association derives also from another aspect of the northern frontier, the form of its political dependence. Although its remoteness and the separation of communities created a spirit of local independence, the limitations of its economy made for political dependence. That dependence found the most ready historical and the most satisfying psychological expression in allegiance to a monarchy. Until the rise of modern communication it was difficult to maintain unity in states based on popular sovereignty. Moreover, in Canada two historic factors combined to make monarchical allegiance a particularly satisfying political tie.

One was the French monarchical tradition of the old regime. The royal government of France, and particularly in New France, was largely military in organization and combined much personal independence in its subjects with a regular hierarchy of rank and subordination. It was also paternalistic in that all ranks looked to the higher for the defence of rights and the grant of help. The exercise of the power conferred on the king and his officers by the system was extraordinarily humane, and the bureaucracy remained a surprisingly serviceable one, partly because the personal royal will might always be invoked to correct hardship or bestow favour, partly because it was suffused with the religious principle that royal authority was a trust to be exercised for the doing of justice and the granting of mercy. The failure of the early British regime to capture and perpetuate some of this spirit is to be explained not so much by the fact of conquest as by the pressure of the "old subjects" and

loyalists for government favours and by the fears aroused by the French Revolution. None the less, much of the old attitude to government and public service survived in French Canada.

The second factor was the great strengthening in the bond of allegiance in British America caused by the American Revolution. The decisive act of the Revolution was of course the throwing off of allegiance by the Declaration of Independence. Equally decisive was the resolution of the loyalists to maintain their allegiance. How clearly the matter was understood is shown by the declaration required of settlers in British America after 1783, in which they were required to acknowledge "the Authority of the King in his Parliament as the Supreme Legislature of this Province".¹² Not only allegiance was required, that is, but an acknowledgement of that theoretically unqualified supremacy of the Crown in Parliament against which the thirteen colonies had revolted. The second British Empire was founded explicitly on allegiance and the legislative supremacy of the king in Parliament.¹³

Nor was a theory of government wanting to support the constitutional position. It was ready to hand in the stock view of the nature of constitutional monarchy at the time, the theory of the mixed government of monarchy, aristocracy and democracy, which had not only the fact of British usage but the authority of antiquity to sanction it. In such a mixed government monarchy operated to check that "excess of democracy" which, it was held, had led the American colonies to revolt.

Monarchy by that theory had itself to be checked by other elements, and in the colonies these had been weak or absent, namely, aristocracy and an established church. Accordingly, efforts were made to correct these defects in the surviving colonies by strengthening the governor's council in its legislative capacity and by aiding an establishment of religion. If monarchical authority was to be strengthened, however, no one intended to bring about any diminution of freedom. All the safeguards of civil liberty were maintained, *habeas corpus* and trial by jury and the procedure of the Common Law. All the political liberty compatible with imperial subordination was freely granted and exercised, the election of an assembly on a broad franchise, the control of taxation by vote and appropriation except for the routine expenses of government, and the exercise of local taxation under the royal veto. Empire, that is, was held to be compatible with liberty, and liberty was guaranteed by the obligation of monarchical government to maintain the inherited rights of its subjects.

¹² A. G. Doughty and D. A. McArthur, *Constitutional Documents Relating to the History of Canada, 1791-1818* (Ottawa, 1914) 22, Instructions to Dorchester, Sept. 16, 1791, No. 35.

¹³ Except in the matter of taxation.

This ancient British ideal was of course challenged by one also British in origin, but now largely of American development and formulation. From 1783 to 1848 it was to dispute with the older British concept how the political evolution of British North America should proceed. That was the ideal of government founded not on allegiance but on the social compact. Strongly advocated by the extremer Puritans in the Great Rebellion, it had been driven underground with the Restoration, but was restored to respectability by Locke and the Revolution of 1688, and found an especially congenial climate in the American colonies. As the doctrine of the covenanting people, it underlay the colonial institutions of New England, and in particular made for the increase of the power of the assembly over that of the executive.

