

Preface

When thinking of Canada, images of a sublime nature, large forests as well as beautiful lakes and mountains probably come up your mind. Those images are, besides the country's great educational and health facilities as well as job offerings, the reason why people decide to immigrate to Canada nowadays. But what if the circumstances do not give you a choice and you rather *have to* leave your country? Not in the 21st century, where infrastructures and mobility offerings are at the peak of development, but during the 19th century, where most of the Canadian land was still undiscovered and uncleared, bearing largely uncivilised areas.

During the early 19th century, it was very common for Europeans and especially British people to leave their busy and overcrowded home and emigrate to colonised countries such as Canada or South Africa. Reason for that was the bad economic situation due to the Great Depression in 1930. Values of the British exports halved, taxes raised and the unemployment rate more than doubled to 20 percent, leading to high poverty. Prices dropped and farmers, for example, were not able to maintain their farms and went bankrupt. Many British citizens therefore were alarmed and took steps to escape the risk of poverty and dependence, seeking a secure and independent life by purchasing a piece of land in the wide outback of Canada, for instance. It led to a big increase of the Canadian population. About 30,000 new emigrants, mainly from England, Ireland and Scotland, landed in Quebec each year. They took a path to a completely unknown, widely undiscovered and uncivilised land, often purchasing a piece of land while bearing hope of an economically successful and independent future.

One of them was Susanna Moodie (born Strickland), who recorded her personal settler experience in this autobiographical novel, a collection of all her sketches that she started writing right after she left Britain as the beginning of her emigration experience.

Susanna Moodie was born on December 6th, 1803 in Bungay, Suffolk, England as the youngest daughter of Elizabeth Homer and Thomas Strick-

land. While growing up in the rural and seaside region of Suffolk, Susanna's great fascination for nature was manifested and influenced her literary works, which can be observed in *Canada From the Wild Side*, as well. Thomas and his wife were very eager to teach their elder children history, literature, languages and mathematics, as well as practical skills, while the elder children had the responsibility to teach those subjects their younger siblings in return. Education and learning were therefore seen as highly important, which might also explain why most of the Strickland children were later involved in literary careers. Susanna and her sister Catherine began their literary careers shortly after the death of their father, who did not leave much money. Therefore, the Strickland sisters were urged to produce and sell literature for the market, as for example children's books, poems and stories for gift books¹ or magazines for women, such as *The Lady's Magazine*. During that time, Susanna also published her first biographical sketch of the Suffolk life in *La Belle Assemblée* (1827–1828), inspired by Mary Russel Mitford, whom she will be good friends with later.

Living in London, her friendship with Thomas Pringle, a Scottish writer, poet and editor of the annual *Friendship's offering*, engaged her in a circle of literary and artistic persons, which made her to contribute to annuals frequently and to pursue a literary career. By 1831 she published her first collection of poems, called *Enthusiasm; and other poems*. Most of her works deal with Christian values and the love of God as well as freedom and transience. Thomas Pringle was the secretary to the so-called Anti-Slavery Society and a convinced abolitionist, who lived in South Africa for several years. Through their friendship, Susanna's awareness of the issue was increased, and she was able to meet former slaves, motivating her to give them a voice through her literature. She therefore wrote two anti-slavery novels: *The history of Mary Prince, a West Indian slave...* (1831) and *Negro slavery described by a negro: being the narrative of Ashton Warner...* (1831), as well as several poems concerning this particular topic. Considering the widely spread prejudices towards black people during the 19th century, her critical social views and sense for injustice are even more remarkable. In this book you will find some passages that deal with those prejudices and that reflect the problematic worldview of many people during that time, from

1 In the 19th century gift books and annuals were often lavishly decorated books that contained essays, short stories and poems, that were intended to be gifted and therefore very popular in holiday seasons.

which Susanna distances herself. Nevertheless, her distancing seems quite careful and might not directly reveal her position towards those statements. Therefore we as publishers see the responsibility to point out her stance and that we are aware of it.

