# Sir Daniel Wilson: Canada's First Anthropologist

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RÉSUMÉ

L'article présente d'abord Sir Daniel Wilson, premier anthropologiste canadien. Suit un essai de classification et d'évaluation de ses écrits: quatre volumes et environ 45 articles portant sur l'archéologie, l'ethnologie et l'anthropologie physique.

Sir Daniel Wilson was a many-sided individual who developed new interests throughout his life, without ever entirely losing sight of older ones. In Canada he is honoured as a Scotsman who came to Toronto in 1853 to take the chair of History and English Literature at University College and remained to become the second president of the college and the first president of the reorganized University of Toronto.[1] Wilson wrote at least three books dealing with British history — two of them early and the third based upon early work.[2] In the field of English literature he produced *Chatterton* (1869), a biographical study, and *Caliban* (1873), dealing with the creative imagination of Shakespeare as applied to supernatural beings. Both of them, if the charge cards in various libraries are any indication, are not totally ignored today. In addition he published a volume of poems entitled *Spring Wild Flowers* (1875) and a 254 page memoir of William Nelson, the head of the Edinburgh publishing house (1889). Although an eminent scholar, both Wilson and his con-

[1] Our biographical data come from two articles and from Daniel Wilson's own writings. The more important article is in "Review of Historical Publications Relating to Canada", 5:199-217, and includes an almost complete bibliography of Wilson's works. The second article is in "Dictionary of National Biography, vol. 62.

[2] Oliver Cromwell and the Protectorate (1848); Memorials of Edinburgh in the Olden Time (1848); Reminiscences of Old Edinburgh (1878).

temporaries regarded his primary life's work as a battle "for the maintenance of a national system of university education in opposition to sectarian or denominational colleges" (Harris, 1900:62, 90-91). Largely through his efforts the foundations were laid for the University of Toronto's future greatness. Both in his lifetime and today Wilson's achievements as an administrator and teacher are recognized and respected.

In this paper we aim to concentrate on yet another aspect of Sir Daniel Wilson — his anthropology. In addition to his "professional" writing in the fields of history and English literature, Wilson managed to publish no less than four books and 45 articles devoted to archaeology, ethnology, and physical anthropology. Half way through his life he was recognized as one of the leading prehistorians in Europe, and afterwards anthropology remained "his favourite study" as his daughter, Sybil Wilson, described it in her introduction to his last and posthumously published book (Wilson, 1892:vi).

Yet, if specific aspects of Wilson's work as an anthropologist are remembered by a few specialists, his work as a whole remains virtually unknown — and perhaps nowhere more than in Canada itself. I remember hearing Wilson's name mentioned only twice in connection with anthropology during the years I was an undergraduate at Toronto. The first was a brief aside praising his work in a lecture given by Edmund Carpenter; the second was a question asked by a don, in the course of an informal discussion in the Sir Daniel Wilson Residence, regarding the sort of work he did. I recall that after a brief silence someone suggested that Wilson's work in anthropology was generally regarded as that of a dilettante. This impression was already part of the climate of opinion concerning Wilson that existed in Toronto at the time of his death, and was one even shared by some of his friends. Since then, unfortunately, there have been no attempts to appraise the value of his work, an undertaking that would at least have some interest in terms of the history of anthropology. I will concentrate primarily upon Wilson's writings, since I have had neither the space nor the materials at hand to undertake an extensive biographical study of the man himself. After describing his writings in roughly chronological order, I will attempt to evaluate them, in terms of their historical setting and lasting value.

Daniel Wilson was born in 1816 in Edinburgh, where he was educated at the old High School and the university. In 1837 he went south to try his fortune working in London as a writer and an engraver — the two vocations being an early indication of his versatility. In 1842 he returned to Edinburgh where he continued to write with some success, although in later years he was greatly distressed by the unauthorized identification of some of his early work. At the same time he pursued a hobby that was to lead to his publication of *Memorials of Edinburgh in the Olden Time* in 1848, and eventually to his more important work on Scottish archaeology. *Memorials of Edinburgh* began, in his own words, "not with the pen, but the pencil" (Wilson, 1872:1, ix). For some years many of the quaint and the historic buildings of old Edinburgh had been disappearing, as growing prosperity led to a desire for improved sanitation and "urban renewal". During these years Wilson explored Edinburgh making pencil drawings of its old buildings. When such buildings were torn down he also tried to record whatever of note might be found in the course of demolition. Wilson's most interesting find was the rediscovery of St. Margaret's Chapel which was built by the daughter of Edward the Confessor and today is a prized attraction of Edinburgh Castle. For many years it had stood unrecognized, and at the time of Wilson's investigations it was being used as a store room for gunpowder (*Ibid,* 1872:2, 128; 1863:2, 405). In 1848 Wilson published a large number of his best sketches accompanied by a rambling account of interesting and picturesque events in the history of the city. The text forms a fitting accompaniment to the pictures, which are invariably of high quality both technically and artistically, and today are an important source of information concerning old Edinburgh. Wilson retained his interest in Scottish history throughout his life, and after coming to Canada was delighted to find and publish for the first time an accurate description of the crozier of St. Fillan, an ancient Scottish relic which had been brought to this country in 1818. When Wilson found it, it was in the possession of a farmer, Alexander Dewar, whose forefathers had been given charge of it at Bannockburn.[3]

[3] The crozier, described as "a priceless relic of the Celtic Church" was returned to Scotland by the Dewar family in 1877 and is now in the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, Edinburgh, (Wilson, 1863, vol. 2, p. 477).

