

CANADIAN IMPRESSIONS

HUGH MARTIN

SLOW-MOTION pictures have always seemed to me to be grossly unfair to the cinematograph film. You work the sensitive thing desperately hard, at an incredible pace, to secure an accurate impression of scenes presented, and afterwards proceed—by a process equally exaggerated in the opposite direction—to force it to exhibit these scenes as they never were in nature. You call this record a record of truth; and it is certainly true that, if you are sufficiently intelligent to make the needful allowance, you can gain a measure of information even by so roundabout a route. But my sympathy remains with the outraged film.

So in the present instance I am inclined to be strongly sympathetic with myself. During the late summer of 1925 I travelled in eight weeks some 15,500 miles, in order to make a cerebral record of impressions in Canada, 9,500 miles of the itinerary lying within the boundaries of the Dominion. As movies go, the record fascinates me. It suggests space, wealth, power, vitality. There is an infinite complexity of plot just hinted at; I get glimpses of a future so wonderful that I suspect my imagination of most of the sins of the scenario writer; impressions of hardship abound, but also impressions of the sort of abounding health and opportunity for energetic expansion which it is comparatively rare to find in the Old Country nowadays. There is tedium too, and loneliness, and a foreign colour—physical, mental and spiritual. The film is both too long and too complex. Making the cuts is extraordinarily difficult. Turning it into a slow-motion picture seems unfair. But the result may at least be interesting to those Canadians who would like to know what their country looks like to a tourist with an eye for something besides scenery and the surface strangeness of a new land, and who has a fairly wide knowledge of conditions in the older countries of Europe.

With the exception of Prince Edward Island, I made it my business to see as much as was humanly possible in so short a time of all of the nine provinces in the Dominion, from Nova Scotia to British Columbia. It may be as well to present a few provincial pictures, before attempting to take a bird's eye survey of what is evidently a transcontinental group of countries united in a single nation.

My very definite impression in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia was that there is something wrong, but that nobody with a full appreciation both of local and of national interests can see clearly how to set things right. We on the other side of the Atlantic are familiar enough with that sort of situation, and know what a strain it puts upon good temper. Here is a land that, at one time, seemed to have everything in her favour. In climate, soil and geographical position she equalled her near neighbour, New England—in mineral resources far surpassing her. New England, centring in the State of Massachusetts, has gone ahead by leaps and bounds; the Maritime Provinces of Canada stand still. American holiday-makers teem, for it is a land of lovely lakes and streams full of salmon and trout, of great forests full of moose and deer, of charming seaside resorts with better yachting than can be had in Europe anywhere outside the Mediterranean or the Baltic. But the British population is stationary. The young men are drawn away by the magnet of the United States, and but little new stock comes to take their place. Everywhere the cry is, "Send us men—the right men!" The whole region is seething with political discontent; that discontent has been forcibly expressed at the polls; yet I failed to discover anything that can justly be termed a Maritime Provinces policy. The movement for de-federation and the institution of a Maritime Union appeared to a stranger to have no deep roots in local sentiment, but incalculable dangers for the British Commonwealth. It is clear that to satisfy the legitimate aspirations of the Maritime Provinces—to bring this backwater again into the main stream of the national life—is going to be one of the hardest tasks of Canadian statesmanship. In the meantime those provinces ought to be able, with their great natural resources, to do a good deal more to help themselves than they are doing at present. One thing they seem to lack is self-reliance.

It was in Ontario that I heard more interesting things about French Canada than in Quebec itself. The position of the French in Canada has always fascinated me: the anomaly of their "Liberalism," the hold they have kept on their distinctive culture, the pathos and the romance of their past, are obvious material for study. Opportunity for that study was denied me, but in Toronto I met a man who had made it pretty fully, and had acquired a point of view. He said, among other things: "The Anglo-Saxon has got too proud to bend his back. He has almost ceased to be a pioneer. The race that is going ahead is the French race, not

so much in Quebec as in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick and Northern Ontario. Here in Ontario more particularly it is bending its back as men did in the old days. It is multiplying and staying on the soil, content to be happy without being rich. Though I am not a religious man myself, I must say that I think religion has a good deal to do with it. These French Canadians are more Catholic than the Pope. You might call a good many of them disgracefully ignorant and desperately superstitious. They seem to me to be a century behind the times, and a century nearer happiness. Apart from the fact that their women often bear an incredible number of children, you have this other consequence of their submission to the priest,—that a social organization is created which is of incalculable value in the backwoods. The church, the school, the curé, hold each little group together as a unit. Do not think for one moment that I believe a general spread of Catholicism could turn us back into a pioneer people. One might just as reasonably recommend a return to early Scottish Protestantism. I merely record the fact that the simplicity of these people is proving their salvation, and is one of the most hopeful things in Canada to-day.

