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THE NICOLLS PAPERS: A STUDY IN ANGLICAN TORYISM

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TORYISM, as a political philosophy and a way of life, is as old in Canada as Anglo-Saxon settlement itself. It began with the arrival of the merchant group in Quebec and Montreal immediately after the conquest. It received fresh support with the advent of the Loyalists into Upper Canada and of immigration which followed almost immediately from the British Isles. Throughout the nineteenth century Toryism went from strength to strength, fostered by the vicissitudes of Canadian politics and constantly reinforced by new waves of immigration from the Mother Country.

The mainspring of Toryism was no doubt the urge to political and economic dominance. Yet its outward manifestation took the form of a whole series of beliefs and antipathies. Toryism, on its theoretical side, was more than a political philosophy. It was almost a religious faith and its principal positive tenet was always loyalty to the Mother Country and to the Empire. To the Tory any discussion of Canada's future which questioned the imperial tie was treason and heresy. He was no more prepared to discuss the issue than the mediæval church would have been prepared to discuss the nature of the Trinity. When one of Colonel George Denison's acquaintances in Toronto suggested that the Canadian people should be able to discuss annexation or independence, the doughty old Tory reported, "I denied this vehemently, and declared they could not have either without fighting, and I told him plainly that if he meant to secure either he had better hang me on a lamp-post or otherwise, if it became a live issue, I would hang him."¹ Coupled with this strong advocacy of Empire went a belief in the maintenance of the propertied classes and of the political and economic *status quo*, a fervent dislike of Americans, of the Church of Rome, and particularly of French Canadians.

The connection between Canadian Toryism and the Church of England in Canada was always close. In the nineteenth century the Anglican clergy were Tories almost to a man. Lord Elgin, in his progress through Upper Canada, after the crisis over the Rebellion Losses Bill, which brought the Tories into solid opposition to the Governor, reported, "The people who behave worst are the Church of England parsons the old Tory Mags. & office holders and the members of the Orange Lodges."² The Reverend Benjamin Cronyn, later Bishop Cronyn, of London provides an example, perhaps extreme but not unrepresentative, of Anglican Toryism. Cronyn campaigned actively for the Lieutenant-Governor and the Family Compact in the Upper Canada election of 1836. Wrote the Reverend William Proudfoot, a Presbyterian, "Parson Cronyn has been all over the township electioneering." According to Dr. Duncombe, a Reform leader, Cronyn, on election day, urged on the Orangemen in their riotous efforts to prevent the Reformers from voting.³ The fortunes of the Family Compact in

¹George T. Denison, *The Struggle for Imperial Unity* (Macmillans, 1909), 126.

²*Elgin Papers*, Broomhall, Scotland, Elgin to Cumming Bruce, Sept. 17, 1849.

³Quoted in Fred Landon, "The Common Man in the Era of the Rebellion in Upper Canada" (*Canadian Historical Association Report*, 1937), 88.

Upper Canada were, of course, closely linked with those of the Church of England; but the association between Toryism and the Church was equally strong in the other colonies. Canadian Tories, like their English counterparts, stood for Church and King.

For this reason a description of the papers of Jasper Nicolls, an Anglican clergyman and first Principal of Bishop's University, may appropriately be termed "A Study in Anglican Toryism."

Nicolls, Principal of Bishop's from 1845 to 1877, was a son-in-law of the second Bishop Mountain, having married Mountain's daughter, Harriet, in 1847. The papers consist mainly of private letters interchanged between the two establishments—the Mountains at Quebec and the Nicolls family in Lennoxville. The principal correspondents, in addition to Nicolls and Bishop Mountain are Harriet Nicolls, Mrs. Mountain, and Kate Mountain, Harriet's younger sister who was still at home in Quebec. In addition there are many letters to Nicolls from various Anglican clergy in the Diocese of Quebec, describing conditions in the country and in the church.

II

The Nicolls papers give one a glimpse of a close-knit family community, Anglican, high Tory, and very pro-English. The comments of Bishop Mountain and his family on the French Canadians, "Yankee ways," the Roman Catholic Church, and Lord Elgin were characteristic of the group of which they were members.

Like so many Canadian Tories the Mountains and the Nicolls were at heart colonials. England was still home. Yankee ways must be shunned and English habits cultivated. Bishop Mountain admonished Harriet at Lennoxville: "It is high time, in my simple judgment, that you should break through the rough Yankee ways which *necessity* may have *imposed* some years ago. . . . I think it would do a great deal of good, in different ways, that you should have everything about you—without aiming at ostentatious style,—as *thoroughly nice & English* as circumstances will permit."⁴

Like other members of this group the Mountains and the Nicolls showed a proper awareness of the existence of the class system in Canadian society. References to servants showed a combination of amused contempt modified at times by a genuine, though indulgent, affection. In a particularly revealing letter of May 3, 1851, the Bishop warned Harriet against allowing her maid to read novels since it might have the result "of her becoming unnerved for the station appointed for her in the providence of God."

