CANADIAN PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES

Winthrop Pickard Bell (1915 or 1916)

I. Introduction

The information about Canada which is most assiduously circulated on this side of the water concerns the material resources of the country, the allurements and openings for prospective settlers, and statistics of produce, trade and the like. I have had my lecture this evening announced as a lecture on "Canadian Problems and Possibilities." Now problems and possibilities—or perhaps, in reverse order: possibilities and problems!—cover fairly inclusively the material of the average old-country man's knowledge of our country. But this is usually knowledge of the possibilities of the new land for him as an individual—of the problems as difficulties which he, or any one else, the individual settler or investor, might expect to encounter in the course of his own personal struggle for existence and something more. Now all that (the kind of information which is nowadays so abundantly circulated by legitimate and illegitimate sources, and usually with a greater or lesser emphasis on the rosy and the golden in the prospect) I shall tonight only touch [upon] incidentally and unintentionally. What I have to say to you will be of a nature that ought to be of interest, indeed, to any prospective settler, but nonetheless to any intelligent citizen of the British Empire. For it is not of the possibilities and problems of the individual in Canada that I intend to speak, but of the problems and possibilities (here I place the words in this order) of Canada itself—as a land, a people, a potential nation, a unit of Empire. Some of these problems are urgent and not all of them are being grappled with adequately; the possibilities are by no means all of a material nature, and some of them are by no means golden.

When I have been in the United Kingdom I have been sometimes amused, sometimes annoyed, at the ideas on Canada which I have found current there. One favourite picture seemed to be composed of vast sketches of unbelievably fertile wheat-grown prairie, bounded by mountain ranges beside whose grandeur the Alps would be insignificant; somewhere in the picture was an indefinite space filled with inexhaustible forests, and underground (especially in the mountainous region) was mineral wealth. Of course there was a frozen north in the background, but even that the fancy peopled with prosperous fur-
hunters and adventurous gold-diggers. And the one real cloud on the horizon was a somewhat skeptical doubt of the assurance that one could live comfortably through a winter where the temperature was anything from zero downward to 50 or 60 degrees below. The pictures weren’t all as glowing as this, of course, and details varied. But they nearly all agreed in certain fundamental points: In their composition out of the material elements of the situation, and even where the life, the feelings, aspirations, problems, policies of the people were taken into consideration, characteristic was the lack of historical perspective for the consideration of these; and then too the elements out of which the picture was constructed bore reference almost entirely to Western Canada. This is, of course, quite intelligible. It is about Western Canada that government and railway immigration literature has been let loose in a flood over Great Britain. It is Western Canada alone which, in the overwhelming number of cases, came into consideration for any individual thinking of settling in Canada. It is Western Canada which offers the most picturesque features of Canadian life and where the effects of growth of population and material development are most rapid and dramatic. And, finally, if the person in question had friends who had gone out to Canada, and from whose letters he had formed his ideas, this friend was naturally usually in Western Canada.

I think the real cause of the trouble, in cases where people who have taken the trouble to inform themselves at all about Canada still have materially false ideas of the land, is nearly always the same: True information producing a false impression. The details which one reads or hears concerning a foreign land will deal only with specific and limited features of the same. One instinctively supplements these in one’s imagination to complete a unitary picture. And one does not always realise the limits of that which really may justly be taken for granted in respect to another land, or how much of one’s ideas are not the product of definite information at all.

