

## REFLECTIONS OF A GENTLEWOMAN DEPARTING FROM UPPER CANADA

It is a rare privilege to speak today to this distinguished gathering. The hospitality of this occasion and your invitation this afternoon symbolize to me so many of the opportunities I and others like me have encountered in Ontario during the past decade. In Canada today there are many negative perceptions of foreign academics and few of us find the occasion when we can publicly acknowledge the opportunities for growth and development which this society has presented to us during the peak years of University expansion. It is worth remembering that many scholars arrived here at my age, found the kinds of opportunities which I have encountered and became devoted to the society and its institutions. I am happy that there is such a public occasion on which I can make this particular point because when I leave next month, I shall be greatly indebted to the readiness with which Ontario universities have opened their doors to non-Canadians and given us the opportunity to bring our particular perspectives to the study of our academic specialties, and to the solution of University problems.

I have taken for my theme this afternoon the reflections of a woman traveller journeying through that part of the country which is the inheritor of the culture of the old Upper Canada. The lineaments of that culture have become very familiar to me now - durable, embattled, on guard against incursions from the South, mobilized against the danger of degeneration before the forces of the wilderness, and against the forces of revolution and change. This mood and stance to cultural life have been described by Northrop Frye as that of a fortress culture, and I have spent my ten years here deep in what many regard as one of the major battlements of the fortress.

The gentlewomen who visited Upper Canada a century or so ago and whose recollections inspired the title for my remarks this afternoon were of two kinds though both varieties made extended comments about Canadian culture and its institutions. Some, like Anne Langton<sup>1</sup>, came to settle and immediately made the battle between culture and the wilderness a personal struggle to which they were deeply committed. The other kind came to visit, like Mrs. Jameson<sup>2</sup>. Because she was merely passing through, she could afford to indulge a romantic imagination about the splendours of the scenery. Having no involvement in the problems of the society, she could comment adversely on the manners and culture of Toronto with what can only be described as acid detachment. Neither of these two attitudes is open to me as I look back upon my decade in Ontario. Being Australian born, I'm part of the cultural dilemmas of the British Commonwealth

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<sup>1</sup>H. H. Langton, ed., A Gentlewoman in Upper Canada (Toronto, 1950).

<sup>2</sup>Anna Brownell Jameson, Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada (London, 1838).

and, to that extent, personally involved in the problems of British Canadian culture, so I can't share the distance of Mrs. Jameson's Winter Studies and Summer Rambles. However, not having been born into the uncertainties and anxieties of the Canadian consciousness, the unquestioned assumptions and attitudes of those doing cultural sentry duty within Ontario society occasionally seem puzzling and alien to me. After much careful analysis, I've decided that I should speak today using the persona of a visiting cousin. I can claim that relationship by birth, being Australian, and by marriage, being the wife of a British Columbian, something which I've learned after ten years here, puts one in an ambiguous but nonetheless real relationship with Toronto. Now I know that cousins who make lengthy family visits and then unburden themselves on some of the family battles they have observed are not popular and are rarely invited back but I am nonetheless going to do just that because my ten-year stay has spanned a period of critical significance for Ontario's universities and I feel I must talk about what I've seen.

The perceptions of travellers of course always depend on points of departure ---- on the perspective from which one arrives ---- and the place to which the mind's eye turns more and more frequently as one's journey draws to a close. My journey here during the last decade has taken me to the heart of the institutions which are the major battlements of the fortress culture, and I have become very familiar with the oldest University in Ontario, and with York University - one of the newest in the Province. My travels began with a departure from Australia, and from one of its oldest universities, and they will conclude, at least temporarily, in the United States at one of its oldest and most distinguished private colleges for women. Naturally, with this frame of reference, the central theme of my reflections on my sojourn in Ontario must be its universities.

Though I have a personal acquaintance with only two institutions in the Ontario system, I believe my general comments today may be taken as applying to all the province's universities for one of the negative results of the system of public funding which has developed in the last decade has been the imposition of such uniformity in the patterns of development of each institution with the system that one may generalize with much higher accuracy than might be expected about so many institutions.

