



# THE ROYAL BANK OF CANADA MONTHLY LETTER

VOL. 52, NO. 6

HEAD OFFICE: MONTREAL, JUNE 1971

## *Canada's Cultural Riches*

CANADA AS A NATION is 104 years old in July 1971, but Canada as a place for European settlement dates back to 1534 when Jacques Cartier came to our coast seeking a seaway to the Orient: he found instead a country vast and beautiful beyond his dreams.

When the first settlers came to this land the French and the English were already cultured peoples, with ancient roots in literature, fine art, music, science and government. They had social structures of a high quality.

The increasing mobility of mankind has brought to our shores millions of men and women of many other cultures. Today's Canadians come from more than sixty national families. They have not congealed into a uniform mass. As John Murray Gibbon said in the introduction to his book *Canadian Mosaic*: "The Canadian people have not lived long enough together to be set in their ways . . . they have not yet been blended into one type."

When he was speaking to Ukrainian-Canadians on one occasion, the Governor General, Baron Tweedsmuir, said: "I want you to remember your old Ukrainian traditions—your beautiful handicrafts, your folksongs and dances and your folk legends. Your traditions are all valuable contributions toward our Canadian culture which must be a new thing created by the contributions of all the elements that make up the nation."

We are all kinds of people. The French-speaking Canadians have more American generations behind them than any other white stock north of the Rio Grande, save only the Spanish. Other nationalities have added their quota year after year. The vital question to be answered today is: "Can we get along together?" If we do not reply in the affirmative there is no further question to be asked, because we shall not survive.

### *Canadian culture*

So we are a mixed aggregation of people in a land of challenge and opportunity, facing together problems of wide diversity. Just as in the domain of economics every

province and district must seek to ensure that its electorate enjoys a standard of living approaching the Canadian pattern, so it must bring its culture into line with that attained in other parts of the country.

A country that has geographic, racial, political and economic differences may draw itself together and bridge its divisions through blending its many cultures. Instead of existing as isolated clusters of people in detached provinces and communities we become a group of men and women with common interests, and culture is the tie that binds.

All the traditions and wisdom of more than three-score ethnic groups are becoming common property. We put out our hands and help ourselves to what is best, and give in return what we have found to be best, and make the resulting combination available to everyone.

The Japanese Gardens at Lethbridge were built by the city as a tribute to the Japanese people of Southern Alberta. At the same time, the style and design of the gardens themselves represent a contribution to Canada from the ancient cultural heritage of Japan.

Canada has been engaged in one of the world's most successful experiments in cultural blending. Our purpose is to provide a society in which the people, by free consent, dwell together in unity. This means, as Arnold J. Toynbee wrote in *A Study of History*: "the far-reaching adjustments and concessions without which this ideal cannot be realized in practice."

Canada does not aspire to be a Utopia of the story-book sort. A perusal of most books about Utopias shows life there to be intolerably dull. The kind of country we desire is one sparkling with the different precious stones contributed by all kinds of people and lively with the colour of many national customs.

Just as a deck of cards, made up of different symbols and colours, provides the framework of a meaningful game, so the sixty ethnic cultures spread across the continent go together to give Canadians a game of life that is significant and pleasurable.

Through the bond of a common culture Canada can become a fraternity co-operating in the interests of the

common weal. A sense of collective Canadianism does not imply the doctrine of national uniformity. Hugh MacLennan said at a Conference of the Canadian Institute on Public Affairs: "A Canadian culture grows out of the Canadian experience." We try out the cultures brought from other lands for fit and quality, and accept them in such measure as rational judgment tells us will give the truest satisfaction to all citizens.

This is a country-wide process. Just as there is no provincial right to default on a national duty, so there is no right of factions to obstruct the growth of a beneficent national culture.

### *What culture is*

The word "culture" suffers from the fact that it, like the word "democracy", means different things to different people.

"Culture" has 164 known definitions, but the one accepted by the Duke of Edinburgh's Second Commonwealth Study Conference, held in Canada in 1962, is simple and inclusive: "Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by a man as a member of society."