I have sketched here some rough maps of Canada, to convey to you graphically an idea of the real Canada as regards topography, resources, transportation, population and so on. There are, then, as you see, of course, certain parts of Canada with continuous and fairly thick settlement. These as a rule offer little inducement to the adventurous immigrant anxious to better his condition through hard work in a new land. Even they are, of course, capable of growth in population and development of industry and the like. But it will be a process of gradual and normal intensive economic growth, presenting no problems very peculiar to a new country. The towns grow gradually with the demands of business or manufacturing and gradually acquire fixed
wealth in the forms of street paving, lighting, public buildings, etc. The farmers are mostly well-to-do, almost all owners of their own land, able to afford their sons a good education. The typical wooden farmhouses with their background of barns and stables, which every visitor to the prosperous agricultural sections of Eastern Canada and the United States knows so well, are comfortable; their owners are apt to be intelligent and industrious with an average working education. They have comfortable carriages or autos; they read a good deal in a miscellaneous fashion—often the current magazines, which in America vie with one another in interesting and at the same time accurate and adequate articles on current problems. They have their church interests and their local social diversions. To be sure, the scattered nature of all farming settlement in America brings minor problems of school management and equipment with it. But the educational difficulties in such districts which really need to be regarded as serious are shared by the country as a whole. I am speaking now of the prosperous agricultural districts of the older and most thickly settled parts of the land, and I dwell for a moment on these because this is really a considerable section of our country. When one passes from these sections, however, one immediately encounters pressing problems.

II. Problems of Canadian Society: Education, Agricultural Credits, Immigration

[There is a] short-sighted materialism in education [that is] always with us [and is] to be combated. Peculiar Canadian circumstances, such as unwillingness to pay teachers well, lack of insight into the need for thoroughly trained teachers even for elementary branches (Germany as example of contrary), and a peculiar social attitude [which has kept] the teaching profession not in high estimation, combined with brilliant opportunities for men gifted enough to be good teachers, have brought about this state of affairs: Outside of the very thickest settled parts, the young women teachers [who predominate are] often temporary. This, of course, reacts in turn on the standard of teaching and on the general attitude to, estimation of, and prestige of the teaching profession. [It is a] problem whether nothing can be done to accelerate a remedy (which would itself come in time) [through the]
overcoming of materialism. This is partly an old problem of whether, with increase of the wealth necessary as the material basis for culture, one can succeed in developing a powerful enough interest for that [improvement of education] within the nation as a whole. This problem is general; [it is the] old problem of luxury, culture and decadence, [and only a] special Canadian problem inasmuch as even in older sections more than half the population is still rural. Educational problems [are] of course everywhere. Here, however, [they occur] in connection with internal movements of population of national significance. Rule: once urban, always urban, even in Canada.

There is a short-sighted attitude toward education over a surprisingly large part of the country, education with no direct points of contact with farmers’ daily life, [added to an] incapacity of teachers which scattered farming settlements could employ to give anything to bring it into such contact. Farmers are therefore at first not ready either by education or capital to avail themselves of [the] results of central institutions of boards of agriculture, etc. Up till very recently, [there has been a] wide-spread lack of proper sense for experimenting, lack of general business training and acumen, and of capital to make use of either. [There is] great hope for betterment here in new schemes of agricultural education, etc. [We are still] too close to it to see the full effects yet: whether it will succeed in altering entirely the general outlook of farm life, especially in putting within command of young men from poorer farming districts such an educational basis as will enable them to bring more intelligent knowledge of agricultural science and business to bear on their work, so that the poor and uneconomical farm will be [become] the sign of laziness or stupidity. The work of government agricultural departments is excellent from the scientific point of view, [but it is unclear] whether government will take the steps necessary to counteract the tendency for most enterprising boys to leave farms—the question of agricultural credits comes up here. [I am] personally a great believer in the vital strength for a people of a numerous, sturdy, intelligent and prosperous class of independent farmers.

The general problem of agricultural credits ought to receive more attention [than it does]. Economists long ago recognised that the purposes for which a farmer needs capital come under three categories fundamentally different from one another as regards their natural period and method of return for investment, such that circumstances render ordinary bank credits an utterly unsuitable means of making the sources of stored-up capital of the nation available for furthering agriculture as well as industry and trade. Between personal credits of banks, [which are] suitable only for seasonal movements—really
agricultural business—and mortgages, another source and method is necessary. Capital follows the lines of least resistance. [There is a] necessity for government action (e.g., German models such as Landschtafen, Raiffeisen Banks, etc.). [There is also the] difficulty that farmers have never learned to cooperate in recognising and forcing their own interests. A feature of democratic government as we have it in America [is] that it puts a premium on government taking no real far-seeing initiative measures, but wait[s] for demands from public opinion (but not waiting till this gets too loud, of course). It attempts just to anticipate popular demands. Now, the average man is of course not in a position to weigh the needs and dangers of questions of public policy from a far-seeing national standpoint, as a statesman ought by tradition and training to be able to. The average man is engrossed with his own business and feels all problems and lines of policy only if they perceptibly affect him. How this plays into [the] hands of “special interests”! The policies necessary for the country as whole but which would hit certain special interests hard without benefitting any special group in any very striking way are very difficult of realisation. This is one of the failings of all democratic systems, but especially noticeable in a new land without a politically educated and more or less leisured class with a hereditary inclination to political life and popular prestige as an election asset. Many of our most difficult problems may be shown to be just special cases of this general rule.

