

Report of the Annual Meeting Rapports annuels de la Société historique du Canada

Report of the Annual Meeting

The Enthusiasms of John Graves Simcoe

S. R. Mealing

Volume 37, numéro 1, 1958

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/300570ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/300570ar>

[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 cet article

Mealing, S. R. (1958). The Enthusiasms of John Graves Simcoe. *Report of the Annual Meeting / Rapports annuels de la Société historique du Canada*, 37(1), 50–62. <https://doi.org/10.7202/300570ar>

All rights reserved © The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada, 1958

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

é
rudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>

THE ENTHUSIASMS OF JOHN GRAVES SIMCOE

S. R. MEALING
Carleton University

I

In the thirty-odd years since Canadians have stopped writing biographies of the first Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada, his place in our history has changed a good deal. No one any longer believes with D. B. Read that he "acquired his knowledge of parliamentary procedure and of statecraft under the tutelage . . . of William Pitt and Charles James Fox",¹ or with D. C. Scott that he practically drafted the Constitutional Act. If the aspersions cast on him by an American have been vigorously rebutted by one Canadian, a new and more insidious attack has been opened by another. If his memoranda on commerce have won him the incidental approval of Professors Creighton and Graham, the whole of his administration has suffered the not quite so incidental condemnation of Professor Lower. He will no doubt always have a sort of local immortality as the founder of York, but his spirit can hardly enjoy that; what it really records is his failure to locate the capital at London. He has fallen from the high estate of a Maker of Canada, a victim of our preference for native heroes. He even serves as a stock figure, useful, along with Sir Francis Bond Head and his brace of pistols, to enliven lectures a little: the militant buffoon, bent on turning "British truisms into American absurdities".²

The proconsul of the imperial romance and the bit of comic relief in the Canadian saga have this in common; Simcoe remains a figure of more than tory orthodoxy and more than human enthusiasm. He did not write dispatches, he wrote exhortations. "A thousand details crowd upon my mind", he once assured a secretary of state, "that would be productive of the most salutary consequences."³ He came to Upper Canada full of projects for the manufacture of hats, the development of iron mines, and the founding of a university; for the curing of pork — it took three successive boards of survey to save his troops from that experiment — and for shipbuilding; for the use of East India rockets, the growing of indigo and a commercial sturgeon fishery. His mind was, like a toy train, in continual brisk movement about the same circumference. Apart from his stock of minor projects, his official utterances are

¹ D. B. Read, *The Lieutenant-Governors of Upper Canada and Ontario, 1792-1899* (Toronto, 1900), p. 20.

² The phrase is Mr. S. F. Wise's in "The Indian Diplomacy of John Graves Simcoe", *Canadian Historical Association Report*, 1953, p. 44.

³ Public Record Office, WO 1/65, 397-98. Simcoe to Dundas, No. 2, November 16, 1796.

chiefly remarkable for their rigorous pursuit of commonplace ideas, which he was not content to hold in ordinary isolation from one another. In his own words, he "proceeded upon a System". This inner ferment manifested itself not only in long dispatches but in zealous activity, including the habit of volunteering special services. The range of his interests and information, while respectable, was not actually remarkable. That adjective must be reserved for the readiness with which they came bubbling to the surface. This paper might indeed have been called "The Effervescent Governor".

I do not question that the new image of Simcoe is on the whole more credible than the old. What I am inclined to throw some doubt on is the point at which both images agree: the genuineness, durability and simplicity of his expressed enthusiasms. This may seem perverse. Nevertheless I think it removes Simcoe from the gallery of insensitively and naïvely British governors that is so entertaining a part of our national folklore, while leaving him as fallible a mortal as anyone could wish. In particular, it brings the four years he spent in Upper Canada into line with the other fifty years of a busy life and gives a picture of British policy, and of Canadian society, in which the deliberate clash of explicit principles played as small a part as it has done since. I do not want, however, to insist upon this scepticism. My main object is to describe the range of Simcoe's projects as his papers show them.

