

FRANCE AND FRENCH-CANADIAN CULTURE

French interest in the life of Canada has increased noticeably since the Liberation. Before the last war, it is true, a cordial feeling for Canada existed, but a thorough knowledge of this country was still limited to quite a small group. There were exchanges of professional men and in university circles; moreover, there were certain stimuli, such as André Siegfried's lectures on Canada's political institutions, which exercised a wide influence, especially among students. But the new interest in Canadian affairs is due largely to the part played by the Canadian army in liberating French territory and to the considerable material assistance rendered by Canada to her ally; these brought various classes of French society to an awareness of Canada's existence. This interest has not been limited, however, to Canada's material life alone but has extended also to include the things of the mind and spirit.

Canadian Culture Increasingly Self-confident

Less tangible factors have also contributed greatly to creating a favourable atmosphere for a more just French appreciation of the Canadian cultural heritage. In the first place, it has been observed in France that Canadian culture has been increasingly self-confident and rightly so. Probably the most potent force in making the intellectuals of French-speaking Canada aware of their opportunity and responsibility was the disaster that befell France in 1940. Our writers, too often inclined to draw their inspiration from current French thought, suddenly found themselves intellectually isolated and temporarily cut off from this source by the German occupation of France. They had no choice but to turn to themselves, and this introspection, imposed by external circumstances, broadened their vision and brought them to a maturity they had not previously known. They found within themselves a wealth almost untouched, and a capacity to produce works of originality.

The Right Honourable W. L. Mackenzie King, at that time Prime Minister of Canada, commented on this event in an address delivered on the festival of the patron saint of French Canada on June 24, 1940, only a few days after France was forced to lay down her arms. Convinced that, if the culture of France were to disappear even temporarily, the world would feel a great lack, he sounded the alarm and appealed to his French-speaking fellow-countrymen to help keep that culture alive throughout the world:

On this festival of the patron saint of French Canada I wish to address a message to my French-Canadian compatriots. The agony of France has brought the horrors of war closer than ever both to Canadian hearts and to Canadian shores.

The tragic fate of France leaves to French Canada the duty of upholding the traditions of French culture and civilization and the French passion for liberty in the world. This new responsibility will, I believe, be accepted proudly.

The intellectuals of French-speaking Canada proved themselves equal to this great mission and faithful to their calling. They did more than maintain the French tradition by publishing many thousands of copies of the French classics; they enriched this tradition as well, aware that they were under an obligation to produce new creative works. With this responsibility in view, intellectual activity in Canada made extraordinary progress in every field.

The friendly relations established between Canadian writers in French and French men of letters who had been able to flee their country and had come to America added greatly to a fraternal co-operation which, before 1939, had never been so close. During the war, indeed, newspapers and literary periodicals of French