[With regard to the] immigration problem: the Canadian government has, it is true, sifted immigration to certain extent, but the half-

27 At this point, Bell makes reference to a writer whom he simply calls “Ross,” which probably refers to Prof. Edward Alsworth Ross, since Bell quotes from an article by this person titled “Origins of the American People,” dated January 1914, and noted as “Century” (though it is not clear whether this is the journal’s name) on the back of one of the pages opposite the lecture’s text. The quotation reads as follows: "I do not maintain that life in America has added any new traits to the descendents [sic] of transplanted Europeans, nor has it filled them all with pioneer virtues. What I do mean is that, owing to the progressive peopling of the fertile wilderness, certain valuable strains that once were represented in, say, a sixth of the population, might come to be represented in a quarter of it; and the timid, inert sort might shrivel from a fifth of the population to a tenth. Such a shifting in the numerical strength of types would account both for the large contingent of the forceful in the normal American community, and for the prevalence of the ruthless, high pressure, get there at any cost spirit which leaves in its wake achievement, prosperity, neurosthema [sic], Bright’s disease, heart failure, and shattered moral standards.” The next few fragmentary sentences in the main text of the lecture take off from what Bell thinks valuable in Ross’ work so that the transition to Bell’s own thoughts is unclear. The edited version resumes only at the point where it is certain that Bell is speaking in his own voice. The elided sentences, in
million people from Southern and Eastern Europe are already a problem whether we are sensible of it or not. (The C.P.R. line to Trieste as a symptom of this tendency.) The types of these people; their thrift, etc.; the alarming growth of the Jewish population of cities. There is a slowness to realise this problem so long as these people give little or no economic trouble. [There is] even the argument that their descendants [sic] will mix with the other population. [This is] just the crucial point! [Canada] probably could assimilate the present proportion of these peoples without difficulty. And Teutonic immigration [is] always to our advantage, [since] for one thing [it presents] no religious and cultural barriers—especially Scandinavian with their inimitably high Volks-Kultur. Too bad we can’t get more of it. But if it [i.e., Southern and Eastern European immigration] increases, as seems likely, we are faced with the problem of whether we shall be able to assimilate it without risk of materially altering the type of our race. [There are] problems now facing the U.S.A. [which] has let in so much.

Don’t misunderstand me, etc. [There is] no answer to questions and doubts re Slavic, Jewish, etc., immigration that these people are industrious, sober and the like. The question is what sort of a people will the mixture produce, or if no mixture results, what effect will this body of people with diverging types of feeling and thinking have on edited form, read as follows: “The only qualified man who has tackled the problem of real definite effects traceable to emigration is Ross. Much of the technique of science consists in discovering just which factors of a given situation are determinative for others. [Consider] his [Ross’] reasons for thinking [that the] time is pressingly ripe for a vigorous restriction and sifting of immigration. The types apt to be predominant in immigration today, and cessation of circumstances which try out the unfit. The same is applicable to us if we want to save Canada from some of [the] problems now weighing on national life in U.S.A.” It is not likely, given the quotation from Edward Alsworth Ross, that Bell is referring to George Ross, whose Addresses Delivered by Hon. G.W. Ross During His Recent Visit to England and at the Meeting on His Return (1910, n.p.) was a major reference point for debates on immigration during the period. See Carl Berger, The Sense of Power, 149–52.