*Memorials of Edinburgh* was reprinted in 1872, and Wilson published a revised edition in 1891. In addition he wrote a shorter and more popular account of the Edinburgh of his childhood and the past, which was published in 1878 (see 2). In this latter book Wilson tells how his interest in the civic history of Edinburgh led to his interest in prehistory. The exploration of Edinburgh revealed not only medieval buildings but much earlier material. Wilson had been interested in comparative anatomy for some time and in 1850 read a paper to the British Association entitled "Inquiry into the evidence of the existence of primitive races in Scotland prior to the Celts".[4] Concerning this preliminary study of skeletal differences he later noted: "It is amusing now to recall the undisguised incredulity with which a theory was then received which has since met with universal acceptance as a mere truism necessarily involved in greatly more comprehensive assumptions" (Wilson, 1878:2, 140-141).

Meanwhile, Wilson was pressing ahead with a much more ambitious scheme. In 1846 he was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland and in 1847 he became an honorary secretary of the association. In this capacity he began to visit sites and correspond with interested people throughout Scotland in order to prepare the first "consistent and comprehensive" study of Scottish archaeological remains. The result was his publication of the *Archaeology and Prehistoric Annals of Scotland* in 1851, eight years before Darwin's *Origin of Species* and before Boucher de Perth's paleolithic finds were accepted in Britain.

It is important to remember that at this time serious prehistoric archaeology scarcely existed except in Scandinavia (Daniel, 1950:54). It is therefore significant that in this book Wilson squarely broke with the traditions of British antiquarianism, which was dominated by an intense concern with classical remains and a sterile desire to identify all other archaeological remains as the relics of historically known peoples. By way of contrast with his own approach, he described previous work in Britain as follows:

> A very simple theory sufficed until very recently, for the classification of all... British antiquities. Whatever was rude and barbarous...

[4] Brit. Assoc. Rep. 1850: pt. 2, 142-146.

> was native and Druidical; whatever manifested skill, invention, or any progress in the arts was Phoenician, Roman, or Danish! Britain was tacitly assumed to have been sunk in the lowest state of barbarism, until humanized by the bloody missionaries of Roman civilization. But such ignorant assumption will no longer suffice (Wilson, 1851: 1, 353).

And more pointedly:

> The name of Dane has in fact for centuries been one of those convenient words which so often take the place of ideas, and save the trouble and inconvenience of reasoning (Ibid.:1, 353).

Wilson correctly saw the work of Christian Thomsen as "the foundation of archaeology as a science" (*ibid:*1, chap. 1), and an escape from the impasse in which the "fog and flood" archaeology of the previous century had resulted.[5] Following Thomsen's general scheme, he divided his book into four sections devoted to the ages of Stone (Primeval), Bronze (Archaic), and Iron, and to the Christian period. Within each section individual chapters were given over to various classes of data — tombs, fortifications, dwellings, weapons, vessels, ornaments, art, religion, and domestic life. In the latter part of the book historical data supplemented the record of material culture. While keenly aware of the difficulties which a lack of historical data imposed, Wilson nevertheless felt that the study of archaeological assemblages offered the hope of being able to learn at least something about the more perishable aspects of culture.

> We need not despair of learning somewhat of the early Caledonian, of his habits, his thoughts, and even of his faith, when we are able to refer to so many specimens of his handiwork and inventive design; and retain some relics of his ruined temples, and abundant illustrations of his sepulchral rites (Wilson, 1863:1, 486).

While Wilson postulated an "eastern cradle of our race" (*ibid:*introduction, and p. 300) (in his early works this was probably as much a biblical as an historical concept) and noted that there was trade between Britain and the Mediterranean in early times, he was strongly opposed to attributing all cultural development in the north to influences from the south. He even suggested that bronze might have been invented in Britain where copper and tin occur together (*ibid:*1, 310). While later research makes

[5] For an explanation of this term see Daniel, GLYN, The Idea of Prehistory, pp. 13-37.

this last suggestion highly unlikely, it is worth remembering that the smelting of iron was probably an invention of Anatolia rather than of the Middle East.

While using the three-age scheme, Wilson carefully noted that there were considerable differences in detail when the material from Scandinavia was compared with objects from the corresponding period in Scotland. He concluded that the development of culture in each area was sufficiently different to render individual sequences worthy of study in their own right. Although he did not attempt to define culture units, as opposed to stages, within Scotland during the prehistoric periods, he was able to do this with the material culture of the Danes and the Anglo-Saxons.

Scotland, unlike France, had been covered by glaciers and its earliest artifacts are of Mesolithic (Azilian) age.[6] Hence Wilson's material offered no prospect of dramatic discoveries about man's earliest past such as characterized the work of Boucher de Perthes, and he was unable to catch sight of the great antiquity of man, although he went further in doing so than did most British scholars of the day. He noted that in Scotland prehistoric man and some kinds of prehistoric animals had existed together, and that there had been notable changes in the shoreline since that time. But as yet, this deeply religious scientist was unwilling to contradict publicly the Bible as the "most commonly received chronology" (Wilson, 1863:1, 24, 227) — a point we shall return to later. Even as late as 1863 he apparently did not fully appreciate the difference in age between his own Mesolithic finds in Scotland and the Brixham cave discoveries in England.[7]

In *The Prehistoric Annals of Scotland* Wilson also showed something of the practical turn of mind that he was to turn to such good account in Canada. The proposals which he makes suggest some of the lines along which his career as a prehistorian might have developed had he remained in Scotland. For example, Wilson noted that the comparison of pottery might form the basis of a more sensitive chronology than any then known, but that at

[6] A Short Guide to Scottish Antiquities, (3rd ed.), Edinburgh, National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, 1962:6.