II

His first public enthusiasm, and the only one that did him any good, was for North America and British rule over it. After his brilliant career in the American War of Independence he kept up a Loyalist connection in Great Britain; it was as an expert on America that he began, about 1784, the quest for office that made him Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada in 1791. He was the second generation of his family to take a fancy to the continent. His father had memorialized the government on the value of Canada in 1755, even suggesting its erection into a separate kingdom for the duke of York. He had also urged the acquisition of a fortified harbour on either side of the Isthmus of Panama in 1757, to secure "the entire trade and dominion of the South Sea".⁴ The elder Simcoe had known North America on naval service in the Seven Years' War, when enthusiasm for possessions in it was normal. John Graves' keenness was rather dated to start with, and there is something a little synthetic about the first of the three forms that it assumed.

This first form was a hope of recovering the American states. It was the prospect of peaceful reunion of the empire, he wrote Secretary Dundas, that made him value his appointment to Upper Canada. There were

⁴ W. R. Riddell, *The Life of John Graves Simcoe, First Lieutenant-Governor of the Province of Upper Canada, 1792-1796* (Toronto, 1926), p. 22.

moments when his attitude towards Americans was a compound of "military contempt" and "civil desecration".⁵ The frontier crisis of 1794 was one of them. But generally he had a high opinion of the "true New England Americans",⁶ and he looked upon them as Our Lord is said to look upon sinners; he wished not their death, but rather that they should repent and live. For a year or so he overflowed with suggestions for detaching Vermont or Kentucky, for a federal alliance with the "unprincipled state of New York" and even for making the offer of Trinidad in the event of a war (between unspecified combatants) so as to divide the northern and southern states. These dreams were no more than variations on two commonplace themes, that the Americans could never unite and that most of them were not rebels at heart. The reunion of the empire was a natural if not a feasible idea just after 1783. To take it seriously in 1793 was to show political innocence of a high order.

Simcoe did not take it seriously for much longer than that. From the moment (May 28, 1792) that he became involved in the briefly renewed project of a neutral Indian barrier, the dream of reunion began to fade before the danger first of an American and then of an Indian attack on Upper Canada. Perhaps the frontier crisis of 1794 was decisive, perhaps the facts were just slowly sinking in; in any case the dream had moved not only into the past tense but also into the conditional mood by December of that year. He wrote that Shay's rebels, "who perhaps have broke out in their late violence in the hope of Great Britain and the United States going to war", might have "entered into some compact" with him if there had been war as a result of Wayne's campaign. But at the time of the rebellion he had in fact been afraid that it would be an excuse to raise troops against Upper Canada.⁷ He did not follow the will o' the wisp of reunion for more than three years at the most. His pursuit of it after all only consisted of the embellishment of his dispatches. There, for the last six months, it served the useful object of emphasizing that he would never have done anything to increase tension on the border. The blame for that lay with Dorchester. His main elaborations of the notion all date from before he sailed for Upper Canada (September 26, 1791). He was then nearly forty years old, and had been unable to find active service since he was thirty; his new appointment had just released him from the prospect of a dreary future on half-pay. Perhaps it is worth remembering, too, that the most extravagant of his reunion passages, in which he offered to "die by more than Indian torture" if it

⁵ John Graves Simcoe, *The Military Journal of the Operations of the Queen's Rangers, commanded by Lieut.-Colonel J. G. Simcoe, during the War of the American Revolution* (New York, 1844), pp. 15 and 19.

⁶ E. A. Cruikshank (ed.), *The Correspondence of John Graves Simcoe, with Allied Documents Relating to his Administration of the Government of Upper Canada* (5 vols., Toronto, 1923-1931), I, 18. Simcoe to Sir Joseph Banks, January 8, 1791.