28 It is clear that the “it” in this sentence refers back to the immigrant groups that have been added parenthetically because the previous two sentences are subsequent marginal additions.

29 This sentence is an addition written in the space between the paragraphs. It is important to include because it indicates that Bell anticipated some negative reaction to his remarks from the mixed national group to whom he was speaking in Ruhleben. The paragraph goes on to say that it is not a matter of whether immigrant groups in themselves possess the good qualities desirable for immigration, but whether they are likely to mix into the already-existing Canadian population and what characteristics such a mixture will produce. I take it that this is the understanding that he wanted to promote as against the misunderstanding that he was ranking potential immigrant groups based on their separate characteristics.
questions where the common sentiment and united communal instinct of the nation are thought to be the deciding factors.

The peculiar capacity of Anglo-Saxons for absorbing heterogeneous elements has had its advantages but promises to become a real problem in Canada. I have indicated the economic reasons why the simple expedient of refusing admission to such immigration has today absolutely no prospect of being carried into effect, [which is] an example of the complication of such problems under a laissez-faire system of democratic government. But it is also not certain what effect drastic action would have on international relations. The endless difficulties with Japan [are still] fresh in everyone’s memories. [There is a] difficulty of making general, not definitely nationally discriminating, regulations which will keep out those we don’t want and won’t keep out those we do want. [What is] certain is that increasing pressure of the tide from the South and East of Europe. (The effects of war [1914–18] are unforeseeable, but I doubt whether it will greatly change the proportions of immigration.) And just at present we have got ourselves into an economic situation where we need settlers. Direct barriers are impossible. It is a question whether the Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic type can retain its dominance by supplying the necessary expansion and supplying it of such a quality that we could raise requirements and keep out these elements. Let me remind you that if the Boer War had any wider moral justification at all it was as a protest that those able and willing to occupy, settle and people a land should not be kept out by a handful which merely happened to come first, and which was itself not capable of resisting pressure from without through pressure of its own expansion from within. Application of this maxim to the case of Canada is obvious: [Whether the] chance of history has given the Anglo-Saxons Canada, whether the Anglo-Saxon people have a strong enough racial instinct for expansion, occupation, etc., to direct the opportunity which the chance of history has thrown in their way.

Unfortunately, the question of a sense for the racial results of immigration [has] not [been a] question of practical politics and discussion. However much the Anglo-Saxon may feel other factors and motives, he is peculiarly apt to realise only the economic ones in formulating his public problems. This is on occasion a source of strength [since it] assures a sort of sober business consideration of problems even in cases where tides of passion run high. But it is perhaps even more a failing and source of weakness. For the economic factors of a situation are never the final arguments in any great question. Even with nations there are motives, prejudices, instincts, sympathies and interests which lie much deeper, and which tell in determining attitudes on vital points. And it is not well if we are (as a race or nation) slow to recog-
nise the abstract forces tremendously at work in social reality: the
nature and bearing of concrete situations when reduced to general
terms, or the potency of the almost unrealised tendencies in national
life and development. I forget who it was who said: “Let me make the
songs of a people and I care not who makes its laws,” but whoever it
was, he found a very striking expression for the fact which I am trying
to emphasise now. All history bears witness.

III. The Idea of a Nation

Let me, for the interest of my professional colleagues [i.e., philos-
ophers] here, just add the philosophical claim that all such instances (in
Canadian history, such as Loyalism, the contingents in the Boer War,
the elections of 1911) are only striking examples of a broad scale of
laws which govern the motivation of all human action, not as a merely
factual order of things to be empirically determined, but as apriori
relations of the eternal nature of the structure of any intelligible
universe—in this case, essential relations between value-qualities as
such—which are necessary norms for any rational choice (volition).
Consider the bi-racial problem in Canada, where race, language and
religious divisions coincide. There is a diversity here of just that tradi-
tion which could really act as a binding force. There is [in French
Canada] no tendency to fusion, only with other Catholic elements and
even there [with remaining] differences. My sober judgment is that
any apparent unity of the two elements is really only a coincidence of
interests. There is petty friction and especially jealousy between the
two elements always; it is always a question of finding a modus vivendi.

