

Geography too plays its part in giving us an individual character. This is better understood to-day than it used to be as the geographer has taken his proper place in the field of scholarship. We have two great natural features which have helped to shape our national economy. One of these is what we call the Canadian Shield, the vast area of ancient rock which stretches from Quebec northwest across the continent and gives us our mineral wealth and also with its lakes and forests provides a playground for innumerable people from this side of the line. The St. Lawrence River is the other feature. It is the greatest natural gateway into this continent and has been ever since Champlain first sailed up its broad reaches. The river and the Great Lakes which it drains have helped to give an East-West axis - contacts with Europe - to our national life, in trade in the things one cannot weigh or measure.

Then of course there is the climate. This year, at least in my part of Canada, we have had less winter than you apparently have had in New York, but Canada is a northern country, we are exclusively a northern country unlike our neighbor, and this has had a decided effect on national temperament and on the type of settler who elects to come to our shores.

But there is something else which distinguishes us. We are the offspring of a marriage between history and geography. This of course is true in some measure of all countries but the blend is more striking with us, the combination of historical and geographical elements. While our cultural traditions come from both Great Britain and France, our political traditions come from Great Britain. We have a constitution formed largely on the British model. We are the only monarchy in the Americas just as we are the only American country out of the 22 which has retained constitutional links with the old world. It was a great act of faith and vision which led the architects of our country to build into our young democracy the framework of Crown and Parliament which had stood the test of time in the parent country. With great boldness they based it on a federal foundation not unlike yours. Our British institutions were planted in North American soil and physical environment naturally plays a great part in shaping our life. We belong to the British Commonwealth - yet we are an American nation. We can say in the same breath "we British" and "we North Americans". We like to think that we have made a pretty good job of weaving the two threads into our national fabric, the intangible ones representing the British heritage and those which are physical, - the habits and customs which belong to North America.

This I fear sounds very theoretical. You will ask what is the concrete proof of all this. Well, during the war we were able to see an actual demonstration of the fact that Canada is a product of heredity and environment. There were many thousands of Canadian servicemen in England working alongside the British and American forces there and we could therefore see for the first time innumerable members of the three countries together. Canadians could generally be identified without difficulty. Something in their bearing marked them as Canadians. They had qualities which suggested both the new world and the old. They had much in common with both their British and American friends but were rarely to be mistaken for either. We had often asked ourselves had we produced a Canadian type. Here he was.

Canada's position in the world as an independent sovereign nation and also as a member state of the British Commonwealth is of course a commonplace to Canadians. But it is sometimes confusing to others. There are those, including occasionally friends on this side of the boundary, who still find it hard to understand the paradox of our position, however clear it is to us. Similarities between communities are often deceptive. We know this well in the field of Anglo-American relations. Each country is apt to judge the other in terms of its own institutions. The things they have in common give rise to illusions. I wonder who it was who said that Great Britain and the United States were "two friendly countries separated by a common language"? It was a shrewd remark.

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