

THE CANADIAN CULTURAL PATTERN

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It is assumed that every country possessing a definitely national core represents a uniform cultural set; in other words, that if a nation as a whole possesses and shares many characteristics such as customs, habits, language, religion, and trends in educational systems, it may be described as having an integrated culture or more generally a "cultural face." This definition is obviously not intended to serve as a means of evaluating cultures in the sense of "higher" or "lower". The average cultural trend is not affected to too great an extent by existing regional influences and differences. Thus, it can be said of any nation that has developed this kind of cultural relationship that its culture is both distinct and original.

The phenomenon of enriching the existing culture by neighbourly influences, either by wars and conquests, is in the light of the above definition only of secondary importance. Culture, or rather its development and peak, requires not so much a period of peace¹ as a definite and stable national entity. Cultural development is impeded greatly in rather young countries with a large influx of widely differentiated cultural and national groups. Such countries show only slow progress in both spontaneous and planned development of Culture, because the population has to be fused into one national group, which is a slow operation. The immigrant population possesses at the beginning tendencies that can be understood in the light of sociology or psychology.

Immigrants tend at first to live in closed ethnical groups. In large cities they form Polish, Hungarian, Ukrainian or Chinese districts, dissolving in the older and more domesticated groups, unwillingly and sluggishly. Their eventual role in the creation of culture is therefore rather negligible. It is negligible also because the immigrant groups consist of European or other lower classes that, either because of specific conditions in their homelands or through lack of time—true of young immigration—took no part in the cultural life of their own countries.

Every immigrant aims at making a fortune in as short a time as possible; many dream of returning with the money thus

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1. The influence of peace is often overrated in this respect; long-lasting peace often accelerates the process of cultural petrification.

made to their homeland and contributing towards the effective raising of its living standard. The fact that only a few meet with enough success to be able to carry through this second phase of their plans is of no consequence to the argument. There remains one vital fact for the problem discussed below, which also means the development of Canadian culture, namely the fact that each individual immigrant already on this soil, as well as each definite immigrant group, has only one aim; that of making a fortune as quickly as possible. This phenomenon of both a sociological and psychological nature has a pronounced effect upon the society in which the immigrant element is of high percentage.

The sporadic influx of immigrants from other classes or the quantitatively negligible immigration of scientists or intellectuals is, because of its very limitation in quantity, of little or no consequence to the problem. Intellectuals or scientists coming from another country are easily, even if only outwardly, assimilated upon immigration. The process is usually independent of whether they do or do not find proper environment; however, they retain their own cultural identity. This difference of their cultural identities can, if properly handled, serve as a creative element in the formation of culture.

These general remarks seem to me necessary to picture the specific way of life of countries as young as Canada or the United States.

Every immigrant strives for a living and for acceptance into a society that is strange to him in language, customs and religion. This process usually takes place together with the accumulating of capital by the individual, which, in turn, causes him to break away from the old ethnical group. The severance of bonds between an individual and the language group may exert an inhibiting influence on an ambitious individual who is fighting his way up, in a material or social sense. This tends to have a levelling influence upon the group as a whole. It would be erroneous, however, to assume that the clever capable individual who succeeds in breaking through the barriers and establishing himself in the desired group would automatically change his set of cultural values to that of the group or acquire any values at all. Values that are still in a state of flux in young nations may be termed only potentially "cultural". On the other hand, the attainment of, the initial assimilation by, the financially more significant and usually well-established group meets with other obstacles no less important. Amongst

these is the irrational bond of sentiment to the "old country" and its specific customs and ways, also an inadequate knowledge of the language of the new group desired by the individual. It often happens that these obstacles remain during several generations. These are the reasons why one should be rather cautious about including in the near future both the immigrant individuals as well as nationally determined groups desiring assimilation in the spontaneous or planned development of Canadian culture, cautious even in spite of the fact that certain groups settled on this continent a few generations ago.

The groups most influential in the development and the initial formation of culture are those national or ethnical groups that are either strong in numbers or settled first and managed to form the framework of a new society. In Canadian reality, therefore, consideration can be given to the creative struggle going on between only the two fundamental ethnical groups. These two groups have been and in all probability will continue to be decisive for the whole process of culture formation. The influence of the other smaller units can be felt only on very small and insignificant fragments in the general process of development of culture. In the following pages I am going to discuss only the English speaking community, mainly because my knowledge of the subject, however imperfect, is limited to the English-speaking provinces.

