

Canadian Poets of the Great War

I must be pardoned for the far from original remark that a period of intense national exaltation is usually followed by a period of intense literary activity. The Augustan Age, the Medicean, the Isabellian, the Elizabethan, the Louis XIV, the Victorian—are they not common examples? Sometimes local difficulties have prevented the sequence, such as in the United States after the Revolution, and in Canada after the migration of the Loyalists—though in the end these movements have produced profound effects in thought and expression; for even if the "Great American novel," and the Great Canadian one, be still missing, the traditions of Independence and of United Empire have both been vastly fruitful. It is fair to prognosticate an intense literary activity in Canada, as well as elsewhere, in the near future, resulting from the Great War and it is well to scrutinize the straws in the wind even now, because that literary activity will not be merely a bookish matter, but a voice issuing out of our people's deepest soul.

What took place after that much less stirring, although momentous event, Confederation? Momentous, for Confederation made us a nation. By the way, it is amusing to hear every now and then that So-and-so "made Canada a nation." The feat has been attributed to at least a dozen different gentlemen by their admirers on fanciful grounds, from time to time; and to the C.P.R., and the McKinley tariff. But regarding even the superior claim of the Fathers of Confederation, had as many as two of them any real idea of the effects of what they were doing, beyond the solution of the old Provincial deadlock? Was it not only after the deed was done that the true scope of it began to dawn on our people?

The word "nation" itself is one used in too many senses, and needs some standardization by the British Academic Committee, or, in a suggestive way, by some such literary body as The Royal Society of Canada. At any rate a word used in so many confusing senses as "The Five Nations" for the Iroquois tribes; "la nation canadienne" for the French-Canadian race, in Lord Durham's Report, and its French sources; "le parti national" for the old Mercier Race Party in Quebec; "the British nation" for the people of the British Isles, and also for the British Imperial stock; "the Scotch nation", "the Irish nation," for two dialectic British provinces