In the British American colonies after 1783 this essentially democratic or popular spirit, fed by the practices of the Protestant churches and by local needs, operated to turn the constitutional development of the colonies away from the *monarchical ideal affirmed after the Revolution* towards popular and American practices. The local democracies from time to time and in varying degrees used the assemblies to express and assert interests in conflicts with Imperial policies or the outlook of the colonial administrations. The assemblies made the Speaker their leader, and sometimes, especially in Lower Canada, a tribune of the people and the leader of a popular opposition. By the use of committees and commissioners to administer expenditures of money voted by the legislature, they assumed executive powers and of course strengthened their own hands by the distribution of patronage. The recurrent clashes which led up to the rebellions of 1837 in the Canadas were thus not only political struggles between the assemblies and the entrenched councillors and governors; they were a constitutional conflict between an ideal of government essentially republican and one essentially monarchical.

The former was the "elective system" of Papineau and the republic of Mackenzie, the latter was the "responsible government" of W. W. Baldwin and Etienne Parent. Whence the latter derived and by what processes has yet to be fully explained; from Irish travail, it may be surmised, the constitutional study and agitation of the democrats of Lower Canada, the family talk of the Baldwins, the little explored politics of Upper Canada. But, whatever the sources, the result of the application of the concept of ministerial responsibility to a colonial constitution is clear. It was the preservation of a British, hereditary and monarchical executive acting on the advice of local ministers. By the application, the democracy of the colonies was reconciled with the allegiance of the colonists. Political sovereignty in Canada could become democratic, as democratic as in a republic, while legal sovereignty remained unaffected and not less powerful

in its ancient form, the monarchy. British America might walk in its own political paths, but never lose contact with its constitutional heritage of political and civil liberty upheld by law declared in the Queen's courts and made by the Queen in Parliament.

While responsible government was a Canadian concept amplified by Joseph Howe and sanctioned by Durham, there can be little doubt that in Canada the compromise its adoption embodied was made possible in large and perhaps decisive measure by the great British migration that began after Waterloo and was at flood tide when responsible government finally became a basic convention of Canadian government at mid-century. English Canada had until 1812 become largely American in population and in the functioning of its institutions. After 1815 the old American stock, both loyalist refugee and mere immigrant, was swamped by the new British immigrants. Political power in the English Canada was taken from the native born by the British-born by the eighteen fifties, a process which happened, to a less degree and much more slowly, in the Atlantic provinces. The names tell the story, Baldwin, Hincks, Gowan, Draper, Harrison, Macdonald, Brown — all were British born.¹⁴ Only the French remained to represent the native born in the first exercise of the new powers of self-government.¹⁵

It is also to be noted that while the governors ceased to be active executives with the adoption of the principles and practices of cabinet government, and became in theory constitutional or limited monarchs, they by the change also became the guardians of the conventions of responsible government.¹⁶ These indeed had, if not to be evolved, as they were still evolving in the United Kingdom, at least to be adapted to Canadian conditions. The governors became, from the glimpses our present knowledge affords us, the mentors of politicians who themselves had to learn the manifold and often subtle applications of the conventions. In turn, because the succession of governors was periodic and on the average much more frequent than the succession of hereditary monarchs, no doubt the experienced politicians and permanent clerks often became the instructors of the governor. The immediate point is, however, that all these men were of British birth before Confederation, with the single exception of Sir Fenwick Williams. None of them had parliamentary experience approaching that of Sydenham, but only three, Williams being one, were soldiers,

¹⁴ J. M. S. Careless, "Mid-Victorian Liberalism in Canadian Newspapers, 1850-67", *Canadian Historical Review*, Sept., 1950.

¹⁵ This of course partly explains why self government was used in Canada to reform the institutions of English Canada and to confirm those of French, with the one great exception of the abolition of seigneurial tenure.

¹⁶ W. M. Whitelaw, "Responsible Government and the Irresponsible Governor", *Canadian Historical Review*, Dec., 1932, pp. 364-386, reveals how freely the governors exercised their power after 1848.

and all came from the British governing class and knew the traditions and nuances of parliamentary government and no doubt, even before Bagehot, had a very clear idea of the limitations which hedged a constitutional monarch.