Anti-American sentiments frequently appear in the Nicolls Papers. Bishop Mountain disliked "rough Yankee ways." He was contemptuous of a church in the Eastern Townships which "according to the Yankee fashion" had not been appropriated to any particular denomination. Armine, the Bishop's son, described a woman whom he had met as "rather likeable, barring a little Yankeeism." Jasper Nicolls, after a journey across New England, rejoiced on his return to Canada, "Indeed *it was* a satisfaction to find oneself once more removed from under the ignorant

⁴Nicolls Papers, Bishop's University, Bishop Mountain to Harriet Nicolls, May 31, 1858.

self-satisfied barbarism of these folks of the star spangled banner."⁵ And so it went. Nothing American was any good. Kate Mountain even deplored the fact that most of the seeds used in flower gardens in Quebec were imported from the United States and took steps to secure her seeds from England.⁶ Although the Mountains and the Nicolls were not of Loyalist stock they had acquired the Loyalist dislike of all things American. In this, they were typical of many immigrants from the Mother Country who became assimilated to the Loyalist pattern.

References to the French Canadians in the Nicolls Papers are comparatively few. So far as possible the Nicolls and the Mountains sought to ignore the alien race. A few significant quotations, however, indicate that the attitude of the group toward the French and toward Lord Elgin who was thought to favour them unduly, was typical of Canadian Toryism. Thus Bishop Mountain complained to his daughter, Harriet: "I trust in God that the scheme of Messrs. O'reilly & Co., in which the name of Mr. *Papineau* now figures, to swamp the Protestant interest altogether in the townships & to overwhelm us in the only corner of L. Canada where we have anything like a preponderating interest, will be defeated."⁷ Suspicious of the French as they were, it was natural that the Mountains should dislike Lord Elgin after his acceptance of the Rebellion Losses Bill in 1849. "His political principles and acts I abominate," wrote Bishop Mountain;⁸ and Kate Mountain was reflecting the family attitude when she wrote: "Lord Elgin has become quite foolishly gay & drives the girls out to picnics—and dines out with Tom Dick & Harry & has parties every week. When they play games and *romp*. . . all the sensible people seem quite disgusted."⁹ Bishop Mountain told the same story of "all sorts of gambols at Spencer Wood" led by Lord Elgin and added "He is now laid up by having, it is said, broken some small tendon in the 'facetious' use of his nether extremities, at about 4 o'clock in the morning."¹⁰

In one point, however, the Toryism of the Mountains differed from the more secular Toryism of the Montreal merchants who threw the Empire overboard in 1849 in order to advocate annexation to the United States. Such a step the Mountains and the Nicolls could never have accepted. Their Toryism was much less directly associated with the marts of trade and, while by no means divorced from political and economic considerations, it was more a matter of the spirit than the Toryism of Montreal. Thus it is not surprising that Mrs. Mountain should have written in August, 1849: "I believe *wise* folk laugh at the idea of annexation being a matter of easy accomplishment."

The Toryism of the Nicolls and the Mountains, however, was much the same in its basic tenets as the Toryism of Montreal. There was, of course, some difference in tone. One never detects quite the violent, blood-thirsty note so characteristic of Montreal and Toronto Toryism in the nineteenth century. Yet at times there is the same suggestion of potential lawlessness in the Quebec and Lennoxville group. Kate Mountain, for

⁵*Ibid.*, Bishop Mountain to Mrs. Mountain, Aug. 30, 1852; Armine Mountain to Harriet Nicolls, March 15, 1848; Jasper Nicolls to Harriet Mountain, Aug. 23, 1847.

⁶*Ibid.*, Kate Mountain to Harriet Nicolls, June 15, 1849.

⁷*Ibid.*, Bishop Mountain to Harriet Nicolls, April 13, 1848.

⁸*Ibid.*, Bishop Mountain to Harriet Nicolls, Dec. 21, 1854.

