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Culture for Everybody

SCIENCE is not the be-all and end-all of life. You may know all about the sun and all about the atmosphere and all about the rotation of the earth, and yet miss the radiance of the sunset.

Culture has to do with the less material aspects of life, like intellectual proficiency and the love of beautiful things. It includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, and other attributes acquired by man in the shared existence we call society.

It is false to think of culture as something we seek merely as a distraction from the workaday world. Neither is it a craving for sensation, a fastidious search for strange refinement, or a jealous cultivation of art as a thing preserved for the elite.

Walter Herbert, Director of the Canada Foundation, wrote in his essay on "The Cultural Pattern" which he contributed to the United Nations Series book *Canada* (University of Toronto Press 1950): "The cultural pattern of a nation is a mosaic of many intricately adjusted parts, touching almost every aspect of the national life." It is, collectively, the sum of special knowledge that accumulates in any large united family and is the common property of all its members.

Culture is also an individual thing. Man does not live by bread alone. He turns from labour to look inward, examining himself, and outward, speculating on life and what is beyond life. These thoughts he expresses through speech and drama, music and ballet, painting and sculpture, poetry and literature. These are the things which give us our status as human beings.

As has been said before in these *Letters*, Canada is a country in which no one need live meanly except by choice.

We had a stock-taking in 1949 to 1951, when the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences (the Massey Commission) examined us in depth from coast to coast. Its report went a long way toward convincing us that culture is worth while in both national and individual life. Its sequel, the setting up of a Canada Council for the

Encouragement of the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences in 1957 gave practical form to the Commission's recommendations.

Culture, as interpreted by these media, is a means to help people to appreciate the first rate and seek it instinctively.

Not all things culturally good in other parts of the world are acceptable in Canada. Lapis lazuli, the deep blue stone which is so beautiful against the sun and the sand of Egypt, may be a dull, darkish bead under our northern sky.

But we have assembled the vivid and adventurous spirits of many races in an environment favourable to the creation of a great Canadian culture. There is, as the Massey Commission said: "an earnest and widespread will of our people to enrich and quicken the cultural and intellectual life" of Canada.

Some forms of culture

MUSIC. Darwin claimed that the power of producing and appreciating music existed among the human race long before the power of speech was arrived at. Shakespeare, when he had to express the inexpressible, laid down his pen and called for music. And Friedrich Nietzsche, author of the creed of the superman, wrote in 1910: "Without music, life would be a mistake."

During one season alone, eight Canadian singers sang leading roles at Covent Garden, one of the great opera houses of the world. Canadian composers are receiving the attention they deserve at home and abroad. Young men and women participate in the National Youth Orchestra of Canada, which made its debut at the end of 1960. There were seventeen summer festivals of opera productions and musicals scheduled in 1962.

Many organizations are helping in the development of music in Canada. The Canadian Music Centre was formed in 1959 to make Canadian music better known. It acts as a library and promoting agency, and distributes scores by Canadian composers to conductors, performers and programme builders. It listed 318 composers in 1962, of whom ninety were active.

Music is not alone an instrument of entertainment, but also one of personal development. The Canadian Bureau for the Advancement of Music stated its purpose in 1919: "to develop the study and appreciation of music for its educational and stimulating value in life."

DRAMA. There is in this country a large and until recent years unsuspected audience for good theatre. This is evidenced by the success of the Dominion Drama Festival, which saw sixty-three groups entered in the fourteen Regional Festivals held across Canada. Since it was formed in 1933, the Dominion Drama Festival has come to mean "the stage" for most Canadians.

It is significant that the Departments of Education of the provinces are providing the majority of the halls for performance of the theatrical arts. In this way they are providing a good opportunity for cultural enrichment to young people.

The freshly imaginative work, the thoughtful drama of a new playwright, need such help if they are to reach the large number of people who are interested in ideas as well as in entertainment.