At first glance, the Canadian way of life, in spite of wide differentiations in fragments, seems to be based on mainly the production of material goods. That is the reason why, to an impartial observer, it seems predominantly materialistic. All other traits, though undoubtedly existing are overshadowed by that dominant one. The secluded type of life led by all the smaller ethnical groups does not alter the fact that they too conform, if only out of sheer necessity, to this pattern. This pattern, common to all of them, originated through the equal-for-all opportunities in the struggle for a living, and was accentuated by the modern phenomenon of patternized mass-production. Such a pattern is always bound to appear wherever production is highly mechanised and individual production cannot compete with mass-production.

Canadian society is of a classless nature—which statement is in agreement with both the convictions of its own and of European standards. The convictions of the members of the community, being an expression of public opinion, need not correspond to the true picture. Referring to European stan-

dards, the classlessness of the society is due to the fact that the groups in higher income brackets have not as yet developed original cultural aspects or even expressed distinct cultural needs. To a European this situation appears as unfortunate, if only from the standpoint of cultural development, not to mention other deeply-rooted superstitions from which a representative of an older culture may not be entirely free. At the basis of the non-peculiarity of the materially well-to-do groups lies probably the same reason: the trend towards the betterment of the material standard of living. In the classless or pseudo-classless societies, i.e., those whose social distinctions are based not on the quality of the mode of life but solely on the amount of income, those win public admiration who have proved their industry and have scored personal success, quickly attaining a certain level of material wealth. This is not an appraisal but only a remark that can be substantiated by numerous examples should the need arise.

The materialistic aspect of the Canadian culture that is forming results in public backing for all practical professions, which are supposed to give the best opportunities for immediate success and social usefulness, in the realm of developing material needs. This attitude is responsible for the pronounced reluctance of Canadian social groups to accept anything that at first glance does not promise immediate usefulness. There lies the cause of the social aversion and occasional contempt in which the intellectual professions are held. Very frequently one can meet with a statement that only people unfit for manual factory work or business make school or university teaching their profession. Statements of the sort are undoubtedly inspired by the ideal pattern of the "heroic businessman." They have even been uttered in public by teachers themselves, with a trace of self-contempt and inferiority.

This type of judgement of the intellectual professions whose values cannot be measured by the amount of income but by the results of scientific work and education, is widespread and provides a very effective dam to culture-creating. The appallingly low salaries of the school or university teaching staff, as compared to other professions, are a by-product of this aversion mingled with contempt, which in turn discourages many from joining such a poorly rewarded profession. This, combined with a keen demand for teachers and a limited supply, may cause a catastrophic situation in the educational field. The keen demand and meager supply of teachers limits the possibilities of selection

of candidates and consequently imperils the standards of educational institutions. All educational institutions that are backed by private group capital must inevitably feel the weight of public opinion based on such a distortion. But under certain conditions and circumstances the pressure of public opinion is harmful, since it tends to retard the normal growth of culture.

Discord existing between certain elements of the arising civilisation may be held responsible for further obstacles in the way of culture creation in Canada. Such discords have become properly balanced in countries that can be described as "old". When referring to countries as old or rather old, I usually mean not only their achievement in culture or civilisation but primarily what I call the "static probability" or "static condition" in the creation of any culture. By "static condition" I mean a maximum density of population and a settled arrangement of national groups in a certain territory. I regard the emphasis placed on the technical development—an element of civilization, not of culture in both theoretical and practical spheres of "useful" life—as one of these obstacles. Here in Canada, this emphasis is out of proportion to the development of other branches of science which, appearing less useful socially, do not offer immediate and visible material gains. In this respect Canada may be regarded as a victim of certain influences emanating from her technically powerful neighbour, the United States. The intellectual "imports" from the U. S. A. should be treated with the same caution as the infiltration of American capital, which, according to the general view, might lead Canada into a sort of economic dependence. Certain large areas of life in the U. S. A. suffer from a deficiency of cultural interests, combined with a peculiar lack of ability to do abstract thinking. This phenomenon has nothing whatsoever to do with the mass development of educational institutions of all sorts nor is it typical of all elements in the American nation. For example, the more materialistic trends in the U. S. A. offer the best proof of the statement that technology has nothing whatsoever to do with intellectualism.