Certain it is that by Confederation in Canada and Nova Scotia, the politicians who achieved cabinet rank from time to time had learned and were at home in the mixture of traditional form and business-like dispatch with which the prerogatives of monarchy were exercised in the service of democracy. It was this familiar and valued working system that British American politicians thought infinitely preferable to the democratic presidency and the government of separated powers of the United States. The belief was not a mere provincial prejudice, but the sober judgement of mature and experienced men who had learned their art in one of the most difficult of all schools, a democracy of diverse ethnic groups. For it is to be remembered that there were not only French and English in British America; there were Highland Scots, Catholic Irish and Lunenburg and loyalist Germans, all of whom had had small experience of parliamentary government, though as quick as the French to learn all the tricks of the game. In such a society responsible government had been made to work so that local communities and special interests could get done what they wanted done, if it were not blatantly contrary to the public interest.

Extraordinarily little republican sentiment, always to a degree endemic in Canada as in the United Kingdom, seems moreover to have survived in the last years of the generation after the rebellions. There was therefore a great consensus of opinion in both French and English British America that in any future union the basic institution of responsible cabinet government in the Queen's name should be embodied in the new general government and continued in the continuing local ones. "The Executive Government and authority of and over Canada continues and is vested in the Queen", was to be the most significant, as it is the most simple and direct of all the sections of the British North America Act. On that basic principle there was neither hesitation nor complexity to blur the simple, positive affirmation. The language is lucid, the intent unquestionable. Canada was to continue a constitutional monarchy.¹⁷

So insistent is the emphasis on monarchy in the Confederation debates and in the speeches made throughout the provinces that it is necessary to ask just what was meant by it. No one spelled it out.

¹⁷ I trust it is unnecessary to point out that in speaking of monarchy in this context I have in mind only a set of constitutional principles, and neither a sentimental royalism nor the regrettable Edwardian pomp which alienated the affections of so many Canadians from the outward expression of what is the core of the Canadian political tradition.

By inference from the whole of what was said and from the historical context in which it was said, it is legitimate to suppose that it meant on one hand the retention of personal allegiance to the Crown with responsible and parliamentary government, and on the other the avoidance of popular sovereignty (or democracy) and a federal union.

The desire to continue personal allegiance to the Crown, after liberal principles had triumphed in British America with the grant of responsible government, and at a time when British America was about by uniting to take a great and conscious step towards nationhood, calls for explanation. Responsible government, of course, had been a compromise in which parliamentary democracy had been combined with constitutional monarchy on the British model. The monarchical element was in fact central to the compromise. By it a number of things were accomplished, over and above the essential matter of maintaining the personal bond of allegiance between the Queen and her subjects in British America. One was the maintenance of the Imperial connection. The material bonds of empire, it is true, had ended with the commercial revolution of 1846-1849. There was, moreover, no good reason, commercial or financial, still less military, why the connection between the United Kingdom and the colonies should be kept up. And there were those who looked to a speedy end of the connection. But there were other reasons, important to British America, for maintaining the tie. The main and central one was that the Imperial connection sustained the whole constitutional heritage of the colonies. Without the connection, the allegiance to the Crown would have ended and the monarchical principle would have been lost. With it would have gone the compromise of responsible government and all the gains made since 1837. The ending of the connection would have thrown the control of events into the hands of the extremists, *les rouges*, the Clear Grits and, so do extremes meet, the old Compact Tories, none of whom valued responsible government, and all of whom would have plumped for republican institutions and annexation.¹⁸

With parliamentary and cabinet government would have gone other matters of value to the moderates and conservatives of that day, a few of which are still of value to most Canadians. One was the limited franchise and the idea that the franchise was a trust. Another was the British system of justice, challenged at the time of course by the principle of election applied to the selection of judges by the Jacksonian democrats across the border. Yet another was the sense of public rank and personal honour, then still strong in British as in French Canada. Finally, there was the instinctive feeling, an articulate perception in French Canada, that monarchical allegiance

¹⁸ As some of all of the three groups did in the crisis of 1849.

allowed a diversity of customs and rights under law in a way that the rational scheme and abstract principles or republican democracy did not. The monarchy, in short, subsumed a heterogeneous and conservative society governed in freedom under law, law upheld by monarchy, where the republic would have levelled the diversities and made uniform the various groups by breaking them down into individuals, free indeed, but bound by social conformity and regimented by an inherent social intolerance.

