

MOULDING A NATION

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THOUGH it is insufficiently appreciated, Western Canada is in many respects the most interesting section of the North American continent to-day. It is the youngest section, merely in the primary stages of development through which others have passed. Ontario, Quebec, and the Maritime Provinces are established, their characteristics clearly defined, and their courses can be seen fairly clearly ahead of them. The West is still in a state of flux, the bourn of the land-hungry, the land where fresh careers are possible. Men of every race, class and condition are still pouring in to contribute to its building and development. Its future is still uncertain enough to make speculation interesting.

This heterogeneity is a unique quality, possessed by no other section of the Dominion to anything like the same extent, and by few countries the world over. People of every nation of Europe are gathering there, making of the western provinces one of the most cosmopolitan areas of the globe. There is a proneness on the part of older Canadians to deplore this, as something unfortunately inevitable and not particularly to be desired, whereas viewed in another light this quality constitutes one of the most fascinating phases of Dominion life. There are so many characteristically different threads to be woven into the fabric of the national life, but so much depends upon the manner of weaving!

It must be confessed that among older Canadians, no matter how enlightened their views upon immigration, often quite unconsciously, there is a superiority of attitude towards the immigrant, and a complacent feeling of generosity in admitting him to the country. The newcomer to the Dominion is regarded solely as a labourer admitted to further the material prosperity of the country, while incidentally securing a share of it for himself. It occurs to few to look beyond this physical contribution, and dwell on the possibility of his having something to add to the spiritual and cultural side of Canadian life.

Yet what, after all, is more natural than that he should? These people come straight from countries soaked in the culture of centuries, which has come to permeate every class and condition of the populace. Those qualities which in Canada have tended

to become submerged in engrossment in the work of hewing a new country out of rough elements are in these newcomers vivid and dominant. Such can justly be regarded as a contribution to the land they have adopted, in addition to the labour of their hands. But what use has been made of these in the past?

One of the greatest problems in the Canadian West has been the Canadianization of the foreign born, or the moulding of these people to a pattern acceptable to the Canadian born. There have been no very clearly defined ideas on the subject. In the past the progress has been left largely to take care of itself. The only guide Canada had to follow was the experience of the United States, where this lax method was practised, and a product considered more or less satisfactory turned out. But certain students, idealists, on both sides of the border have questioned whether the best results were obtained through this levelling, rolling out, and stamping as with a die to an accepted pattern. They seriously doubted whether a car, a radio, and a taste for jazz and cheap movies were adequate compensation for the loss of aestheticism. They speculated on the possibility of turning out a more desirable product by permitting the immigrant to retain a measure of individuality, through the retention and cultivation of those aesthetic qualities he brought with him from the homeland, of which Canadians were generally unconscious or which they slightly regarded.

The first attempt made to demonstrate to Canadians that these newcomers from Europe possessed characteristically spiritual qualities which might be made to enrich the national life was the New Canadians Folksong, Folkdance, and Handicrafts Festival in Winnipeg in 1928. It is not too much to say that it was amazingly revealing. Few suspected the beautiful craftsmanship, the store of traditional songs and dances hidden away in the foreign colonies of Western Canada. The wholehearted cooperation of the various European peoples represented in the territory was enthusiastically given, evidencing their anxiety to share what they had with older Canadians. They flocked in from hamlets and farms to exhibit the skilled work of their hands, and entertain with the song and dance of their native countries.

The prevailing Canadian attitude, that has been termed a "Nordic complex," was at first markedly evident, and the festival at the outset was regarded very apathetically. As it proceeded, however, news circulated of the really unique entertainment provided, so that interest steadily grew and attendance swelled until the end came in a burst of enthusiasm. The climax was a petition to the province and the city for assistance in the establishment of

a museum to house the handicrafts and other characteristically national cultural contributions of these new citizens of Western Canada. The objective aimed at was practically attained at a bound.