⁹*Ibid.*, Kate Mountain to someone unknown, 1854.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, Bishop Mountain to Harriet Nicolls, Nov. 25, 1854.

instance, in 1849 contemplated a situation in which the Tories and the British garrison would be in arms against each other.¹¹ A much more vigorous example of the same spirit was later provided by Colonel Denison in Toronto. In 1870 he was much incensed at the supposed failure of the Macdonald government to deal firmly with the Red River insurrection. He thought that Macdonald was truckling to Georges Cartier and the French. When he heard that Cartier and Bishop Taché were coming to Toronto he organized a demonstration in which Cartier was to be burned in effigy. Hearing that the District Adjutant-General, Lieutenant-Colonel Durie, planned to provide a guard of honour for the visitors, Denison went to him and protested: "I told him if we heard any more of it, we would take possession of the armoury that night, and that we would have ten men to his one, and if anyone in Toronto wanted to fight it out, we were ready to fight it out on the streets. He told me I was threatening revolution. I said, 'Yes, I know I am, and we can make it one. A half continent is at stake, and it is a stake worth fighting for'."¹² This language is perhaps extreme. Yet it is not unrepresentative of a movement which produced the anti-Elgin riots in April of 1849, the Orange demonstrations during the visit of the Prince of Wales to Toronto in 1860, and many other exhibitions of Tory vigour. Neither Bishop Mountain nor Jasper Nicolls would have spoken in this explosive manner. Yet they would probably have condoned Denison's action in doing so.

III

The Anglican clergy in mid-nineteenth century Canada had two battles to fight: one in the political field against radicals and French Canadians and one in the field of religion proper against other denominations particularly the Methodists. The fact that many of the Methodists were also radicals tended of course to make it all one struggle.

The Nicolls Papers are full of the din of battle from the struggle with Methodism. Bishop Mountain made frequent references to the struggle over the Clergy Reserves which he, of course, thought should have been an Anglican monopoly and when the Reserves were secularized he wrote that the Legislature had "plundered the Church of God & divided the plunder among the constituencies."¹³ Jasper Nicolls's clerical correspondents described the struggle with Methodism in the mission field and they all told much the same story. Their parishioners were poor and had to work hard to obtain a bare subsistence. The clergy were struggling to establish the Church of England in the face of great difficulties particularly the opposition of the Methodists. The Methodists were always being successfully resisted and were often at the point of extinction but references to this troublesome sect still continued. Methodism seemed to die hard.

Typical of Nicolls's letters from the clergy is that from Charles Forest, the rector of Grenville, dated December 30, 1848. Forest began with a vivid description of life in his parish, castigating various allies of the devil especially the local store-keepers who debauched the people with drink. But he reserved his most severe criticism for the rival religious denom-

¹¹*Ibid.*, Kate Mountain to Harriet Nicolls, June, 1849.

¹²Denison, *Struggle for Imperial Unity*, 37-8.

¹³Nicolls Papers, Bishop Mountain to Harriet Nicolls, Nov. 25, 1854.

inations particularly the Methodists. "If these sectaries have done mischief elsewhere," he reported, "beyond all bounds they have done so *here*. They have had emissaries at work—the most ignorant and debased of their kind—Men, not only unskilled in everything which a divine ought to know, but absolutely unable to read the ordinary text of our Eng. bibles without hesitation and spelling."

However, Forest like his fellow clergy was able to conclude happily that the Methodists had lost their grip and that "the reign of misrule has almost come to an end." A similar tone of confidence was shown by the Reverend James Fulton who reported to Nicolls, "Notwithstanding all the increased exertions of the Methodists I have lost none. And I had the satisfaction last Sunday of having a good congregation whilst the Methodists were roaring away at a protracted meeting."¹⁴ Many other clergymen gave similar reports.

The Mountains and the Nicolls shared these views on the Methodists and other Dissenters as numerous references in the letters indicate.¹⁵

IV

Kate Mountain's letters give one an interesting glimpse of polite society in Quebec: its riding, its formal dinners and balls, and its musical evenings. The officers of the British garrison were always very much in demand. Kate observed that so long as there were interesting British officers available the "Quebec boys" were "looked down upon."¹⁶ The tone of Quebec society was strongly Tory and Tory attitudes appear to have been shared by the garrison. During the crisis over the Rebellion Losses Bill Kate reported a conversation with an officer in the Rifle Brigade, "Mr. Doherty says that if there are any rows & they have to fight against us he will be with us in heart for he thinks we are shamefully treated." Kate added significantly "they all say the *same*."¹⁷ That this report was accurate is suggested by Lord Elgin's wry comment to Earl Grey, after the completion of arrangements for the free admission of commissariat and military supplies, "It is gratifying to reflect that henceforward the Gentlemen of H.M.'s Army will be able to drink confusion to the Gov. Gen. and his administration in untaxed liquor."¹⁸

Kate Mountain engaged in all the fashionable amusements of the city. A typical glimpse is provided in her letter to Harriet of May 27, 1848:

I believe that I wrote last on Saturday on which I rode out & dined with the Cochranes & on Sunday Kate [Cochrane] staid in town with me on Monday I rode out to the Cochranes—& also on Tuesday early so that I might be back in time for the band which plays from three to five upon the Esplanade. On Wednesday the Queen's birthday it poured as usual—so there was no trooping of the colors. . . . I went in the evening to the artillery shine. [splurge ed.] I came out in white tarlton with a white sash & my hair was turned up. I danced the second quadrille with Mr. Newton

¹⁴*Ibid.*, James Fulton to Jasper Nicolls, March 8, 1848.

