

A PLANNER LOOKS AT CANADA

By W. H. G. ARMYTAGE

LEWIS Mumford in his many books has rightly hailed James Silk Buckingham, (1786-1855), as a pioneer of modern planning techniques.¹ His *National Evils and Practical Remedies* blazed the trail for Ebenezer Howard and the model towns of Letchworth and Welwyn Garden City: it was the first complete and concrete blueprint for a planned town. But Buckingham was more than a geographic planner, he was a demographic analyst of some importance. C. R. Fay in this connection has acknowledged that Buckingham "interested Lord Ducham in self-government for the colonies"² and accords him a niche in the gallery of colonial theorists. But here interest has stopped. No modern writer has considered his connection with Canada, his observations on the towns he visited, and the place that he accorded it in a remodelled imperial economy.³

Buckingham came to Canada on a lecture tour when he was fifty-three years old. Already, he had built up a reputation and background second to none in radical circles. At sea before his 'teens, a commercial envoy for Mehemet Ali of Egypt in his twenties, an Indian newspaper editor in his thirties, he had descended on London at the age of thirty-seven to found three periodicals and become the unofficial propaganda leader of the Radical whigs. These three ventures, *The Oriental Herald and Colonial Review*, *The Sphynx*, and *The Athanaeum* became platforms for promising writers, especially the last, which through affording an outlet to F. D. Maurice and John Sterling, became one of the most distinguished of Victorian journals. He became M.P. for Sheffield in 1832, in spite of the formidable opposition of local worthies, but, not having the requisite financial resources, was forced to undertake lecture tours in order to supplement his income. It was a lecture tour for the North American Temperance Union that enabled him to visit the North American Continent in 1837, and to come to Canada two years later.

He landed at Queenstown on 24 August, went on to Toronto, and stayed there for three weeks. He felt himself more at home than at any other time since leaving London. The

¹ As, for instance in *The Culture of Cities* (London, 1940) p. 394.

² *Cambridge History of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 1940) ii p. 405.

³ Which emerge from a reading of *Canada, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and other British Provinces of North America* (London, 1842), in which Buckingham's ideas and observations are set forth.

town planner looked with approval on Toronto: a city which was "regular and symmetrical." The width of King Street, the longevity and comfort of the planked and sanded roads, and the buildings; all drew praise, Government House especially so: as "the least ostentatious residence of a colonial governor to be found anywhere in the British Dominions".

For the three Sundays of his stay, Buckingham attended the services of the Established Church. For one who had been long absent from England, the sight was nostalgic. Pews filled with soldiers, the Governor-General with his cocked hat and plumes, the external marks of social distinction in the seating of the congregation, all seemed a replica of England. The picture was made more complete by the presence of the parish clerk, who read the responses and gave out the psalms "in the same nasal tone, and with the same defective and uneducated manner which characterises that race in England." Buckingham was disappointed. Nor did the singing compensate for this, since the powerful organ completely drowned the voices both of choir and of congregation.

In secular matters too, Buckingham saw room for much improvement. Most imperative, in his opinion, was "a supply of healthy, vigorous and sober immigrants, who, if they came with nothing but the labour of their own hands, would serve to augment the national wealth from the very first day they began to till the soil". The prevalence of drunkenness, profanity, and blasphemy was greater here than anywhere in the United States. He lectured on this alarming symptom in the Methodist Church, but few of the upper classes turned out to hear him. If the upper classes did not attend, the Indians did, and Buckingham proudly recorded that Kah-ke-wa-quon-a-bee (whose English wife was a friend of the family) sent down two hundred and fifty Chippewas to hear him lecture on Palestine: "the first time", proudly added the lecturer, "that Indians had ever been assembled for such a purpose in Canada."

He left for Kingston on 14 August, in the steamboat *William IV*. Stopping at Coburg he noticed the external symptoms of advancing prosperity in the number of stone houses. It was just at this time that news of the Act for the Union of Upper and Lower Canada reached the province, yet Buckingham recorded no observations of the inhabitants. Instead, he devoted his powers to an appraisal of Kingston. Here, the blue limestone of which many of the houses were built tended to give the town "a heavy and peculiar appearance". At the church, he

found the same maltreatment of the liturgy by the parish clerk. He visited the penitentiary, lectured on the evils of intemperance and was pleased to remark on the number of troops who attended his lecture. The existence of a Mechanics' Institute that could sustain the interest of 300 members was a redeeming feature.

The weather was intensely hot during his stay, the thermometer reading from 90 to 95 degrees in the shade. On the last day but one, the Governor-General arrived from Montreal. "No demonstration or enthusiasm marked his arrival" noted Buckingham with some surprise; "his reception was respectful and nothing more; there was not the slightest demonstration of any opposite feeling, but in England it would be called cold, though here it was not meant to be so". When the presentation of addresses took place (lasting about fifteen minutes) the absence of feeling was even more noticeable: "the whole proceeding was one of the coldest kind that I had ever witnessed", he wrote, though "congratulation and respect were really intended to be expressed".

