

**CANADA: AN
ACTUAL
DEMOCRACY**

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JAMES BRYCE

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CHAPTER I

THE COUNTRY AND THE FRAME OF GOVERNMENT

THE study of popular government in Canada derives a peculiar interest from the fact that while the economic and social conditions of the country are generally similar to those of the United States, the political institutions have been framed upon English models, and the political habits, traditions, and usages have retained an English character. Thus it is that in Canada, better perhaps than in any other country, the working of the English system can be judged in its application to the facts of a new and swiftly growing country, thoroughly democratic in its ideas and its institutions. Let us begin by looking at those facts, for they determine the economic and social environment into which English institutions have been set down.

The Dominion of Canada is a country more than three thousand miles long from east to west, with a region, which at the meridian of 114° W. is about seven hundred miles broad from north to south. This region is interrupted to the north of Lakes Huron and Superior by a rocky and barren, and therefore almost uninhabited tract, which separates the fertile and populous districts of Ontario from those of the Prairie Provinces, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, lying farther west. Unless valuable minerals are discovered in many parts of this tract, as there have been in some, it may remain thinly peopled. The natural

¹ The reader is recommended to peruse first the account of democracy in the United States, which is contained in Volume II of "Modern Democracies", as much of what is said regarding Canada will be better understood if the description of the United States, the economic and social conditions of which resemble those of Canada, while the political institutions are different, has been previously read.

resources of the Dominion, besides its still only partially explored mineral wealth, consist in vast areas of rich soil, in enormous forests, both in the eastern Provinces and in British Columbia and in the fisheries of the Maritime Provinces of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, which give employment to a large and hardy population. There is coal in Nova Scotia and many parts of the West, with large deposits on the Pacific coast also; and the total quantity, estimated as second in the world only to that in the United States and Alaska, is more than sufficient to cause the development of manufactures on a large scale. Severe as are the winters on the Atlantic side of the Continent, the climate is everywhere healthy, favourable to physical and mental vigour, the death-rate low and the birth-rate high.

These conditions indicate the lines which economic development will follow. Agriculture is now and may long continue to be the chief source of livelihood, and forestry may provide employment for centuries if fires are checked and replanting is carried out on a large scale. Mining is now confined to comparatively few districts, but it, and the manufacturing industries also, aided by the utilization of the enormous volume of water power, cannot but increase. At present the bulk of the population are tillers of the soil, dwelling in rural areas or towns of moderate size; huge cities like those of Britain and the United States being comparatively few. Two only (Montreal and Toronto) out of a total population of about 8,000,000,¹ have more than 300,000 inhabitants, and there are but five others whose population exceeds 50,000. Plenty of good land is still to be had at a moderate price, and the agricultural class lives in comfort as does also the less numerous class who produce goods for the home market. There is hardly any pauperism and need be none at all. No such opposition is raised to immigration as has been raised in Australia, so the population is likely to go on increasing for generations to come, especially in the western half of the country. The fact most important to note is that the land is almost entirely in the hands of small cultivating owners, an industrious and independent class. As great landed estates are unknown, so, too, great financial or commercial fortunes are comparatively

¹ In 1911 the population was 7,206,000.

few, those who have suddenly risen to wealth having mostly acquired it by an increase in the value of land, or of railroad properties, and by speculative land investments.

With the growth, however, of commerce and the development of the country generally the opportunities for accumulating wealth by business are now fast increasing as they did in the United States half a century ago. Meantime, one may note the absence in Canada of two factors powerful in the great countries of Western Europe and equally so in the United States. There are not many great capitalists, or great incorporated companies taking a hand in politics for their own interests and exciting suspicion by their secret influence. Neither has the element of working men, congregated in large centres of industry and organized in labour unions, yet found leaders of conspicuous capacity, nor acquired a voting power which, whether by votes or by strikes, can tell upon the action of governments and party organizations, constituting a force outside the regular political parties and, like the capitalists of France and America, using them for the furtherance of its own economic aims.

One feature which is conspicuous by its absence, alike in Great Britain, in the United States, and in Australia and New Zealand, is here of the first importance. It is the influence of Race and of Religion.