Her open-minded and kind character gets further revealed in her encounters with Native Americans, which are always very friendly and even though stuck in their cultural differences very unbiased and based on mutual interest. What is not mentioned in the book, which is probably because Susanna and many other settlers were not even aware of those issues, are the affected indigenous tribes by the colonisation and settlement. Even though it is a common belief that the Canadian colonisation would have been less violent than the American, European settlers had to pursue laws as a response to the high population growth and indigenous people were nevertheless displaced, for example by treaties, some willingly, some forced, to receive their land, displacing them in reserves, forcing them out of their territories and creating land for the new settlers. Since the book only reviews the perspective of the European settler it was also important for us as publishers not to whitewash the colonisation process in order to remember those, who had to face severe consequences of it. Nevertheless, it is beautiful to see how peaceful and kind the encounters between Susanna and Native Americans are in this book.

The friendship between Susanna and Pringle did not only bring her closer to the abolitionist movement and rose awareness for racial problems, but also introduced her to the mutual friend John Wedderburn Dunbar Moodie, whom she met at Pringle's house. They fell in love and even though their engagement had to pause for some time, since Susanna was primarily focused on her literary career, they married on April 4th, 1831.

A year after their marriage, they realised the bad economic situation of England and decided to leave the country to establish security and independence outside of the overpopulated England. Her two siblings, Samuel Strickland and Catherine Parr Trail², had emigrated to Canada before Susanna and her husband decided to follow their footsteps and to create a

2 Her pioneer experience is recounted in her best-known book *The backwoods of Canada: being letters from the wife of an emigrant officer, illustrative of the domestic economy of British America* (1836) and is very similar to Susanna's book, depicting her emigration story and personal experiences within eighteen letters to her mother. The book will be published in German by SEVERUS publisher, as well, with the German title *Ansiedlungen in den Urwäldern*.

new home in the New World, as well. Decisive for that were especially Samuel's letters that were filled with rather positive descriptions of the country and its scenery. Even though her husband preferred South Africa, since he had lived there for about ten years before he returned to England, he agreed to move to Canada for the love of his wife. With a queasy feeling Susanna left her home, knowing that it was necessary to find a new mainstay. It is a feeling that she and her husband might have never gotten completely rid of.

In her book, Susanna depicts how ambiguous the establishment of a new life can be. Starting at a farm near Cobourg, a very civilised area, and due to financial issues going further to the uncleared land in the Peterborough area, they experienced both, the populated and unpopulated areas of Canada. Most of the British immigrants settled in Upper Canada, which was not prepared for such a population increase. Therefore, settlers often had to face forests and wilderness of the uncleared land. In order to establish a life there, British settlers were often forced to give up their privileges and to adapt to the new wild environment, which is also a main topic of Susanna's book. Her autobiographical novel deals with the rather difficult experience of being a stranger in a new land, whose residents encountered them with preconceptions and judgement. But it is not only about adapting to a new country and their culture, but also about becoming familiar with a whole new environment that is packed with farm and household duties one has never done before. Her story describes her rollercoaster ride consisting of happy, harmonic moments, but also of homesickness, despair and tiredness that were especially fuelled by some disappointing encounters with certain „Yankee“³ neighbours, harsh weather conditions and diseases as cholera; nonetheless, Susanna always tries to do her best maintaining a decent life and putting some sense of humour into her stories. Although Susanna is used to the middle-class life of London, she still manages the balancing act between being a lady and a hard-working woman, not considering herself too good for rough work, always trying to adapt to her environments and growing over herself, no matter how hard it can be.

In her overall role as a loving wife, mother and mindful author, she appears to be a very harmony-seeking and gentle character. This might also be associated with her Christian faith and thankfulness to God, that she points

3 According to the Oxford English Dictionary it is "a nickname for a native or inhabitant of New England, or, more widely, of the northern States generally."

out in her sketches several times. But her faith seems to not only support her morality but also her sense of aesthetics and beauty that appears in her descriptions of the sublime and diverse Canadian nature, worshipping the beauty as godly creations.

The balance between subjectivity and objectivity, her own personal perception and the general descriptions of the settler experience, give her book a good mixture of a novel and a guidance, which also includes the negative aspects and critical views on the experience. Even though she outgrew herself by the obstacles as near-disasters, bad health and growing poverty, they increased the feeling of discomfiture, which she fought hardly but never quite succeeded. Susanna's heart never really stopped beating for England throughout the rest of her life that she spent in Canada until her death in 1885.