On 22 August, he left Kingston by the steamer *Dolphin* for Montreal. The journey down was eventful. They waited for four hours at Prescott (which they made in seven hours) waiting for an American boat which never materialised. Here he was able to admire the Prescott-Osnaburgh ferryboat, built on two hollow tubes, in the centre of which was a waterwheel worked by a small engine. At two o'clock in the following morning, they reached Dickenson's landing, where they had to leave the *Dolphin* to avoid the Long Sault Rapids. The journey was about twelve miles overland, but it rained so heavily that they couldn't see ten yards ahead of them. Three stage coaches took them, but on the way, over the roughest of roads, one of the three upset. In the dark and rainy night, the passengers from the other two had to get the coach on its wheels again and reload the baggage—all in the darkness while the rain poured down. However, by six in the morning, they were able to re-embark from Cornwall in the *Highlander*, a bigger and better boat than the *Dolphin*. Four hours later, a quieter and more orderly disembarkation was effected at Couteau de Lac. By noon, the third disembarkation point at the Cascades was encountered, the last before the Lachine Rapids just before Montreal. At Beauharnois, where they refuelled with wood, Buckingham was convinced that the company of proprietors who had recently purchased the estate of Edward Ellice had made a cheap

purchase for their £120,000 outlay. "In twenty years hence, with the infusion of a good class of settlers, and the judicious application of capital, the value of this estate may easily be raised to £500,000; and in half a century can hardly fail to be worth a million".

Montreal was eventually reached after the fourth disembarkation. He remained here for a fortnight, staying at Rasco's Hotel, meeting many old friends. Montreal he considered "as likely to become the seat of the general government instead of Quebec or Toronto." The French influence he noticed in the plan of the town: the Rue Notre Dame was only thirty feet broad, though nearly a mile long, and St. Paul's was yet narrower. "Some of the lanes and alleys leading from this down to the river", he continued, "are barely sufficient for a horse and cart to go through, obliging the passenger who meets it to shrink back against the wall to avoid coming in contact with the wheels". The streets that were not macadamised were "so full of deep holes and inequalities; so that a drive over them in one of the caleches of the town, might be imposed as a penance from the violent shaking it gives to the whole frame". Those that were macadamised had limestone instead of granite as the basic material, so that they were muddy in wet weather and dusty in dry weather. "Neither driving nor walking," concluded Buckingham, "can be much enjoyed in the streets of Montreal".

He visited the nunneries, and the University of McGill College. He noted the appropriate siting of the local jail,—between two large distilleries,—“the manufacturers of that liquid poison which makes the greatest number of debtors and criminals too”. When he compared the comparative sobriety of the Americans to that of the Canadians, he was not heard very tolerantly. "My observations," he wrote, "were usually resented with indignation. I was more than once told that it was unworthy of me, as an Englishman, to admit the existence of any good qualities among such a people as the Americans". Nevertheless he noted that many of the books he saw for sale in the shops were American editions of English works, and in turn, he was able to blame the English law of copyright.

The effect of the garrison on Montreal social life was not a pleasant one. He himself remarked on "the intemperate and dissipated manner" of the officers and the "manner in which many of these had comported themselves towards ladies, both married and single, was spoken of in terms of severe reprobation." Yet he was able to find many listeners. There was a great

"Temperance Excursion" to St. Sulpice, when a large party went by steamer, the steam was let off, and for an hour the three hundred on board listened to one of his addresses on signing the pledge. It was the first excursion of its kind made from the town, and Buckingham was well pleased with the results.

On 5 September, he took the *Canadian Eagle* to Quebec. Here he stayed at Payne's Hotel, near the ramparts. Quebec's town plan was "as irregular as the greatest enemy of symmetry could desire". Not one of its streets could compare with King Street, Toronto, or Notre Dame in Montreal. His indictment of the streets was that they were "short, narrow, crooked, steep, wretchedly paved at the centre, still worse provided with sidewalks, and not lighted with lamps at night". The rest of the town was no better. "The private dwellings are in general destitute of architectural beauty, and small and incommodious. The shops are also small and mean, and greatly inferior, in the extent and variety of their contents, to those of Montreal and Toronto." Other unpleasant features of Quebec rose to meet him. The Museum of the Literary and Historical Society was "disordered" and "suffered much from neglect"; and the School of the Royal Institution appeared to him to be a "scandalous sinecure".

The cause for his jaundiced outlook was soon found. Poverty, filth and intemperance abounded. There were over 600 establishments selling intoxicants to the 30,000 inhabitants. He devotes some time to the presentation of statistics, finding that no less than 378,186 gallons of wines, and 766,886 gallons of spirits were imported yearly into Canada, though the population was not quite a million.

