

We do not always, perhaps, fully realize that national *character* is just as real and positive a fact as personal character, and one just as largely dependent upon determinable influences—just as easily shaped and modified, not to say moulded, by agencies under human control. As in the one case so in the other, there are certain inborn traits and tendencies, and certain predetermined surroundings and influences, which together rough-hew the outlines. But there is none the less in the growth of the one, as in that of the other, the plastic stage during which every new contact and association without, and every new thought and volition and impulse within—all alike controllable by the choice of the subject—is little by little graving and remodelling those changing features of the man, or the nation, which in their turn are, under the very process, gradually hardening into inflexibility.

Nor does the analogy stop here. Every one who has come to years of maturity knows something, probably, of a kind of transition period—a crisis—in the individual life, when there is a strange, often sudden, awakening from the day-dreams of youth into an intense consciousness of real life, with all its actualities and possibilities. The mental energies are aroused to unwonted activity, new aspirations are enkindled in the soul, larger purposes begin to take root; in short, the whole life is stimulated and the whole man stirred by impulses deeper and mightier than any before known—impulses which soon either ripen into fruitful activities, or wither away in a more cowardly and inglorious lethargy.

Through such a critical stage we seem to be just now passing in our history as a people. The tendencies of our development are not yet fully settled, nor is its goal clearly in sight. Questions involving issues almost vital to our future well-being are still coming to the surface. The elements of our nationality, so recently in a state of upheaval, are gradually settling into position and solidity. Customs and institutions and modes of thought and feeling which will have much to do in shaping our destiny for all future time are just now crystallizing into shape. In short a thousand exigencies, springing out of our new relations, remind us how large are the possibilities within our reach, and how truly the current decade constitutes for us a crisis in which we

“ May rise on stepping-stones  
Of our dead selves to higher things.”

What, let us then ask, is to be the intellectual character of the typical Canadian one century or five centuries hence? The present tendencies of our Christian civilization are manifestly towards rivalry in the arts of peace, the pursuit of science, the culture of mind. The happy day when national duels will come to be regarded by civilized peoples as being as truly barbarous in themselves, and as utterly worthless for the decision of questions of *right*, as personal duels, may be yet far in the future, but it is, it may be hoped, approaching. Even now, military prowess is no longer admittedly the highest, much less the sole, standard by which to measure a nation's greatness; while even the, same prowess is itself, year by year, becoming more and more a question of skill and intelligence, of scientific knowledge and mind power. Hence, every consideration, the most selfish and the most elevated alike, urge those who have something to do—as what citizen has not?—with shaping the course of events in this our formative stage, to use their endeavours to secure and foster the very best agencies for the promotion of a thorough and widespread mental culture. Nor is our infant horoscope without some combinations full of promise in this respect. The Canadian people are descendants of some of the most intellectual races of the world. They have free access to the literary stores of both hemispheres. Situated well up in the temperate zone, their climatic conditions are such as have usually proved most favourable to mental as well as physical development. The main question, and that which we propose to discuss briefly, is whether and to what extent provision is being made amongst us for that culture and that stimulus which are the most indispensable conditions of large intellectual growth and achievement.

The question of our Common and High Schools we do not propose to touch, not because these appear to us to have already reached the highest pitch of excellence, but because there are many indications that they are just now being subjected to a healthful and hopeful scrutiny. It is always a good omen to see the stage of self-complacency passing away, and a sense of dissatisfaction setting in and begetting enquiry and candid