When Canada was ceded to Great Britain by France in 1763, the French-speaking inhabitants numbered 60,000. They have now grown to nearly two and a half millions, or about one-third of the whole population, and this by natural increase, the stock being very prolific, for there has been practically no immigration from France. The great majority of these French speakers dwell in the Province of Quebec, which was the region first settled, but a large number are also to be found in Eastern and Northern Ontario, in the Maritime Provinces and scattered out over the West. Of those in Quebec extremely few speak English. There they constitute a community retaining with its language its French manners and ideas, quite distinct from those of the British districts. This separation is mainly due to religion, for they are all Roman Catholics, deeply attached to their faith, and if no longer obedient yet still deferential, in secular as well as ecclesiastical matters, to

their bishops and priests. Nowhere in the world did the Roman priesthood during last century exert so great a power in politics.

During the last twenty years the tide of immigrants to Canada has flowed freely, chiefly from Scotland and from the countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe. There have also come into the Western Provinces from the adjoining parts of the United States a great crowd of farmers attracted by the cheapness of good land. Nearly all of these have been naturalized as Canadian citizens and are rapidly blent with their Canadian neighbours. Thus one may say, omitting the most recent immigrants, that the Canadian nation consists of two parts, nearly one-third French speaking and Roman Catholic, two-thirds English speaking and Protestant.¹

The Constitution of Canada was prepared by a group of colonial statesmen in 1864 and enacted in 1867, by a statute of the British Parliament. The scheme of government is Federal, a form prescribed not merely by the diversities to be found in a vast territory stretching westward from Nova Scotia to the Pacific, but also by the aforesaid dual character of the population, one-third of which inhabits Quebec, speaking French and following the Roman law established there by France when her first settlers arrived, while in the other provinces the common law of England prevails. The Federal system roughly resembles that of the United States, framed seventy-eight years earlier, and that of Australia, framed thirty-three years later, as respects the distribution of powers between the Central or National and the Provincial Governments, each in the main independent of the other, while the former has nevertheless, within its allotted sphere, a direct authority over all citizens, with adequate means for enforcing that authority.

As this federal form of government has little to do with the subject that here concerns us, the actual working of democratic institutions, it may suffice to call attention to

¹ Though very nearly all the French speakers are Catholics, by no means all the Catholics are French speakers, for many of the German, Irish, Italian, and Polish immigrants are Catholics, so it might be more exact to say that three-tenths are French speaking, and rather more than one-third Catholics. Conversions from either faith to the other are uncommon, but the children of Catholics from the European Continents often lapse from their faith, the Irish rarely.

three important points in which the National Government has powers wider in Canada than in Australia or the United States.

1. The legislative authority of the Dominion Government covers a larger field, and includes a power of disallowing acts of the Provincial Legislature. This particular power is, however, seldom used, and practically only where such a Legislature is deemed to have exceeded the functions assigned to it by the Constitution or to have violated any fundamental principle of law and justice.

2. Judicial authority (except as respects minor local courts) belongs solely to the Dominion Government.

3. All powers and functions of government not expressly assigned either to the Dominion or to the Provinces respectively are deemed to belong to the Dominion, i.e. where doubt arises the presumption is in its favour, whereas in the United States and in Australia the presumption is in favour of the States.

4. Amendments to the Constitution can be made not by the people, but only by a Statute of the Imperial Parliament of the United Kingdom. This follows from the fact that the Constitution itself is a Statute of that Parliament. But the provision is in reality no restriction of the powers of the Dominion, for it is well understood that in such a matter the British Parliament would take no action except when satisfied that the Canadian people as a whole wished it to do so, and were approving any request made by the Dominion Parliament to that effect, just as the Act of 1867 was passed to give effect to what had been shown to be the wishes of the Dominion itself. This theoretic or technical sovereignty of the British Parliament provides a more convenient method of altering the Constitution than the complicated machinery created for that purpose in the United States and in Australia,¹ and is even more certain to give to a dissident minority whatever consideration it deserves.

The frame of the Dominion or National Government has been constructed on the lines of the Cabinet or Parliamen-

¹ That machinery is described in the chapters on Australia and the United States respectively in "Modern Democracies". Other points in which the constitutional arrangements of Canada differ from those of the United States will be noticed in Chapter XXXV of "Modern Democracies".