Such a levelling and uniformity was the work of the principle of popular sovereignty, of French Jacobins and American Jacksonians. The diffusion of power among the people gave use inevitably to the demand that it be diffused equally, and Canadian radicals used the Benthamite formula of one man, one vote. The demand for representation by population was of course another application of the same ideal of political equality in a society of equals. What excesses that principle had led to in France and the United States all liberal and conservative Canadians at Confederation knew, and in their view Canada had been saved from it only by the repression of the rebellions of 1837. In a republic, it was felt, such a principle could lead only to anarchy or a Caesarian dictatorship, as it had done in France, as perhaps it had done in the United States at civil war under Lincoln. Again, the monarchy by ensuring that legal sovereignty rested on foundations independent of the results of the last election, ensured also, however political sovereignty might be diffused through the electorate, that the last essential of government, the maintenance of peace and order, would be independent of popular impulse.

Finally, the emphasis on monarchy by the Fathers of Confederation arose from their conviction that monarchical institutions had enabled them to avoid the necessity of resorting to a federal union in their scheme of union for British America. It was true that they had left the provincial governments in being. It was true that the scheme could be described and defended as a federal one. But they were persuaded that they had not recognized the principle of co-ordinate sovereignty, as they were convinced they had avoided those weaknesses of federal union which had plunged the United States into Civil War. They thought in fact that, under the supremacy of the Imperial Crown in Parliament they had created a Canadian Crown in Parliament which would be actively supreme in the union as the Imperial power was supreme, if with a supremacy mostly latent in the Empire. The union, to their minds, was a legislative union, not a federal or a quasi-federal one, and the anomalies of the special rights of French Canada, or provincial legislatures which possessed all the potent apparatus of responsible government, were no more striking than the many which the Empire in the amplitude of its

constitutional variety had nourished from the covenant of Plymouth Colony to the latest experiment in Western Australia.¹⁹

VII

The monarchical emphasis of the Confederation debates was unusual in Canadian politics, a response both to the profounder than usual reflections of the nature of Canadian government prompted by the work of constitution making, and also to the collapse of the American scheme of government in the Civil War. But as a consequence, the monarchy continued in its central place in the Canadian political tradition to become after 1931 the symbol of association with the Commonwealth, and that association is one part of the commitment of Canada. The second part is the new and unfamiliar alliance with the United States. The association with the Commonwealth expresses exactly the Canadian desire for an association compatible with independence. The alliance with the United States, however, raises the question of whether an alliance between states so unequal in power and so intimately linked by economy, language and culture, can in fact be compatible with independence. The question will not be explored here. That the American alliance is a major and a growing commitment of Canada is evident. The point made here is that the preservation of Canadian integrity in that alliance will depend upon the relevance of Canadian history, on its cultural and moral significance in universal history and on American recognition of that relevance.

The relevance of Canadian history lies, then, in the morally defensible character of Canadian purpose in maintaining a northern nation in independence and vigour in the circumstances of the second half of the twentieth century. The first element of that purpose is to be found in the realization of the northern economy. For that Canada possesses the necessary land bases in the great river valleys of the south. It possesses also in ever increasing measure the industrial power by which to bring to bear on the Canadian Shield and the Arctic the technological skill and power to conquer the North. It possesses in its scientists and its universities the knowledge and the capabilities in research to fathom the deep secrets of the north and to measure the hair's breadth difference between disaster and success in northern development.

In this, there need be no thought of turning the Canadian back on the south. The northern economy has never been self-sufficient, nor can it ever be. But it is manifest from Canadian history that

¹⁹ I am indebted to Mr. Peter B. Waite, "Ideas and Politics in British North America, 1864-1866" (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Toronto, 1953) for the substance of this paragraph.

every time that Canada has sought a destiny in the south, disaster has threatened. Every time that impulse came from outside, from the imperial aims of the House of Bourbon in 1701, from the European strategy of La Galissonnière in 1749, from the desire of Great Britain to tap the commerce of the Mississippi valley between 1783 and 1846. The effort was beyond the resources of a northern economy and a northern people, and every time Canada was thrown back upon the Shield and the North-West.