[7] Note, however, that by this time Wilson had not been in Britain for almost a decade (Wilson, 1863: vol. 1, p. 122).

the time there was not enough material available to make such a study possible. He requested readers to save the pottery which they dug up and not to throw it away as was the usual practice among antiquarians of the time. He also urged the systematic display of artifacts at the British Museum, organized on the basis of Thomsen's system, and advocated the repeal of the Treasure Trove law in Scotland, which he demonstrated had resulted in the destruction of large numbers of artifacts made of precious materials. Data which he had collected revealed that less than ten of some 200 gold relics known to have been found in Scotland could be located at the time of his study. He also solicited a letter from Jens Worsaae describing the benefits which had resulted from the repeal of a similar law in Denmark.

Although in only a few years the novelty of Wilson's research was to be pushed into the background by the upheaval resulting from the theory of biological evolution and the discovery of the paleolithic, his work was important in helping to establish prehistory as a science in Britain and in replacing the antiquarian traditions of the past. Although proper techniques of archaeology remained to be developed by General Pitt-Rivers and Flinders Petrie, Daniel Wilson was one of the foremost European archaeologists of his time, and was a man well qualified to take part in the exciting events that were to transform European archaeology in the years to come.

Very soon, however, Wilson made a decision which was to alter the course of his life. In 1848 he had been an unsuccessful applicant for the position of librarian for the Faculty of Advocates in Edinburgh. In 1853 he was offered, and accepted, the chair of History and English Literature at University College, Toronto.

Although the rest of Wilson's life was devoted increasingly to administration and teaching, the move to Canada did not end his interest in archaeology. Nevertheless, it did change the direction of that interest. Wilson was quick to appreciate that in the wilderness of Canada there was a situation of great value to a prehistorian. For him, the pioneers who were pushing back the forest constituted a society similar in many ways to that of northern Europe in ancient times. He recalled that in the reign of David I (A.D. 1124-1153) and even later, Scotland had

been a land where beavers were trapped and their skins exported, even as they were in Canada in his own day (D. Wilson, 1878:2, 152). On the other hand, the Indians were a living example of what European societies must have been like still earlier. Contact with these Indians familiarized Wilson "with a condition of social life realizing in the living present nearly all (he) had conceived of in studying the chroniclings of Britain's prehistoric centuries" (Wilson, 1863:1, xv). This aided him in the preparation of the second edition of the *Prehistoric Annals of Scotland* (1863). Moreover, in the general opening up of the New World, Wilson saw an unparalleled opportunity to study both the interaction of the peoples of Europe and Africa with new environments, and the processes by which different cultures came into contact in the widest variety of different circumstances. He foresaw that a study of contemporary changes in the New World would result in a more general understanding of the nature of culture contact, race mixing, and adaptation to environment and that this in turn would aid scholars to understand the culture history of the Old World.

> It has been my fortune to become a settler... in the midst of scenes where the primeval forests and their savage inhabitants are in process of displacement by the arts and races of civilised Europe. (This is one of) its great transitional eras: with its native tribes and its European and African colonists in various stages of (cultural and physical) mutation, consequent on migration, intermixture or collision. Man is seen (on the grandest scale) subject to influences similar to those which have affected him in all great migrations and collisions of diverse races. Some difficult problems of ethnology have (hereby) been simplified in my own mind; and opinions relative to Europe's prehistoric races, based on inference and induction have received striking confirmation (D. Wilson, 1876:1, 4-5).

Throughout his life Wilson eschewed extreme theories of migration and diffusion, and like his contemporary, Adolf Bastian, although in a less extreme form, he tended to attribute widely separated similarities to the operation of common human abilities under similar conditions. He became convinced for a number of sound, though general, reasons, that the culture histories of the Eastern and Western Hemispheres were for all intents and purposes separate. His first reason was the great variety of Indian languages and their lack of any obvious connection with those of the Old World. Secondly, despite the general racial similarities

between Indians and Mongols, the amount of physical variation among New World peoples also seemed to suggest a rather long separation. Finally, neither the archaeological record nor the available ethnology suggested close connections (*ibid,* 1876:1; 12, 13). Most alleged similarities seemed to Wilson more likely to have resulted from parallel development. Significantly, Wilson never put much trust in the presumed geological proofs of the antiquity of man in America that were being put forth in the second half of the nineteenth century in an effort to emulate the discoveries being made in the Pleistocene deposits of the Old World (*ibid,* 1876:1; 47-63). Wilson noted correctly that many of these finds had proved false and that most of the rest were very doubtful. As a result of these observations, Wilson was able to conclude that the study of New World prehistory gave "promise of disclosures replete with interest in their bearings on the secrets of the elder world" (*ibid,* 1876:1, 16). With the New World as an example of independent culture development, it would be possible to detect what was inherent in the course of such development and what was unique. Thus Wilson came to feel that a study of his adopted land was of significance for his first field of interest.

Soon Wilson was devoting much of his spare time to the history and ethnography of the New World. In the summer vacation of 1855 he made the first of several difficult trips as far as Fond du Lac on the shores of Lake Superior, where he examined the Indian copper mines. He reported his findings concerning their mode of operation and the copper artifacts in the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* and in volume one of the new series of the *Canadian Journal.*[8] Wilson realized the antiquity of the use of native copper and noted that the presence of pure copper in a natural state had allowed its use by simple hunters and gatherers without smelting — a situation that was wholly unparalleled in Europe. The culture history of the New World was thus not only independent of the Old, but in some ways not even roughly parallel. Lewis Henry Morgan was later to make the same point when he indicated that the lack

[8] For the reference to these articles see WRONG and LANGTON, op. cit., p. 212.

of domesticable animals in the New World altered the later stages of cultural development for the two hemispheres (Morgan, 1877). It is to Wilson's credit that he, a European, should have made the same observation so much earlier. On the other hand, Wilson was properly skeptical of contemporary speculations about a "lost Indian secret" for hardening and tempering copper, and he had Henry Croft of the University of Toronto analyse a number of native copper implements which were found near Brockville, Ontario. His tests, which were some of the earliest made on native copper tools from the New World, found no signs of artificial hardening, although it should be noted that this myth has persisted to the present (Griffin, 1961:x, 118-123). A fondness for laboratory work was characteristic of Wilson. Already in 1850 he and his brother, George Wilson, had analysed the metal in some bronze axes from Peru and prehistoric Europe.

