

CULTURAL VALUES IN OLD COUNTRIES AND NEW

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WE in the New World are constantly being reminded of our fortunate and enviable position and extent as compared with over-crowded, war-torn and still ever-militaristic Europe. How much more fortunate are we than even England, whose very proximity to the Continent places her on the edge of the whirlpool, while she is self-supporting to an extent very meagre indeed! We are told that with no past to hang heavily upon it, and far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife, the New World—its youthful pulses beating high—has but to march triumphantly onward to the gates of Utopia, whose walls at the blast of the trumpet will fall, and where a new order will be revealed.

Of course, it is not meant to be inferred that even those most sanguine in their hopes for the new trans-Atlantic civilization think the march is going to be altogether along a road which is perfectly paved and without hills or detours. Perhaps, in the metaphor of Utopia, justice has not been done to those college presidents and other leaders who, addressing the youth of the land in Convocation, point out the special privilege which is theirs in that they can steer their course along a road unobstructed by the mistakes of centuries. But certain it is that had Sir Thomas More not conceived that perfect island, it would be difficult to apply a significant adjective to the state of things which many imagine will result from a new land *ipse per se*. Far be it from me to minimize the advantages which should be ours; there can be little doubt that we have profited much by the mistakes of the Old World, and this is as it should be. We have much also for which to render thanks,—the blessings of a rich and vast expanse of territory which God in His goodness had seen fit to grant as a new home for those Old Country pioneers, our ancestors. But—and this is the thought-skein from which the present article will be woven—is it not a fact that in the relentless process of elimination which we have pursued against Old World customs and institutions we have discarded much wheat with the chaff? Is it not so that many valuable things, which are the products of a centuries-old process of national development, have not been given a proper place in our fair Dominion?

This question having been raised, it is but common prudence that we should look about us and subject ourselves to a rigid examination. Much has been said of late about the so-called scientific method, which calls in the first instance to a thorough reconstruction of our minds; regards facts and these only, freshly, critically and dispassionately, with scorn for mere appeals to prejudice and emotion; demands that we courageously put our conclusions to the test of experiment. This should be our attitude of mind when we attempt to assess the value of much that is—and much that is not—in Canada. It may be objected, not without considerable justification, that a comparison between the Motherland and her trans-Atlantic daughter cannot be fairly made in a glance across the water from the seat of England's most illustrious university whence this article emanates. For this reason, it is perhaps only fair to explain that the writer has not spent all his time since coming to Europe at this ancient seat of learning. Further, that the comparison may seem with better reason drawn, it may be said that he also spent some four years at a Canadian university, and so is able to note the points of resemblance and difference between the students of the two countries.

Wise in our own conceit, we are probably not very much better than we think we are. Rejoicing in the fact that speed and efficiency are the keynote of our industrial and commercial life, and scorning too much tradition as a bugbear to progress, we regard Old World customs and institutions both with pity and with amusement. We may just as well save our sympathy, however, for it is neither appreciated nor needed. Despite the fact that England has become the dumping ground for the bad debts of the world, and that this means also considerable unemployment, there is to be found here a self-complacency which is nevertheless not antithetical to progress. Even to the casual American tourist who has mapped out his itinerary to include London in one day and the cathedral towns of England in the next, it must be apparent that there is in the air, not a feeling of superiority, but a consciousness on the part of the people of a better estimate than we possess of the values of life. It is worthy of note, also, that those in our own land—and there are many—whose outlook is similar, are moved to admiration rather than to sympathy at a contemplation of English standards of value.

What, after all, should be a proper estimate of value? What is the *summum bonum* towards which we should direct our civilization, the ideal which is as yet visionary in all lands, but to which some approximate rather better than others? Is it industrial efficiency

and the fulfilment of the sociologist's dream? Or are these but means to the end to be achieved? It must be apparent to all thoughtful persons that, despite our ingenuity in Canada in constructing railways over thousands of miles of territory, and bringing to but nine million people—spread over such a vast area—a high degree of material civilization, we have not, as a people, as a nation, arrived at a satisfactory solution to the problem which these questions should provoke. It is a homely truth that the standards which we ascribe to a civilization must not be destitute of either religious or ethical considerations, unless we are to descend into rank materialism. Just as to-day in all sovereign legislation the all-important factor is the social instinct of mankind, so in setting up a standard of life we cannot disregard morality, for morality is essentially a relation among the individuals of mankind. Of course, it must not be denied that the law and equity of modern States have been governed immeasurable by morality. It does not follow, however, that the people have an all-embracing concept towards which to direct individual efforts, a concept essentially moral, although it may not even be recognized as such.