There is [a] great deal of loose talk in Canadian papers and from
public speakers about Canada being a nation, which perhaps appeals
to the vanity of Canadians. There is a vague recognition of nationality
as a stage or goal, or form of development, necessary for the fulfilment
of certain hopes, aims, aspirations, dreams, tendencies more or less
vividly felt and shared by [the] people of Canada today. This, of
course, opens up [the] whole question of what a nation is, in what
nationality consists, which is one of the most puzzling questions of
political philosophy and of the philosophy of history. A nation is not a
mere sum of individuals, not merely a total but a whole. Strange as it
may sound to the casual thinker who has never delved into the
problem, it is nevertheless impossible to define a nation as a group of

30 This parenthetical reference is interpolated here from a fragmentary sentence
prior to this one in the manuscript.
beings with such and such characteristics. An illustration: one can give *national* characteristics, but these pertain to smaller groups of people of that nation. One can characterise each nationality but never adequately define a Nation. It is always a circular definition. What we are forced to recognise as the unity of national being has shown itself historically capable of *surmounting differences* of race and of languages, and national *diversity* is clearly capable of resisting the unifying tendencies of both. A nation is clearly something which *grows* into being. You can't take a chance collection of individuals and put them together under a single system of law or government and expect them to be at once a nation. In the miscellaneous collection of peoples, races and tribes contained within the Turkish Empire, especially in its former extent, one could never recognise that form of life which we feel under the word "national," any more than we would naturally speak of the inhabitants of India as a nation.

On the other hand, one does feel justified in speaking of the "American Nation." The United States is not merely a political structure, a state, but exhibits those phenomena (at least in great measure) that lead us to recognise that form of super-individual life known as a nation, however many of the *possible* functions of nationality may still be in the U.S.A. somewhat difficult. In contrast, one might hesitate to speak of the Mexican or the Liberian nation. Size, and form of government, have little or nothing to do with it. There are very small yet intensely genuine nations (Scandinavians, Swiss, e.g.) without unity of either race or language, uniformity of government or law, or great size! Yet the Swiss undoubtedly deserve the title of nation and also Belgium probably after this war [1914–18]. As little as smallness hinders national unity does greatness insure it. The greatest empires of history, most uniform in their institutions and longest established in imperial dominion, have failed to weld constituent elements into *nation*, but only into state. [Note the difference between the] "Roman Empire" versus the "Roman people," or the "British Empire" and "British nation." Indeed, I often hesitate over the British *nation*, due to the Irish question and just that colonial question that I am about to try to analyse in [the] case of Canada. For, gentlemen, whether the concept of the British nation shall include the colonies or not, or whether these shall grow to be sister nations within a common bond of race and language and empire, is something which historical events and

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31 This enigmatic but illuminating sentence is inserted here: "If: group of people so and so – must always add – with that form of collective organic life or activity or the like peculiar to nations."
government policies may hinder or further, but which no human decision can determine.

A nation is a living organism, as truly as any plant or individual animal. Break a stone and you have stones. Break a plant and you have destroyed the organic unity, and equally so with a nation. Add matter to matter and you have a bigger piece of matter. But you can’t add organism to organism promiscuously and expect to have one larger organism, whether it be plant, animal or nation. Life is unique and undefinable, and the growth of a nation is as great a mystery as that of a plant. This growth may be artificially helped or hindered, but in neither case can the living organism be artificially created out of its constituent parts.