⁷ *Ibid.*, III, 233. Simcoe to Portland, No. 2, December 20, 1794. Compare his dispatch to Dorchester on November 10, *ibid.*, III, 176.

would heal the breach, was wrung from him by the news that the post of minister to the United States was unexpectedly vacant.⁸

III

The second of Simcoe's grand schemes for the North American continent was for trade in the interior by way of the St. Lawrence. There was nothing original about it, and not even very much that was peculiar. It came in two instalments, one when he was appointed to Upper Canada and one after he had been there for a couple of years. In the first the western posts were important, especially Detroit, and there were political overtones of varying intensity, directed at Vermont or Kentucky. In the second the route to the interior had shifted west of Lake Michigan and the western posts did not matter. The change came before Jay's Treaty, although not before he had seen Detroit and pronounced it indefensible. Most of his arguments for both versions were severely mercantilist. This involved him in the contention that Upper Canada, 250 miles upstream from the nearest port and separated from it by rapids over which the water was less than a foot deep, was in effect on the sea coast. But better men than he found difficulty in extending the mercantilist justification of empire to the province, and his invocation of it was purely conventional. The first version was a very flimsy affair. It was really little more than an argument for retaining the western posts (then, at least as he believed, the intention of the British government) with some odd pieces of information showing how complete an American expert Simcoe was. One of the oddest of these, which came from his father, was that "with the assistance of a few sluices" Montreal might preside over a continuous waterway from Hudson's Bay to the Gulf of Mexico.⁹ In one way it was an excellent scheme; nobody could object to it except for being impracticable and its details were too vague to make such a charge serious. It was a defence of the commercial value of interior settlements by a man just appointed to govern one.

The second version was very different. It was well-informed, well worked out and I think may be called realistic except in its expectation of government expenditure and its prediction of British policy. These were of course fatal weaknesses, because it was submitted just when the British government was deciding, in Jay's Treaty, to reach the interior markets of the continent by free rather than mercantilist trade. For an appreciation of Simcoe, the significant thing about this second scheme is that it was not his. One part of it, a fur-trading factory west of Lake Michigan, was based on the obvious analogy of current American practice and more precisely on the memorial of a Detroit fur trader. The other part, for the manufacture and export of flour, was suggested by a Niagara merchant. What Simcoe did was to remove any suggestion of local mono-

⁸ See note 6.

⁹ *Ibid.*, I, 8. Simcoe to Nepean, December 3, 1789.

polies and to elaborate the claims of advantage to the mother country as well as to the colony. Apart from that nothing was his but the adjectives, although of course he presented the whole thing as the product of his advanced ideas. I am not bringing a charge of plagiarism; it was no part of his duty to supply footnotes to his dispatches, and the two inspiring memoranda were sent to the Committee for Trade along with a dozen other enclosures.¹⁰ The point to be insisted on is that in this scheme Simcoe was entirely in sympathy with the aspirations of Upper Canada and entirely out of touch with Westminster. The facts to which he was most blind were not those of North America. In so far as he tried to support the plan by dwelling on its special advantages to the mother country, he was turning British arguments to Canadian purposes.

IV

Commercial advantages had to be a part of any imperial design, and Simcoe's real design was to make Upper Canada a thriving and important colony. It was to this that his nebulous enthusiasm for the American world was finally reduced. The plan to encourage the manufacture of flour put most of its emphasis on the prosperity of the province, an emphasis not inconsistent with but tending to overshadow its usefulness to the empire. It was only natural that the internal prosperity of Upper Canada should be the more immediate object of his attention, since it was more purely his responsibility. Naturally, also, it was for the province's own benefit that he recommended its assembly to enact whatever might give "clear and evident Security to the Possessor of Capitals in the British Empire" who might be willing to invest in land.¹¹ No consideration of circumstances, or of the limits to his share in regulating the imperial economy, can however explain away the fact that Simcoe's aim was political. Upper Canada had to be prosperous to convince its inhabitants of the merit of the imperial connection. They would, he wrote, be "attached to the British Government or hostile to it by the result of their own comparison and investigation". Even "those who may not see the necessity and immense advantage of experience in the form of Government . . . may be attached to it by the undisturbed possession of present benefits and the prospect of future advantages for their families".¹² Simcoe intended to prove not so much that his colonists were good for the empire as that the empire was good for them.