What served as a (critical) guidance through the settler experience after publishing it in 1852, can today be seen as a highly historical novel, whose content gives us as today's readers a first-hand insight into the settler life of the early eighteen hundreds, which otherwise would be rather hard to imagine.

"This, although a long digression, will not, I hope, be without its use; and if this book is regarded not as a work of amusement but one of practical experience, written for the benefit of others, it will not fail to convey some useful hints to those who have contemplated emigration to Canada; the best country in the world for the industrious and well principled man, who really comes out to work and to better his condition by the labour of his hands; but a gulf of ruin to the vain and idle, who only set foot upon these shores to accelerate their ruin."

Melina Temme
SEVERUS Verlag

“The poor exiles of wealthy and over-populous nations have generally been the first founders of mighty empires. Necessity and industry producing greater results than rank and affluence in the civilisation of barbarous countries.”

PAST
GAINED
PRESENT



Canada – A Contrast

In the year 1832 I landed with my husband, J. W. Dunbar Moodie, in Canada. Mr. Moodie was the youngest son of Major Moodie of Mellsetter in the Orkney Islands; he was a lieutenant in the 21st regiment of Fusileers and had been severely wounded in the night attack upon Bergen op Zoom in Holland.

Not being overgifted with the good things of this world – the younger sons of old British families seldom are – he had, after mature deliberation, determined to try his fortunes in Canada and settle upon the grant of four hundred acres of land, ceded by the Government¹ to officers upon half-pay.

Emigration, in most cases – and ours was no exception to the general rule –, is a matter of necessity, not of choice. It may, indeed, generally be regarded as an act of duty performed at the expense of personal enjoyment and at the sacrifice of all those local attachments which stamp the scenes in which our childhood grew in imperishable characters upon the heart.

Nor is it, until adversity has pressed hard upon the wounded spirit of the sons and daughters of old, but impoverished, families, that they can subdue their proud and rebellious feelings and submit to make the trial.

This was our case, and our motive for emigrating to one of the British colonies can be summed up in a few words.

The emigrant's hope of bettering his condition and securing a sufficient competence to support his family, to free himself from the slighting remarks, too often hurled at the poor gentleman by the practical people of the world, which is always galling to a proud man, but doubly so, when he knows that the want of wealth constitutes the sole difference between him and the more favoured offspring of the same parent stock.

In 1830 the tide of emigration flowed westward, and Canada became the great landmark for the rich in hope and poor in purse. Public newspapers

1 Publisher's annotation: Throughout the text, different spellings of this word can be found. According to the Cambridge Dictionary it is spelled with an upper-case letter when referring to His/Her Majesty's Government of the United Kingdom since Canada at that time was a British colony. The spelling with a lower-case letter then refers to any other government depending on the context.

and private letters teemed with the almost fabulous advantages to be derived from a settlement in this highly favoured region. Men who had been doubtful of supporting their families in comfort at home thought that they had only to land in Canada to realise a fortune. The infection became general. Thousands and tens of thousands from the middle ranks of British society, for the space of three or four years, landed upon these shores. A large majority of these emigrants were officers of the army and navy, with their families; a class perfectly unfitted, by their previous habits and standing in society, for contending with the stern realities of emigrant life in the backwoods. A class formed mainly from the younger scions of great families, naturally proud and not only accustomed to command but to receive implicit obedience from the people under them, are not men adapted to the hard toil of the woodman's life. Nor will such persons submit cheerfully to the saucy familiarity of servants, who, republicans at heart, think themselves quite as good as their employers.

Too many of these brave and honest men took up their grants of wild land in remote and unfavourable localities, far from churches, schools and markets, and fell an easy prey to the land speculators, that swarmed in every rising village on the borders of civilisation.

It was to warn such settlers as these last mentioned, not to take up grants and pitch their tents in the wilderness, and by so doing, reduce themselves and their families to hopeless poverty, that my work "*Roughing it in the Bush*" was written.

I gave the experience of the first seven years we passed in the woods, attempting to clear a bush farm, as a warning to others, and the number of persons who have since told me that my book "told the history" of their own life in the woods ought to be the best proof to every candid mind that I spoke the truth. It is not by such feeble instruments as the above that providence works, when it seeks to reclaim the waste places of the earth and make them subservient to the wants and happiness of its creatures. The Great Father of the souls and bodies of men knows the arm which wholesome labour from infancy has made strong, the nerves that have become iron by patient endurance, and he chooses such to send forth into the forest to hew out the rough paths for the advance of civilisation.

