

UPPER CANADA IN EARLY TIMES

A REVIEW

BY WILLIAM RENWICK RIDDELL

JOHN HOWISON, a surgeon in the East India Company's service, spent some two years and a half in Upper Canada in the second decade of the nineteenth century, and he has left us a most entertainingly written account of his impressions of the country and its people. He brought down on himself by his book* the wrath of Robert Gourlsy the "Banished Briton," who admitting that "we see a book very well written, very readable as a romance"—still considers it "the tale of a sentimental weak man. . . worse than trifling—scandalous;" and his account of the people of Niagara District "is indiscreet, is ungenerous, is ungrateful."

Landing in Quebec after a seven weeks' passage across the Atlantic in company with a large number of British emigrants, mostly from Scotland, and all bound for Upper Canada, he was pleased with the appearance of Quebec as a commercial city, as well as amused by the manner in which the officiousness of the French-Canadian porters was damped by the watchfulness and suspicion of the Highlanders.

Taking a steamboat to Montreal, he found there the "lightness of the streets, the neatness of the buildings, the hospitality and polished manners of the people and the air of enterprise and activity that is everywhere exhibited in it . . . truly attrac-

tive"; and they "appear to particular advantage when contrasted with the dullness, gloom and dirtiness of Quebec." Even "individuals of the lower classes . . . carry with them an appearance of vigour, contentment and gayety very different from the comfortless and desponding looks that characterise the manufacturing population of the large towns of Britain." Which, *en passant*, sounds very modern.

He drove in "an amusing ride which lasted more than an hour" from Montreal to Lachine; then, next morning, provided with another *calash* and driver, continued his journey west; he stopped for breakfast at St. Anne's, where he first had the opportunity of observing the manners of an American inn-keeper. "Gentlemen of this description," he later found in Upper Canada. They, "in their anxiety to display a noble spirit of independence, sometimes forgot those courtesies that are paid to travellers by publicans in all civilised countries; but the moment one shows his readiness to be on an equality with them, they become tolerably polite." So the St. Anne's boniface seated at his door poising his chair on its hind legs and swinging backwards and forwards, paid no attention to the traveller as he alighted, or walked into the house or even when he desired him to get breakfast ready, but when he said, "Will you

*Sketches of Upper Canada, Domestic, Local and Characteristic. By John Howison, Esq., Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, High Street. 1821.