Whether this informant was right or wrong, I had no personal chance of judging, though his opinions were certainly shared by some others with whom I had talked in Nova Scotia. As they have now, I find, become an integral part of the impressions I have brought away with me, it is only right that they should be set down here for assessment by those better able to judge of their truth than I am.

It was in Ontario also that I got my first vivid impression of what wheat means to the Dominion, and in Saskatchewan, where a splendid harvest had just been reaped and was in process of threshing, that that impression was completed—at the head waters, as I liked to picture it, of the mighty wheat river flowing eastward in spate. Mother Earth had been kind. The river was deep and full, rolling down to the ports and across the Atlantic Ocean to the shores of Europe like another Gulf Stream. And this is the film picture I have brought back with me.

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I see golden rivulets of wheat filling the holds of great ships at Halifax and Montreal so swiftly that a whole cargo can be taken aboard in 24 hours. They steam away to the East, and I know that if the Martians had sufficiently powerful telescopes they would see ships hurrying across the Atlantic like ants across a woodland path.

Pushing westward against the stream, I come to the head of Lake Superior, where huge box-like buildings act as a dam along the lake shore, catching the wheat and holding it for a time while it is cleaned and graded and put aboard lake steamers for cheaper transit. These terminal elevators are among the wonders of the world. I calculate that the Northland Company's, said to be the largest in existence, could easily hold enough grain to make 250,000,000 English loaves. The storage bins are slowly filling now—a hundred monstrous concrete cylinders more than 30 yards deep and nine yards across, each holding 36,000 bushels. No longer a river, the grain has become a soaring wheat-spout, a falling cataract. The air is filled with the dust of its spray, and the pungent odour of a hundred thousand sun-baked fields.

Westward again against the stream! All night long, as I dozing in my bunk, I hear the river roaring past. Each truck may hold, they tell me, as much as 1,800 bushels, and as much as 3,000,000 bushels a day may be going east when the river is in full flood.

From the wheat elevators at Fort William to the wheat pit at Winnipeg! Men are bawling like bookies, packed together on a couple of octagonal platforms that are hollowed out by steps so as to form two hollow pits. Four agile young fellows in their shirtsleeves dart up and down on a high platform, chalking figures with lightning speed on huge, room-high blackboards labelled Winnipeg, Chicago, Duluth, Minneapolis. Telephones and telegraph tickers are telling them what to write. In a pulpit overlooking the pits, sphinx-like men with telephone apparatus hung upon their heads talk endlessly into the transmitters, while their eyes travel over the gesticulating mob. You know they are talking merely because their lips never cease moving. They are reading the dumb-show signals below; every signal may mean a fortune won or lost. A third sphinx in the pulpit telegraphs endlessly to Chicago, Duluth, Minneapolis. Space is eliminated. Electricity makes the wheat pits one. Five minutes before the pit closes at a quarter past twelve the noise rises to a maddening crescendo. Men charge down into the heart of the crowd, beating the air above their heads with extended fingers, shouting till their voices splinter. And, by that queer blend of primitive passion and scientific organization, the price of wheat to you and me and the farmer gets somehow fixed.

Again westward, to Regina, queen city of the Western Plain. From the Pit to the Pool. Not long ago it struck certain farmers that, by clubbing together and using the machinery of the pit

to sell in bulk, they could eliminate speculators' profits and keep their own upon a more level keel. Therefore the wheat pool was formed last year, and it is going ahead at a great pace. Like some western township, it has sprung up in a night and become a city. This autumn, 70 per cent of the wheat grown in the province of Saskatchewan will be marketed at a common price through the already huge machinery of the pool. This means that nine million acres of wheat-land have come in. Next year the proportion may well have risen to 85 per cent, and in 1927 Will the Winnipeg Pit be able to survive in its present form? For the other prairie provinces are following suit. Up to the present, this is the world's most sensationally successful co-operative effort.

And so we come to the source of this golden river. The yellow fields lead on to the horizon, the evening sun striking long shadows from their endless lines of pointed stooks. Threshers spout broken straw like smoke; the air vibrates to the purr of whirling wheels. The dark, warm earth gives willingly. Rising from its million pores, the springs of the river of the wheat unite in the river of life for you and me.