It was a merit of Simcoe's, for which he is not often given credit, that he had a very ready sympathy for the aspirations of the people he

¹⁰ Public Archives of Canada, Q280-2. Simcoe to the Lords of Trade, September 1, 1794, with enclosures. The report alone is in Cruikshank (ed.), *Simcoe Papers*, III, 52-70.

¹¹ Public Record Office, CO 42/319, 603-6. Speech opening the fourth session of the Assembly, July 6, 1795.

¹² Cruikshank (ed.), *Simcoe Papers*, III, 67-68. Simcoe to the Lords of Trade, September 1, 1794.

governed. He was to show it later in Saint Domingo, where the British intervened in a complicated racial war. In Upper Canada it led him to set about the land-granting problem with special zeal, which if it did not settle much was at least well meant. He is said never to have refused anyone an audience and he certainly forwarded with approval some memorials that his superiors made short work of. "He has", wrote Chief Justice Osgoode, "a benevolent heart without much discrimination."¹³ His manner was "simple, plain and obliging".¹⁴ His receptiveness probably bordered on credulity, but it was no bad qualification for his post, where easy personal relations were of real importance. He did bristle with animosities, but they were towards people at a distance and generally towards his superiors. His only important critic in Upper Canada, the Kingston merchant Richard Cartwright, stopped his criticisms after they had met. Earlier, the two had written bitter nonsense about one another. Apparently the charm at which his wife's diary hints was real; but mere amiability was not the main part of the story. In fact Simcoe, who spent all his life in government service or in seeking after it and who was forever extolling subordination, never acquired the official outlook. He had no skill at all in gauging or predicting ministers' emphasis. The whole of his correspondence, from all his posts, has the character of a debate between metropolitan official and local enthusiast.

Ever since the end of the American war Upper Canada had been the focus of his interest in the continent. His earliest surviving reference to British North America, long antedating his appointment as lieutenant-governor, is to the province. The little group of Loyalist lobbyists in England to which he once belonged had a sharp eye on the lands of the future colony. With his appointment his enthusiasm rose to a fever, which lasted undiminished for three years or so. His headiest proposals for interior commerce or for converting Americans all depended on the position or the example of Upper Canada, "the Spot destined by Nature . . . to govern the interior world".¹⁵ But by the beginning of 1794 his most frequently expressed ground for insisting on its importance was military. He thought that the lower province was a hotbed of sedition, and kept a wary eye on the French Canadians within his own jurisdiction; the American Congress was scarcely more dangerous. The defence of which Upper Canada proved itself capable in the war of 1812 cannot be said altogether to have confirmed his judgement, for he went so far as to maintain that the upper province could be held if the lower were lost, whereas the reverse was not true. When it seemed that Wayne might attack Detroit, he predicted the loss of both Canadas if the post fell.

¹³ Quoted in J. E. Middleton and F. Landon, *The Province of Ontario—A History, 1615-1927* (5 vols., Toronto, 1927), I, 76.

¹⁴ François Alexandre Frédéric, duc de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, *Travels through the United States of North America, the Country of the Iroquois, and Upper Canada, in the Years 1795, 1796 and 1797, with an Authentic Account of Lower Canada*, translated by H. Neuman (2nd ed., 4 vols., London, 1800), I, 430.

¹⁵ See note 6.