We have heard much recently about the financial crisis which besets institutions of higher learning in the Province. There has been some public discussion of student/faculty ratios and of the technical details of formula financing. This afternoon, I wish to take a broader theme and to discuss the essential functions of the University and some of the different ways these functions are viewed in the three cultures with which I am familiar. My purpose in doing this is to raise with you some of the issues in the current discussion of the financing of higher education in Ontario, and treat them from a perspective which is a little larger than this Province and the internal

debates within it about the University system. I don't propose to enter into a discussion of figures about teaching loads and physical plant costs. Information on these matters, as they relate to levels of public support, has been placed before the public with great care by the Presidents of the Province's Universities. Instead, I want to talk about issues which enter the realm of public debate infrequently when we confine our attention only to current and projected costs.

Since its origins in mediaeval culture, the University has had three essential functions: The creation of knowledge, the transmission of knowledge to the young, and the training of professionals in skills derived from the applications of knowledge. In the history of the University, these three activities have had many patrons - the church, great merchant princes, the monarchy and finally, in our own day, the democratic or the totalitarian state. Since the utility of training the young in the skills of a culture and of developing competent professionals is self-evident, these two activities are well supported in any efficient modern state. Indeed, one of the key indicators of modernization is the extension of the educational system to wider social groups and the development of more systematic means of training the professionals whose skills are required by the state. However, the role of the state in patronizing or supporting creative thought and research has been much less striking. There has been an ambiguous relationship between achievement in the creation of knowledge and public support. There must be external support for research activity if it is to occur at all. It is not something whose utility is immediately apparent. Ideas and discoveries do not pay unless mechanisms exist for their profitable application and exploitation, so that the researcher must be supported for the activity itself, rather than for quantifiable results. Research has been an activity which gains little popularity in democratic societies because not all of us can be creative thinkers and to claim the right to be a creative thinker smacks of elitism and privilege. In the United States, except in war time, the extraordinary creativity of the scientific community has been the result of private support derived from business and the great philanthropic foundations. In this way, the virtues of private support for the creative thinker have been blended with public support and the drive to make higher education accessible to the widest possible public.

In my native Australia, there has been much hostility to the pure researcher, and support for research in the sciences, social sciences or the humanities has been limited and has come exclusively from government through a small number of research institutes and through the Australian National University.

Since there has been no significant history in Australia of private support for universities, the priorities for growth and decisions about support for research have been dependent entirely on criteria decided by government and the civil service.

In this situation, many great Australian scholars have echoed the complaint of the distinguished Australian medical scientist, the late Sir Howard Florey, about the unpleasant national habit of "perpetually nagging against all those who raise themselves above the common rut." This is, of course, a characteristic of popular democracies where the freedom to pursue excellence must always be suspect. The nagging and the lack of resources has resulted in an intellectual migration for which Australia is famous, not merely of the scholars, but of young students wishing to learn where the best minds were to be found.

When I arrived in Ontario a decade ago, it seemed as though this remarkable Province with its publicly owned utilities and its conservative governments might somehow follow an equally idiosyncratic course in the development of its university system. There was in 1964 a sense that under public patronage a great university system was being built in Ontario for which there was a commitment to support research as well as undergraduate and professional education and in which, under the formula system of financing, there would be freedom for individual centres of excellence to develop, and for them to produce in time the new knowledge which is essential to the vitality of academic institutions. Now, of course, the tide of sentiment has changed, and Sir Howard Florey's shade would recognize the familiar nagging tones in the editorial columns of the Globe and Mail. It is quite clear that a course is now being set by government and the civil servants responsible for planning the Ontario higher educational system which will follow the Australian model, will limit the opportunities for the creation of new knowledge, and will assign support to only two functions of the universities in the Province: the transmission of established knowledge to the young, and the training of competent professionals.

All of us in the universities must exert every energy to preserve the third function, currently so undervalued, against the political pressures of contemporary society even though we naturally accept the process of decision making. Because it is clear that in the long run the value of the university to society, collectively and to individuals throughout the world where the impact of advances in knowledge is experienced, lies in the vitality of its capacity to create new knowledge. Teaching may flourish for a while without creativity in research, professional education may appear to be effective in the short run without creativity in research, but over a longer period, the quest for new knowledge is the life of a university. For this reason, a change in priorities in the public sector such as has recently been experienced, merely raises questions about locating new sources of support. It cannot lead us to accept deterioration in the quality and vitality of what we do.

