

# ART AND CANADIAN LIFE

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A MANY-FACETED thing, Art is capable of many definitions—each different, each incomplete, and each true; but above all, there is one summing-up of the matter which may pass as universal:—Art is the making-tangible, through whatever medium, of Beauty. The difference between the sister-arts of music, sculpture, painting, and literature is not one of matter but of manner merely. Beauty, whether expressed by words, tones, pigment or marble, is one Beauty, revealed in all these, but transcending them.

Because Art is the manifestation of Beauty, therefore is it the essential of the life of our souls. The intellectual part of man's being feeds on Beauty, and is warmed and clothed by it. Perception of Beauty is perhaps one of the distinctions between man and animal; the next stage, the attempt to create Beauty, brings about the distinction between savage and civilized; and this struggle it is whereby nations have mounted slowly but none the less steadily from barbarism. The tragedy of the fall of Greece was not the casting-down of power, but the eclipse of Beauty—the trampling out of a torch. What riches had Greece agriculturally or industrially? Her wealth was in her mastery of the technique of revealing Beauty; and with that wealth she enriched her world and the generations of the unborn.

As a nation, have we in Canada put first things first? We strive after material prosperity, hoping by its means to increase our stature among the nations of the world. When we are rich, we say—in effect, if not in words—we shall be able to buy Beauty. Ah, but while we are still poor, we could make it: and what is bought Beauty compared to Beauty which we have created—which we have brooded over, and fashioned tenderly, and shaped partly out of our own lives and partly from eternity? Such Beauty is the flowering of the soul; such Beauty would be to our posterity a far truer witness of ourselves than any written chronicle—at once a testimony to, and a standard for, the multitudes of them that come after.

If Art be the expression of Beauty, what is Beauty? And here we may meet many definitions of that which is perhaps not humanly definable. But, reduced to its utmost simplicity, may be not say that Beauty is harmony? Is not ugliness discordance, and

if it be true that we live in an ugly age, is it not ugly because it has become a welter of warring elements and jarring passions? The artist, says Elie Faure, is the sole man of order who exists. If that be true, surely it is so because Beauty is harmony, and the shaping of Beauty out of chaos is the blending of disunion into accord. The artist, therefore, should be the invaluable factor in Canadian life, the gradual welder of that which combines and contains the spirit of the nation.

True Beauty may or may not be of material value, but is inevitably of spiritual significance. There is a physical, a mental, and a moral Beauty, according to the threefold nature of man: but Beauty in its fullest sense must be the union of the three, which more than triples each, even as the union of the seven colours of the spectrum produces, not another colour, but Light itself. Beauty is the child and the mother of Beauty. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." Ugly thoughts are first the intake and later the output of misshapen minds. Thought is the seed, speech the flower, and action the fruit.

Canada to-day has the ingredients of a great nation, but in a state of flux. She is a great orchestra whose instruments are not yet tuned and set in order. Here and there voices float out to us, but one clashes against another; they invade our ear together in a disorderly rabble of sound. No individual note is yet developed to its complete capacity: what foretaste have we, or can we have, of the potentialities of the whole? We not more than vaguely image to ourselves the mighty music which may swell forth from the tuned and ordered pipes—music which will teach us for what wood and brass and silver were created. When the instruments are set in order, Canada will speak with one voice, and she will be a nation.

How shall we set the instruments in order? How shall we who are one in body become one in soul? It is not an act but a process—a process as natural as growth, but which like growth can be hindered and maldirected. We need not be concerned to hasten our nationhood, nor should we encourage a hothouse fostering of Canadianism, nor the morbid preoccupation with nationalism that pulls up the plant to see if it has taken root. To watch the growth of Canada let us watch the development of Canadian art, not in contradistinction to but in co-operation with the art of the nations of the world. Let our poets, our sculptors, our painters and musicians make themselves heard; let us listen for their message, and let them for their part learn their message and learn how to deliver it, that the trumpet give no uncertain sound, and that its echoes

may "roll from soul to soul, and grow forever and forever." Let them bring to their work an undivided heart and clean hands, remembering that the ministry of Beauty is holy because true Beauty is of God. And let them be willing for the sake of their high calling to hunger and thirst, to suffer and labour, and to ask no reward of men; always remembering that he who has imprisoned a fragment of Beauty has captured a handful of Eternity.