He stayed for three weeks in Quebec, comparing the social conditions with those of American towns. The editors of Canadian journals he found to be above their American counterparts, both as regards their information and the tone of their writing. Of Canadian editors he confessed that the French papers were above those of the English in "elegance of style and acuteness of reasoning". He gave three courses of lectures: one on Egypt, one on Palestine, and one on Mesopotamia. The first was allowed to be held in the Methodist Church, but on the specific condition that "no meeting in favour of temperance should be held in the same edifice. The condition was exacted by some of the trustees of the chapel, who were distillers and dealers in ardent spirits; and who did not wish to have their

craft out in danger". The second series, on Palestine, was held in the Theatre Royal. The last, on Mesopotamia, was held in the Hall of the Legislative Assembly in the Quebec Parliament House, which contained 1,000 listeners on his last lecture. It was on this occasion that the commander of the garrison, impressed by Buckingham's temperance crusade, had a large body of Coldstream Guards marched down to seats in the strangers' gallery. The meeting lasted for nearly three hours, and dispersed "with strong feelings in favour of the cause", one gentleman of means going away with the express intention of destroying all the spirits in his cellars.

On 29 September, he left for Halifax on the *Unicorn*. The journey took four days, giving him opportunity to observe the hundreds of merchant ships in the river. Reaching Halifax, he was very unfavourably impressed with its dusty streets, unpainted houses, and broken and neglected sidewalks. Numbers of ill clad and dirty negroes added to the effect. "Our impression was", he wrote "we had never seen either in the United States or Canada, a town with such few good private dwellings or public buildings in proportion to its antiquity and population as Halifax seemed to present". The plan, however, was more symmetrical than that of Quebec or Montreal.

Redeeming features became apparent. The rich brown Province Building, built of close grained sandstone, evoked his admiration: "nowhere in any country do I remember to have seen more perfectly executed masonry than in this building." Of the same construction, Government House and Dalhousie College came in for comment. Buckingham was of the opinion that though the older college at Windsor was much more efficient, Dalhousie having "all the accommodation and materials for a large number of students, time will no doubt increase them".

Round Halifax, too, he saw farming "greatly superior to anything we saw in Canada". This was attributed to the exertions and example of John Young, who had introduced the Scots system of farming. A further view of the province as a whole confirmed him in his original view that "all that is wanting is population, capital, roads, and agricultural settlers to make it richer and more competent to self government, every year".

He left Halifax on 13 October by stage coach for Windsor. From there he took steamer across the Bay of Fundy to St. John, New Brunswick. He found Windsor poorer in amenities than he had been led to suppose, yet managed to deliver two

short lectures before embarking on the *Maid of the West* on 15 October. During the crossing, a threatened gale caused them to remain at anchor in a creek in the Bay of Minas. Buckingham was surprised to notice, that, far from having a sobering effect, "some were so utterly regardless of the peril of their situation, that they became intoxicated by the large draughts of brandy in which they indulged. Long before midnight we had scenes of drunkenness, blasphemy, and riot in the cabin, among some of our stage passengers from Halifax, such as we had never witnessed in all the three years we had passed in the United States". After a passage of twenty-six hours, he landed at St. John, to be met by a naval officer who had met him in Bombay thirteen years earlier, and an army officer who had met him in Egypt before that. They had formed a committee of welcome and did much to make up for the voyage, which Buckingham regarded as the dearest passage he had ever made.

St. John had a spacious layout, and good grey granite buildings. The influence animating its economic life was, however, decidedly American. The owners of the sawmill, who were of American extraction, were "observed to be generally more enterprising and more speculative than the native colonists or the British; sometimes to their own enrichment, but sometimes also, it must be admitted, to the impoverishment of others". Though St. John had "less elegance and refinement than Toronto, Montreal, Quebec, or Halifax . . . there is an American air of equality in the conditions and manners of all classes here, with the eager bustle and pursuit of business, which is so characteristic of American towns". Buckingham's lectures were well attended for six successive evenings by an audience of 500, although the weather was sometimes "most inclement".

On 22 October, he went up the river to Fredericton. On the boat was a young colonist who applauded the burning in effigy of Governor-General Poulett-Thompson. When Buckingham asked why he felt so bitter (for the young colonist had added that it was a pity that the process had stopped only at burning his effigy) the young colonist replied "because he was known to have spoken and voted in the house for a reduction of the duty on Baltic timber, and this was *oppression* to the Colonies". Buckingham's comment shows the free trade outlook: Such are the feelings that are engendered by being brought up under the restrictive or protecting system". It was at Fredericton that he delivered the last lectures that he was to give on the American continent. It was by no means the most

successful. "There was an appendage which might well have been spared", he commented. "In the pews reserved for the Lieut. Governor and his staff, were orderly sergeants, keeping possession previous to his arrival, while military sentries with fixed bayonets were placed at each entrance of the chapel; and the concourse of a large retinue of officers . . . made the aisle ring with the clatter of heavy boots, steel scabbards, and the tramp of numbers, not quite in harmony with the grave decorum of a chapel or lecture room".