Enthusiasm did not end here, but carried well beyond the festival, having far-reaching and somewhat unexpected results! Other provinces became interested in what such celebrations seemed likely to effect, and officially asked to have subsequent festivals held within their confines. New British people in the West, with eyes still cast back across the ocean, were induced to turn from concentration upon purely material pursuits to recollect their own national heritages of song and dance, and demand representation in the festivals. So the scope widened, and a festival was envisaged embodying the entire spiritual life of Western Canada—to include the lore of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, French Canada and the native Indians—all those peoples who are playing a part in bringing a new nation into being in the territory.

Getting yet more deeply into the heart of the newer developing West, where the process of transition is in a yet earlier stage, the Great West Canadian Folksong, Folkdance, and Handicrafts Festival elicited yet more spontaneous and enthusiastic response. Very definitely it may be considered to have completed the awakening of Western Canada to a consciousness of the possession of a great spiritual wealth it had never previously occurred to it to count among its assets. This was demonstrated from the very outset in the fervour of public support. The festival was officially opened by the Lieutenant-Governor of Saskatchewan, and the inauguration was attended by the provincial premier who delivered a stirring address, representatives of all public bodies, and outstanding figures in all phases of the West's varied life. People came from all parts of Western Canada to throng all day the corridors of the Saskatchewan Hotel where handicrafts were exhibited, and pack to the utmost capacity the hall where the concerts were given. It could scarcely have been more representative, or the inner life of the great West have been more effectively epitomized.

The handicraft exhibit was a revelation to even the people of Western Canada, as reflecting a side of the life in the foreign colonies on the western plains about which people know so little, yet which many are prone to criticize. Details would be tedious, so varied was the nature of the display, but taken altogether the superb craftsmanship, the patient labour, and withal the expressed sense of beauty and artistry evidenced were amazing in the modern age of mass production, loss of pride in workmanship, and high

speed living. They were doubly revealing as emanating from a people to whom the term "foreign immigrant" is applied in a somewhat derogatory sense, and who are never thought of except in connection with the roughest, most unimaginative labour. The effect upon the beholder was yet more striking when he remembered that these had not been prepared for display, but formed part and parcel of the everyday life of the people, the expression of a traditional love of the beautiful, and the desire to have loveliness at all times about them.

Many of these foreign born women, so slightly regarded as they pass through the eastern provinces in their shawls and kerchiefs, have brought with them a knowledge, skill and taste in many intricate and elaborate forms of needlecraft such as many Canadian women would consider a supreme accomplishment. This is not used for commercial ends, but to express an artistic sense in the utilization of spare time on the farms and elsewhere. Among the men the same desire finds outlet in somewhat similar fashion, in intricate wood carving, hammering brass, the manufacture of musical instruments, carpet weaving, and the weaving of basketware. In their bright-hued native costumes, which made of the hotel corridors a blaze of colour, they could be seen working at their various crafts just as they had done in their homelands, as they do now in their new homes on the western expanse. The elaborate handicraft exhibit at the festival was representative enough of the Canadian West to show that throughout foreign colonies there is a little suspected cultural life, through which these people find a satisfaction it is somewhat difficult for the inhabitants of modern Canada to understand.

A particularly interesting phase of this work is the finding of outlet for the artistic sense through practical channels by the utilization of native products, certainly one that warrants every encouragement. It is illuminating to many older Canadians, for instance, to discover that there are newer citizens of the Dominion who complete the manufacture of fabrics upon the farms, such as was done in the olden days, but which is generally believed to have altogether passed in America. Craftsmen in many of the West's foreign colonies take the wool from their own sheep, wash it, spin it, and weave it into cloth. They grow their own flax, ret it, spin it, and weave it into fine linen. Their artistic talent reveals itself in the patterns woven into the woollen homespuns, in the elaborate embroidery and other needlework upon the linens. The native willow is being used by Central European immigrants upon the farm in the manufacture of lovely basketware. Saskatchewan

is planning for a great pottery industry in the future, basing her aspirations on the province's wealth of varied clays, but already immigrants from Europe are making splendid pottery of many kinds in their farm homes from these same raw materials.

It must not be lost sight of that Western Canada had already its foundation of native handicrafts. The exhibit of Indian craftsmanship at the festival, collected by the Department of Indian Affairs, was the finest and most comprehensive ever drawn together, and an astonishing disclosure of what Canada's original inhabitants have been responsible for in the way of leather, bead, and basket work, rug weaving, etc., and what they are still contributing through the Indian schools. At the same time French Canadians settling in the western provinces took with them the traditional crafts of old Quebec which in several settlements have managed to survive. These Western Canadian arts are receiving stimulation and encouragement through that new recognition of importance which is being accorded such home industries in Western Canada.

The concerts each afternoon and evening revealed yet additional sources of spiritual wealth in the lore of the homelands to which the people of Western Canada are yet so close. More than twenty racial groups which are contributing to the building up of the territory were represented in these, and each had its characteristic offering of song and dance which is part of its national heritage, and which the country of adoption can rightfully appropriate.

Canadians realize only in a rather vague way that all sections of the British Isles are rich in an historic store of lilting folksongs, Morris and country dances, jigs, reels, strathspeys etc., with which they are familiarized rather in a professional way than as an intimate phase of the life of the people. The festival disclosed that in parts of Western Canada these are still being kept alive, and are prevailing ties with the homeland. Similarly Germany, Italy, Hungary, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, Holland, Ukrania, Russia, Poland, Roumania, Czecho-Slovakia, Jugo-Slavia, Serbia and others—all the countries from which Western Canada is drawing lifeblood—have their national songs and dances, differing intrinsically as reflecting temperaments and history, but all possessing the essence of beauty and the value of tradition. Then there are the lovely old folk songs of Quebec and the Metis, and other old tunes and dances of early English Canada, the first of which has but recently been revived and given to the Dominion at large, while the latter is in danger of passing entirely into oblivion.

It is astonishing to discover the manner in which all these are being preserved in Western Canada, and the willingness and enthusiasm with which the various nationalities who live apart will come together to share their own particular talents and pleasures with others. This has definitely pointed out a course to be followed, and Western Canada is wisely moving before it is too late and these invaluable qualities have been lost in the levelling process of modern life. The lesson which certain authorities have long tried to teach is being slowly but thoroughly learned, that the removal by any means of those spiritual gifts brought by these simple people with them from Europe without giving anything adequate in exchange is nothing less than a calamity, and is the worst possible preparation for future citizenship. It is gradually being realized that the welding of the cultural contributions of these various nationalities may develop the process of Canadianization on a higher plane than has yet been conceived.

That very heterogeneity which has often been deplored as Western Canada's problem may be turned into the most valuable of attributes. In the harmonious mingling of peoples at the festival seems to be foreshadowed that great unification of citizenship which is so much to be desired. All the varied wealth brought to the country by those contributing to population and material accomplishment can be absorbed into the nation's cultural life, and the outcome should be a people unique the world over, possessed of the advantages of development on the North American continent, yet with an inner life that draws inspiration from the traditional beauty and culture of all Europe.

Western Canada is to-day becoming keenly alive to all this. Such festivals are now permanently established as regular events under popular demand and recognition, and the next will probably be held in Alberta. At Winnipeg the project for a museum of handicrafts and national lore is taking shape, and is to take the form of a number of typical cottages where these will be stored and preserved. Western Canada, the youngest of nations on the North American continent, has never become too thoroughly engrossed in material pursuits to neglect the cultural side of its development, but has throughout its brief history made every praiseworthy effort to encourage a spiritual growth parallel to a material prosperity. It is now receiving fresh light, discovering the foundation of its cultural existence in the mass of the common people it has attracted from all quarters to it. A new and gigantic work, the development of which it will be interesting to watch!