We have some difficulty in making people understand why the function of research is so essential because the creation of new knowledge is not really susceptible of cost accounting, and we cannot explain to the public in advance of creativity why it is necessary to have a Banting and Best thinking about the problems which led to the discovery of insulin, why it is important, in advance of the creative insight to have a Northrop Frye; using his critical powers to enable deeper and deeper understanding of the working of the literary imagination and the cultural symbols which give meaning to our experience; why, before the results are known, it is of significance to society that a Tuzo Wilson carry out his brilliant research in geophysics, or a Marshall McLuhan, develop his profound understanding of the impact of modern media of communication on our lives. It's hard to explain clearly that the new insight is arrived at by a different process from the communication of the established one in teaching, and that research or creative thinking take time to mature and the results are not as quickly evident as numbers taught or examinations administered. It is apparent that the civil servants who advise government on these matters are either unwilling or unable to become strong advocates of this third and essential function of universities. In many respects, this situation arises because here, as in Australia, there is reluctance to support the creativity of a few over the more routine cultural activities of the many. The priorities for the public support of housing or welfare are easily articulated, and the civil servants responsible in these areas can readily become the advocates of their service to those in political power. It's harder to do this for scholarly activity and so, because one can't quantify the value of knowledge for the human spirit, it's very easy to focus attention on numbers taught and operating costs of physical plant. Both these are important matters to consider in setting goals for the Province and deciding about levels of support, but they cannot be the exclusive criteria used in defining academic goals. It is the insistence of government that only numbers taught and cost per square foot should define academic objectives and the refusal of those who must give leadership in universities to accept so narrow a definition which has caused the debate over the financing of universities in Ontario to become both more public and more heated during recent years. Lack of expertise in assessing the research functions of universities means that the provincial civil service in educational matters functions like the watchdogs of the auditor general's office, but never as a lively channel of communication between those responsible for the administration of provincial universities and those with political responsibility. Thus, those responsible for planning within the provincial university system cannot, at present, find the means for bringing about an informed debate on questions of university support within the public sector.

In this predicament, it seems to me that Ontario's universities have only one option -- they must bring their needs clearly before the private sector and look for radically new levels of private support for the university functions which are not receiving adequate public funding.

I am less hesitant than I might once have been about making this statement because I am moving towards a position of responsibility for a private institution in the United States, and so I am becoming better and better informed about the creative interplay between privately and publicly funded institutions which is the great strength of the American educational system. I have frequently encountered in Canada the argument that private funding of education on the scale practised in the United States cannot be contemplated because Canadian society lacks the great fortunes and the great philanthropic foundations which are the key source of support for education in the United States. Now, that I am becoming familiar with the levels of alumnae support and corporate giving which make private institutions possible in the American context, this familiar Canadian argument seems to have little merit. What is different in the Canadian context is not the resources available but the sense of responsibility for and commitment to education in the private sector. In making this comment, I may seem to be trespassing on your hospitality this afternoon more than is warranted even for a cousin. However, as I leave, it is with a sense of deep disquiet and concern for the future of higher education in this Province. This disquiet casts a shadow and lends a sense of urgency to an occasion which might otherwise have been devoted to celebrating the many delights of a decade in Ontario. There can be few departing travellers who have had the opportunities I have had to observe the functioning of the Ontario university system. During this past decade, I have seen the Province's universities develop remarkable strengths. The advance in quality in research in the social sciences now brings work in this area to the level of international excellence already reached by the humanities when I came in 1964. In the life sciences and the hard sciences, the Province's universities developed, during this last decade, the physical plant which now enables the gifted researcher to follow through on the important observation, something which was not the case, for lack of physical resources, when I arrived.

As I leave, it appears to me that the great advances made in the 1960's, when the Province acquired the educational resources to train its own professionals to educate its youth and to develop its own creative scholars, will be lost unless you are willing to give your backing to the scholarly excellence which is no longer claiming the support of the public purse. This excellence; if supported and allowed to mature, will in time produce a very lively garrison indeed for the fortress culture, but I fear that, unless you are willing to give it more than just your tax dollars, the fortress will fall into disrepair and the liveliest troops will choose to serve elsewhere.