BALLET. Ballet is a going concern in Canada. It might be argued that a country like this, with a population of eighteen million dispersed over an enormous area, would be lucky to have and support one ballet company adequately. But in Canada we have three: the National Ballet, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, and Les Grands Ballets Canadiens. Their combined budget tops a million dollars a year.

Ballet is one of the most demanding of all the performing arts. They say that behind every little ballerina there is a dedicated mother. She has to be, what with practices and the making of costumes. There is also a devoted father, who must foot the bill and attend performances. There are also enthusiastic performers: to see the eagerness with which students at the Banff School of Fine Arts hurry to classes every day for six weeks and linger at practice late into the night is an experience not soon forgotten.

The difficulties multiply when one gets into the highly exacting professional arena. A ballet company cannot be put together for a limited season and then disbanded. It is not only a group of artists performing together, but also a team of athletes which must practise and work together for the greater part of the year. No city in Canada is big enough to support a fairly long season of the kind possible in London and New York, and so our ballet companies must take to the road, spreading their art across the country to reach their potential audience. The National Ballet of Canada attracts up to 14,000 persons a night on its United States tours.

OPERA. Opera has made strides in recent years. In its third annual report the Canada Council drew attention to the Opera Festival Association of Toronto (later named the Canadian Opera Company

because of its extended work) which had drawn audiences totalling 65,000 in a single season.

The Canadian Opera Guild, with membership in every province, was formed in 1959 to support and sponsor the Canadian Opera Company. The length of the season is second only to the Metropolitan in this hemisphere. Beginning at Toronto, the company travels throughout Canada, presenting opera in more than 85 centres. It is handicapped in that the expense compels it to travel without an orchestra, making use of only a single piano and thus limiting its possible repertoire, except in one or two centres where a local orchestra permits a full performance.

FOLK-SONGS. Folk-songs, which were once a feature of the daily life of the French Canadians, are enjoying a revival, even though the preoccupations of the folk-song movement have tended to be a little far out for the ordinary man. We shrug off the rudely honest songs our forebears sang in favour of records with electric guitars and songs from the current shows. But these folk-songs are part of our culture, as was recognized by the late John Murray Gibbon when he organized a series of folk-song festivals for the Canadian Pacific Railway thirty years ago.

LITERATURE. Language is indispensable to culture. Individuals die, but the culture which flows through them, and which they help to create and to change, is all but immortal. Without literature the flow would cease, the culture would wither. A static world has no need for new writing, but if men are to take part in a process of progressive self-liberation, a process of culture, then an expanding literature is a fundamental necessity.

The rise of Canadian poetry to a position of international stature is one of the striking features of Canadian letters during the past decade. It has been estimated that there are today some fifty Canadian poets deserving of serious reading. The vigour of contemporary French Canadian poetry impressed a French writer who was here on a France-Canada Association scholarship. "Quebec," he said, "now ranks with Paris and North Africa as one of the three most important centres of French poetry in the world."

ARCHITECTURE. Those who wish to add materially to the cultural climate of Canada have an opportunity in the approaching celebration of the Centenary of Canada's Confederation.

It is said that the Greeks began their towns by laying the foundations of a theatre. What better way is there of marking the Centenary than by following the suggestion of Hazen Sise, a Montreal architect, to erect social-cultural community centres across the nation?

Ballet, music and drama require buildings of a size and type of construction which do not exist

outside a few of our larger cities. Design and construction of these would provide our architects with the opportunity to display their imaginative skill.

Agencies of culture

THE C.B.C. First to be mentioned among the major agencies of culture is the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, because of the ubiquity of its coverage. As Mr. Herbert said in his essay: "The Corporation performs a vital function in presenting indigenous music, drama, and literature, and in stimulating public interest in cultural matters." And Hugh MacLennan, in an article for the *Montreal Star* wrote this: "You may say, 'What about the CBC?' and I would of course answer 'Without the CBC there would probably be no Canada'."