It seems to me, on the other hand, that a proper balance of technical and intellectual abilities is of decisive importance in certain cultural aspects or even in the possibilities of culture formation. Certain universities are staunchly opposed to the infiltration of the American system and methods of education. For a variety of reasons this infiltration cannot be welcomed here. In spite of the close resemblance both in early history

and the character of the countries, American slogans here are not warranted by either local needs or by the basic assumptions of the Canadian people. However, the half-hearted resistance offered them is still instinctive rather than premeditated. A premeditated counteroffensive and the developments of ideas and methods suited to the needs of more intellectually-minded groups should characterize the second phase.

It is also my impression that the problem has been shaped to a great extent by a philosophical trend, fashionable on this continent, called pragmatism. Pragmatism is still one of the important factors in the U. S. A. I have also been able to detect traces of it in this country. Pragmatism is the last of the original forms of minimalistic philosophy aimed at the elimination of defective problems and conceptions from science, and therefore from life. It has, however, failed to achieve the elimination of faulty assumptions. Practicability and usefulness were its criteria. Pragmatism has not only weighed heavily in theoretical sciences but has also set its imprint on the methods of their practical interpretation, thus influencing the methods of teaching. Perpetual experimentation in the scope of methods and in systems of teaching along rigidly pragmatic lines leads to a condensation of problems and to a confusion and distortion of concepts. I should hesitate however, to name pragmatism as the most important cause of the existing situation in Canada. On the other hand, little, if any doubt can remain as to the fact that the utilitarian character of public sponsorship has its roots in this philosophy.

Far-reaching conclusions should be drawn from the provisional assumption agreed upon that in the task of culture creation, one cannot count on support from the alien group, which differs both in language and "pre"-cultural qualities. Cases in which a more or less homogeneous culture is created with the cooperation of those groups are exceptional. Having recognized the necessity for the formation of a staff of experts in the cultural fields, we must also realize that only the settled elements and those following a definite pattern of life, not exclusively materialistic, can be appointed to serve on that staff. The classlessness or quasi-classlessness of Canadian society makes the creation of those groups easier, eliminating all charges that might be made on the ground of a violation of democratic principles. By taking advantage of this democratic privilege, the task of choosing the right people from a variety of creative environments will be simplified.

I am going to reply with a cogent argument to the adversaries of conscious cultural planning, culture-creating elites, and supporters of the view favouring the spontaneity of culture formation. If the ideal of the "heroic businessman" has been generally accepted as a social standard, thus idealizing a man who achieved a colossal material fortune, why should we deprive society of the possibility of the existence of another pattern-ideal, different from the "homo economicus" or "homo cocacolas"? Why should we prevent anybody, who has the will and the capacity for it, from achieving a different kind of fortune? Why should we discourage anybody who aims at acquiring certain definite cultural values or who wishes even to contribute to cultural development?

I am well prepared to face the rejoinder that any Canadian may enter a university upon graduation from high-school. That would be an answer partly accomplished and partly justified. One part of my question,—what and how one is taught in those institutions—remains still unanswered. In posing this question I have no intention of launching a thoughtless attack on Canadian education, or of seeking control over subjects that are only indirectly related to my profession. This question, which is based on observation, aims at attracting the attention of the general public—not merely that of specialists who may be fully aware of the situation. It is aimed also at provoking and maintaining a state of continuous discussion, and necessitating a revision of our opinions on education as a culture-providing element.

Teaching should not, as we know from many sad European experiences, consist of a mechanical acquisition of general knowledge that is regarded by public opinion as sufficient. The teaching staffs of both high-schools and universities are still too small and too over-burdened with regular teaching duties to do any creative cultural work. Articles published by university professors, aside from their teaching, should be treated with respect, not only because of their scientific value but also to give due credit to those who have written them in spite of the most trying circumstances such as limited time, excess burden of teaching, and low salaries. These publications in the field of their specific disciplines represent not only an important contribution by the university professors towards culture but also help, if only in a minor degree, in establishing cultural contacts with a society that is being neglected in this respect. They are vital for culture creation on the highest level, which often tends

to enter an "ivory tower", remote from the rest of the society which should operate in the creation of national culture on lower levels. Popular lecturing fulfills magnificently its informative task but it is in a position to alter or uproot certain utilitarian superstitions, prejudices and obstacles. Analogous to well-trained army instructors, who cannot wage war unless backed by the whole army, cultural instructors can not battle alone against ignorance nor can they undertake any offensives for the sake of culture unless they are backed by society. Such leaders are formed not only to teach but also, in certain circumstances, to command. I do not know many individuals in Canada, who, under prevailing conditions, would be capable of both instructing and "commanding" in the battle that is being waged for cultural expression on the part of this young and worthy nation.