That is not to say that ordinary, or even special, ties to southward need be harmful; on the contrary. Reciprocity, on Canadian terms, as in 1854 and 1935, strengthened the northern economy. The great areas of overlap in the Atlantic provinces, the Eastern Townships, the Ontario peninsula, in Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota and the prairies, and on the Gulf of Georgia, reveal how rough the division between the northern and the continental economies have been. But the division was made and remains, and the areas of overlap have been areas of exchange in which the two economies mingle and strengthen one another by a traffic in raw materials, goods and skills which, however, is the exchange that arises from difference, not from uniformity.

The northern economy is a clear and evident thing, explicit in history. Not so definite, but still discernible, is what may be called the northern outlook of Canadian arts and letters. The mere reflection in art of northern scenery, or northern life, important though that is, is not what is meant. What is meant is the existence in Canadian art and literature of distinctive qualities engendered by the experience of northern life. These are a tendency to the heroic and the epic, to the art which deals with violence, a tendency not only realized in the work of E. J. Pratt, but also indicated in that of Louis Fréchette, and in the much less successful writings of Charles Heavysege and William Wilfred Campbell. The later canvases of Lawren Harris and those of Emily Carr have this same heroic quality stylized.

That is the art of the hinterland. The art of the baseland is the lyric of Archibald Lampman, of Octave Crémazie, and the landscape of Cornelius Krieghoff and W. J. Phillips. The great cities of the baselands have their sophisticated art, of course, and that eludes the generalization attempted here, as it should. The reference is only to what is characteristically Canadian, not to what is universal as well as Canadian.

To the heroic and the lyric, the satiric is to be added. For northern life is moral or puritanical, being so harsh that life can allow little laxity in convention. But the moral affords the substance and creates the disposition for satire. Canadian literature has been comparatively rich in satire, from the parody of Sam Slick's Yankee

sharpness by a Tory loyalist to the extravaganzas on small town life of Stephen Leacock, or prairie rural life of Paul Hiebert. For satire feeds upon the gap between profession and performance, and the puritan both displays the gap more and sees it in other men's performance more readily than those of less rigid standards. The excellence of Canadian political and social caricature stands on the same satiric footing. In all these qualities, Canadian literature has of course affinities with both Scottish and Icelandic literature. They give promise of a literature, and an art, as idiomatic as it is significant universally.

Finally, the northern quality of Canadian life is maintained by a factor of deliberate choice and natural selection. As the American frontier has always been open, absolutely or comparatively, to Canadians, Canadians have always been free to live as Canadians or to become Americans. Many who make the latter choice do it with reluctance, but the choice is nearly always made on the grounds of greater reward or wider opportunity. That is, they have rejected the harder life and smaller material rewards of Canada. The result is that Canadians to an extraordinary degree are Canadians by choice. In consequence, Canadians become generation by generation more and more a northern people, either because northern origins have fitted them for northern life, or because they have become adapted to it.²⁰

One element in that choice has often, perhaps usually, been the desire to maintain the Canadian allegiance. Canada has never been a country royalist in sentiment any more than Canadian society has remained formally hierarchical in structure. Canadian manners have always tended to be simple, and Canadian society has steadily become a society of social equals. But for many reasons it has been a monarchical country, and not a country of the social compact like its great neighbour. The reasons for this have been historic rather than sentimental. Allegiance means that the law and the state have an objective reality embodied in the succession of persons designated by Parliament and hereditary right. They do not rest on contemporary assent, although the policies and acts of government do. In Canada therefore government possesses an objective life of its own. It moves in all its parts at popular impulse, but if there were no impulse, it would still move. In the United States government is subjective. It is designed to move on popular impulse, and if there is no impulse, the movement soon flags and falters. The republican government,

²⁰ Lest this seem harsh, as it is not meant to be, let a well-known Canadian-American speak: "So far as Canadian academic migration is concerned, this means an awareness of the growth of a North American nationality in which the old loyalties are cherished, not for provincial exclusiveness but for the maintenance of the enduring virtues which embody the ideals of human rights and freedom as expressed in the history and the institutions of both Canada and the United States." H. T. Shotwell, in *Canadian Historical Review*, Mar., 1947, pp. 42-43.

massive as are its institutions, historic as is its momentum, in a very real sense rests upon assent periodically renewed. Such a government requires as basis a society of great intrinsic unity and conformity in which a consensus works to a common end. In Canada, a country of economic hazard, external dependence, and plural culture, only the objective reality of a monarchy and the permanent force of monarchical institutions could form the centre and pivot of unity. Allegiance was a social and political necessity of national existence and prevailed over the manifest and insistent attraction of republican institutions and republican liberty.

