

In this joint secular work, France has made an immense contribution to the heritage of the moral, spiritual and civilizing forces of humanity. In fact, the world is her debtor. Her culture has enlightened and enriched it for centuries.

Earliest Element of Canadian Culture

These are some of the reasons, taken from history, which should incite Canada to know and to understand France. I would add another. French culture was the first element of civilization planted in Canada. Nothing can change the historic fact, that during 200 years it was the only one in the country. Many Canadians are unaware of its existence because of their distance from the centre of this culture, but it exists in abundance, and has made in cultural affairs a prodigious progress during the past few years. I will not offend you who know how important it is by an enumeration of its many manifestations. They are so numerous in the fields of literature, painting, sculpture, music, the theatre, and the dance, that I might run the risk of omitting some. Those who wish to know what these cultural activities are, have only to consult the report which is published annually by the Canada Council.

And this culture goes back a long time. Because of my forebears, anything I say about French culture in Canada might be thought biased, so I shall quote the testimony of a few of my predecessors.

Here is what Lord Dufferin said in Quebec in 1878:

"It is needless for me to assure you with what pleasure I again find myself taking part in those refined and artistic relations with which the French race delight to solace their leisure ... It has been one of the happy peculiarities of your nationality that you have ever known how to enliven the serious occupations of life by a graceful gaiety and to introduce a brilliancy of colour amid the sombre shadows of our dull work-a-day world. This happy temperament not only sheds its benign influence over your social existence, but it has invested everything you have touched -- your architecture, your literature, your history -- with a most attractive individuality. Brilliancy, picturesqueness, dramatic force, a chivalrous inspiration -- these are the characteristics which have thrown over the annals of Canada a glamour of romance which attaches to the history of no other part of the continent ...

"Your past has refused to die. Its vitality was too exuberant, too rich with splendid achievements, too resonant, too replete with the daring and gallantry of stately seigneurs -- the creations of able statesmen -- the martyrdoms of holy men and women, to be smothered by the dust of ages, or overwhelmed by the uproar of subsequent events."

The Marquess of Lorne, on his arrival in Quebec in 1879, said in French: