



# THE ROYAL BANK OF CANADA MONTHLY LETTER

VOL. 47, No. 12

HEAD OFFICE: MONTREAL, DECEMBER 1966

## *Seeing Canada Whole*

CENTENARY YEAR offers Canadians an opportunity to take a good look at themselves and their country, to view themselves from many angles, and to see themselves as others see them.

The pictures should have some of the qualities seen in great portraits: they should be like us, not idealizations or, on the other hand, caricatures; they should show our traits and our spirit, not just the skin and clothes we wear. *Mona Lisa* is considered to be a masterpiece precisely because it expresses an inner spirit.

Our pictures of ourselves should have some depth and range to their setting. It was Leonardo da Vinci who said that perspective is the bridle and rudder of painting. It is also the only way in which we can judge what we are putting into the forefront of our lives and what we are banishing to the background.

To obtain a conspectus of Canada, we may detach ourselves from our bustling surroundings and take station out in space.

We shall see twenty million Canadians, heirs of the 3,635,000 who inhabited the country a hundred years ago. We shall see grain elevators and sky-scrapers, railways and air strips, thousands of square miles of factories and millions of homes, all signs of material advancement. We shall also see the sun shining on the domes and spires of thousands of cathedrals, churches and synagogues, evidence that moral values are treasured among us.

No one in his senses would suppose that everything in each century is better than in the one before. But viewed in a broad way, as from a great altitude, the movement is recognized to be of that sort.

Canada may not have achieved all that she might, but when we measure her progress we do not find cause for pessimism. Our past is not ignoble.

When we sketch the background with bold strokes, without going into details, we see that what looked at the time like disastrous events were merely incidents in the development of the nation, while the day-to-day efforts of the farmers and woodmen and explorers and trappers and governments built lastingly.

Canada has achieved, not completely but to a considerable extent, a way of life having certain merits that are new in human history. It has moved toward eliminating poverty; it has cut down illness to a degree that a hundred years ago would have seemed ridiculously impossible; it has spread the opportunity for education throughout the country; and it has maintained a high degree of harmony between freedom and order.

This is no unprofitable recapitulation. When we look at our past, we understand better what we are today and what we must do to make the future worthy.

Having respect for the past both because of what our forefathers did then and because of what it has enabled us to do, does not mean adopting it slavishly. We may admire and profit by it, without trying to squeeze today's circumstances into its mould.

### *The pioneers*

Though Jacques Cartier made his first voyage to this land in 1534, the event whose hundredth anniversary Canada celebrates in 1967 did not take place until 333 years later.

Those three centuries were marked by the hardship of pioneering in a country for which life in French and English villages was a poor rehearsal.

Besides the adversity of climate and the heartache of loneliness there were hostile clans, belligerent neighbours, natural barriers, and the uncertainty of life under rulers who were three thousand miles away across an ocean traversed slowly by sailing vessels; rulers who knew little and cared less about conditions in their colonies.

We may look back toward our ancestors with very deep sympathy for all their toil and tribulation, for all their unfinished business, and for all their unfulfilled desires, while at the same time giving them credit for their impregnable fortitude in laying the foundation of a road on which we may put the top-dressing. As we try to improve the heritage they left

us we may find it an occasion for meekness.

The men who followed the pioneers, to bring about Confederation, were brave men, too. They were not setting up a blast-off for a flight to some future state: they were building the state there and then. They were not philosophical theorists like Plato framing his *Republic*. They were not gifted with second sight showing them that within a hundred years the population would have increased between five- and sixfold; that oil and gas and gold and silver and copper, and iron ore, and nickel and a dozen other minerals would have entered the economy of the country; that transportation by land, water, air and pipeline would revolutionize the way of living. What they did was construct within their scope of knowledge, and with spirits that were idealistic and hands that were practical, a foundation on which two races and cultures could find firm footing as a united nation.

Perched in an office building forty or more storeys taller than our fathers ever dreamed of, we may feel that we are getting up in the world. But modernity is only the moment of time in which we happen to find ourselves.

We have reached these heights partly because of our heritage. From our pioneers we inherited the faculty of hard work, of making do while improving, of attending to business today while preparing for tomorrow. From more remote ancestors we inherited the ethical standards of the Hebraic-Christian faith; the humanistic spirit of the Greeks and of the Renaissance, emphasizing the dignity of man; the Roman and Anglo-Saxon rule of law to provide for peaceful change in society; and the democratic faith in liberty, equality and fraternity which came from the eighteenth century philosophers and the French Revolution.

### *Looking forward*

No nation has solved the problem of keeping itself static. Day by day the past is being brought up to date and pushed into the future. Monuments to statesmen and conquering heroes are among the most depressing sights in the world unless someone keeps them tidied up and in order.

Love of one's country involves knowing what the country was, what it is, and what it may become — and then working toward the resulting ideal.

Canada's past was a good past with which to face the future. No country on earth is in better position to make its future bright and significant. The great danger is that of coming to believe that present well-being justifies relaxation.

The future of Canada is largely based upon how we bestir ourselves today, but it also includes expectations and hopes which have their foundations deep in our thinking. It will, therefore, pay us to be quiet every once in a while, withdrawing from the compulsive haste of our environment, and listen to our deeper thoughts about the past and the future. Johannes

Brahms is quoted as saying: "The reason why there is so much bad music in the world is that composers are in too much of a hurry."

We cannot be John Cabots, sailing off into the blue with the King's patent to discover new lands. But we can be explorers in spirit, with democracy's mandate to make this land better by discovering new ways of living and of doing things.

The spirit of exploration, whether it be of the surface of the earth or the principles of living greatly, includes developing the capacity to face trouble with courage, disappointment with cheerfulness, and triumph with humility.

### *Patriotic democracy*

Every person who thinks beyond next pay-day knows that a nation does not live by gross national product statistics alone. It must have high employment figures and healthy production figures, but these are not enough. It needs a spirit that holds the community together by giving its citizens a sense of sharing something unique. Its people may have different personal traditions, cultures, religions, backgrounds and earning power, but they must feel themselves to be vital elements in the Canadian society.

This does not mean being patriotic in the sense of believing that your country, or province, or county is superior to all others because you were born in it or live there. True patriotism is not the emotional luxury of vanity expressing itself in flag-waving, but a sentiment that expresses itself as a share in collective life, standing staunchly for the good principles of one's country. It is morale. It is living together.

Morale is a sharing of goals in common, the enthusiastic planning of effective means of reaching those goals, and the aggressive and efficient team action that makes goals become realities.

As the wizard Merlyn said to King Arthur in T. H. White's delightful story *The Once and Future King*: "The destiny of Man is to unite, not to divide. If you keep on dividing you end up as a collection of monkeys throwing nuts at each other out of separate trees."

The patriotic democracy we seek is a spirit within individuals, not a piece of governmental machinery to hold people together. The citizen is one who enjoys the right of every man to have, in accordance with his aptitudes of character and mentality, the material and spiritual opportunities that nature and science have placed at the disposition of mankind, and who accords the same right to all other people. He believes in equality, but leaves room for excellence.

Citizenship requires a large amount of perceptive intelligence. It is not a mode of life for people who are willing to hear only what they have always heard and who cling to beliefs and myths because they have always taken them for granted.

To be an enlightened citizen is the essential idea

which gives meaning and order to the discordant and confused mass of details in national life. This requires that we continue to learn. Democracy cannot be preserved by an illiterate mob: it demands that we struggle from ignorance to wisdom.

The picture of a democracy drawn by Thucydides, one of the world's great historians, is of a state made up of people who are self-reliant individuals, who want to be let alone to do their own work, but who are also closely bound together by a great aim, the commonweal, so that every one seeks to devote himself to his country's good.

If democracy is precious — and it is immeasurably superior to all other forms of national life — it must be worked at co-operatively, or we forfeit freedom.

At the beginning of our second century of nationhood we are still learning to be Canadians. We have no time to spend over the dead ashes of past controversies.

### *About living together*

Looking at Canada's problems as from a great height does not mean looking at them as one who does not care, but rather as one who cuts through attitudes and prejudices to look at facts as they are and then joins others to fix what is faulty and expand what is good. This approach brings together people of all races and languages and religions to realize their hopes in the large context of Canada. The people who built the Tower of Babel deserve credit at least for getting together in an effort to reach heaven.

What is the story of Canada? Great nations, France and Britain, established colonies in North America. By the chance of arms, all came under the British Crown. In similar circumstances elsewhere the outcome has been painful as one culture absorbed another forcibly. Canadians found a different way of doing things. They embarked upon an experiment never conceived of elsewhere. Settlement was not reached by warriors drawn up in battle array as at Runnymede, or by terror and the guillotine as in France, but peacefully by negotiation. It was a rare feat, accomplished with great difficulty.

The nation that was established a hundred years ago is a continental one made up of separate provinces. Canada has made her two-race society work by applying a great deal of intelligence, hard work, and determination by both groups.

All history shows that dissolution of Canada into smaller states would be like the blowing out of candles in a castle, one by one, until all the castle is dark. The anthropologists have found in all the outlandish parts of the world that it is possible for human beings to live together co-operatively under an extraordinary variety of conditions.

Plato's story in one of his dialogues makes clear that prosperity results when pious, law-abiding, industrious people develop a civilization, but falls

apart in the midst of bickering.

Alexander Hamilton, urging the United States against fragmentation, said this: "I have endeavoured to place before you the importance of union to your political safety and happiness. I have unfolded to you a complication of dangers to which you would be exposed, should you permit that sacred knot which binds the people of America together, to be severed by ambition or by avarice, by jealousy or by misrepresentation."

And Napoleon Bonaparte declared: "The simple title of French citizen is worth far more than that of any of those thousand and one denominations which have sprung from the spirit of faction, and which are hurling the nation into an abyss."

### *Utopia requires purpose*

We cannot do without the idea of Utopia, even though we deny being idealists. If there were no Utopian standard for Canada it would be necessary to invent one. Some may attempt to evade responsibility for building a better Canada by saying: "What's the use? Life is but a dream". The realist will reply: "The search for Utopia may be a dream, but let us live this dream as beautifully as we can."

The world we are building, even in our most enlightened moments, is still far from the world we want: a world of good will, mutual respect, reciprocal confidence, and unselfish co-operative endeavour. What we seek will recapture the values of the Golden Age and give them a larger and more universal setting.

A nation is not, as H. G. Wells cynically suggested, a group of people gathered together under a foreign office, but a group of people with a purpose in life, a purpose in being together. Canada has passed the twenty million mark in population, but the state of the nation is not measured in figures. It is far stronger than the sum of its parts. It has a bond of confidence between its people, the quality of comradeship, and a sense of united purpose.

An observer from the *Manchester Guardian* wrote a few years ago: "Canada seems to be a nation wrapped in the darkest self-doubt." There is danger that some of our people may feel "lost", and perhaps the time has come to develop for them a dynamically constructive role in national life. It would concentrate thought and energy on making Canada a good place, and combine practical wisdom in government with the moral virtue of an enduring code of values.

"Value" is a multi-purpose word. It may mean the tendency to prefer one kind of object to another; it may mean the choice of this or that action directed by anticipation or foresight of the consequences; it may be concerned with what is ethically excellent.

When a way of life is changing very rapidly, as our own is at present, offering more and more choices for individuals, there is danger that the essential foundation principles may perish. Then it might come about

that we had no longer enough items on which all members of our society agree to provide our culture with form and substance. This is why it is urgent that we take an over-all view, plan a course, and enter enthusiastically into preserving and enlarging our already big store of things in common: our culture.

### *What culture is*

Culture is not adeptness in performing or admiring the arts. It is the superiority of our thought, our enjoyment of beauty, our efforts to raise ourselves and others to a higher level; it implies openness of mind, objectiveness of attitude, a sensitive appreciation of human values, and development of the potentialities all of us have.

To expand in this way is to grow up, to become mature. There is nothing sadder than the boy genius who does not understand why the performance that won him acclaim when he was fifteen draws only polite applause now that he is thirty.

We have, in Canada, passed from the stone age to the age of agriculture; from that to industrialization; from that to nuclear power. While we are not trying to handle the everyday work of this century using stone-age tools, we have perhaps relaxed our grip on the urbanities picked up through the years and remained static intellectually.

The imponderable things are important; things that cannot be measured with the yardstick of utility or weighed on the scales of affluence. In planning ahead for our second century as a nation are we going to judge the degree of our civilization by the number of automobiles per hundred thousand population?

A building which houses archives has printed on its façade the phrase from Shakespeare's *Tempest*: "What's past is prologue." In the play, Antonio completes his comment by saying that what is to come is in our hands.

This is a time for digesting experience, applying co-operative wisdom, and making plans. Without plans we shall be jostled and confused by events. Our social and political structures will become a medley of ill-assorted adaptations to successive needs. We shall be like the paramecium, that lowly one-celled creature which progresses through life by taking avoiding action. It bumps into an obstacle, backs up, and goes off in a new direction.

Our plans will have to be repeatedly re-edited, of course. We may have to go back to the drawing-board in the knowledge that charts drawn a hundred years ago or last year do not meet the priorities and proportions of today.

When we have plans, and when the traditions and energies of all the nations represented in our population become assembled to press toward the ideal, Canada will become a distinguished nation, and Canadians will enrich their lives.

All men have many things in common although all

men are different. We can always find an area of agreement if we determine to do so. Thereafter, co-operation requires only tolerance and trust, and these can often take the place of legislation. There is no "ism" that will substitute for patient, pedestrian, earnest work participated in by everyone pulling in the same direction.

### *Action needed*

As Canada turns into her second century of confederation she has no time for lethargy. She needs leaders in church, university, school, community and government who have a long view and who will sound a spirit-stirring note calling her people to national and individual advancement. Not so much a new ideology is needed as an earnest spirit that will sustain the people of Canada in seeking the good life.

Our Centenary resolutions must have vitality and the thrust of immediacy. This is not a time to dote or dream, but a time for obtaining knowledge and taking action; for a sense of purpose plus enthusiasm. The Greeks meant by "enthusiasm" the visit of a god: to be enthusiastic is to permit the divine fire to flow through one's veins. Then the impossible becomes possible.

How far this is from the belief of some that an easy life is desirable! Such people are looking only for what is given them. If bread is supplied regularly and plentifully three times a day, they will be content to live by bread alone, with perhaps a few circuses to liven things up. About such people the Grand Inquisitor in Dostoevsky's parable says: "In the end they will lay their freedom at our feet and say to us, 'make us your slaves, but feed us'."

Is there any danger of this in Canada? Even the Greeks and Romans descended to it. After prevailing magnificently in a barbaric world, slackness and softness came over them to their ruin. In the end, they wanted security and a comfortable life more than they wanted freedom, and they lost all.

Canada has, at this memorable period in her history, assembled the spirited and enterprising people of numerous races in an environment favourable to the development of a great society. It is a time for all Canadians to share a great moment in history.

Sir Charles G. D. Roberts wrote a poem addressed to Canada which begins: "O child of nations, giant-limbed, who stand'st among the nations now . . .". It has a vigorous line: "O Falterer, let thy past convince thy future."

In doing so we shall see the need to brush aside artificial grievances, throw away scarecrows, spurn glossy bait, and exorcize divisive influences.

With vision, and the firm and dignified determination to do the best we can, much may be accomplished in the second century of the nation — much that we should be proud to look back upon from Canada's two hundredth birthday.