The CBC television service is within reach of 91 per cent of our population. It endeavours to reflect and interpret the various parts of the nation to one another. It tries to portray the Canadian heritage in documentary and dramatic form, to provide viewers with selections from the best works of literature and drama, and to enhance the development of Canadian talent in all fields.

In an age of trans-solar-system pioneering, we may wonder what use it is to go back to the trans-cosmic flights of Dante and Milton. We do so simply because the germ of our ideas of the nature of beauty and the drama of existence are to be found in the ancient world. And meditation upon the great speculative questions concerning man and the universe produces culture.

That is why CBC TV has presented programmes on serious political thought, outlining ideas presented by Plato, St. Augustine, Hume and Kant. That is why the French network gave us "L'art, et son secret", discussing the integration of various art forms in daily life.

That is why CBC radio presents "The Conscience of Man" and "Architects of Modern Thought" in English, and "Des idées et des hommes" in French. These special programmes on TV and radio offer freedom to speculate and room to think. Artists and intellectual people, ground between commercial hokum and the frustrations of life, discover that here is balm and inspiration.

Music receives thorough attention. Compositions and performances by Canadians originate in every centre across the country where talent can be tapped. The ballet "Swan Lake" alternates with the opera "Falstaff." Glenn Gould takes his turn with "l'Enfance du Christ" broadcast from the Basilica in Quebec City. "Hommage à Debussy" and "Carmen" take their winter season place alongside the New York City Ballet and Les Grands Ballets Canadiens.

As J. Alphonse Ouimet, President of the C.B.C., said in a convocation address at Acadia University: "Broadcasters have a tremendous responsibility to the public. They must not abdicate this responsibility

by relying entirely on ratings to justify a repetitive and unvarying diet of the kind of programmes which cater to the lowest common denominator. They must offer a wide range of programmes so that each member of the audience has an opportunity to choose for himself."

THE NATIONAL GALLERY. Perhaps one explanation for the fact that 350,000 people visit the National Gallery of Canada in a year is its balance. The gallery's programme does not lean toward either the radical or the conservative, but tries to present the best exhibitions available, with quality as the sole criterion.

The beginning of this institution goes back to the founding of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts in 1880, at a time when Canada's population was about four million; today it has shouldered the formidable task of serving a country in which the great bulk of the eighteen million people will never have an opportunity to visit the gallery personally.

Lecturers, travelling exhibitions, and exhibitions organized by the Gallery for distribution through art circuits, are a part of its programme. It takes its place alongside the American Federation of Arts and the Smithsonian Institution as one of the three major circulation agencies in North America.

Estimates indicate that more than a quarter million people see the exhibitions during their tours of Canada. The programme is being expanded every year in response to public interest. In one year recently there were 38 exhibitions offered for general circulation in Canada, to be shown on 166 occasions in art galleries and exhibiting centres.

Art instruction classes for children and adults and public lectures and film showings now form a regular part of the programmes of most of the larger Canadian galleries. The National Gallery produces filmstrips on Canadian artists, thus providing an important service to schools and art groups. Twenty of its 82 movie films on art are borrowed every month by groups and institutions.

The National Gallery houses the finest collection of Canadian painting in existence, and takes every means in its power to encourage Canadian painters and stimulate public interest. The Gallery's beautiful 1962 engagement calendar featured 28 colour reproductions of outstanding eighteenth and nineteenth century Canadian paintings and sculptures.

Art does not date itself like the height of an automobile fin. The oldest painting in the collections of the National Gallery, an Egyptian mummy portrait, dates back to the first century A.D. But buildings do get out of date and are outgrown, so the Gallery moved in 1960 to the new Lorne Building where it has five times as much space as in the former gallery in the Victoria Museum.

NATIONAL FILM BOARD. Canada's National Film Board is doing much to save film from the outer darkness to which

many people who professed interest in culture had relegated it from the beginning. Throughout the history of movie-making there has been a solid core of those who believe in its creative function.