I fear much of this has been tiresome or has seemed hopelessly abstract to many of you. But its bearing is practical and obvious. (Just as higher math is abstract but the bearing practical and obvious when you determine structural details of an iron bridge.) Though one cannot find any empirical definition of a nation, one can recognise many of the distinctive factors and features of its life and growth. There are such things as national instincts, national prejudices, national ideals, national taste. There are national styles and national habits in the petty as well as in the serious activities of life. Imponderabilia, abstractions if you will, but very real in their effects. How often has the student of history to refer an event to just such factors in order to understand the historical sequence at all! And after all, too, most of the real priceless treasures that give life its value consist of such imponderabilia. And it is abstractions such as honour, fidelity and fame which have been able to fire men to the noblest heroisms and the greatest sacrifices. There are national tendencies, none the less definite in being usually hidden from those living in the midst of them. And, of supreme importance as the atmosphere of national life—the medium of its continuity—we have national tradition. Now these are all elements of the life of the nation as an organism, and not simply common characteristics or properties of a collection of individuals. Such factors as tendencies and tradition affect the individuals but are borne only by the super-individual being. No individuals incorporate these things, only the nation as a whole does that. [Here one may use an] analogy between the health of [the] body and the condition of an individual cell or organ, etc. These are all things which cannot be arbitrarily created or established. “Go to, let us make for ourselves suitable ideals and traditions” is an undertaking foredoomed to failure. Avowedly, nationalistic propaganda in schools, etc., leads only to ignorance, self-satisfaction, unfairness and, fortunately or unfortunately, almost the only national characteristics capable of creation or development by propaganda are
national prejudices and national conceit! Of both these all nations seem to have an abundant supply.

Now in the light of all that which I have been contending (with no chance for proper demonstration), Canada is not yet a fully-developed nation, fond as her press, politicians and a certain type of imperialising publicist from the old country is of calling her one. But as far as one can see, she is growing towards one; she has the aspirations and instincts which will, in the natural course of events, in longer or shorter time, develop the vital principles, organs and forces of a national life. Now, of course, I cannot foretell the path of Canada’s growth to a nation, a growth which, as I have shown, must be intensive as well as, or rather than, extensive (cultural consolidation, etc.), but I want to indicate to you some of the symptoms of that growth, and then finally its bearing on the imperial problem.

First of all, there are difficulties in the way of the formation of a unitary national tradition: Loyalist beginnings, the French problem, then promiscuous and unsystematic immigration and intermigration—in general, the difficulty of finding any deeper instincts and feeling in which these people are at one. Also, a wide scattering [of population] demanding a long time for consolidation of all that which shows itself in national style, taste, culture. This leaves only material matters and externals in which consciousness of nationality can find a content, though there we have a common delight and pride in the material greatness of our country, a common joy in the type of life which it allows (summer, wildlife, etc.). But even these features vary enormously between the different parts of the country. On sober consideration, this common possession would seem really rather an utterly undefined hope and confidence in a future than anything else! Of course the average Canadian may not be aware of any lack. Satisfied with his opportunities for material comfort and prosperity, buoyed up by the excitement, enterprise and speculative success possible in a new land, he may not realise that these are an inadequate basis for the somewhat bombastic use of its word “national” by his country’s press. Educated Europeans are apt, with some justification, to reproach us, along with the U.S.A., for the material preoccupation of our life. This is, of course, one of our problems. A mere community of economic interest may suffice to hold a group of people together, but will never provide the material out of which a national culture can grow. To be very definite: if what holds one’s nation together is the common material prosperity of its citizens, then the collapse of that prosperity, national hardship and disaster, would be the death blow to national life. In a real nation, it is often the very reverse. The greatest example in recent times was the birth of the German national consciousness in
the troubles of the Napoleonic times. The reproach of materialism is not unfounded. I see one of the weightiest problems for the future of Canada, as for that of the U.S.A., just in this point: to what extent the people remain engrossed in material interests as they become prosperous enough to afford some of the cultural luxuries. But let me say that it is really marvelous that it isn’t even more so. The original settlements of America and Canada were made largely on an ideal basis. Once the first struggle for existence and establishment of means of living was overcome, this part of America showed itself able, willing and eager to realise other than material phases of life and to find her own expression for them. (For example, the literary bloom in [the] first half of the last century.) But look what has happened since! We have been overwhelmed by an immigration with very few exceptions determined by economic causes and considerations.

Hardly a nation in Europe would want to own its representations in the new world. Too often no impulse towards culture, no appreciation for education except as a lever for material advancement. (There are exceptions, such as the Scandinavians, etc.) Canada, of course, received largely intelligent agricultural immigration from the U.S.A. and assimilable immigration from the old country, but consider the effect it must have on Canada and the problem it must be for her to have a percentage of culture and education in immigrants lower than in the old-country population itself. Those who are highly educated are often educated so that they can never really make the most of it. They never feel at home in the environment they are bound to find. We don’t benefit by all European cultures through immigration, unlike in earlier days where emigration was often for principles or conscience’s sake. Elements that emigrate nowadays, as a rule, are not bearers of their nation’s culture.

The lure of material success in the new West has been constantly before our own youth. There have been difficulties in the way of education on which I have already touched. America has been suffering from spiritual indigestion, non-assimilation and the results ought not to cause surprise. I see one of the greatest problems, one of greatest obstacles to hopeful development of national life, in this fact: that the expanding sentiment, the growing realisation of its own life and tendencies, the nascent culture and tradition of the country will for many decades to come have to cope with a constant influx of settlers in the first place with little or no ability or will to appreciate and further these sides of national life. And where ability and will are present, the new settler of education and culture is often so rooted in the tradition of an older land that he can never appreciate the different
life struggling to realise and manifest itself in Canada, and so to help
the birth of the new life.

I do not believe that there is any longer any possibility of the ab-
sorption or re-absorption of Canada into one whole of British national-
ity. I know that another type of belief is often very popular at imperial-
istic dinners in London and elsewhere. But I don't believe there is any
use in shutting eyes to facts, to definite tendencies which continue to
manifest themselves in spite of all assurances of something else. No! If
imperialists are sincere, they mustn't attempt to deny or forcibly to
check the tendencies actually present, but to understand them, to think
them out to their logical conclusion, and then to consider the possi-
Bility of a lasting imperial bond on the basis thus established. It may be
consoling for the ostrich to stick its head in the sand; but it is hardly
wise. The impossibility of hindering devolution of constituent nations
doesn't prevent these nations from remaining constituent (in some
other kind of whole), as I shall briefly suggest.

So I say (approaching [the] matter as objectively as possible) that I
do not believe [in the absorption of Canada into British nationality].
There is too much which separates us already, even in such ways of
doing little and unimportant things as are at all distinctive, there are
already too many differences. (I was struck with the greater unity of
Australian and English life.) One mustn't forget that the great body of
Canadian people has long had no family connection with [the] old
country at all! What we have of a national tradition is confined to the
new world—not continuous with modern English tradition. There is
much in the history of connections in older days which resulted in
Canadians facing their problems alone and not as consciously part of a
nation unitary with Great Britain! In short, the Canadian is surely and
irrevocably a different man from the Englishman. One can't make him
an Englishman because one can't give him the historical environment
and the tradition. The continuity has too long been broken. The En-
glishman and the Canadian have been too long leading a different kind
of life.

It is almost certain that, in spite of alien immigration, our national
development will be (broadly) Anglo-Saxon. French will probably
remain unassimilable and a picturesque fragment of nationality within
a nation, less of a danger and problem in proportion as preponder-
ance of others increases. Probably the type which will develop will be much
more akin to the U.S. than to the old country type. The notorious
unpopularity of some frequent types of Englishmen in Canada is a
symptom [of this phenomenon], whereas the American can generally
fit in well. The Englishman is at once recognised in Canada, and not
only by his pronunciation, whereas in most situations the American
passes unmarked. There is a similarity of problems, needs and possibilities, [as can be seen in] American magazines, etc. If Canada fails to become a nation, the only hope is in absorption into the U.S.A. Absorption into England is impossible. The enormous preponderance of trade with the U.S.A. has little to do with it. The sense of affinity isn't based on business transactions in national, any more than in personal, life. Hopeless from this point of view is any idea that the imperial tariff wall would materially change the course of national devolution within empire—whatever its advisability from other points of view might be. Indeed, if one tries to make the bond of Empire an economic rather than a cultural or political one, one is treading the road most sure to lead to dissolution of the Empire altogether. The time is sure to come when the economic bond will fail one or another member where [they are] so widely scattered. Then, if [there is] no great reason back of this ... Durham’s insight into this principle, and his far-sighted, whole-souled acceptance of its consequences, mark his Report as the work of a constructive Statesman. Hope for absorption into England [is therefore] impossible. A country with no definite national life and character is in a bad way in very concrete respects, such as chaos in too many forms of social, intellectual life.

