

GUY FRÉGAULT. — *Le XVIII^e Siècle canadien : études*. Montréal, Éditions HMH, 1968. 387 pp.

A Canada Council grant facilitated the publication of this volume of articles and essays by Guy Frégault, deputy minister of Québec's ministère des Affaires culturelles since 1961, and French Canada's most eminent neo-nationalist historian before that date. One item, "La Nouvelle-France, territoire et population", now appears in print for the first time. The other six were originally published between 1956 and 1961 in various learned journals. Topically, they cover a broad range of subjects : finance, the fur trade, government and politics, the Church, intercolonial rivalry. Thematically, they are visibly interconnected.

Implicitly at least, Frégault's historical writing of the 1950s was a rebuttal of the interpretation which traditional nationalist historians, led by Lionel Groulx, had placed on the evolution of New France. Convinced that French Canada would survive only as long as it remained different from neighbouring North American societies, Groulx had used history to reinforce Québec's particularism. He had claimed that before 1760, Roman Catholicism and agriculture had combined to mould a spiritual French Canadian civilization which it was the duty of his contemporaries to preserve. Frégault, on the other hand, was a product of the period which preceded the official beginning of the Quiet Revolution in 1960. One cannot help but feel that, perhaps unconsciously, he was using history to legitimize the aspirations of modern Québec. At a time when French Canada was being absorbed into the mainstream of North American life, Frégault argued the central thesis that even before the conquest there had been essential similarities — not differences — between New France and the English colonies which had not, however, eroded the French community's will to maintain a separate existence.¹ While *La Guerre de la Conquête* represents his most impressive attempt to analyze New France's collective will to live, *Le XVIII^e Siècle canadien* deals for the most part with the material organization of the colony in the early part of the eighteenth century. The conclusions arrived at in this volume can be summarized as follows. During this period Canada was already a firmly and normally structured society and, despite the weak intensity of state colonization, a dynamic one. The most important social type was not the farm-dwelling habitant but the bourgeois businessman.

What is the value of the individual articles and essays that proclaim this message ? To begin with, it should be stated that they are all meticulously documented and written in a style that constitutes a model of clarity and elegance. "Essai sur les finances canadiennes" is a masterful analysis of the

¹ See p. 368 where Frégault, with an obvious eye on both contemporary Québec and traditional nationalist historiography, denies that New France was characterized by "des innités pittoresques, propres à les isoler du monde moderne".

financial structure of New France: "Politique et politiciens", a brilliantly perceptive study of colonial government and politics in the early eighteenth century. Historians of New France would be well advised to study the methods employed by Frégault here in order to apply them to other periods of the colony's history. "L'Empire britannique et la conquête du Canada (1700-1713)", on the other hand, reveals the author's tendency to dogmatize. "Du simple fait de son existence, le Canada assure le maintien de l'empire français du Nouveau Monde et celui-ci compromet le développement normal de l'Amérique anglaise."² Frégault holds this truth to be self-evident and he has little patience with the Englishmen of the first decade of the eighteenth century who were so myopic as not to be blinded by its light. "La Colonisation du Canada au XVIII^e siècle" contains all the old unverified assertions, seriously challenged by Jean Hamelin and Fernand Ouellet in recent years, about the calamitous consequences of the conquest for French Canada. "La Nouvelle-France, territoire et peuplement", presumably the last article Frégault wrote before leaving academic life, is largely a repetition of old themes rather than an attempt to develop new ideas.