In 1862 Wilson published *Prehistoric Man,* which appeared in a second edition in 1865 and was revised and enlarged in 1876. As its subtitle explained, the book was intended as an introductory study of the origin of civilization in the Old and New World and it was in fact one of the first attempts to synthesize the culture history of the New World. As such it was a worthy successor to Scotland's first important contribution to the study of the native cultures of the New World, William Robertson's *The History of America,* published almost a century earlier (Hoebel, 1960:x, 648-655). Well aware of the meagreness of his data Wilson commented "we must be content to limit speculation to the confines of existing evidence and aim at clearly discriminating between fact and fancy" (Wilson, 1865, 2nd ed.: 255).

Wilson believed, unlike many of his contemporaries but as most anthropologists do today, that primitive man has the same intellectual capacities as civilized peoples, and he refused to consider the state of a culture's development to be an indication of the intellectual ability of its members. To Wilson the savage appeared unintellectual only because much of his time was spent trying to remain alive. He noted, rather quaintly, that the wise man Job must have lived a life little better than that of most Indians (Wilson, 1876:1, 36). Man's great distinguishing characteristic was his ability to accumulate knowledge. Man alone has

an "inner world of thought by means of which he is capable of searching into the past; anticipating the future" (Wilson, 1865: 121). Although Wilson pointed out that his knowledge of recent discoveries in Europe was limited to articles which were generally available, he was by this time aware of some of the paleolithic finds. While he believed in the generally progressive nature of cultural evolution and saw man's golden age to be in the future, not in the past, he did not accept the idea of either unilineal or unidirectional evolution. He objected especially to the uncritical use of principles of biological evolution in trying to understand cultural development, holding that the latter was best conceived of as a process of learning (Wilson, 1876: 1, 36). He believed it possible for a society to pass from a more advanced to a more primitive state and indeed held pioneer life in America to be one (albeit probably temporary) instance of such regression.

Wilson, who was familiar with many of the available accounts of the Spanish conquest of Mexico and Peru, perceived that the cultures of the New World ranged from simple to complex. Although much of *Prehistoric Man* dealt with eastern North America and in particular with a classification of "Mound Builder" remains in this area, he attempted to deal with the full range of this variation. Despite his limited data, Wilson's judgment concerning the degree of culture attained by the most complex societies of the New World is strikingly modern and shows the advantages which he derived from his familiarity with Old World material. Wilson felt, as Lewis Henry Morgan did later, that Prescott and others like him had exaggerated the degree of civilization in Mexico. Indeed he referred to Prescott's book, certainly too harshly, as "an historical romance". According to Wilson his picture of Peru and Mexico had been distorted by the Spanish adaptation of native history and tradition to European conceptions, a tendency which Prescott furthered by identifying Indian institutions with those of Europe (*ibid,* 1876:1, 242). But he certainly did not agree with Morgan that the Aztecs and the Iroquois Indians of New York State were comparable, and he later openly criticized Morgan for exaggerating the degree of social and political development among the Five Nations (Wilson, 1876:1, 263-264, and 1892:174-175). Wilson maintained that the Inca and Aztec civilizations, which he saw as developing more

or less independently of one another, were more directly analogous with the early civilizations of the Old World such as Egypt and Babylonia. While he admitted that the art of these early civilizations could be equal to that of Greece and Rome, he characterized the societies as a whole as belonging to a "stage of advancement where art and even science contributed to sensuous craving for magnificent display but are of little avail for mental and moral progress" (Wilson, 1876:2, 10). Although Wilson, like most of his generation, had a strong faith in the improvement of man, he was not devoid of a sense of cultural relativism. Again and again he took pains to point out that the cruelty commonly attributed to the Caribs, Papuans, and Aztecs should be regarded as a sign of "primitive vigour". Similar behaviour he pointed out had characterized the Vikings and Hungarians in earlier times, and all too often the people who despise modern primitive tribes for their cruelty, admire much the same kind of behaviour in their own ancestors. On the other hand, an institution like the Inquisition was more reprehensible since it had been "grafted onto" an advanced society (*ibid*, 1, 247). Modern students of Andean culture history will be interested to learn that Wilson considered the numerous juxtaposed microclimates in that area to have been an important factor in the development of trade and civilization (*ibid,* 1, 343, 344). Wilson's search for parallel situations in the Old and New Worlds continually resulted in novel and interesting analogies. For example, to make the point in his discussion of the Aztec penetration of central Mexico and the destruction of Toltec civilization, he calls to mind the analagous Anglo-Saxon invasion of Roman Britain. What emerged from Wilson's investigation of New World civilizations was that, despite many important differences in the process, mankind in both hemispheres had independently tended to develop a higher civilization. Like many of his contemporaries Wilson regarded the Indians as being of east Asiatic origin, having entered the New World by way of the Bering Strait. He did not, however, rule out the possibility that some of the racial stock of the New World had reached it in early times across either the Pacific or Atlantic Oceans.

Much of volume two of *Prehistoric Man* is given over to Wilson's oldest and one of his most absorbing anthropological

interests — physical anthropology. In it is a reworking of an attack on Samuel Morton's *Crania Americana* which he had published in the *Proceedings of the American Association for the Advancement of Science* in 1857 (Wilson, 1859:2, 109-127). Morton, whom Hrdlicka was later to describe as "the father of American anthropology" (Hrdlicka, 1914:x, 508-554) had postulated one head type for all the Indians in America. In his paper Wilson produced a good deal of evidence, some of it from Ontario, to show that there was considerable variation in cranial types among the Indians of the New World.