The theory of morality, then, which I suppose at the present day most recommends itself to thoughtful ethicists, is that known as eudaemonism. The eudaemonistic criterion is, in a word, that the goal of right living should be happiness—not mere superficial, fleeting, transient, epicurean pleasure, but the greatest totality of happiness, which is quite a different thing. Nor is one consciously, and therefore selfishly, to direct actions for the sole purpose of bringing happiness to *one's self*, for the eudaemonist should be essentially altruistic. Such a theory is, indeed, not without its serious dangers and practical limitations; for it is extremely difficult, nay, even impossible, to foretell at all times what action will bring the greatest happiness to the greatest number. It is with an appreciation of this difficulty that emphasis has been placed on motive rather than on result. But lest we linger too long over an ethical theory the very complexity of which has necessitated whole volumes, we must be content to note that the happiness which it would have us attain lays emphasis on mental (which, of course, includes moral) and cultural riches, rather than on material. To live the fullest sort of life, we must as far as possible be able to attain an exact and thorough knowledge of what is going on in the world in which we have been placed; we must appreciate all that is beautiful; learn “to look on Nature not as in the hour of thoughtless youth, but feeling oftentimes the still, sad music of humanity”; understand so as to be able to take an intelligent interest in the

machinery of government; realize and aid in the solution of the many problems which can be grouped under the wide term of sociology in a manner commensurate with the sphere in which the individual may be placed; appreciate the significance of the last message the late Woodrow Wilson issued to the public, which was—in effect—that our civilization cannot survive materially unless it be revived spiritually.

Dr. N. Murray Butler, President of Columbia University, considers the five chief marks of an educated man to be correctness and precision in the use of the mother tongue; refined and gentle manners which are the result of fixed habits of thought and action; sound standards of appreciation of beauty and of worth and character built on those standards; the power and habit of reflection; efficiency and power to do. To these five Mr. Clynes adds a sixth,—public-spirited interest in the good government of nations. While it is by no means wise to regard education as sure to yield happiness, it is nevertheless true that one who is equipped thus must surely approximate to the fullest returns from life. Moreover, if the term education be extended to mean training for the true art of living, it must be evident that to the educated man will come the greatest happiness.

Having noticed the way in which Old World customs and institutions are regarded in certain sections of the New World, it should be both interesting and helpful to have the light turned on our own continent and the rays reflected back to this island country. Here it may be interesting to record some of the impressions which a certain theological professor of Oxford University has brought back with him from America. He had crossed the ocean for the purpose of delivering a course of lectures in a university there. This gentleman has always seemed to have a keenly analytical mental prowess, destined before long to make him one of Oxford's most illustrious theologians. For this reason I was the more anxious to hear of the impression which my native continent had created, and it must be confessed that I was expecting an outburst of enthusiasm, varying from respect for quick-lunch counters to admiration of magnificent church edifices and university buildings. On learning of his attitude to the New World, however, I received a somewhat rude shock, which—in view of the distinguished source from which it came—did not fail to leave an impression and stimulate considerable thought. It was with no degree of levity that he gave it as his conviction that the mammon-worshipping, pleasure-seeking tendency of certain classes in the United States (and in less degree in Canada) was fast hurrying people on to the

state of social decadence which characterized the Roman Empire in its last stages. He feared, he said, the great Republic's influence on civilization as a whole; for while it is true that America has no past to drag her down, her present standards of value constitute a graver menace to the nations of Europe than does the past from which these peoples have emerged. He went on to speak of Americans as "living on the surface" (I thought of Canada then) and as having little interest in the finer things of life. He likened the people to overgrown children, quick to seize upon ideas, but, having carried them out, unable to utilize the products as they should be used.

I do not think that all of these impressions either will be or should be received by those to whom they are divulged, otherwise than with the proverbial pinch of salt. It is more or less understandable that one's thoughts should be thus affected when one is whirled into the confusion of New York life, hustled across the Canadian frontier on a fast International Limited and back to the great metropolis, only to be hustled on board a liner again before recovering one's breath from the first shock of the rapidity with which American life moves. It would take an unusually discerning, and almost intuitive, mind to appraise correctly the values and defects of American civilization in its entirety in a few weeks,—much of this time spent in a lecture room. Perhaps if the English gentleman had lingered longer in centres other than New York—in Boston, for instance—and had sought out elsewhere the very many evidences of cultural refinement which undoubtedly exist, he would not have been so quick in characterizing the civilization of the United States as altogether based on a rank materialism. Further, it is scarcely to be imagined that our American friends would relish the description of over-grown children, nor does it seem at all appropriate to describe them so. Undoubtedly there is a lack of directed effort in both Canada and the United States, but the cause cannot be laid at the feet of a child-like population;—it lies rather in a present poverty of leadership.

Nevertheless, many of these observations must give us pause. For they have by no means hit altogether wide of the mark. Especially is this true with reference to the flagitious influence of wealth in the New World, which, on the increase as it is, must give cause for reflection to all serious-minded persons who love their country. There is a growing danger of standards, intellectual, moral and social, being measured in terms of shekels. Wealth may well exert a disproportionate influence on society. After all, man is a gregarious animal, that not only craves the company of

its fellows but has its overt actions immeasurably governed by those strong social psychological forces of Praise and Blame. If, then, the attainment of material riches becomes the one *res laudanda*, will not this react unfavorably to the prevalence of those other possessions which, if you like, we may call "cultural"? Wealth, like everything else, should not be an end in itself, but a means to that end of which so much has already been written. It is, of course, useless to deny what seems to be a more or less established sociological fact, that increased prosperity should bring with it more leisure, more educational opportunities, and therefore a greater appreciation of cultural values. If this conclusion followed in practice from the premiss (it *is* true, in a measure), we should have a continent peculiarly blessed, for we have been given much of this particular means to the end of the best things in life. But it does not follow, for the simple reason that *we have not yet learned how to utilize the leisure time which does come*. Furthermore, while it is true that much money has been lavished on many elaborate buildings, and perhaps too university education is within the reach of more people, the standard of education has been lowered. A splendid class-room will not, in itself, turn out a finished product; Burns working in his attic, and Samuel Johnson on his deal bench at Pembroke College, managed to make their works famous and perhaps even immortal, without this inspiration.

If it is true—as I think there can be little doubt—that the principle "knowledge for knowledge sake" is more universally held in Great Britain than in North America, this should not be the cause for any great wonder. The reason for it is quite apparent, and follows from perfectly natural causes. It is not, certainly, because we are by nature a different people. Psychologists may or may not agree as to the influence of the racial factor on native ability; but such a question is quite irrelevant when one compares the stock which constitutes the "backbone", as it were, of these two peoples. We must, then, have recourse to the environmental factor, which undoubtedly will respond quite satisfactorily. In the New World, many and varied are the means for obtaining riches. But the sad part of the whole affair is that as the opportunities for the attainment of wealth increase, there seems to be a corresponding abatement in the standard of education. "Boom" towns, as the result of the discovery of certain natural resources and a movement westward, mean the amassing of huge sums from the unearned increment of land; mines and oil fields are often the cause for sudden riches; and the many other ways of amassing fortunes, which do not presuppose any great degree of intellectual accom-

plishment, all begin to make one doubt as to whether the money spent on university training is well invested. Here again the conception of just what constitutes a good investment is hopelessly materialistic, the result of a universal respect for wealth which is out of all proportion to a true sense of values. In England, on the other hand, there are now much fewer opportunities for the attainment of wealth; the very physical limitations of the country have made it so. There are many arguments which could be advanced in support of this thesis, but it is so apparent that it need scarcely be laboured. There follows, then, from this condition of just so many lucrative opportunities for just so many people, a consequent stunting of ambition for material advancement. Pleasure is therefore taken in things cultural, *ipsius gratia*. It is for this reason that Oxford and Cambridge graduates, having an excellent classical and broad education, are to be found as clerks in the civil service where they draw pay cheques of a size which would make much of our unskilled Labour smile with scorn. The peoples of the Old and the New Worlds are therefore the *heredes naturales* of their respective attitudes towards the attainment of knowledge.