Some criticism can be formulated of individual points as well. In "Politique et politiciens" there are a few pages where Frégault, despite the fact that he has apparently not studied very closely the public life of Hector de Callière, attempts to evaluate contemporary opinions of this governor. In "La Compagnie de la Colonie", a breakdown in research occurs at a crucial point. On p. 246 Frégault states that the decision to form the company was reached by Canadians in 1699. In reality, however, all they were interested in at this stage was the right to dispose of their beaver pelts freely on the metropolitan market. The decision to form a Canadian company with control over the beaver trade was made in 1700 by the Minister of Marine, Jérôme de Pontchartrain.³ Perhaps this correction in the sequence of events will raise certain questions about the validity of the following passage taken from the conclusion of the article: "Le simple fait que la société soit parvenue à se constituer indique sans aucun doute que les Canadiens de l'époque possèdent un sens réel de l'organisation collective"...⁴

Although Guy Frégault is still an object of uncritical adulation in some French-Canadian historical circles, it is becoming possible, eight years after his retirement from academia, to view with some objectivity the significance of his historical contribution. When, in a justifiable reaction to French-Canadian traditional historiography, he proclaims that commerce and money, businessmen and politicians, not habitants and priest, shaped the destinies of New France, one must largely agree with him. But when, in an overreaction

² P. 66.

³ This information on the origins of the company was obtained in the course of research on the life of Antoine Pascaud, a company member, for a biography to be published in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. II.

⁴ P. 281.

to the historiographical tradition alluded to above, he maintains that the difference between New France and the English colonies was merely one of size, that the middle class played as important a role in the French colony as in the English ones,⁵ one must dissent. For at this point, Frégault is but projecting into the past the preoccupations of the bourgeois nationalist intelligentsia of the 1950's. After all, there is no more reason to suppose that New France resembled the early ideals of the Quiet Revolution than it did the rural clerical *Laurentia* dreamt of by Lionel Groulx.

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LOUIS-PHILIPPE CORMIER (éd.). — *Lettres à Pierre Margry de 1844 à 1886.* (Papineau, Lafontaine, Faillon, Leprohon et autres.) Coll. « Cahiers de l'institut d'histoire », n° 10, Québec, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1968. XXVI-229 p. Index.

Dans cette édition de documents, Louis-Philippe Cormier présente une partie de la correspondance canadienne adressée à l'archiviste français Pierre Margry; celle qui a été conservée à la William L. Clements Library de l'Université du Michigan. Il s'agit de quatre-vingt-dix lettres tirées du fonds Henry Vignaud (1830-1922), instituteur louisianais qui fut, pendant près de trente-cinq ans, attaché au secrétariat de l'ambassade américaine en France. Comment cette correspondance fut-elle incorporée au fonds Vignaud? L'éditeur l'ignore. Tout au plus, fait-il mention de ses liens d'amitié avec le bibliographe Henry Harriette, un de ces amateurs de l'histoire américaine qui commencent à foisonner, chez nous comme ailleurs, dans la seconde moitié du XIX^e siècle.

Chez nous, c'est au lendemain de la rébellion de 1837 que l'on assiste à la naissance d'un véritable engouement pour notre histoire nationale. Un spécialiste de l'analyse des idéologies a voulu y voir un besoin, face à l'échec de l'aventure révolutionnaire, de renouer avec un passé que l'on se présente comme idyllique et glorieux (voir Fernand DUMONT, *Idéologie et conscience historique dans la société canadienne-française du XIX^e siècle*, in Claude GALARNEAU et Elzéar LAVOIE [éd.], *France et Canada français du XVI^e au XX^e siècle*, Coll. « Cahiers de l'institut d'histoire », n° 7, Québec, Presses de l'Université Laval, 1966). Pour séduisante qu'elle paraisse, cette hypothèse mérite d'être précisée; à la revalorisation de la France d'ancien régime, notre première historiographie va tenter de mettre en lumière le rôle bénéfique du clergé, au niveau de la conscience nationale. C'est du moins cette conclusion provisoire que suggère la correspondance éditée par Philippe Cormier.

Cette soif d'introspection collective, elle va d'abord se manifester par la recherche des documents. Quand les ressources locales ne suffisent pas, on

⁵ G. FRÉGAULT, *Canadian Society in the French Regime*, The Canadian Historical Association, Booklet #3, *passim*.