Even more interesting were Wilson's views on race. Wilson was aware what a delicate topic this was, particularly in the United States where pseudo-scientific writers like J.C. Nott and George Gliddon were attempting scientifically to justify the institution of Negro slavery. One of Wilson's comments in a later popular publication deserves to be quoted in full since it summarizes the position which he took from the first:

> It is not easy to discriminate here between hereditary race differences and those due to particular food and habit of life. A similar difficulty has hitherto stood in the way of any definite classification of the emotional, moral, and intellectual characters of races. Some of the most confident judgments which have been delivered on this subject have been distorted by prejudice or wilful slander, as in the many lamentable cases in which slave-holders or conquerors have excused their ill-treatment of subject and invaded races on the ground of their being creatures of bestial nature in mind and morals (Wilson, 1885: no. 71, 11).

Through his personal association with the Indians of eastern Canada Wilson became convinced more than ever that the triumph of Europeans over other races was due less to "constitution" than "acquired civilization". He pointed out to his readers that while Magyars and Indians were both descended from much the same stock, the Magyars had been able to develop along with the rest of European civilization, whereas the Indian cultures had not been given such an opportunity (Wilson, 1876:2, 243).

Wilson noted that interbreeding between Indians and Europeans was very common and that in more settled areas few of the reserve Indians were pure-blooded. The frontier half-breed was often a vigorous sort and proof that racial interbreeding was not in itself harmful (*ibid*:238-298). Turning to the United

States he branded Nott's theory of the inferiority of hybrids as nonsensical and pointed out that it could be disproved merely by an examination of census data. Wilson, as a prehistorian, noted that the mingling of peoples had been the usual accompaniment of human migrations, and that the British, then at the height of their power, were a particularly mixed population. Wilson felt that prolonged government tutelage of the Indians might ultimately be harmful and looked forward to the day when the Indian and European races would mingle to form a single Canadian population. For Wilson, races were not necessarily fixed entities of great antiquity but groupings which had perished and been created in historic times as a result of mixture and segregation. Races were not only modifiable, but the cultural results of contact and blending were a positive historical force, unlike isolation, discrimination, and repression, all factors which promote "race purity".

Wilson extended the same understanding to the Negro. He pointed out to his readers that evidence of the capabilities of the Negro should not be sought solely among the Negroes in America whom the white population had excluded "from every source of intellectual or moral development" (*ibid*:325), but rather among the free Negroes of Africa. He testified that many of the latter, whom he had met in England, impressed him as being men of vigour and ability. But he further cautioned that cultural attainment was no measure of potential ability. Seemingly unprogressive races have shown considerable capacity for progress; the Arab bedouin were very primitive, yet these same people had built a great civilization after the Islamic conquests (*ibid*:1, 11, 12). Replying to the charge that the free Negroes of Haiti were incapable of self-government he pointed out that the government of France itself was not notable for its stability and that English liberty had taken many centuries to develop. He was not sparing in his advocacy of fair treatment for Negroes and branded the practice of having separate schools for Negroes in Canada and New England as a fraud. These schools were defended on the grounds that the pattern of learning among Negro children differed from that of Whites (*ibid*:2, 325).

A final section dealing with language was slimmer than the rest, but contained the interesting observations that the form of

languages was not racially determined and that New World languages were every bit as complicated as were those of the Old World. Any person was capable of learning any language and there was no evidence that grammar was not historically independent of race, as demonstrated by the variety of grammatical systems within Indo-European (Aryan). Later he observed that "to classify mankind into races on the mere evidence of languages is an intrinsically unsound procedure" (Wilson, 1885: 27).

This book, which dealt with race, language, and culture marked Daniel Wilson's coming of age as an anthropologist whose scope was at least as broad as that of Tylor or Boas. As a result of his interest in prehistory Wilson's anthropology had a decidedly historical and processual cast and in a small pamphlet entitled *Anthropology* Wilson defined the discipline as being "the natural history of mankind" (ibid, 1885:1). Nevertheless in later years Wilson applied himself to many problems that were not historical.

Some of these concerned physical anthropology. In several important papers published in the last decades of his life,[9] Wilson presented evidence to show that cranial capacity did not provide a reliable measurement of the relative ability of different races or individuals. He rejected any significance to Pierre Broca's (Broca, 1862:3, 102-106) evidence that the cranial capacity of Parisians had increased significantly since medieval times. Indeed he pointed out that the cranial capacity of Frenchmen as a whole had declined since the Upper Paleolithic. Later Gustav Retzius (Retzius, 1914: 18, 49-64) was to show that Broca's conclusions were not supported by data from Scandinavia.

A special and highly personal interest of Wilson was in right and left handedness. Wilson was himself left handed, but his training in school had given him much of the "dexterity" of a person who normally uses his right hand. Beginning in 1872 he published a series of articles in the *Canadian Journal* and the *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada* which formed the basis of a book entitled *The Right Hand: Left Handedness*

[9] The most important is "Brain-weight and Size in Relation to Relative Capacity of Races", Canadian Journal n.s. vol. 15, 1876:177-230.