There are probable Imperial effects of this war [1914–18], but mere common military history doesn’t suffice to hold nations together any more than economic interdependence. There are two definite forms of “nationalism” in Canada. The Englishman is perhaps too ready to applaud or denounce the attitude in _individual_ questions without realising that whole of which this one manifestation is a part is other than _his_ whole. I have said possibly that Canada might develop her own genuinely independent national life (just as much so as that of U.S.A.) and still the political bond not be broken (as it might conceivably still include the U.S.A.). The question is what has Britain to offer us. “Protection” we may leave out of the question. Mutual economic advantage is not enough [due to the] U.S.A. Mere external pride of belonging to [the] greatest world empire won’t stand the possible and probable strain of internal friction. [There is an] undoubted need of new instruments and institutions of political unity, but if these are to be sound and stable, a pledge of the future, they must not be mere mechanism but must correspond to some genuine inner unity of sentiment and interest among the parts. My sober judgment [is] that as far as Canada is concerned, this bond can only be two-fold: 1) A bond of mutual understanding and respect in realisation that whatever the development the constituent nations of the Empire, [they] are at least so far allied by nature that they can afford to remain together even at [the] cost of certain interests (such as Canada’s role in the
foreign policy of Empire), and 2) a bond in the common possession of sources of spiritual life in the broadest sense and their common accessibility.

If these bonds are to be strengthened, much in communication between the old and the new land must change. Recent care to send out only Governors-General who will not rub us up the wrong way; feasting of colonial dignitaries, especially imperially talking ones—in fact, a sort of general gracious and indulgent pat on the back. But how much real effort to understand us is there? How much willingness to give Canada of your best? To put the same question to Canada is not fair. She is not sure enough of herself yet to be the one to move in such matters, and as yet she has little but the material returns of her resources and labour to give. Those apostles of culture that England has sent us have often been lamentable failures. The one didactic idea of making as many of us as possible into Englishmen [indicates that they are] not content merely to be to Canada the media for acquaintance with and appreciation of English culture while recognising all the time that they could never determine how much of this could be assimilated by Canada; and in their turn to try and grasp the deeper significance of what is typically or distinctively Canadian (all that of which I have spoken as the nascent and growing Canadian nationality) and interpreting this to the people of the old country. We mutually lack just that: Apostles of Culture willing and able to be simply interpreters.

That Canadians have resented the assumption of superiority on the part of many English is perhaps a sign of crudeness and youth, but by no means an unhealthy sign. The first felt difference is that of mere acquired externals—manners and forms. The English must answer by laying weight upon things that really count. The obligation of tact really rests upon the older party. (This is a general rule in pedagogy which is not universally enough recognised.) Some practical suggestions: Exchange of professors willing to try and get in touch with student life. Delegates of one kind or another willing not merely to express their wonder over our vast transportation system, our fine government buildings, and the extent of our country. Facilities for a better chance for Canadians visiting England really to see English life (remember the above point about the lack of family connections). But nothing can now prevent the divergence of types; such divergence is already present. What conceivably and practically can be prevented is growing mistrust and lack of mutual understanding and respect. The other factor is a common language as the vehicle of spiritual life in [the] broadest sense and the bond of both with the U.S.A. In Germany, one often meets the idea that the English World Empire would fall to pieces if the English fleet were destroyed. In such matters, of course,
definite prophecy is impossible, but one may certainly say that those who judge so misunderstand entirely the real basis of imperial power. England might in that case lose its tropical colonies, Egypt, even India, and a great proportion of its influence among the non-British nations, but its rule over Australia, South Africa, and Canada would by such an event alone be scarcely affected. The binding force of a common culture does not sink with the guns of a defeated navy.

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