After his return to England he sent the Duke of Portland his considered ideas on the defence of the Canadas. Invasion by a French fleet, he thought, was not very difficult, and if the main body of British troops were kept at Quebec they would in such an event be bypassed while the *habitants* were led in revolt. As strong a force at Montreal as at Quebec was necessary, but even it would be inadequate against an American invasion, coupled as it was bound to be with "an universal insurrection of the French Canadians". To meet that danger required a force in Upper Canada as large as the other two combined. With this force, "to which the Indians might coalesce and a Loyal Militia rally", his province would answer for the safety of the rest.¹⁶ Simcoe had meant what he wrote three years earlier; he thought Upper Canada was "the Bulwark of the British Empire in America".¹⁷

V

It is not surprising that Simcoe's preference for Upper Canada should finally have taken a predominantly military form. From about the middle of 1793 the bulk of his correspondence is concerned with Indians and Americans, with danger and the ways to meet it. In any case he was really a soldier. He had been put under a tutor of military science at the age of fifteen. Before that, when he was only two years old, his father had drawn up a set of maxims for the training of his sons as officers. Simcoe always revered his father as a "most able military statesman" — in fact he was convinced that his father was really responsible for the capture of Quebec.¹⁸ These maxims may be taken to be the military principles which, as he once tartly reminded Dorchester, Simcoe had "imbibed from earliest infancy".¹⁹

One of them in particular, the fifteenth, was an important part of what he called his "system". It insists that good military authors are the guide not only of the soldier but also of the "patriot, courtier, statesman, magistrate and finished gentleman".²⁰ When he went to Upper Canada Simcoe hoped, as one way of forming its society, to enlist the sons of principal inhabitants as ensigns in the Sixtieth Regiment, giving them the military education that had done so much for himself. It was characteristic of him that the regiment of his choice was in the West Indies at the time, and would have had to be brought away. He told Dundas that the

¹⁶ E. A. Cruikshank and A. F. Hunter (eds.), *The Correspondence of the Honourable Peter Russell, Relating to his Administration of Upper Canada during the Official Term of Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe while on Leave of Absence* (3 vols., Toronto, 1932-1936), I, 104-105. Simcoe to Portland, December 11, 1796.

¹⁷ Cruikshank (ed.), *Simcoe Papers*, II, 104. Simcoe to Dorchester, November 10, 1793.

¹⁸ Public Record Office, WO 1/66, 647-48. Simcoe to Malouet, December 30, 1797.

¹⁹ Cruikshank (ed.), *Simcoe Papers*, III, 212. Simcoe to Dorchester, December 10, 1794.

²⁰ These maxims are printed in Riddell, *Life*, pp. 32-35.

leading feature of all his plans was "the wise Principle (at least such it appears to me) of blending civil and military Advantages".²¹ His constant refrain was that in every establishment military and civil concerns were too "intimately blended" to be separated. In Saint Domingo this conviction gave impetus to his reform of the civil administration. In this country it led to his long squabble with Dorchester and to the experiment of the second Queen's Rangers.

Simcoe thought of himself as coming out more to found than to govern Upper Canada and, to an even greater extent than he is accused of, he meant to do so by working from recognized models. Those models were the British constitution and the Roman military colony. To admire the first was ordinary, but to have considered the second at all was originality of a kind. He knew that the first land grants had been largely to disbanded soldiers and, forgetting that the leadership of ex-officers had been rejected, he supposed that the Loyalist settlements retained a military character. Further, he wanted to provide more surely military nuclei for new settlement in the winter quarters of his provincial corps, the Queen's Rangers. "Stations to be judiciously selected for the Quarters of the King's Troops", he was still explaining at the end of 1795, "is in my System and Opinion, the only basis on which Towns will speedily and inevitably arise".²² The alternative was settlement "incoherent in every particular, not to be relied on by Government".²³ In his original presentation of the scheme he had made the Roman analogy explicit.²⁴ A chain of military *coloniae* in the Ontario peninsula was to act as they had for the Romans on the Rhine; it was to ensure the security and allegiance and to mould the character of a frontier.