(1891). The announced aim of the book was practical — to prove "the folly of persistently trying to suppress an innate faculty" (Wilson, 1891:7-8), which he then attempted to demonstrate that left handedness was. After discussing the importance of the hand in human evolution, Wilson presented historical evidence (based on tools, paintings, and handwriting) and ethnographic data to show that while the majority of the members of any human group are right handed, a minority are not. He demonstrated that there was no foundation for the claims that some living tribes were left handed; moreover there was no evidence that such groups had existed in the past. As a result, it could be concluded that right or left handedness was not merely a matter of cultural choice, although he admitted that almost every element of culture tends to reinforce the use of the right hand and to penalize those who are left handed. In a number of experiments carried out on University of Toronto students in cooperation with W.J. Louden, Wilson determined the number of students who preferred or had a tendency to prefer one hand over the other, and with tests using water of various temperatures failed to confirm a commonly held notion that the preferred hand was the more sensitive.

He also produced some genealogical evidence to suggest that left handedness was inherited, hence biological, and concluded that handedness was probably related to the dominance of one hemisphere of the brain over the other. However, he admitted that he had not been able to gather much anatomical evidence in support of his conclusion. He argued that a natural predisposition to left handedness should not be suppressed, but that supplementary training of the right hand could develop a useful ambidexterity.

Perhaps the most disturbing problem Wilson had to deal with was raised by the new theory of human evolution. The heated discussions which surrounded this problem troubled Wilson, who was both a devout Anglican and a man who had a deep respect for scientific findings. In his earliest writings he had expressed pleasure that his materials were not such as to require deciding between the biblical chronology and the new geological one. As the theory of biological evolution itself evolved, Wilson came to see that here was essentially a scientific problem

whose resolution depended upon scientific findings. In *Prehistoric Man* he observed, perhaps half-introspectively, that "our own confused minglings of religious questions with scientific investigations will seem ridiculous" (Wilson, 1876:1, 54).

Wilson was pained not so much by the idea of human descent from animal forebears as by the use that was being made of this concept by men whose plain ambition was to weaken faith in established religion. Thomas Huxley's attempt to show that men and apes were more closely related than apes and monkeys was too overtly an attempt to view man as "nothing but" an animal. In his book *Caliban,* which is primarily a study of Shakespeare's treatment of mythical creatures, Wilson expressed some of his strongest sentiments on the subject. He attempted first of all to cool the ardour of the Huxleyites by pointing out that at that time there was no fossil evidence to back up the claim of man's descent from other primates. Until such evidence was forthcoming, he argued, "all is vain" (Wilson, 1873:7). While it is now apparent that this first argument was to prove his weakest, it is doubtful that Wilson took it too seriously, for elsewhere he grandly observed that "man is the last and best of an order of animated beings whose line sweeps back into the shadows of an unmeasured past" (Wilson, 1865:126). He also accepted the theory of evolution in general, not only praising Darwin as a most competent naturalist (Wilson, 1885: 16) but also noting that the theory itself was "the key to a thousand difficulties" (Wilson, 1873:7). Rather he was opposed to the notion that man was not a creature of a very special, if not a unique, sort within the animal kingdom. For Wilson, man was set apart by his possession of tools and reason in place of instincts and by his ability "to use words in themselves unmeaning, as symbols by which to conduct ... complex intellectual processes (Wilson, 1885:5). Man was "no longer subject to (aimless) change in a changing universe"[10] and change in "mind" was more characteristic of recent human evolution than change in "body". Today it is generally recognized that while man is closely allied to the higher primates and they are all descended from a common ancestor, man's ability to symbolize and his possession

[10] Quoted from A.R. Wallace in D. WILSON, Anthropology, 1885-6.

of culture makes him unique. As anthropologists, we can both appreciate Wilson's agreeing with Wallace that all living men are intellectually highly differentiated from all other animals and also sympathize with his anger at the dogmatism of men like Huxley — anger which at one point led him to exclaim that "infallibility has deserted the chair of St. Peter and finds itself at home on a new throne" (Wilson, 1873:6).

Despite Wilson's early and intense interest in physical anthropology his later work was far from confined to this topic. In 1882 he began to write a series of articles which he finally published as a book, *The Lost Atlantis*. It was on this book that he read proof just before he died in the summer of 1892. In it he developed a number of topics first touched on in *Prehistoric Man*. The first essay, which gives the book its rather strange title, dismisses the then popular notion of the origins of New World culture on a lost continent in the Atlantic as "speculation of unregulated zeal unworthy of serious consideration" (Wilson, 1892:5). The body of the article is a restatement of his belief in the essentially indigenous nature of cultural development in the New World, a development which was little affected even by genuine contacts with the Vikings. Long before this, Wilson had systematically examined and dismissed all of the supposed proofs of Irish, or even Phoenecian contacts which such men as Ezra Stiles, the president of Yale University, had championed.

The chapter on trade and commerce discussed archaeological and ethnographic data (much of it collected personally by Wilson in Northern Ontario), concerning aboriginal trade. He noted the early development and extent of trading among even the simplest societies and recognized that as a result a division of labour beyond that of the household could evolve at an early stage in man's cultural development. Far from sharing Rousseau's view of primitive society, Wilson saw that a man who possessed superior skills and aptitudes could acquire a fair measure of power even among hunters and gatherers.

The chapter "Pre-Aryan Man" contained the key notion of American anthropology in the years following Wilson's death, namely, that the native cultures of North America were quickly changing, if not dying out, and needed to be recorded. Other

articles include studies of the aesthetic faculty in aboriginal races, the Huron-Iroquois, one on hybridity and heredity citing additional information that race mixture was not harmful and providing much information on Indian acculturation in Canada at the time, and finally an article on brain weight. While containing less original material than Wilson's earlier works, the anthology is an indication of the continuing breadth of his interests. It expresses his fundamental belief in the unity of man, in the possession by all peoples of a common humanity, and in the capacity of all peoples for attaining the highest possible state of development. His work is nowhere blemished by the tendency of so many of his contemporaries to try to explain cultural and even linguistic differences in terms of racial variation.