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That is the only "pen picture" with which I propose to weary Canadian readers. It is tempting to write about the towering splendour of the Rockies, the fruitfulness of the Pacific slope beyond, the singular charm of Vancouver Island,—but it would be carrying coal to Newcastle. You know all about it I have merely won a fleeting vision. Let me turn instead to those general considerations that must be forced upon the attention of every thoughtful visitor to the country, more especially if he comes from Great Britain. Three points for special examination appear upon my notes of the tour. They are:

- (1). Canada to-day has a greater capacity for wealth production, and a relatively smaller population, than any other equally accessible country in the world.
- (2). Great Britain has to-day a larger surplus of potential wealth-producers than any other country in the world.
- (3). Canada is determined to populate her vacant spaces soon, foreigners are prepared to populate them, and the United States—the wealthiest and most powerful nation in the world—dominates the life of the North American continent.

The first thing and the last and the middle thing that strikes a stranger is that Canada is suffering from the malady known as arrested development, and is bitterly conscious of the fact. There

are other nations on the globe that are also suffering from the disease, but they are not conscious of it in the same way, because they are not next-door neighbours to the United States of America.

This close proximity to the alarmingly prosperous colossus of the New World is at once Canada's greatest blessing and deepest curse. It is obviously a blessing to have a wealthy neighbour with whom to trade, members of whose family bring some of their riches within your gates when they are out "on the spree," and by whose optimism and vitality you may to some extent be infected. On the other hand, I was struck by nothing more than by the fact that Canada is trying to live up to a material standard which, at present, is not naturally hers—a standard of capitalization and expenditure appropriate enough to a highly developed nation of 115,000,000 souls, but unsuitable for an immature one of 9,000,000 souls, and therefore likely to produce a condition of overstrain in all departments of the body politic. In Europe, what with transport difficulties and language difficulties, big nations and small could grow up side by side, developing their respective cultures and satisfied with their respective scales of living. In modern North America that is impossible. Canada and the United States are one, however rigidly they may draw their frontiers, however high they may pile their tariff walls. Yet at one and the same time they are distinct entities, with their own history and their own loyalties, and the stresses created by such a dual relationship bear heavily upon the lesser of the two. A dozen years ago Canada was full of faith in her ability to live up to her big neighbour, and laid plans accordingly—poured out money on railways and buildings and schemes of education, with an enthusiasm that may have been magnificent but was certainly not business. For world reasons, things have gone wrong, and the simple fact is that Canada can no longer—at any rate for a time—stand the American pace. That makes her "grumpy," and no wonder. She is far more prosperous, far less heavily taxed, far more comfortable (within the limits of her youth and rawness) than any of the countries of the Old World, but she is less prosperous, less heavily taxed, less comfortable than America. Our neighbours, the people we move about among, inevitably become our standard of comparison.

In the meantime,—that is, while Canada is recuperating, and getting ready for the next leap upwards—American penetration develops along all the lines of approach. Any bookstall was able to show me what Canadians read; and very good reading it often is, in spite of the accompanying deluge of trash. It is American. I find that last year we in Great Britain sent you periodicals and

films worth 33,150 dollars, while America sent you periodicals and films worth 4,554,352 dollars. I found no evidence of any widespread campaign of conscious propaganda for fusion with the States; my own impression is that America is indifferent. But certain facts need no embroidery. I picked up, for instance, the *Saturday Evening Post*—with a vast Canadian circulation—for Sept. 19, and read in the first leading article that “to-day the country (that is, the U. S. A.) is prosperous and the Treasury overflowing,” and in the third leading article that “the year 1925 has so far been one of bitter disappointment to British commerce and manufactures.” I found only one English periodical with a Canadian circulation approaching that of the American *Saturday Evening Post*; the culture of the Motherland is represented from the Atlantic to the Pacific by that pure and intellectual organ, the *News of the World*.

I take it that the facts about American business penetration are well known on your side, but as they were new to me I shall set them down here in the briefest possible form. British and American money invested in Canada is, I find, about equal in the aggregate; but while American investment is rapidly rising, British investment is rapidly falling. Taking the 16 main industries together, we see that the United States holds between three and four times as great a volume of securities as does Great Britain, and about half as much as does Canada herself. British imports into Canada have increased by 56,000,000 dollars during the past 15 years, and American imports by 293,000,000 dollars. During the year ending March 31, 1924, the United States did just twice as much trade—imports and exports—with Canada as did Great Britain.

Naturally these facts set me asking myself how, if America has already permeated the Dominion so thoroughly, it can be held that there is no immediate prospect of the two nations coalescing through the absorption of the weaker by the more powerful. And I think I found my answer in the old saying that man does not live by bread alone. Here are five reasons I set down why, in spite of the economic and cultural pull, union with the States (presuming that the States desired or would accept union) would not at present be practical politics:

Sentiment: Loyalty to the King and the Flag is real and widespread.

Liberty: Though provinces may quarrel, the sense of Canadian nationhood is growing, together with the conviction that only as a nation can Canada be free.

Justice: Distrust of the American judicial system is almost universal.

Pride: The not altogether tactful attitude of individual Americans is a factor that is counting.

Quebec: For religious and cultural reasons, French-Catholic Quebec will never enter the Union as long as she remains French and Catholic.

An essay might be written upon each of these reasons, but I shall permit myself only one comment here, in development of the first: the Union Jack appeared to me to be the most colourful thing in Canadian life. We in the Old Country take the Flag for granted; it is unchallenged and unchallengeable. With you it is neither. At the Toronto Exhibition pageant, on the shore of Lake Superior, I saw and heard 50,000 men and women cheer the Flag as though we were still at war. British Columbia and the Maritime Provinces are in love with the Flag; Quebec and the Prairie Provinces less in love with it, but all loyal enough for reasons of their own.

While, however, union with the States is not practical politics to-day, and there is nothing that can be dignified with the name of a secessionist movement, surely it is possible that it may become practical politics the day after tomorrow. Much depends upon how Canada is populated. This brings me back to the main points for discussion that I set out earlier in this article.

Of course Canada is under-populated. But so also is Australia, and in Australia there cannot be said to be any national movement for remedying the defect. Indeed the policy of Australian Labour, which holds the reins, is to surround Australia not only with an unclimbable tariff fence, but also with an immigration wall in which there are only a very few closely guarded doors. The logical corollary of high protection against goods imports is seen to be high protection against human imports. It is curious, under these circumstances, that the tide of emigration from Great Britain at the moment should be favouring Australia rather than Canada, but a consideration of all the causes of that symptom would lead me too far afield. The point I want to make here is that the reason for Canada's national determination to populate her vast vacant spaces is to be found in that over-capitalization to which I have already drawn attention when considering the effect of America's contiguity. So urgent is this problem of over-capitalization that even organized labour, though protectionist by natural inclination, is obliged to sing low on the subject of immigration,

at any rate in public. I do not think there is any doubt at all that Canada means to get the people she needs, or that, while she prefers Britishers, she will be ready to take foreigners in any number that may be requisite for the fulfilment of this purpose.

On the side of the Old Country, which is my side, it is necessary to remember that we have a million and a quarter men and women out of work, that they are costing at least £65,000,000 a year merely to keep alive, and that there is no immediate prospect of a large reduction in that figure. Upon this subject I found a lamentable lack of understanding among public men, who ought to have known better, as well as among the rank and file, who cannot be expected to know more than they are told by the popular newspapers. Lunching with the mayor of an important town in the province of Ontario, I had to endure a lecture upon the culpable indolence of the inhabitants of this island, and the fatuousness of successive governments that have provided unlimited cash to "pay people for doing nothing," coupled with a threat by His Worship that, if we did not mend our ways, Canada would cut the painter in sheer disgust. Though this gentleman took less trouble to be polite than did others, it was a common experience throughout Canada to find a complete ignorance of the machinery of "the dole," associated with the belief that the only reason why public assistance is necessary is that our workers will not work. The fact that the bottom has fallen out of our greatest staple industry, coal mining, had not been grasped, nor had that other elementary economic fact, that this country depends far more than any other upon world trade, with all the fluctuations connected with an international market. I am not denying that the gravest evils, not least of which is a decay of moral fibre, must ensue upon the protracted receipt of public assistance; but what I did deny, in the endless conversations with Canadians about "the dole," was that we regard the system as other than a regretted expedient to meet a lamentable and exceptional set of circumstances, most of which have been beyond our control. This misunderstanding of the Motherland's attitude towards "the dole" stands out in my memory as a leading impression of Canada. I am convinced that it has been doing more than any other single thing to sour the relationship between the two countries, for no relationship can fail to be sour that is marked on the one hand by contempt and on the other by resentment. It also has its bearing, from the Canadian end, upon the Canadian immigration problem. Immigrants who are regarded from the start as lazy fellows coming from an effete country are not being given the chance they have a right

to expect. Nevertheless, I found an eagerness everywhere to welcome the right type of immigrant from the British Isles, and an evidently genuine anxiety that I should do everything in my power to promote a fuller flow.

The latest available figures relating to Canadian immigration spoke for themselves. I noted that in the first quarter of the year only 4,358 British subjects settled in the Dominion, as against 6,434 non-British, a total of 10,762. As my information was that the subsequent quarters were not likely to show any substantial improvement, I anticipated a total immigration for the year of not more than 45,000 as compared with 124,000 in 1924 and 137,000 in 1923. These are some of the statistics that usher in the new immigration policy, with its greater measure of freedom for the railway immigration departments.

In view of such facts—Canada's shortage, and our own surplus—Englishmen have been asking me ever since my return: Is Canada's need our opportunity? Is Canada really able to offer us anything worth going so many thousands of miles to get? Such questions need answering thoughtfully, and with a due sense of responsibility. The investment of flesh and blood calls for even greater care than the investment of capital, and it is as easy to start a disastrous boom in the one as in the other.

First of all, the mere fact that thousands of Englishmen have gone to Canada in the past with little or no money in their pockets, and done well, is plainly no argument for packing men off wholesale to Canada to-day. Conditions have, I should judge, greatly changed during the past ten or fifteen years. There are no longer great railway works in progress to eke out a farm hand's livelihood. Simultaneously Canada, like the rest of the world, has been witnessing a steady downward drift of her people, so that at the present moment her towns are full and the urban and rural populations of the Dominion are about equal. Then the natural increase of population has to be taken into account, and—in spite of the heavy emigration to the United States—there is almost certainly a substantial credit balance who have to be found work each year. Nothing I saw or heard during my six weeks' tour modified an early impression that the towns are fully stocked for present needs, and that, owing to the tendency for the sons and daughters of Canadian farmers to gravitate to the towns—often as a first step to the United States—this is not a condition likely to be altered in the near future.

What then, I asked myself, about agriculture as a whole-time job? Still looking at the *contra* side of the argument, the personal

view I reached was that in the struggle for survival on the Western Plain, more particularly in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, the odds are often against our own people. The still primitive social conditions, the exceptionally severe winter climate, even the extraordinary featurelessness of the landscape, seem to be cheerfully accepted by settlers from Northern, Central and South-Eastern Europe, or from Russia; but in the average man, and still more woman, from the British Isles these circumstances may well produce early discouragement that ends in failure. Much the same remark applies to pioneering in that country with a wonderful future, Northern Ontario, where the French Canadian is at home from the first in conditions that would appal most Englishmen. Remember that I am thinking throughout in terms of good average quality; the exceptional man or woman will always be doing exceptional and wonderful things. Again, the migrant speculative farmer from the western States of America might, I imagine, have a better chance of scratching the face of the prairie and carrying away a small fortune in a few years than would the Englishman or Scot of the same calibre. He has been bred up to that sort of job.

Now, if what I have written in the last few paragraphs is carefully read, it will be seen to amount to no more than a cautious man's opinion that certain parts of Canada which he visited are more suited for settlement by non-British than by British immigration. To ignore that fact, if you believe it, would be to invite another slump in British-Canadian migration, although it might help to drive up the curve for the moment.

But there are immense under-populated territories in the Dominion that are crying out for British settlers, where British settlers can make a good living by hard work under happy conditions, and which it would be a shame and disaster for the Mother Country to let pass into other hands while her own children are hungry and idle. Such territories are Nova Scotia and New Brunswick (also, doubtless, Prince Edward Island, which I had not the good fortune to visit) on the Atlantic seaboard, parts of Ontario in the centre, much of Alberta at the foot of the Rocky Mountains, and British Columbia between the Rockies and the Pacific. Even in these regions, the ideal immigrant is not the married man, particularly if he has children, but the young fellow without family responsibilities who can raise, say, £200 to £300 at home (possibly on loan), and will put in a couple of years as a farm hand before he attempts to spend a penny of it, except on his fare out. I believe that this man, if he is made of the right

stuff, is as sure of a good livelihood—by which I mean enough to marry upon and raise a family in health and happiness—as any man can be anywhere in this difficult world. Could the same be said of the same young fellow if he stayed here in England? And is it really beyond the power of statecraft to lend such young fellows the small capital that would set them up for life, instead of presenting them with it, often to their ruin, in the form of a weekly pittance?

WHEN TWILIGHT BROODS

E. O. FEWSTER.

When twilight broods and the day
Is a dash of scarlet on the sea,
Then do I walk the woods and pray
To the Spirit without and the Spirit that dwells in me.

My heart is light for it knows
That the day was good,—and now withdrawn
My soul shall rest, to awake
When the little wind comes forth that runs before the feet
of dawn.

When twilight broods at life's end,
And Death flings dusk on my Sea of Time
I shall need no prayer, but glad,
With love for wings, I shall beat through a glorious night
to those who are mine.