

THE PEACEABLE KINGDOM

One Man's Canada

Excerpts from the Introduction to William Kilbourn's *Canada: A Guide to the Peaceable Kingdom*. The writer is a professor of humanities at York University, Toronto, and author of several histories.

The title of this book was chosen to suggest that it would serve as a travel companion for explorers of the Canadian spiritual landscape. But the title also hints at something else: the astonishing notion that this two-cultured, multi-ghettoed, plural community, this non-nation, this wind that lacks a flag, this Canada of ours, might be a guide to other peoples who seek a path to the peaceable kingdom. The child of nations, giant-limbed, as Sir Charles G. D. Roberts called it back in Laurier's day, may even have grown up, no longer ungainly, no longer immature, ready at last to be a father to a few of the world's lost and abandoned children and a brother to all mankind.

In the 1970's there is a new urgency to Canadian nationalism that it did not possess before. Things have changed so fast, so recently. In the past to be a patriot in Canada has often been a bit pointless—as official as a Centennial Commissioner, as silly as that hundred-per-cent CBC listener whose favourite program was the Dominion Observatory Official Time Signal. The new

sense of conviction and purpose to Canadian nationalism derives in part, of course, from strong feelings about the direction of American society. These feelings certainly add substance to the new radical attack on United States economic domination, and to Jane Jacob's plea for us to preserve Toronto and Montreal from the fate of the American metropolis. They add an extra poignancy to Joyce Wieland's pastoral vision of Canada in her film *Rat Life and Diet in North America*.

The basic experience of Canadian history has been that of sharing the northern part of the continent with the other, larger America. Everywhere in the twentieth century man is becoming American, or, to put it another way, is moving in some way towards a condition of high industrialization, affluence and leisure, instant communication, an urban man-made environment, and a mingling of cultures and traditions in a mobile, classless global society. There is no country in the world, except the United States, which has gone further in this direction than Canada; none that has done so in such an American way; and none that is

so experienced in the art of living with, emulating, and differing from the United States. If Canadians (and perhaps others) wish to explore the real freedoms open to them in such a society and to escape the blandness and boredom, the sameness and despair latent in such a brave new world, they could usefully examine the subtle but profound ways in which Canada differs from the United States. For what emerges clearly to me is that Canada is a different kind of American society, an American alternative to what has happened in the United States.

When William Van Horne gave up his American citizenship after completing the C.P.R., he is said to have remarked, 'Building that railroad would have made a Canadian out of the German Emperor.' The inexorable land, like the Canadian climate, has always commanded the respect of those who have tried to master it. It is simply overwhelming. Except in small pastoral slices of southern Ontario and Quebec, the original wilderness of bush

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