To judge Sir Daniel Wilson's work in proper perspective we must consider the early development of anthropology as a whole. His first major work was published in 1851, the same year as Lewis Henry Morgan's *League of the Iroquois* and almost a decade before the great year 1859 that saw the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* and the acceptance of the findings of De Perthes and Pengelly. *Prehistoric Man,* written entirely in Canada, appeared in 1862, only a year after Maine's *Ancient Law,* Bachofen's *Mutterrecht,* and Tylor's first book, *Anahuac.* The latter's *Primitive Culture* was not to appear until 1871 and Morgan's *Ancient Society* not until 1877. To appreciate fully the extent of Wilson's achievement, it must be remembered that circumstances made it impossible for him to devote full time to anthropological research. Even the *Prehistoric Annals of Scotland* was "a work of leisure time from less congenial pursuits" (Wilson, 1863:1, 29). This book was still considered as a standard work on Scottish prehistory as late as 1900 (Wrong and Langton, 1901:202). In Britain it marked an escape from a bankrupt antiquarianism and an advance in the development of scientific prehistory.

His second major work in anthropology, and the one I believe his most important, was published only nine years after he came to Canada. *Prehistoric Man* dealt with all the major fields subsequently recognized as part of anthropology — ethnology, prehistory, physical anthropology, and linguistics. Wilson showed a keen interest not only in the prehistory of the New

World but also in its living peoples and the social and cultural changes that were overtaking them. From an original interest in culture history, Wilson gradually became interested in problems of culture contact and race mixture, as indicated by the increasing number of his publications devoted to physical anthropology and ethnology.

This book's major theme — the comparison of cultural development in the Old and New Worlds-reflects the new environment in which Wilson found himself. Nevertheless it is significant that the book was written within a decade of his arrival in Canada and that, with the exception of some work in physical anthropology, it contains the germs of most of his later ideas.

Thus, while the initial result of his coming to Toronto proved beneficial to his work as an anthropologist, we are bound to inquire whether his life in "the wilderness of Canada" did not ultimately have adverse effects. According to his friend, Robert Chambers, the author of *Vestiges of Creation,* the effects were not as harmful as his friends in Britain had at first feared. Following a visit to Canada, Chambers wrote, "I had been mourning over you as banished, cut off from all congenial pursuits ... but here I find you fit into your own favourite tastes as aptly as though Graeme's slough had marked out the line of your Toronto railway!" (Wilson, 1878:2, 148-149).

But Wilson himself was aware of "the clearly marked line which the broad Atlantic has drawn between those early years and later Canadian experiences" (*ibid:*2, 41). For he was not only being increasingly drawn away from scholarly pursuits into those administrative duties which he came to regard as the great work of his life, but at the same time he was also cut off from the libraries of Europe and the mainstream of scientific development. He did, of course, manage to visit Europe a few times and tells with relish of being able to examine (in 1864) several large collections of palaeolithic implements in France and England (Wilson, 1865:27). He also frequently visited the United States and noted with pleasure the generosity with which private and public collections alike were thrown open to him. "In no country of the world are ... libraries and collections made available to the inquirer with the same unrestricted freedom as in the United

States" (*ibid:*xxiv). But his references to these American visits mention collections and sites rather than the scholars he met. Wilson's intellectual ties were with Europe and he was more often critical than approving of Americans who were interested in anthropology. He contrasted his work with that of the "native school of American ethnologists". Prescott, Schoolcraft, and Morton all came in for their share of criticism, and while he recognized Morgan as "the historian of the Iroquois" and corresponded with him, he manifested with his silence the same disregard for Morgan's theoretical works as did the contemporary ethnologists in Britain[11].

But, while he never developed close ties with his colleagues in America he was aware that his distance from Britain not only cut him off from sources of data and ideas but even made the process of publishing his books more difficult. Much of what he learned about distant peoples was gathered from travellers like Paul Kane and from missionaries, and it is significant that in 1885 it was E.B. Tylor who prepared the appendix on archaeology for his *Anthropology* — and this for a man who formerly had been one of Europe's most promising prehistorians. In Canada, Wilson found men who were interested in various facets of his work, but none who had an interest in anthropology that was at all equal to his own. In a very real sense, Wilson's anthropology was forced to develop in isolation. It is thus understandable that as his other duties increased Wilson's work failed to keep abreast of world anthropology. One instance of this is his almost total lack of interest in studies of kinship and the development of primitive social structure, which played such an important role in contemporary anthropology outside of Canada.

Because of this, it is all the more remarkable not only that his interests were as broad as they were, but also that until the end of his life he should have continued to reach conclusions which have stood the test of time. He had a rare talent for detecting fakes and rejecting fantastic notions. Among the former

[11] A description of the British treatment of Morgan is found in Frederich ENGELS' "The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State". (See K. MARX and F. ENGELS, Selected Works, Moscow; Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962:2, 182.)

were the many false claims put forward in support of Viking and Phoenician visits to the New World, fraudulent Runic translations, and claims of a Mound Builder script. The fantastic notions which he dismissed as wrong or unproved included Atlantis, Basque as an American Indian language, a living Maya civilization lost in the jungles of Central America, that environmental factors would eventually cause the Europeans in North America to resemble Indians, and the existence of lost secrets of Egyptian engineering. Wilson was also an early defender of the intelligence of Neanderthal Man.[12]

Many of his approaches were sophisticated for the time, as for example, his conclusion that the Indians had been living in the New World for a long time which he supported with independent anatomical, linguistic, and cultural data. George Peter Murdock's *Africa* (Murdock, 1959) is a recent example of this kind of an approach. In many cases Wilson reached sound conclusions using limited and often homespun data, drawn as often from his own experience or from history as from anthropological sources. His concept of races as non-permanent entities and his contention that brain size is not a good indication of intelligence are accepted today, although the latter was conclusively demonstrated only much later. Wilson saw more clearly than most anthropologists of his time the necessity of dealing with race, language, and culture separately. If few Americanists are in sympathy with his derivation of a part of the native population of the New World across the Pacific, most would agree with his contention that the New World cultures developed separately. For him cultural development was neither unilineal nor unidirectional. If his occasional doubts about man's biological evolution seem unjustified today, his insistence on the uniqueness of man is accepted by most anthropologists.

