

B.J.S Hoetjes. Canada . Bussum: Unieboek, 1983.

Reviewed by James Tassie, Carleton University

Here is an excellent general introduction to Canada from the pen of a Dutch scholar who presents a balanced and generally accurate picture of the country and its people. It is quite evident that the author had documented himself thoroughly before coming to this country in 1981 to verify on the spot and flesh out the comprehensive and well-rounded information he had already amassed. It is interesting that, whereas superficially one can hardly imagine two countries more dissimilar than Canada and the Netherlands, the author is able to look below the surface appearances and draw parallels at many surprising points. These instances should make the study useful reading for Canadians even though its primary public is naturally to be found among Dutch and Flemish readers.

The book examines six different general areas of interest, arranged in six chapters plus a biographical appendix. It is profusely illustrated, with Tables (5), Charts (10), Maps (21), Photographs (45 black and white). The material is organized as follows:

I **Wat de natuur aan Canada gaf .** (Nature's endowments) Physical description : geology, geography, climate, flora and fauna. Sketch of Indians and Eskimos in historical context, including tribal differences.

II **Canada's geschiedenis tot het begin van de 20ste eeuw .** (Canadian history up to the 20th century) The three phases of Canadian history: the colonial régime of Nouvelle-France, the French-English wars leading to the cession of Canada to England, and the continuing rivalry between the two "founding races." Note is taken of the constant external pressure from the American omnipresence, with the paradoxical effect of forcing self-definition on what would otherwise be a rather amorphous country (p.54-56). This historical constant has come to the fore once again in the current debate over Canadian-American free trade.

III **Bevolking en bedrijvigheid .** (National occupations) Review of the various major primary industries and their relative

importance: fishing, hunting, lumbering, mining, agriculture. Secondary industry: manufacturing and its correlation with demographic concentrations. Good summary of the Canadian economy with its inevitable strengths and weaknesses.

**IV Canada's regio's .** (Regional Canada) Here the author examines in greater depth than in the introductory chapter the interplay between the physical and human elements in the six clearly defined regions of Canada: the Maritimes, Quebec, Ontario, the Prairies, British Columbia, the Far North. Differences in climate geography, history and demography have their definite impact on agriculture and industry.

**V Leven op zijn canadees .** (The Canadian lifestyle) This description of contemporary Canada from the sociological point of view gives a good account of social structures and regional differences in education, employment and politics. At this point we get an objective picture of the Canadian people such as might be gleaned by an observant and intelligent tourist.

**VI Canada en de wereld .** (Canada in the world context) Brief comments on international relations and immigration, with particular attention to the Dutch and Flemish element in the Canadian population. At several points in the body of the text (e.g. p.80ss.), the author takes a fairly critical (but justified) view of certain aspects of Canadian life and economy; in this concluding chapter, however, he shows the country in a very favourable light. Much of what he says here reads like a typical Canadian government publication singing the country's praises with a view to attracting immigrants.

**VI Voor wie meer wil weten over Canada .** (Hints for further reading) This short annotated bibliography is appended to suggest further readings for anyone interested in studying Canada and its potential in greater depth. Such bibliographies are always very personal, and the author makes no pretence at being comprehensive; even so, one would like to suggest a few additions to the novels cited. Let us mention the following: a powerful novel on Eskimo life, *Agaguk* by Yves Thériault (1958); on Montreal working class life, *Bonheur d'occasion* by Gabrielle Roy (1945); on small town jansenism in Quebec, In the same way, the puritanic (p.141) is considerably exaggerated. The colonial heritage of

This description of Canada is therefore carefully prepared and presents a studiously balanced and generally accurate picture in the historical as well as the contemporary perspective, even if it is not entirely without flaws. It will certainly function as a good textbook in Dutch and Flemish schools and universities. One fact that no author can avoid, however, is that certain data drift rapidly into obsolescence, especially with reference to strictly contemporary facts and events. I see no way for any author to circumvent the fact that time marches on. There are also the inevitable inaccuracies of detail, but such peccadilloes are generally not embarrassing; they sometimes reflect those delicate nuances in any given culture that escape even the keenest non-native observer, and we shall mention only the more prominent ones.

It was only the French who colonized Canada in the 17th century (p.42); the English arrived in the 18th century. On the other hand, Acadia did not remain a French colony until the middle of the 18th century (p.43) as it was handed over to England by the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713.

It is true that Quebec is still strongly marked as a Roman Catholic society but the picture given is not entirely accurate. The Church played a lesser role in the colonial period than the author suggests (p.46) because it had to compete with exploitative capitalism at the administrative level and with a libertarian mentality at the popular level. The period of most theocratic impact (p.47) was 1764-1795, because since then secularism has been sweeping the whole occidental world.

The national spirit is not always accurately represented. It is true that Quebec is anti-English, but the intensity varies from age to age. The referendum in 1980 demonstrated that the province was not willing to separate from the rest of Canada, and the elections of 1985 rejected the independence-oriented Parti Québécois. In the 1970's many younger Quebecers refused to learn English (p.105), but this is no longer so. Similarly, the isolationist spirit noted in Ontario (p.115) was typical of small towns, but is no longer accurate after a generation raised on television and easy travel.

In the same way, the puritanical attitude towards alcohol (p.141) is considerably exaggerated. The colonial heritage of

abuse of alcohol had a long afterlife; in colonial days alcohol compensated for great suffering from extreme hardships and loneliness (cf. modern Russia), and it was also used as a tool to deprave native populations. The resultant fear of strong drink left a deep imprint on the national psyche, but attitudes have long since softened and alcohol as well as other drugs circulate to a degree approaching what would be seen in western Europe.

Let us also add a couple of nuances on demographic data. Since Indians are found in all parts of Canada, and Eskimos live in the Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Northern Quebec, they should be mentioned in Table 3 (p.89), particularly as much is made of them in Chapter I. Similarly, one would expect mention of the important Icelandic element in the Manitoba population, since stress is laid here on the non-Anglo-Saxon character of this province (p.121).

Finally, the Table of Contents (p.160) is not as helpful as it might be. All items should have page numbers added, and the 45 photographs appearing in the text should be listed here also. Chart 5 is mentioned on p.88 but does not appear in the text as published.