Simcoe's definite reference to the Roman practice was unusual, although easily explained in a man so proud of knowing Tacitus. In itself, however, the ideal of social cohesion was commonplace. The use of troops to attain it, while distinct from their incidental use to promote settlement, was so like it as to pass for the same thing. Simcoe himself never made the distinction entirely clear, and ministers certainly ignored it. Dundas seems to have been most struck by the prospect of economy. He recommended the Queen's Rangers to the House of Commons as a means of avoiding the full expense of sending regular troops. Economy had not been so evident in Simcoe's original proposal for twelve companies, including cavalry and military artificers. The artificers were almost a "system" in themselves, but in spite of Pitt's momentary favour they joined the list of Simcoe's "Public disappointments". Even as actually established, with two infantry companies, the Rangers cost nearly

²¹ Cruikshank (ed.), *Simcoe Papers*, I, 82. Simcoe to Dundas, No. 2, November 17, 1791.

²² *Ibid.*, IV, 156. Simcoe to Dorchester, December 9, 1795.

²³ *Ibid.*, IV, 339-340. Simcoe to Portland, No. 44, July 20, 1796

²⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 44. Simcoe to Dundas, August 12, 1791.

£400 a year more than had been anticipated.²⁵ In informing Dorchester of the corps' existence Dundas was enthusiastic, but he emphasized its normal military function. This dispatch and his speech in Parliament were hardly what Simcoe claimed, "stipulations" that he was free to devote the Rangers entirely to the establishment of his *coloniae*.²⁶ In fact the only just statement of his program for the corps ever made except by himself was that of Fox in objecting to its establishment, and he may have meant to draw a caricature.

In practice the Queen's Rangers turned out to be a quite normal body of men. It is difficult to find in anything they actually did the fruits of Tacitus' inspiration or of a specially intimate blend of civil and military objects. Some people may take this as a defence of Simcoe's common sense; he took it as a grievance. The temptation to use the corps as ordinary troops was strong when there was a war on, and when ministers had always regarded it as a sort of labour battalion anyway. Ministers would make no exception to the rule that Dorchester was Commander-in-Chief, and Dorchester would make no exception to the rule that garrison and communications duties were the main purpose of troops. On June 9, 1796, he forbade the establishment of any new posts in the upper province, and that put an end to Simcoe's peninsular *coloniae*. The corps was by then so thinly officered that its discipline was poor, and the men were likely to desert if given too much work. Confirmed in the role of normal troops, not social prophets, and not even relied on to build roads, it was disbanded in the general reduction of 1802.

VI

In the beginning at least, the *coloniae* were part of a larger plan. Around them new settlers were to "coalesce into the general principles of British subjects".²⁷ What Simcoe proposed for Upper Canada in the first instance was meticulous, instantaneous and uncompromising assimilation to British models. This was not confined to the political framework or to the fostering of a local aristocracy. There would be, he wrote before his appointment was formal, "causes... perpetually offering themselves" for the practice of assimilation.²⁸ "Customs, Manners and Principles"²⁹ were all supposed to follow the flag. This was of course far beyond the intention behind the Constitutional Act. Its aim was to strengthen the colonial executives by giving them social support. In the thirteen colonies, and in Ireland, executives had come to grief because

²⁵ Public Record Office, CO 42/316, 447. "Estimate of the Charge of a Corps of Foot...", February, 1792; CO 42/316, 453-54. "State of the Subsistence of Col. Simcoe's Corps...", February, 1792.

²⁶ See note 22.

²⁷ Cruikshank (ed.), *Simcoe Papers*, IV, 54. Simcoe to Portland, No. 25, July 31, 1795.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, V, 247. Simcoe to the Archbishop of Canterbury, December 30, 1790.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, I, 27. Simcoe to Dundas, June 30, 1791.

they had been unsupported from below; when the Act was being passed there were lesser but similar troubles in Barbados and Dominica. The Legislative Council, the titles of honour and in part the clergy reserves were an attempt to supply the deficiency, without departing from representative government. Beyond this attempt, which was very short-lived, there was only the vague assumption of general similarity that had underlain English colonization since the days when it went no farther afield than Ireland, and that was by no means peculiar to British colonies. Simcoe far exceeded his superiors in presenting assimilation as an object *per se*; but he did so only in words and he was consistent in doing that only in the first flush of enthusiasm. It is a little unfair to pin him too closely to his later oratory. If his speeches to the Assembly are to be taken literally, they probably indicate more zeal for the French war than for the British constitution.