The aforementioned overburdening of the teaching staff provides one explanation of the fact but not the only one. When, in conversation with either faculty members or students, I have drawn their attention to the scant interest paid to matters of culture by Canadian society, an interest almost insignificant as compared to other matters equally or even less important, I have received a standard reply: that the importance of the problems of culture is not only underrated by society but even more often regarded as a superfluous "luxury" or "eccentricity" peculiar to people who either do not work manually or who take no part in business activities. Statistics prove the same lack of cultural consciousness. The fact that there is not a single Canadian theatre that can stay permanently in operation, that exhibitions of the plastic arts are by no means well attended, that museums are only visited by people who are either "eccentric" or who feel bored, and finally the general opinion that "art serves no purpose"—all this may serve as evidence for the statement.

Those facts cry out for immediate action on the part of individuals and institutions. They also prove that the culturally conscious and trained groups are too small to enter the battle of culture unless backed by an "army", even if small, of the socially elite.

The models of the heroic businessman and of the self-made man, born of the individualistic and social conceptions of the first pioneering days, and of the minimalistic point of view and the narrow utilitarian spirit of enterprise, block the way for a more modern ideal. This new model is the outcome of yearning for a broader culture, which would provide not only for the

materialistic aspects of life, but for others as well. I am aware that much progress already had been made in this respect. There are various research commissions, an exchange of intellectuals with European countries, an exchange of students, publication of the results of research on Humanities, and many other to back the statement.

It seems to me, too, however, that the views held in other branches should be made subject to revision. This revision should start at the bottom in the elementary and high schools, rather than at the top, in the universities. In view of the insufficient preparation of candidates for university entrance, it is clear that certain methods of teaching in secondary schools, especially in foreign languages, need to be revised. The revision of methods is not the only important task. On a par with it, and perhaps of greater importance in the construction of culture, is the revision of the situation existing amongst the body of teachers in secondary education. The matter is of dual nature: quantitative and qualitative. The body of teachers is too small; their qualifications and possibilities are overtaxed by demands. An effort should also be made to standardize not only the methods and textbooks but also the courses given in schools. There is no valid reason why a youngster in province "A" should receive a less or more valuable education than his contemporary in province "B" or "C". Such a state of affairs seems to me as undemocratic.

There is always the argument that a prospective student has an unlimited right to choose between institutions, according to his own appreciation of their standards. It is inconceivable, however, to assume that, keeping only the financial aspects in view, a youth of Nova Scotia or Prince Edward Island could easily enter the University of British Columbia by merely choosing to do so. I have been assured in this connection that the system and the standards of education are adapted strictly to the conditions and utilitarian needs of the provinces in question; and, furthermore, that they are planned to meet the local demand for certain professions. This is the result of self-social planning, coupled with certain deeply-rooted prejudices. The abilities of the individual must not be overruled by the fact that, because he is a citizen of a certain province he is doomed to a certain type of education, for economic reasons or peculiarities in the business structure. This state of affairs reminds me vividly of the Medieval conceptions and the Soviet principle of "glebae adscripti".

Social demand cannot limit education, once the decision in favor of mass education has been made. The present state of affairs, coupled with financial possibilities of prospective students, could result in mass exodus from certain provinces where both the scope and the standards of education are lower, thus producing an excess population in other provinces that offer a more thorough preparation. It need hardly be added that such a migration would be both negative and undesired.

There is one solution to this problem: instead of limiting and curbing both the scope and standards of teaching, a standardization of programmes and levels, together with a broadening of interests, should be undertaken. The actual interests are not in a position to satisfy even the minimum needs arising in the field of culture-creation. Desirable differences between schools, in a different sense and on a different scale, however, resulting from the noble spirit of professional and scientific competition, will develop spontaneously from the different personalities of teachers and professors. And so, on this score there seems to be no imminent danger of pattern and its negative implications.

Standardized and rational educational methods are still free from the stigma of a pattern. These methods will serve to propagate the individualistic contents and will reflect the volume of knowledge of teachers whose qualifications will always meet the highest requirements. A pattern of a different kind has existed up to the present. In contrast to European methods, the methods of teaching in vogue here do not encourage a student to think and solve problems independently. Drilling, upon which great emphasis is laid here, fails to produce satisfactory results that have come to my mind during my meditations concerning the dawning Canadian Culture.