Wilson's work is not completely forgotten. Factual material which he collected concerning Scottish archaeology is occasionally quoted, and his reports on the Lake Superior copper sites have recently been described as "valuable (being) those of an individual with some training in both observation and recording of

[12] "Brain Weight and Size in Relation to Relative Capacity of Races" WILSON, 1876 (see note 9).

prehistoric data" (Griffin, 1961:71). On the first page of *The Idea of Prehistory* (Daniel, 1963:13) he is credited as the inventor of the term "prehistory" and *Prehistoric Man* was recently listed alongside such classics as Lyell's *The Geological Evidences of the Antiquity of Man* and Huxley's *Man's Place in Nature* in an editorial in *Antiquity*.[13] A.D. Lacaille has described the *Prehistoric Annals of Scotland* as "the first great classic on Scottish archaeology" (Lacaille, 1954:17) thus making good a curious oversight by V. Gordon Childe who ignored it in his two syntheses of Scottish prehistory (Childe, 1935; 1946). In part the oversight seems to have resulted from Childe's dependence on Joseph Anderson's *Scotland in Pagan Times* (1886), for while Anderson covered much the same material as Wilson, he gave credit to his predecessor only rarely. In a review article written in 1914 Ales Hrdlicka gave cursory notice to Wilson's anthropometric studies, but he does not seem to have paid any attention to his more important general ideas about physical anthropology (Hrdlicka, 1914:532-533). More recently T.D. Stewart and Marshall T. Newman have called favourable attention to Wilson's criticisms of Samuel Morton (Stewart and Newman, 1951:x, 19-36).

Nevertheless, Daniel Wilson is not remembered as an anthropologist who made a significant or lasting contribution to his discipline. If many of his opinions and conclusions are today held to be correct, it is largely if not wholly due to a large number of other men who worked independently of Wilson and may never even have heard of him. Many of his papers were published in obscure Canadian journals and his two most important books, the *Prehistoric Annals of Scotland* and *Prehistoric Man,* were syntheses rather than compilations of data. Like all such syntheses they were bound to become dated. Although Wilson realized that valuable data about the Indians were fast disappearing, he published nothing in the way of systematic ethnography. While this was a trait shared by most important ethnologists of his time,

[13] In the editorial of a recent issue of Antiquity (vol. 37, p. 87) Daniel points out that the terms *historic* and *prehistoric* had already been used in an article published in French by M. Tournal in 1833. It was Wilson's independent invention, however, that introduced the term among English speaking scholars and to archaeology as a whole.

Wilson was in a better position than most to collect and publish such data, and the following comment in a discussion of Indian religion shows that he had at least some appreciation of the problems which fieldwork involved:

> Our own experience with the American savage is that it is only by slow and careful observation of his spontaneous utterances that any conception of his real beliefs can be arrived at. By means of leading questions you may get any answers you like (Wilson, 1873:106).

Much of Wilson's data, especially concerning reservation conditions in the west, were collected by means of questionnaires but only his conclusions were published. If the answers to these questionnaires have survived, they may contain information that would still be of interest. He also enjoyed laboratory work such as anthropometry, the testing of metals, and experiments carried out with students. Nevertheless this work was too erratic to establish either trends in anthropology or a solid reputation for Wilson himself.

But the largely synthetic nature of Wilson's published works cannot explain his lack of fame. Anthropologists like Tylor are remembered while their books remain largely historical curiosities. Rather we must attribute his failure to a lack of interest in his work among his students. Wilson's early work had won him acclaim in Britain, but, however well his later books were received there, he remained a distant figure — isolated from the mainstream of British scholarly life. In Canada his interest in anthropology seems to have aroused more curiosity than genuine interest; on the other hand his skill in practical matters was greatly admired. To his contemporaries he was "essentially a man of affairs", an educational reformer and the champion of the University of Toronto in its many struggles. A short semi-official biography, written soon after he died, dismissed his academic attainments, with a pride more characteristic of the frontier than of a great university, as being "more diffuse than accurate", adding that had he remained primarily a scholar "the real man would have been submerged" (Wrong and Langton, 1901:204). To the still rough society of Upper Canada his scholarship was of little consequence. Since his anthropological interests were relegated to the status of a hobby, he had no students and left no strong impressions. Modern anthropology began in Canada not many years after his death

but it was to grow from new, largely American roots. His books have remained unread in his adopted land for over 70 years, and in the academic community the idea has persisted that since anthropology was Sir Daniel Wilson's hobby his writings must be those of a dilettante.

The last important evaluation of Wilson's anthropology (*ibid*) was made by a person untrained in anthropology and was biased by a too one-sided admiration of Wilson as a man of action. In this paper I have tried to present a short synopsis of his work and to redress the balance of that unfortunate article. Realizing the soundness and worth of his accomplishments we need not consider the time he devoted to the study of anthropology as time wasted. Rather his anthropology can be regarded as another facet of an exceedingly versatile and capable man. Although Sir Daniel Wilson's writings have little to teach us that is new today, it is not too late for the Canadian academic community to accord Wilson the honour he deserves, not only as an educator but as an insightful, if isolated and unheeded, anthropologist of our country's past.

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