

These preliminary remarks are not intended to intimate that we should hitch our literary wagon to the star of France and invite our writers to imitate blindly their confreres in Paris. I shall have an opportunity a little later of declaring the stand I have taken in the long and interesting debate which, in the course of the past two years, has agitated the literary life of French-Canada and in which not only some of our best known authors but also some of the most distinguished French writers have taken part. The subject debated was whether our letters should be patterned after the present trends in France or be the expression of our own Canadian experience and inspiration.

It is beyond question that we should endeavour to become more and more familiar with English-Canadian, French and other contemporary writers, who are true interpreters of the ideals and feelings of our time, rather than to confine our curiosity to those who have been the witnesses of days gone by. But, if we have much to learn from the outstanding French, English, Russian and other authors, we must assimilate only what suits us and refuse what is unsuitable. If we are to create a great and distinctive literature, we must learn not to retire within ourselves nor to blindly swallow whatever comes from abroad; but we must discover and express what has a universality of appeal in our distinctive Canadian present-day life. If our literature is at once profoundly human and profoundly Canadian it will succeed in becoming part of the cultural birthright of our western civilization.

Our French-Canadian literary life has recently made considerable progress in quality and quantity. Not only has the average production improved a great deal, but the general public has become much more conscious of the exigencies of the art of writing. Our papers and magazines dedicate more space than ever before to the discussion of our literary works and problems. Our clubs and salons witness many more literary debates than at any time in the past. The French section of the Royal Society of Canada now holds public meetings and publishes the text of the addresses delivered on the occasion of the reception of new members. Three years ago, Victor Barbeau announced the foundation of a French-Canadian Academy - "l'Académie Canadienne Française" - to be composed of twenty-four members, sixteen of them creative writers and eight essayists. The collaboration or rivalry of these two national literary societies will undoubtedly contribute toward the development of a more acute literary consciousness in the general public and a creative emulation among our writers. It is obviously too early to give an opinion on the achievements of our Academy, but I sincerely hope that it will play a leading part in the development of our literary ideals and also in the solution of our linguistic problems to which it pledged itself to dedicate an important part of its efforts.

I may add that we are now witnessing a welcome phenomenon of decentralization of our literary activity. Trois-Rivières, Sherbrooke and smaller cities are now trying to compete with Montreal, Ottawa and Quebec in the various fields of literary life. I would also mention here the progress achieved in recent years by the Little Theatre movement in the province of Quebec. If very few plays of distinction have been written by our dramatists, our theatrical companies have produced most successfully many plays by classic, romantic and

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