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Colony to Nation: A History of Canada. By Arthur R. M. LOWER. With maps by T. W. MCLEAN. Toronto: Longmans, Green & Company. 1946, Pp. XVI, 600, ($5.00)

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Colony to Nation: A History of Canada. By Arthur R. M. LOWER. With maps by T. W. McLEAN. Toronto: Longmans, Green & Company. 1946, Pp. xvi, 600, ($5.00).

In his Preface, Dr. Lower says he hopes "that a careful reading of his pages will help Canadians to some of that self-knowledge so necessary if they are to take their rightful place in the world, and still more, if they are to be a happy people, at peace with themselves ». He begins frankly enough by telling us that Canada, in contrast with such countries as Ireland, is only « a successful mediocrity of a country ». He continues in this reproving vein throughout.

"There are, as yet", he confesses, "two Canadas, inhabited by two peoples, who as often as not, are at outs. In the strictest sense there can therefore be no History of Canada." Nevertheless, for the good of Canadians, he sets out to write one just the same, and does it with an abundance of both insight and wit.

Professor Lower sees a good deal of determinism in politics. He enquires into everyone's background in order to understand their views. For example, "Meighen exhibited all the faults and virtues that characterize the men of Ulster descent" (502). He would agree, therefore, that some facts about himself are relevant to a review of his book, from the point of view of its relation to the history of French Canada in particular.

The author, like Mackenzie King, was born in Ontario, and graduated, first from Toronto, and then from Harvard. But, unlike Mackenzie King, he was the son of a Methodist from England. Canadians of this background were usually Conserva-

tives,— though not necessarily Tories, for it was "from this branch of Methodism and mainly among persons of English origin that there emerged most of the humanitarian socialism associated with such names as those of J. S. Woodsworth and Salem F. Bland."[1]

In 1914 Mr. Lower was appointed to explore James Bay in relation to its fisheries. He came into youthful contact with French Canadians, lumberjacks, cooks, and canoe-men,— and liked them. He served overseas with the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. Then, from 1919 to 1925, he made direct contact with New France when, on the staff of the Public Archives of Canada, he read through scores of stout volumes on the 17th century.

With a Harvard Ph.D. to guarantee the soundness of his scholarship, and as a member of the United Church of Canada (of which the Methodists became a part in 1925), he was appointed, in 1929, Head of the Department of History at Wesley (now United) College, affiliated to the University of Manitoba,— a Methodist foundation « which took the teachings of Christ seriously enough to father a remarkably large share of the movement for social justice in Canada. J. S. Woodsworth was among its best-known graduates » (499n.). In 1947 he is joining the staff of Queen's University, Kingston, Ont. Always scholarly, his chief object of reasearch has been the staple trades in Canadian history. His authoritative treatment of this subject, and of « metropolitanism », are among the most valuable features of his new book.

Professor Lower has pondered long on the question of two races so radically different living together. This had led him to attempt to penetrate the nature of the respective cultures. But beyond that lies his concern for making the concept, *Canada*, workable. To him, the only thing that justifies this enormously costly experiment is the emergence of some genuine community which will transcend the two races, and produce some contribution of its own to our common human achievement, either cultural or political, in terms of tolerance and understanding. British Canada originated in an effort to keep the old flag flying despite the Yankees, but to Professor Lower, that is no longer good enough. Canada is justifiable only if it is neither British nor American. If this is not possible, thend, one gets the impression that, as an Anglo-Saxon, it would seem to him logical to seek a more prosperous goal in the U.S.A. He is neither a United Empire Loyalist, nor, of course, a French Nationalist.

To this must be added his concern for justice, which almost necessarily brings him out on the side of the weaker group. This goes deeper than mere liking for another culture. He would sympathize with the Jews and Japanese, as he does with the French Canadians.

For Professor Lower, the French-English question *is* Canadian history. In his Presidential address to the Canadian Historical Association in 1943, his topic was, « Two Ways of Life: The Primary Antithesis of Canadian History ». In *Colony to Nation*, he concludes that « the first of Canadian problems was the last, and the

1. A. R. M. Lower, « Determinism in Politics », *The Canadian Historical Review* XXVII, no 3, Toronto, Sept. 1946, p. 243.

primary antithesis of Canadian history remained largely unsolved. Honest effort at a judgment forces the conviction that the heavier share of responsibility has lain with the English Canadians » (559). He has meditated on conquest as an historical experience and has been driven into that area of psychology which depends upon the fact of conquest. He believes that it is self-knowledge which each people needs before it can co-operate, and so, writing for his fellow Anglo-Canadians, he reproves them, though he adds that the French « have been a difficult people ».

His book, which has received the Governor-General's Award for the best academic non-fiction of 1946, contains twenty-one maps and diagrams, of which one of the most interesting is a family tree of Canadian parties, 1824-1945. Half the volume is devoted to the last century. Canada since 1867 is the topic dealt with at greatest length. New France gets only five out of thirty-six chapters. Jacques Cartier is soon disposed of,— « the sum total of his achievements, viewed dispassionately, is not particularly great»(7). Jeanne Mance is not even mentioned. But the general significance of the period, as it affects Canada today, is what interests the author.