The permanent interests of our country are served by culture, because our culture colours our actions in every sphere of life. Affluence is made more enjoyable, and adversity is more bearable, if people are cultured. Its growth is both an art to be enjoyed and a necessity for survival. Unless we continue to rise culturally we sink to a lower level in the animal scale. In fact, as Albert Einstein said in *Out of My Later Years*, without culture the very basis for believing in the need for the existence of the human race will vanish.

Being cultured does not mean that we have to love everybody or support everybody's ideas of refinement, or worship at everybody else's totem, but only that we develop personally and learn to get along with other people. No culture can exist except in a society of men and women, and no society can operate without cultural directives.

Although there are some surface ripples, deep down most Canadians share the same values. They encourage the development of personal characteristics and patterns of behaviour upon which the people of Canada look favourably.

The democratic system depends for its fullest success upon more than having the right to vote. It requires participation in things of the mind.

To brush off culture in the spirit: "I'm a plain man" is to indulge in inverted snobbery. Civilization is more a process of the intellect and spirit than a product of technology and politics. This does not mean that we must all read classical literature in the original languages, or that we can date the Old Masters' paintings, or recognize an aria from an opera, but it does exhort us to enlarge our intelligence so that we appreciate these things. There are profound opportu-

nities for culture open to ordinary people in commonplace circumstances.

### *Social sense*

Social sense is developed when we learn to cherish and practise the beliefs that contribute to the welfare of society. This is not acquired by law or rule. One great impediment to the spirit of cultural growth is the demagogue who teaches that social sense, which is agreement upon what is best for the people, can be imposed by legislation. Winston Churchill dismissed this idea in a speech in the House of Commons: "Parliament can compel people to obey or to submit, but it cannot compel them to agree."

Cultured social sense includes thinking of the sensibilities as well as the good of others. Owen Rutter tells in *The Travels of Tiadatha* how a traveller was welcomed in Formosa. Strange foods were placed in front of him, "each in a porcelain bowl with cover, so that if you didn't like it, nobody could see you'd left it."

Culture plays a big part in effective living. People can dwell together under an extraordinary variety of conditions if they are motivated by the same cultural urges, enjoying harmony, frankness and loyalty. Canada seeks to be, in Rebecca West's description of what a nation should be: "A shelter where all talents are generously recognized, and all forgivable oddities forgiven."

Isocrates, the orator and teacher, saw unity as the only condition upon which Greece could keep freedom and independence in company of a powerful neighbour. The philosopher of today sees in culture the hope of maintaining harmony in a state that has many nationalities represented in its population, and preserving its independence in the midst of more populous and mighty nations.

Culture does not demand that we leave undusted the antique customs. It is a living, forward-moving thing, not a sort of ballet following an automatic pattern in which the faces of the performers show no evidence of thinking or emotion.

To be cultured is to have a tendency to prefer a better kind of object or thought rather than one that is inferior, and to try to improve upon it. Traditions and arts brought by their forefathers inspire and guide today's descendants so that they meet the demands of this new age with the most excellent ideals of yesterday and today in their minds.

### *Our family tree*

There is no excuse for Canadians to be people whose lives and hopes and contributions to culture move in small circles. Canadians speak in many tongues, they go to many churches, they have many customs, they are a cross-section of humanity. The ethnic groups supplement one another in adding to Canada's culture. To accept what they proudly offer is to become

compassionately understanding of our relationship to one another.

All these individuals are in some respect different. As Emerson put it: "Nature never rhymes her children, nor makes two men alike." All have good qualities of mind and skill to bestow. In return, Canada provides the opportunity for free trade in ideas. Many people come to this country because of restraint upon action and suppression of opinions in their homelands. They seek here the peace from factional disputes and the security in which they will work out their yearning for happy lives.

Not all those who have culture to contribute are recent arrivals. Some have lived here all their lives, the descendants of people who came to Canada centuries ago. They have held fast to, and kept alive, and brought to maturity, beliefs and customs that were handed down in their homelands for thousands of years.

