

You have understood the importance of French culture in the world, the benefits which it can bring, the essential role that it plays here in your immediate neighbourhood. You are right in wishing to understand French culture.

In the Middle Ages and during the Renaissance, France, through her cathedrals and her poets, played a preponderant part in our Western world. And, in order to understand our modern world, to grasp its deepest aspirations, its need for justice and liberty, whether in anguish or revolution, is it not in France that we should seek its origins and principal initiators? The French language, coming as it does from Latin and Greek, offered a unique means of expression, of clear and orderly analysis, and so of universal communication. Over the centuries French has added to its wealth through a history which, while no doubt playing a military, political and economic part of the highest importance, exercised to an even greater extent a spiritual influence on the world through its artists, philosophers and saints.

Language and History

The mutual knowledge of our two languages and of our two cultures will help us to understand the respective histories of France and of Great Britain. Are they not to some extent one and the same history? From the general point of view, how can we possibly separate these two countries which, almost always, are to be found together in the same military, scientific, diplomatic and economic fields? According to the time or place, one precedes the other, but in most cases the second one immediately reappears as a competitor or as a protagonist. The history of these two countries is the same, but seen from two different angles according to the two different but complementary geni. If these two great nations have come up against one another so frequently in the past, either on a battlefield or in a race to explore some unknown universe, or to extend their respective empires, was it not because they both had the same sense of universality and the same noble and magnanimous will to spread civilization?

The world will not find peace, except through the harmonization of the universe as a whole. France and England -- countries which in history and geography represent the world at middle age -- retain an essential role, and it is this that explains the spiritual destiny of our country. By her geographical and historical situation, Canada, if it wishes, can have a leading role to play in the conciliation of other nations, in the effort to bring together all men of good faith for the realization at last of a unity that will permit every man in every country to have a human existence in justice and in peace here on earth.

So it is that English-speaking and French-speaking Canadians must know one another and understand one another in order that they may continue the long tradition of Anglo-French civilization.

Rudyard Kipling expressed the same thought in the following terms at the Sorbonne in November 1921:

"For 30 generations, France and England in secular but fruitful conflict have engendered and sustained a civilization which has been attacked by an immense and highly organised barbarism..."