The first three sessions of the provincial legislature did pass several measures that can be represented as instances of meticulous assimilation, but they really belong to the older and vaguer tradition. They can be matched from the statutes of New England or Jamaica, and I think they would have been much the same if the Constitutional Act had never left Grenville's closet or Simcoe had died of one of his three wounds in the American war. Generally, the test of action reduces his anglicization fever to a temperature little above normal. His conduct of administration was decidedly autocratic, quite as much so in Upper Canada as later in Saint Domingo, where there was no question of following British models and where his powers as governor were very wide. The proposal for municipal corporations, which the Duke of Portland vetoed, was hardly a piece of meticulous assimilation. In any case it was Richard Cartwright's scheme, not Simcoe's.³⁰ Simcoe justified his lieutenants of counties on practical as well as messianic grounds, by the need in so large a colony for "a gradation of Officers".³¹ In the perfect autocracy of Saint Domingo he made rather similar appointments. In administration his fetish was efficiency — "neither a *sine cure* mind nor a *sine cure* body throughout the whole Province".³² He was so full of that ideal that there was little room for any other.

Nor did he really rely on the excellence of transplanted British institutions to attract and convert Americans. "The preference for the British form of Government is alledged by some for quitting the States", he wrote, "but the Oppression of the Land Jobbers and the uncertainty

³⁰ C. E. Cartwright (ed.), *The Life and Letters of the late Honourable Richard Cartwright, 1759-1815* (Toronto, 1876), pp. 142-143. "Ideas on the subject of incorporating the town of Kingston, as submitted to Lt.-Govr. Simcoe" (undated memorandum).

³¹ Cruikshank (ed.), *Simcoe Papers*, IV, 116. Simcoe to Portland, No. 30, November 30, 1795.

³² *Ibid.*, I, 34. Simcoe to Dundas, June 30, 1791.

of the Titles is the more general reason".³³ The simple fact was that Upper Canada needed settlers if it was to grow and that there was only one place to get them. He would have preferred, until Dundas objected, to transplant the population of Newfoundland; but he had a high opinion of New Englanders as colonists. When he invited "those who shall prefer the British Constitution in Upper Canada",³⁴ it meant no more than those who were not determined to bring the American constitution with them. To the end of his residence in the colony he could still write of defeating "the spirit of democratic subversion in the very Country which gave it existence and growth",³⁵ but in practice he gave more weight to Upper Canada's economic growth than to its constitutional purity. In his later memorials he did not claim to have given the province a British character, but only to have preserved its British connection.

Assimilation existed on three levels: as an old and flexible assumption that colonies were transplanted societies with their institutions at least rooted in those of the mother country; in the Constitutional Act as a political device for strengthening the executive; and in some of Simcoe's utterances as an end in itself. His actions never approached the last, and did not even amount to the second. I am far from maintaining that the importance of his "image and transcript" notion depends on his practice. The kind of assimilation he advocated in his most exalted moments was too wildly impracticable to be more than preached; to demand its application is rather like questioning the sincerity of a revivalist who cannot produce God in the flesh. Nor is the reality of his intention to transplant the British constitution "in every Branch and Advantage" disproved by a certain tendency to confuse it with the British army. Simcoe was quite capable of bridging the gap between his personal autocracy and a hypothetical aristocracy by the assumption, to which he was prone, that everybody agreed with him. There is really no way of deciding how much of his early effusions he seriously intended to implement and how much he simply found it satisfying or thought it acceptable to say. In any event, his words became more important than whatever he meant by them. A general adherence to British models has been the dominant theme in our constitutional development. Special insistence on it has often been found in company with conservatism and with distrust of the United States. Simcoe gave conspicuous, timely and concise expression to the tradition compounded of these three things. So far as it was necessary or possible for one man to do so, he crystallized it; and there is no wonder that it should for a long time have canonized him.