¹⁵*Ibid.* See particularly Mrs. Mountain to Jasper Nicolls, May 8, 1848.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, Kate Mountain to Harriet Nicolls, March 19, 1856.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, Kate Mountain to Harriet Nicolls, June, 1849.

¹⁸A. G. Doughty (ed.), *Elgin-Grey Papers, 1846-1852* (Ottawa, 1937) 4 vols., Elgin to Grey, Aug. 2, 1850.

who asked me the day before. I danced with him twice and he asked me three times. I danced twice with Mr. Nixon and he asked me three times. . . .

And so on. Apparently it was conventional to turn down a partner at the third time of asking.

Perhaps the social and ecclesiastical highlight of the Mountains's stay at Quebec was the conference of British North American Bishops in 1851. Mrs. Mountain was hostess to the five visiting bishops (Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Toronto, and Montreal) and wrote a racy and amusing letter to Harriet describing the appearance, character, and personal eccentricities of each of the five. Her description of Bishop Strachan gives a vivid glimpse of that doughty champion of the Family Compact and the Church of England. "Toronto—what words can describe this energetic—first rate 74 . . . he has a fringe of black hair round his hard old healthy looking visage, wh. he allows to grow long enough to comb straight back & cover his whole white head—wh: keeps peeping through in cracks & corners not seeming to like that it should be put into the background . . . but he is a lively, laughing, *spunky* old bird,"¹⁹

V

Other material in the Nicolls Papers is not particularly apropos of a study of Toryism. There is a good deal of material about the vicissitudes of travel, especially in the pre-railway period and about fashions in women's clothing. There is a vague suggestion of Toryism in Mrs. Mountain's advice in a letter requesting Harriet to buy a bonnet for a mutual friend, "If you *cannot* get a Tuscan—get one of those *white ones*, like the Bermuda straw—as she dislikes the *common straw* as looking like a servant's. . . ."²⁰ However, most of the material on transportation and on clothing may be classed as non-political. The fashion of wearing four or five petticoats in the decade of the eighteen-forties was presumably not confined to Tory women. When the steamboat broke down on Lake Chats on the Ottawa on one of Bishop Mountain's journeys Tory and radical passengers, no doubt, were alike stranded.

This paper has not been intended as a condemnation but rather as an examination of Canadian Tory attitudes. The Mountains and the Nicolls simply adopted the attitudes of their particular group in society much as they adopted their fashions in clothing or in foodstuffs. Within the framework of those accepted opinions they lived out their lives. One gets the impression of kindly, hard-working, and conscientious people reflecting both the virtues and the little foibles which are common to mankind. The fact that they were Tories shaped their opinions but it did not prejudice their hearts.

The Nicolls Papers provide striking evidence of the fact that almost any collection of old private letters is likely to contain valuable social and political material. In the past the general outline of Canadian history was largely built up through the use of official documents. A great deal can still be accomplished in supplementing official documents with other material of which family letters are an example. Jasper Nicolls, Kate

¹⁹Nicolls Papers, Mrs. Mountain to Harriet Nicolls, Sept. 25, 1851.

²⁰*Ibid.*, Mrs. Mountain to Harriet Mountain, undated.

Mountain, the Reverend Charles Forest, and many other people who never got into the history books before, have their contribution to make. They help to cover the skeleton of Canadian history with flesh and blood.

This paper is mainly concerned with political attitudes. Here a study of particular individuals is of especial value in supplementing our knowledge of a general school of thought. The Nicolls, the Mountains, and their many associates were the rank and file of a Toryism which spread throughout the length and breadth of Canada. It has swung Dominion elections in its day and is particularly active in time of war. Toryism may be now in decline but it has been an unconscionable time a-dying.

DISCUSSION

Professor Underhill pointed out that there is an evangelical tradition in the Anglican Church, and asked if this had been represented in Lower Canada. *Professor Masters* replied that the tradition at Bishop's College has been rather High Church.

Professor Rothney in commenting upon the hostility to the French Canadians evident in the Nicholls papers, stated that Anglican Tories and French-Canadian *Bleus* had always found it possible to get along together politically. He stressed the significance of the Anglican influence in the Protestant educational system in Quebec, saying that Anglicanism combines an external political loyalty with a religious loyalty in contrast to the French-Canadian Catholic's sole loyalty to Canada, and this makes a serious problem.

Professor Masters drew attention to a distinction between Conservatives and Tories, and asserted that it is the Tories who cannot get along with the French-Canadians.