In an article in *The Hibbert Journal* of some time ago, followed in a later edition by a reply to his critics, a Montreal gentleman expressed the belief that the present mode of Canadian life is "discontinuous, spasmodic and haphazard." He pointed a woeful but suggestive finger at the deplorable state of our education, "the poverty of our literature, and the sinister influence of wealth in our politics and our life generally." The writer's frankness in depicting things as they are, rather than as they could be seen through the near-sighted glasses of false patriotism, aroused a storm of indignation in certain quarters—all of which may be said to add weight to his words. As Samuel Butler has aptly written:

Mankind has ever been ready to discuss matters in the inverse ratio of their importance, so that the more closely a question is felt to touch the heart of all of us, the more incumbent it is considered upon prudent people to profess that it does not exist, to frown it down, to tell it to hold its tongue, to maintain that it has long been finally settled so that there is now no question concerning it.

After all, we are never born into the world with a fair chance. Early teachings, from the moment we are able to comprehend, tend to make us a prey to emotional appeals, and make many of our conclusions rank prejudices (pre-judgments). While it is perhaps true that the best interests of society are preserved by the prescription of patent mental medicine on the part of parents, teachers and

church during childhood, it behooves us in later years to subject these dogmatic prescriptions to the test of scientific thinking. The achievement of truth must be our ideal, if there is to be progress.

The writer from Canada's metropolis, then, has with keen discernment made an analysis of the Dominion from which it would be a pity if we did not profit. It must be confessed, however, that the katabolic process has been relentlessly pursued to almost the total exclusion of anabolism. The reader of the articles cannot but feel that, had the two processes been combined, the metabolic result would have been of inestimable value. About the only note of optimism which the article seems to sound is the observation that there appears to be in Canada a growing interest in art, an increasing dissatisfaction with our daily newspapers, and the cropping up of small, independent papers, not of daily issue. As to the first, I am just connoisseur enough to know that the room for improvement is as large as Canada itself. With regard to the last, the magazines which have of late grown up, even few as they are, are truly hopeful signs; we must, when our current periodicals are in their infancy, emphasize quality rather than quantity. Very many publications of this nature are not to be expected, when it is considered that they serve a reading public which raises its flag over not more than nine millions of people.

Mr. Stanley has very clearly seen and has dared to make mention of the many defects in the educational system of Canada. As I see it, the great crying need on the part of our universities is for more courage—courage on the part of professors, on the part of students, on the part of the body which governs requirements;—courage against commercialism. The question as to whether or not barriers should be raised against the hordes crowding into our universities, who are quite unfit to profit by the instruction a university should give, admits of but one answer. Barriers should indeed be raised in the form of higher matriculation standards, which would also react favourably on the work of our high and preparatory schools. There should be a demand that the student should from the outset give evidence of worthy accomplishments, the result of consistent application to duty, if he is to retain his name on the college rolls. Such a move, which many would term drastic, can in no sense be fairly said to be a condemnation of the loudly acclaimed principle—as yet an ideal—of “every man an educated man.” The argument resolves itself into a question of choice between a multitude “half-done” and a smaller number “well-done.” Remembering that Pope was perhaps not far wrong when he said that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, we must

cast our ballot in favour of the latter alternative. It is clear that the public will never become truly educated until our universities begin to send out students with an outlook different from what they now have. The age-long argument of quality rather than quantity, as a rallying ground, is altogether applicable here. Besides, such barriers in the form of higher standards should not, in the last analysis, greatly deplete the various student bodies. It would simply mean that those seeking admission, and desiring to be retained as students, would equip themselves to meet it. The public, high and preparatory schools will also be compelled to respond to the new requirements, although the two phases of the reformation should, of course, be simultaneous. Those who would be eliminated would be those who, because they fail to react to ambitious standards, are just as well left out in the cold. If these refuse to drink of the waters of education, they should not be treated as one does when prescribing castor oil for a rebellious child. With such a new era ushered in, we may *then* feel justified in erecting new buildings and employing more instructors to meet the requirements of a student body whose increase is not one of numbers only.

