A NOTE ON "A CANADIAN CAMPAIGN"

BY MAJOR JOHN RICHARDSON

The location of "A Canadian Campaign, By a British Officer" has long been described as a mystery in bibliographies of Major John Richardson (1796-1852). In his Preface to Tecumseh (London, 1828, p. vii) Richardson had given this clue:

Many of the notes to Tecumseh betray its Author to be that also of the "Canadian Campaign," several passages in both being written nearly in the same words. The fact is, that the Poem was composed five years ago, and before he had thought of compiling the latter narrative.

W. R. Riddell, in his John Richardson (Toronto, 1926?, pp. 7-8) thought that this "Canadian Campaign" could have been War of 1812 (1842) in an earlier form. This guess was substantially correct. Other clues could have been followed. The Gore Gazette, an Ancaster (Upper Canada) newspaper, under the date of Tuesday, May 8, 1827, printed an account of "the Naval engagement on Lake Erie ... from "A Canadian Campaign," "By a British Officer." This account matches Richardson's as it is in the readily-available reprint of War of 1812 (1842) edited by A. C. Casselman in 1902 (pages 189-195 as far as "round shot"). The Gore Gazette had made a copy of this article from the New York Albion, which in turn had drawn it from a London (England) journal.

The original version is in The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal, published by Henry Colburn. "A Canadian Campaign" was in five instalments. The first can be found in N. S. XVII, Page II (July to December 1826), pages 541-548. Instalments II to V are in N. S. XIX, Part I (Jan. to June 1827), pages 162-170, 248-254, 449-457, and 538-551. Richardson's name did not appear; the articles were attributed to "a British Officer."

Supplementary material was supplied by Richardson in the February 1828 issue of The New Monthly Magazine, N. S. XXII, Part I (1828), pages 178-184, in the form of a letter "To the Editor" of the journal. It bears no signature, but it is unmistakably linked to "A Canadian Campaign" and thus to Richardson:

Sir, - In "The Philadelphia National Gazette" of the 6th of August an article has appeared, the tendency of which is to invalidate statements in my "Canadian Campaign." I now notice it only because I am anxious to clear my narrative from the charge of falsehood before the liberal and enlightened part of the American nation, as well as before Englishmen.

This is not the place for a detailed comparison of the text of "A Canadian Campaign" with the notes in Tecumseh and especially with the whole of War of 1812 (1842). For a few hints of what one will find, reference may be made to pages in the Casselman edition of the War of 1812, because the original edition is a rare book. The New Monthly Magazine has an initial paragraph not in Casselman:

This narrative is intended rather as a private memoir than a relation of the incidents of the war, and professes simply to detail the operations of the right division of the British army in Upper Canada, to which I was myself attached, together with its capture and imprisonment, (in October 1813,) without following in progression the movements of the various other corps. I have not gone, therefore, into a diffuse statement of every date and circumstance, which would necessarily encroach too much on the plan I have laid down, as calculated to afford a source of interest to the general reader, rather than a fund from whence minute information for a diffusive work may be obtained.

Then follows the line with which War of 1812 opens, "Much has been said in respect to the American Indians," except that in War of 1812 the last phrase is "to the Redmen of the forest." Pages of quotation from newspapers (see Casselman, pages 8-12) or from official proclamations and letters (*ibid.*, pages 14-19) are not in The New Monthly Magazine version. These documents are later inserts representing fruits of historical research conducted by Richardson in defence of his controversial statements. They also show a change of purpose, since War of 1812 became, as the "Dedication" asserts "the first of an important series" designed to run into three volumes and tell the whole story of that war, not only that of the "Right Division." This venture was to have official approval and support from the "United Legislature of Canada."

Because Richardson used his first military experiences for so many different kinds of writing, thorough comparison of various texts and versions can yield much new knowledge about his opinions and habits of work. Tecumseh, The Canadian Brothers and even Wacousta are related to the "Canadian Campaign" as fiction is related to fact. Bibliography, as it often does, merges here into literary criticism.

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