But his book was more than just another addition to the number of travel books about the New World that had made the reputations of travellers like Captain Basil Hall, Mrs. Trollope, and Harriet Martineau. Like the work of James Stuart (published in 1833) it had a moral to adorn the traveller's tale. In Buckingham's story, the moral was attached as a separate chapter to his book and entitled "A Plan of National Colonisation". In spirit, his plan shows much the same fears for demographic congestion as did the plan of the Earl of Selkirk. But it is a great advance on the school of thought represented by Sir Wilmot Horton, which merely believed in "shovelling out the paupers". In its system and regard for planning it belongs to another school.

Buckingham saw that three cancers had destroyed the vitals of the Spanish and Portugese Empires: the prohibition of colonisation (by which he meant "the fixed and permanent settlement of the European race within the colonial territory") monopoly, and the absence of an educational policy. He saw that there was grave danger that similar evils might affect the British Empire. He saw the problem in terms of four concepts: land, labour, skill, and capital. The 276 millions of acres in Canada (six times as large as all England and Wales) had only 5 millions cultivated out of the 30 millions granted. Labour existed in such over abundance in Great Britain that he confidently asserted that "want of employment for the labouring classes was the greatest evil" from which the home country suffered. Skill he proposed to attract by offering inducements "sufficient to tempt a new and better class of emigrants" than the poor and "persons of broken down and reckless character" who are "looked upon with feelings of the greatest distaste and reluctance". The last element—capital, was in the hands of the British Government. "All that is wanted," he urged, "is that the governing power in England should exert its influence and authority *to bring these elements together*. The flint and the steel will never yield fire while each is kept apart from the other . . .

The untilled areas and the unemployed hands will never produce wealth while they remain apart. Bring them into contact, and the production of riches will be the inevitable asset".

Buckingham's plan differed from that of his better known contemporary Wakefield. Wakefield proposed to sell the colonial lands, but Buckingham proposed a system of free grants. He proposed that the government of the mother country should resume possession of all unappropriated lands and that, to ensure that the lands which they granted were being put to the best advantage, they should have the power to resume possession after seven years (if necessary) of such lands granted to colonists under the proposed scheme. As a formula on which to build, he suggested that a hundred acres should go to a family with one child, or more; fifty acres to a man and wife without children; and twenty acres to an unmarried man. This land was not to be sold or in other ways alienated. It must be tilled within three years, and occupied by a dwelling house within five years of being granted.

He envisaged a million emigrants going out in the first year of the scheme, transported by the government. Implements, cattle and seed should be supplied under further conditions. "The very fact of a colony filling up like this—with all grades and classes of society would lead richer capitalists to turn their attention to the same region". The vast transfer of peoples would have yet one further asset than effecting economies in the poor rate. The demographic re-deployment would stimulate the exchange of goods, and the growth of a new market would more than transcend the cost of creating it.

Buckingham's pre-occupation with a balance of population rather than a balance of power led him to condemn the use of ships for warlike purposes. He urged that fleets should be used, not for the protection of Chinese and Afghanistan interests, but for the carriage of emigrant settlers to Canada. This would prove the real bulwark of England's strength, since, instead of adding to the numbers of those hostile to her, she would ring herself with an association of free peoples. Malcontents at home would become associates abroad.

Needless to say, Lord Stanley (Peel's Colonial Secretary) used Buckingham's plan in the House of Commons only to arouse laughter. Buckingham was furious, and accused Stanley of "breach of courtesy and good taste", adding that it was only to keep the colonies as a system of outdoor relief for their friends that the ruling class persisted in their opposition to his

plan. It was with this in mind that Buckingham was to be found opposing any protection for Canadian timber, urging that if the Canadians could not meet the competition of Baltic growers in a free market, they would find more profitable employment in the tillage of corn and the pasturage of cattle. Protection of any kind, whether for home or Canadian farmer, he heartily deplored.

But though his plan came to nothing, Buckingham's travels and observations were not in vain. He played a great part in agitation that led to the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. When that was over, he turned his attention to planning on a less grandiose scale, and here he might justly claim that the merits of his ideas have been fully recognized by our generation by the appointment of a special and responsible Minister of Town and Country Planning in England. For if Mr. Silkin's Department were to cast about for historical forbears, there would be little doubt that pride of place would be accorded to the cabin boy from Flushing whose only education was in travel and whose imagination was too big for his times.