Not life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness but peace, order and good government are what the national government of Canada guarantees. Under these, it is assumed, life, liberty and happiness may be achieved, but by each according to his taste. For the society of allegiance admits of a diversity the society of compact does not, and one of the blessings of Canadian life is that there is no Canadian way of life, much less two, but a unity under the Crown admitting of a thousand diversities.

For this reason it is not a matter of political concern that Canada has two major cultures and many smaller ones. It would be foolish to deny that the dual culture is one of history's many harsh gifts to Canada, that the duality arose from the ordeal of conquest and suppression and that it has given rise to friction and to weakness. But it is manifest that it is a gift which admits of transmutation into something rich and strange, into a political order as liberal as those which Lord Acton, by way of example, thought approached nearest the ideal.²¹ The transmutation can be wrought when the two cultures are seen as variations on a common experience of the land and history of Canada, and of the common allegiance in law and spirit to the traditions and the Crown of that land.

That common experience has created a common psychology, the psychology of endurance and survival. Canadian experience teaches two clear lessons. One is that the only real victories are the victories over defeat. We have been beaten many times, defeat has been our national portion in America, but we survive and we go on in strength. And our experience teaches also that what is important is not to have triumphed, but to have endured. The pride of victory passes, but a people may survive and have its way if it abides by the traditions which have fostered its growth and clarified its purpose.

²¹ "If we take the establishment of liberty for the realizations of moral duties to be the end of civil society, we must conclude that those states are substantially the most perfect which, like the British and Austrian empire, include various distinct nationalities without oppressing them." *Home and Foreign Review*, II, 25; quoted in Daniel Mathew, *Acton: the Formative Years* (London, 1946), p. 180. Acton's instances seem somewhat unfortunate now, but his point that the state ought not to be identified with society is more valid than ever as the instances of totalitarian regimes multiply.

The common experience extends also to the Canadian achievement of the secret of Commonwealth, that free association in self-government is a bond of union which may yet outlast the controls and authority of empires, however strong. That achievement was the work of Canadians of both the major stocks, it is the outward expression of our domestic institutions, and its spirit informs Canadians of all other origins with an equal pride in free institutions elaborated by the Canadian political genius. We must bring to the working out of the American alliance the same persistence in freedom and the same stubborn ingenuity, recognizing always that this special relationship with the United States is different in kind from the historic association of Canada and can in no sense take their place.

In the end, that common experience extends to a common affirmation of moral purpose, the purpose which makes Canadian history relevant to universal history. Canadians, if one may judge by their history, believe that society cannot live by the state alone. Society has its own autonomous life, which is sustained by sources which may enrich the life of the state, but over which the state has neither authority nor control. Those sources are religious or moral, and flow into society only through persons. The personality of the individual citizen, then, is the object of the justice the state exists to provide and of the welfare society exists to ensure. The individual thus possesses the ultimate autonomy, since he is the end to which both state and society are means. But that autonomy carries with it a sovereign obligation to respect and safeguard the autonomy of his fellows, primarily by manners, which are the dealings of man with man, and secondarily through the social and political order. So reciprocal and delicate a complex of justice, welfare and good manners may function only in an organic unity of state, society and individual. It was such a unity of king, church and people Canadians, both French and English, inherited from their remoter past and have elaborated in their history as a monarchical and democratic nation.²²

The preservation of such a national society is not the unique mission of Canada, but it is the central fact of Canadian history that it has been preserved and elaborated by Canadians in one of the largest, harshest and most intimidating countries on earth. Canada, that is, has preserved and confirmed the essentials of the greatest of civilizations in the grimmest of environments. It is an accomplishment worthy of a better end than absorption in another and an alien society, however friendly and however strong in its own ideals. In that accomplishment and its continuance lies the relevance of Canadian history.

²² K. C. Wheare, *Modern Constitutions* (London, 1951), pp. 43-45; N. Mansergh, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs, 1939-1952* (London, 1958), pp. 369-375.