These people have folkways and mores. The folkways are the habitual ways a people has of carrying on the ordinary activities of living together. The mores are those folkways which are believed to have a bearing upon the welfare of the group. The preservation of folkways in the small group should be encouraged as earnestly as development of the mores in the large group of which they form part.

Civilization is impossible without tradition. Tradition is a set of values based on religious, cultural and social beliefs transmitted from generation to generation. It is the experience and the lessons of the past, handed down through centuries, that combine to make us civilized.

These traditions have come to Canada in diversified abundance. About thirty per cent of Canada's population is of neither French nor British origin. *The Canadian Family Tree* (Canadian Citizenship Branch, Ottawa, 1967; available through the Queen's Printer and government bookshops) tells about 47 ethnic groups in the Canadian family. *Canadian Mosaic, The Making of a Northern Nation*, by John Murray Gibbon (McClelland and Stewart Ltd., Toronto, 1938) has 450 descriptive pages, with 27 colour plates and 108 black and white illustrations.

Here is the distinguished roll-call of the ancestry of Canada's people:

Afghans	Egyptians	Italians
Algerians	English	Japanese
Americans	Eskimos	Jewish community
Armenians	Estonians	Jordanese
Austrians	Finns	Latvians
Belgians	French	Lebanese
Bulgarians	Germans	Libanese
Byelorussians	Greeks	Lithuanians
Chinese	Hungarians	Macedonians
Croats	Icelanders	Maltese
Czechs	Indians	Métis
Danes	Irakians	Moroccans
Dutch	Iranians	Norwegians
East Indians	Irish	Pakistanis

Poles	Slovaks	Tunisians
Portuguese	Slovenes	Turks
Roumanians	Spanish	Ukrainians
Russians	Swedish	Welsh
Scots	Swiss	West Indians
Serbs	Syrians	

### *Helping newcomers*

Our honour puts us under the obligation to make room for people of all beliefs, not alone space in the form of land but space in our minds and lives.

We can make a grace of hospitality by our friendly attitude and by sincerely seeking to understand their problems. Applying the Golden Rule is very far from showing what one thinks is good for them down other men's throats. A cultured person takes note of one of G. B. Shaw's sayings: "Do not do unto others as you would that they should do unto you. Their tastes may not be the same."

Courtesy toward the beliefs and habits of others is part of civilization. Considerations of manner and demeanour and respect are not to be overlooked as being frivolous or unimportant. They are essential components in the life and happiness of every citizen.

### *Receptiveness*

One distinction of a cultured man is the degree of his open-mindedness. We do injustice to our own minds if we do not encourage them to examine other people's views and beliefs. However well informed we may be, we have not the right to assume that all people who have other views than ours, or different customs, are foolish or wrong.

To be cultured means meeting others in reciprocal respect. This requires communication and the exchange of ideas, thus giving ourselves and others a chance to enlarge mutual understanding. It means opening our eyes and our ears and our minds so that we stop carrying around a burden of wrong notions and fancies. It asks us to avoid chauvinism, which is extravagant pride in our own beliefs with corresponding disdain of other notions. This does not call upon us to indulge in passionate mutual admiration, but it does include an enlightened toleration, which is an inherent part of democracy.

There is a personal mental health consideration involved, as well as a social obligation. It is disastrous to our emotional tranquillity to harbour a dislike for people because they hold different opinions, even though their beliefs seem to be eccentric. We can lead more effective and more serene lives, if we apply our minds to understanding our whole society and not only our own corner of it.

Free discussion is an important ingredient in this understanding. An ideal society would be the civilization of the dialogue, a dialogue about the development of society in which every culturally-educated person would take part without heat, discussing common

problems. In a true dialogue people may agree pleasantly, or they may pleasantly agree to differ.

A group is not cultured if the principal purpose of their being together is to share their prejudices, those unreasonable prepossessions for or against anything.