The National Film Board of Canada is the official agency of the Canadian Government, producing and distributing films on matters relating to the interests of Canadians. Its films are designed not only to report events in Canada factually but also to mirror the spirit of Canadian life and culture.

In addition to providing films to community and other organizations for showing to members, the Board encourages library film nights, film festivals and film weeks. These bring documentary and educational films to people who do not belong to one or other of the many film-using organizations.

The non-theatrical 16mm films reach these people through some 470 film councils, provincial film libraries, public libraries, schools, and other groups. More than 10,000 community groups and associations are represented, and more than 30,000 people are actively involved in the work; during the past ten years these organizations have invested at least five million dollars in equipment and facilities. In the course of a year there are at least 272,000 community programme showings of NFB films to audiences aggregating sixteen million people.

The Board pays special attention to schools. A film adds interest to learning, as do the NFB filmstrips, produced in co-operation with Canadian educators.

The National Film Institute (formerly the Society) of Canada is doing good work in its own field. It was formed mainly to encourage and promote the study, appreciation and use of motion and sound pictures and television as educational and cultural factors. It has expanded its activities until today its information and film distribution services are made use of by government departments, universities, schools, voluntary national associations, and a host of others.

THE CANADA COUNCIL. Drawing together Canada's cultural interests in one package is the Canada Council, evolved as an idea by the Massey Commission. The Council came into being by Act of Parliament in 1957, with an allotment of a hundred million dollars. Of this sum, half was assigned to a University Capital Grants Fund, with interest and capital to be expended over ten years in helping to pay for additional space needed in university buildings for the arts, humanities and social sciences. The other half became an Endowment Fund, only the revenue from which is to be expended annually. Its purpose: "to foster and promote the study and encouragement of, and the production of work in, the arts, humanities and social sciences."

The Council is not a producing agency like the CBC and the NFB. Its work is designed to stimulate, not to direct, growth in the arts and social sciences.

Through its activity it makes available financial assistance which enables many organizations in the

performing arts to raise their standards of production. The Council has helped many groups to carry plays, art, ballet, drama and music to regions that might not otherwise have enjoyed them.

The Council has difficult decisions to make in carrying out its mandate. Time and again it returns in its reports to this question: should the fund be applied primarily for the benefit of those already devoted to the arts, or should it be used in a way best calculated to carry the arts to those in whose lives they at present play little or no part? It needs to strike a balance between support for the best and a spreading out to reach more people.

In its report last year the Council said it was convinced that it must support quality rather than quantity, professionalism in the main rather than amateurism; that however necessary it is to support organizations it is equally necessary to support and encourage talented individuals without whom organizations of quality cannot exist. It expressed the opinion that the Council should from time to time help in the creation of something new, provided that the need is demonstrated.

The Council's awards of scholarships and fellowships in the arts are processed by The Canada Foundation whose purpose it is to foster the arts in Canada. The Foundation, which has been in existence for some twenty years, has a roster of 180 experts, including Canada's leading musicians, artists, writers, composers and directors. Scholarships and fellowships in the humanities and the social sciences are processed by The Humanities Research Council of Canada and by the Social Sciences Research Council of Canada. The two research councils have conducted a programme of assistance in the humanities and social sciences since the early 1940's, and derive their membership in the main from members of the academic profession in this country.

Culture changes

Some things offered as cultural seem not only miles but light years away from what we are accustomed to, but we must keep in mind the fact that culture means change. Ours is no guarded citadel in which to dwell, but a road passing into wider fields, leading to things more and more wonderful and strange and unknown. The experiences and standards of past generations of Canadians have been handed down, and have been added to by newcomers to Canada, and are being changed by all of us.

We may, if we wish, disregard this or that sort of cultural expression if it does not appeal to us, but we must not, on that ground merely, condemn it. In any event, let us make sure that there is music somewhere in our lives — the music of orchestras, of poetry, of the dance, of colour. Thus, by participation as an artist or by being part of an appreciative audience, we contribute to an eager, more vivid, way of living.