³³ *Ibid.*, II, 109-110. Simcoe to Dorchester, December 2, 1793.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 152. Simcoe to Phineas Bond, May 7, 1792.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, III, 265. Simcoe to Portland, No. 16, January 22, 1795.

VII

The two most enduring of his Upper Canadian enthusiasms were for the Queen's Rangers and, in a general way, for the province itself. Both became focussed on his attempt to escape from Dorchester's control as commander-in-chief. Once both men had left British North America, Simcoe only once expressed a desire to return; that was when he believed that Portland had promised him the governor-generalship, and even then he wanted a peerage as well. His ambition was too volatile not to be heated by any situation in which he found himself. In his later commands he experienced new sets of revelations: the advantages of conquering Central America, that the navy could restore his troops' health by sailing them around and around Saint Domingo, or that the defence of London depended on a strong force in the Scilly Isles. In Saint Domingo he could not be held within the prescribed limits of expenditure. His instinctive view of the world was always markedly Simcoe-centric.

Moreover, his ambition was deliberate and calculating. In the American war he had chosen the command of a light corps because it was "generally esteemed the best mode of instruction for those who aim at higher stations".³⁶ As soon as he got his appointment to Upper Canada he forgot how much he had solicited it, made a virtue of acceptance and began to look forward to a reward "in future trusts, and more lucrative employments".³⁷ He was an assiduous although unskilful memorialist. It was not the least function of his dispatches to advertise his devotion to duty. The peculiar mixture of fire and platitudes that is their hallmark owed much to his inept determination to follow up any hint ministers gave him. As he put it himself, "nothing is more essential than to profess Correct Opinions, unless to possess a *correct* Acquaintance".³⁸ Since his ambition outran his talents, he deliberately sought after original, ingenious and "enlarged" designs. After the event, he was always prepared for any emergency. In his search for triumphs he came at last to appropriate other people's mistakes; he claimed that the re-occupation of Fort Miamis in 1794 had been his idea and that it had been the master-stroke averting war. He had no knack for the choice of patrons — he backed Clinton against Cornwallis and Addington against Pitt — so that he suffered many disappointments. In the end persistence and a change of ministry made him Commander-in-Chief in India, but he died before he could reach it.

His zeal cannot be separated from his ambition. I should no more suggest that the one was assumed than that the other was discreditable; but his enthusiasm for his various projects is not to be compared with

³⁶ Simcoe, *Military Journal*, pp. 13-14.

³⁷ Public Record Office, CO 42/316, 367-69. Simcoe to Grenville, August 30, 1791.

³⁸ Ontario Department of Public Records and Archives, Simcoe Papers, Non-Canadian Papers 1799-1806, Packet AA. Simcoe to General Conway, October 23, 1801.

his enthusiasm for himself. He was an intellectual magpie. His schemes were without focus, and the consistency he claimed for them was spurious. So, as a rule, was his claim that they were carefully prepared. His hopes of transplanting everything in England except the people were never so articulated as a plan nor so central to his intentions as a mission. He never actually revised them, but they disintegrated. The picture of Simcoe that I invite you to believe in is not primarily that of a secular messiah, a Briton too robustly and stupidly confident of his own institutions to modify them for export. He was a man struggling to rise in a world whose working he imperfectly understood. He tried so hard to please that he became a nuisance. The ministry did not intend to set him on, by biting Upper Canada, to infect it with aristocracy; the real criticism of the imperial administration is that it expected him, in governing one set of people, to give first consideration to the interests of another. It is a little ironic that he must be convicted of regarding British institutions too much. What cost him the goodwill of his superiors was the fact that he regarded British interests too little.