A civilized man sympathizes with other civilized men no matter where they were born or in what part of the country they live, or what their profession or job may be. He knows that making friends is an essential part of being human, and that being part of a nation involves him in association with all other citizens. Ours is inescapably a co-operative society. We all need all the others if we are to survive.

### *We need kinship*

Sam Walter Foss wrote about people who live withdrawn in the peace of their self-content, but his poem points out that no individual can enjoy a rewarding life as a hermit. Everyone needs kinship with other people if he is to unfold his personality. When a bar of gold is put in close contact with a bar of silver and the two bars are pressed together for several months, and then separated, some gold can be found inside the silver bar and some silver inside the gold bar. Selig Hecht tells us in *Explaining the Atom* (Viking Press, 1947): "Particles of gold and silver have migrated across the boundary."

Shared involvement and reciprocity in goodwill provide us with the only sound law by which to live in society. A caste system, whether founded upon racial origin, language, customs or profession, is an enormous enemy of national culture.

No matter in what part of the country they settle, or in what size community they live, newcomers become Canadians. The smallest hamlet may boast: "I am part of Canada", and its people may follow the pattern set by the Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus when he declared: "My city and my country, so far as I am Antoninus, is Rome, but so far as I am a man, it is the world."

Compromise and adaptation are needed between people of different backgrounds when they come together. Some of the differences will be assimilated harmoniously, while others will survive in a way that prevents standardization of the nation.

"It is good", said a commission on minority groups, "to encourage the existence of different traditions, cultures, religions, and backgrounds, provided that the people concerned adhere to fundamental Canadian patterns."

At the second Commonwealth Study Conference, held in 1962, the Right Honourable Vincent Massey, Governor General, said: "We are a plural community made up of two major, and many minor, cultural groups. There is no distinct, uniform, and overwhelming Canadian way of life into which newcomers are expected to be caught up and reshaped. Differences are welcomed."

### *The individual and the family*

Canada will continue beyond our little span of life, but it will absorb and carry into the future what we contribute individually to its character and culture. Culture allows everyone to share in his own intellectual and spiritual development, and to play a part in that of his country.

The family is the most important unit in shaping culture. The domestic hearth is the centre around which the necessities of warmth, comfort and food are satisfied, and it is also the place where companionship is fostered and enjoyed and where culture starts.

It is the family spirit that will hold Canada together. It recognizes differences between its children, it makes room for varying progress in knowledge and wisdom, it allows variety of desire, ambition and action, but it stands firm for its integrity as a functioning unit in making all these possible.

People derived from numerous nationalities may look back to the golden age of their ancestors, but the young people now in Canadian homes have the opportunity and invitation to make a new golden age. Culture gives them an option on the future and the privilege of fashioning ideals for that future.

Canada's cultural destiny may be a vague and disputable outline, like the edges of our country where the surf and the rocks and the sand-banks are mingled with the sea and the sky. Looking at the map of Canada's past as at that of any country ancient or modern, we see smooth, uneventful plateaus, some depressions and ravines, and a few notable pinnacles. Such is the cultural future. Progress may be slow and fitful, but it can be made certain by the co-operative endeavour of citizens.

### *Members one of another*

If we have one obstacle that offers more impediment than another, it is our taking for granted the values and benefits of our Canadian way of life. This free society, eminent in the world because of its individual freedoms and its great opportunities for self-advancement and the sense of security it provides to ease men's minds, was gained by the struggles and sacrifices and intelligence of the men and women from whom we inherit it, and expanded through three centuries by their descendants. Our culture, inherited and brought into being, is what prompts us to view with sorrow the discordant mass of unrest in the world and to impose order on our own lives.

We need to preserve the commendable qualities and traditions that every racial group has brought to Canada, and to refrain from improvising a "modern" sophistication based upon the doings in other countries. Thereby we erect a Canadian culture that gives evidence that we form a viable nation, with citizens who feel that they belong to it in a fraternity that recalls the eloquent phrase used by St. Paul: "We are members one of another."