It is courage, then, that needs to play a great part in surmounting the many educational problems of the New World—courage of the sort that will overcome local and denominational prejudices when such a vital question as the union of the universities of the Maritime Provinces of Canada comes up for consideration; courage which will free us from the yoke of the sort which Mr. Bertrand Russell mentioned, when in an address delivered before the Labour Party of Oxford University he made the declaration that the universities of America were influenced mightily by the millions of millionaires. This sinister influence of wealth is bound to stunt the proficiency of professors; and as long as huge income-tax returns remain indicative of one's position among one's fellows, it will also play a part in attracting by no means the best men as instructors to our seats of learning, for as a rule we do not burden our Faculty members with the weight of gold. The forces over which it has control also are not always the most progressive, and the educator who advocates anything of a revolutionary or unorthodox character may often be placed in a very embarrassing position. It is also something to be pondered over that the same sad state of affairs is often the result of a narrow denominationalism to be found in some of our theological colleges. The spirit of intolerance is in truth rife in the New World, and is evidenced in almost every phase of life whether educational, religious or political.

Not long ago an English acquaintance told me of a friend who left the Motherland to accept a position in one of our smaller colleges. Having dared to point out during his lectures on history a possibility of there being more than one side to the Irish question, he was dismissed without notice. I was ashamed when told.

It should then be essentially the function of an instructor to stimulate and encourage thinking of the adventurous and original sort. Beware of the student who is a replica of his professor, or rather, there is no need to beware of him, for he is probably quite harmless. The emphasis on lectures in our universities presents a danger of having the data there disclosed accepted as gospel and as the "last word" on the subject under discussion.

The largest library in disorder is not so useful as a smaller but orderly one; in the same way the greatest amount of knowledge, if it has not been worked out in one's own mind, is of less value than a much smaller amount that has been fully considered. For it is only when a man combines what he knows from all sides, and compares one truth with another, that he completely realizes his own knowledge and gets it into his power. A man can think over only what he knows, therefore he should learn something; but a man knows only what he has pondered.

Schopenhauer has well spoken.

It is that which seems to be so lacking in our universities which the writer has on various occasions referred to as a true student outlook. This is precisely what Professor J. Arthur Thomson means when he speaks of the scientific mood which, he says, denotes a passion for facts, a clearness of vision, cautiousness of statement, and a keen sense of the inter-relatedness of things. There must come a metamorphosis of atmosphere at our higher seats of learning, if these institutions are to fulfil their truest function. That the need is not fanciful—the result of subjecting ourselves to a scrutiny of undue rigidity—is evidenced by the fact that it has not escaped the notice of overseas visitors to our educational centres. Dr. A. Herbert Gray, an eminent Glasgow divine, who is now connected with the British Student Movement, quite frankly states that this quality is lacking in young Canada.

The trend of our life is "haphazard and spasmodic" not only as regards education, but in other fields as well—in the university and out of it. No wonder it is that the best men are not attracted into politics, or when so attracted are not always elected, when it is realized that apart from the "onesidedness" of party organs, the North American public must have the news told in headlines, the article itself being superfluous for a large proportion. It is a

reflection upon responsible government that Canadians have not been led to formulate a policy on questions which vitally affect their country. As a writer in the *Round Table Magazine* pointed out some time ago, it is deplorable but true that a comparatively small percentage of the adult population of Canada knew previous to the last Imperial Conference what business was to be dealt with when representatives of the Empire met in such a conclave.

But youth is on our side, and perhaps the most hopeful thing to emerge from this article is the fact that the criticisms are for the most part negative, so that our task is rather more one of construction than the twofold and infinitely harder task of both tearing down and building up. May the plasticity which accompanies youth aid in the formation of a proper appraisal of value! Individual Canadians have always been willing to learn, and extremely capable of learning. It must also be said that we cannot, to a degree at least, fail to profit from the mistakes of the great Republic to the south. In this age of specialization not only in industry, but also in the realm of purely intellectual pursuits, one of our great shortcomings seems to be an insufficient stress on the unity of knowledge, and the variety as well as the complexity of the fields to be explored.