These men become wealthy and prosperous and are the bones and sinews of a great and rising country. Their labour is wealth, not exhaustion; it produces content, not home sickness and despair.

What the backwoods of Canada are to the industrious and ever-to-be-honoured sons of honest poverty, and what they are to the refined and polished gentleman, these sketches have endeavoured to show.

The poor man is in his native element; the poor gentleman totally unfitted, by his previous habits and education, to be a hewer of the forest and a tiller of the soil. What money he brought out with him is lavishly expended during the first two years, in paying for labour to clear and fence lands, which, from his ignorance of agricultural pursuits, will never make him the least profitable return, and barely find coarse food for his family. Of clothing we say nothing. Bare feet and rags are too common in the bush.

Now, had the same means and the same labour been employed in the cultivation of a leased farm or one purchased for a few hundred dollars, near a village, how different would have been the results, not only to the settler, but it would have added greatly to the wealth and social improvement of the country.

I am well aware that a great and, I must think, a most unjust prejudice has been felt against my book in Canada, because I dared to give my opinion freely on a subject which had engrossed a great deal of my attention; nor do I believe that the account of our failure in the bush ever deterred a single emigrant from coming to the country, as the only circulation it ever had in the colony was chiefly through the volumes that often formed a portion of their baggage. The many, who have condemned the work without reading it, will be surprised to find that not one word has been said to prejudice intending emigrants from making Canada their home. Unless, indeed, they ascribe the regret expressed at having to leave my native land, so natural in the painful homesickness which, for several months, preys upon the health and spirits of the dejected exile, to a deep-rooted dislike to the country.

So far from this being the case, my love for the country has steadily increased, from year to year, and my attachment to Canada is now so strong, that I cannot imagine any inducement, short of absolute necessity, which could induce me to leave the colony, where, as a wife and mother, some of the happiest years of my life have been spent.

Contrasting the first years of my life in the bush, with Canada as she now is, my mind is filled with wonder and gratitude at the rapid strides she has made towards the fulfilment of a great and glorious destiny.

What important events have been brought to pass within the narrow circle of less than forty years! What a difference since *now* and *then*. The

country is the same only in name. Its aspect is wholly changed. The rough has become smooth, the crooked has been made straight, the forests have been converted into fruitful fields, the rude log cabin of the woodsman has been replaced by the handsome, well appointed homestead and large populous cities have pushed the small clapboarded village into the shade.

The solitary stroke of the axe, that once broke the uniform silence of the vast woods, is only heard in remote districts and is superseded by the thundering tread of the iron horse and the ceaseless panting of the steam engine in our sawmills and factories.

Canada is no longer a child, sleeping in the arms of nature, dependent for her very existence on the fostering care of her illustrious mother. She has outstepped infancy and is in the full enjoyment of a strong and vigorous youth. What may not we hope for her maturity ere another forty summers have glided down the stream of time. Already she holds in her hand the crown of one of the mightiest empires that the world has seen, or is yet to see.

Look at her vast resources – her fine healthy climate – her fruitful soil – the inexhaustible wealth of her pine forests – the untold treasures hidden in her unexplored mines. What other country possesses such an internal navigation for transporting its products from distant Manitoba to the sea, and from thence to every port in the world!

If an excellent Government, defended by wise laws, a loyal people and a free Church can make people happy and proud of their country, surely, we have every reason to rejoice in our new Dominion.

When we first came to the country it was a mere struggle for bread to the many, while all the offices of emolument and power were held by a favoured few. The country was rent to pieces by political factions, and a fierce hostility existed between the native-born Canadians – the first pioneers of the forest – and the British emigrants, who looked upon each other as mutual enemies who were seeking to appropriate the larger share of the new country.

Those who had settled down in the woods were happily unconscious that these quarrels threatened to destroy the peace of the colony.

The insurrection of 1837 came upon them like a thunder clap; they could hardly believe such an incredible tale. Intensely loyal, the emigrant officers rose to a man to defend the British flag and chastise the rebels and their rash leader.