With regard to French-Canadian reactions to the Conquest, the following is typical:

> ...Lafontaine was far from being a Papineau... he was not an idealogue as Papineau tended to be, nor did he feel that his race was suffering intolerable wrongs... Lower Canada, thanks to him, did not become a precedent for Ireland ...This was Lafontaine's contribution: his good sense in accepting something repugnant to French mentality, a compromise.
>
> ...Lower Canada was to remain French; but in doing so, it was putting itself in the harness of English institutions. (268)

Professor Lower sees the death of Scott at the hands of Riel as « the most determinative specific political incident between Confederation and the Great War » (352). His sympathy does not lie with either side in the controversy which followed.

The very title of this volume shows that the author considers the nationalists in Canadian history to have been th« progressives » and the colonials to have been the « reactionaries ». But for him, the « nation », and the only « nation », is Canada.[1] He does not, like most people in Quebec, think of the Province as a « nation » too. For him, politically, there is only a *grande patrie*, no *petite patrie*. From this point of view, to call a provincial government a *Union Nationale* is a contradiction in terms. His nationalism means that on the one hand he repudiates colonialism, but on the other he has no sympathy for the compact theory of confederation. He appears to be a moderate centralizer. (He has lived, with Dafoe and Bracken, in underprivileged Manitoba.) He is neither a « nationalist » of the school of Mercier and

1. *Cf.* A.R.M. Lower, « Two Nations or two Nationalities », *Culture*, IV, no. 4, Quebec, 1943, pp. 470-481.

Duplessis, nor a « colonial » of the school of Mowat and Drew. Of Premiers Fielding, Mowat, Mercier, and Norquay in 1887, he says, « they were not a generation ahead of the Fathers of 1867 but a generation behind » (387), — this notwithstanding the fact that for the bulk of Canada confederation itself was a movement, not away from, but towards greater local autonomy. Legislative union had been given a fair trial and had failed.

For Laurier there is admiration. He « devoted his career to the Christian virtue of tolerance... The English have been Puritan rather than Christian... Sir Wilfrid was a victim of his life ambition to act as a Christian should. » Where contrasted with Sir John Macdonald, the « comparison is all in favour of the French Canadian » (432).

Of the Borden Ministry of 1911, Dr. Lower says, « Papineau-ism, mixed in a strange amalgam with Castor Ultra-montanism, had come full circle: once on the extreme left, it was now on the extreme right » (434). Actually there was not much Papineau-ism about it. The new Quebec ministers were all Conservatives. « Point de représentant du mouvement ni de la génération nationaliste », says Rumilly. Bourassa himself said, « Je ne me sentirais nullement chez moi dans un ministère conservateur. [1] » And in the House of Commons himself after 1925, the ultramontane grandson of Papineau voted consistently with the Liberals against the Conservative « extreme right ». « I was delighted and perhaps surprised », said his deskmate, J. S. Woodsworth, «to find that we had a great deal in common.»[2] But Professor Lower regards Bourassa as one « who always claimed to be a Canadian nationalist but whose words and deeds often suggested that he was little more than a French Canadian Nationalist » (464).

Canada is « a country whose economy cries aloud for central direction », says the author (524). Paul Gouin escapes as a « generous-minded young man », but Maurice Duplessis, of « old *Castor* complexion », « acted as if his sympathies lay with the unscrupulous demagogues of Germany », and in 1939 « the good sense of Quebec » installed « the tolerant, fair-minded and progressive Mr. Godbout ». Something must have gone wrong with this « good sense » later, for Dr. Lower makes a slip when he says that the « *Union Nationale* elected the largest number of members, though not a majority » in 1944 (527-530). Actually, it elected a clear majority of the members.

A liberal, rather than a democrat, the author worries about various « Fascist » tendencies, admits that « the voice of the people may also be the voice of Satan », and is forced back to « something like the natural rights ideas of the 18th century ». From this point of view he criticizes the King war administration « that cut into freedom and abrogated civil right to a degree not equalled in any other English-speaking nation ». Its order-in-council legislation « robbed the Commons of its ancient rights, and turned it into a Reichstag ». But he then says the « men charged with government had not within their breasts the spirit of the despot », being « too

1. Robert Rumilly, *Histoire de la province de Québec*, XVI, pp. 125-7.

2. *House of Commons Debates*, Sept. 8, 1939.

thoroughly saturated in Liberal principles to take advantage of the arbitrary powers they had assumed » (532-4). Mr St. Laurent has quoted this last passage with much satisfaction to the House of Commons itself, but the Mayor of Montreal would find it a bit generous.

This is the most controversial and stimulating history of Canada yet written in English. No living person will agree with all that Professor Lower says. But nobody can deny that he is a man of good will, nor afford not to contemplate and respect his opinions. Here is a reliable and scientific historian who proves that the academic approach can be anything but dull. A text-book which has been desperately needed in English-speaking Canada, its appearance is, in itself, an important event in the history of the Canadian nation.

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