

# CANADA CLIMBS PARNASSUS

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AFTER encircling its base for a number of years, Canada has decided to climb Parnassus. Whereas she has hitherto been exclusively or almost exclusively occupied with literatures of other countries, especially those of England and the United States, she has taken it into her head to look to one of her own, or one she intends to consider her own.

This, of course, has no ulterior implications. Canada is not declaring a literary war. If it seems that she has raised her hands against foreign literatures, this is because she wishes to indicate her satisfaction that they have accomplished something. They did not circulate uselessly; they were helpful. Thus she was enabled to look to them, to witness their experiments, to isolate their merits from their faults, to choose a bit from this movement, to choose a bit from that, and to add a touch of her own sentiment in the matter.

Among the positive precautions that were taken to assure a safe, quick climb, the recent imposition of a tariff tax on foreign periodicals stands out. It went into effect on September the 1st, 1931, and though, comparatively speaking, that was a short time ago, the conviction is already prevalent that it is helping toward the desired literary status—that it is offering “footholds.” The opinion has even come from one quarter that it is doing more than this. It is “damming the inundation of foreign magazines that have come to clot Canadian news-stands, magazines that work not only to the detriment of Canadian publishers by unfairly competing against them, but to the detriment of the Canadian people by militating against their ideals and by distracting their money, through advertisements, into foreign coffers.” This view is probably unrepresentative of the people, seeming to come principally from a minority intent on a species of flag-waving, but it indicates at least the general direction in which Canadian sentiment in the matter is leaning. In a word, Canadians are expecting certain positive advantages from the tax.

What, then, are its provisions, and how do they appear to be redounding to the benefit of Canadian literature?

On magazines that are obscene or otherwise salacious and undesirable, a duty designed to be prohibitive, of fifteen cents a

pound, exists. This duty clause is so worded that it could be construed as applying to all magazines that employ Naturalistic material, and might conceivably be so enforced in the future. For the present, however, it is being directed only against those that are quite patently prejudiced in the matter of sex, such as certain in the so-called "pulp-paper" group. The Government is set in its determination to exclude these publications from Canada, and has warned that, if the present tax fails in this respect, it will adopt more effective measures.

On magazines of bulky advertising content, specifically referred to as magazines devoting more than thirty per cent. of their total space to advertising matter, the duty is five cents per copy. This means that the increase to Canadian buyers is often a little more than five cents per copy, since distributors are being careful to provide against loss on copies which they might not sell, but on which duty has been paid. The majority of magazines, however, fall into other categories. If they devote only twenty to thirty per cent. of their space to advertising, they pay only a duty of two cents per copy; if they devote less than twenty per cent. of their space to advertising, they are non-dutiable. Then, there are exceptions applying to all the classes. Religious magazines, those published by fraternal and other societies, and those of an educational nature which are not published for profit are exempt from duty.

There is no room, then, for any flowery statement to the effect that Canada is in for an era of unmitigated literary bliss because she made a piece of legislation. It was not radical legislation. She is probably benefiting from it in certain ways; she is probably losing from it in other ways. If every United States publisher who has been accustomed to ship his magazine by freight over the Canadian border and pay mailing costs in Canada should discontinue the practice, she would lose in revenue that has ordinarily accrued to her Post Office Department, about \$400,000 a year. This is no inconsiderable point, for the publishers in question might easily be moved to such action by the thought that their Canadian subscribers would have to meet the tariff imposts instead of themselves, and that Uncle Sam would derive some extra postage revenue.

On the other hand, Canada could have benefited from such a legislation as the present one. This is unanimously admitted by everyone who has full knowledge of the facts that promoted its passage. Canadian literature has been in an unprogressive state for a long time, and recent years have not remedied the situation as they might have. In the book field, a Canadian book written

by a Canadian writer and published by a Canadian publisher was (and still is) a rarity. Strictly speaking, it existed only when it bore the imprint of Graphic Publishers, Limited. This publishing company was the only one in the Dominion that professed to depend solely on Canadian material, and it had never impressed the world as being very affluent. The competition from other Canadian publishers, most of whom were only sales agents for English and United States firms, had always been too severe. The magazine field, too, presented a similar story. Foreign publications outnumbered Canadian ones in every category, from five to one to as much as fifty to one. The only all-fiction magazine that Canada ever attempted, *Canadian Stories*, died a six-months-old infant, while other magazines with more varied appeal like *Willison's Monthly*, *The Canadian Nation*, *Goblin*, and *The Canadian Mercury*, had to succumb under the difficult going. Even in magnitude of circulation, foreign magazines have been the leaders. The *Saturday Evening Post* recently had a Dominion circulation of 130,000 copies, the *Ladies Home Journal* had one of 125,000, but the best Canada's oldest magazine, the *Canadian Magazine*, could do was to reach 70,000.

This was not because Canadian literature was at fault, or because any foreign literature was to blame. It was principally because Canadian literature was subject to unfair competition. Through a conspiracy of circumstances, Canadian publishers had to meet what was admittedly a very unfair operating cost. The machinery units, the paper, and so forth, which were required and which had to be bought in the United States since they were not available in Canada, were obtainable only after heavy duties were paid. Paper, though it might originally come from Canadian forests, could leave the Dominion in its crude state and come back in its refined state more economically than it could remain and go through the same process at home. The trouble was that an import tax prevented anyone who would from taking advantage of the fact. When it attempted to return to its native land, paper was promptly confronted with a thirty per cent. levy, unless it attempted to return in the physical appearance of a foreign magazine, in which instance there was a conspicuous exception. And the same situation extended itself to almost every other appurtenance of the printing industry. As one Canadian publisher has pointed out, even printing plates for reproduction in two or more colours, which had originally been made for publication in foreign magazines that entered duty free, when they were forwarded by foreign parent companies to Canadian advertisers for publication in Canadian magazines, were required to meet a large duty!

So Canadian literature has been in such a situation that legislation might have benefited it very considerably. It is almost inconceivable, however, that the present legislation is doing more than according a few opportunities which have hitherto been unaccorded. There seems to be quite a consensus among serious students of the situation that it is having a threefold effect. It is curtailing or tending to curtail the distraction of Canadian money by foreign advertisements in foreign magazines; it is placing Canadian publishers in a fairer position to compete with foreign publishers; it is probably affording more space for the expression of Canadian talent.

Many of the benefits that might be accruing from the first result are not very positive. Certainly they are not very apparent, for not only is it hard to say just what portion of the money that has customarily been diverted to foreign markets under the old régime is ceasing to be diverted under the new, but it is harder still to determine whether Canadian literature will be aided at all by the fact and to what extent. If a sum worth while were to be involved, it is possible that a part of it or even a large part of it would turn in its idleness to advertisers in Canadian magazines. This would tend to strengthen these magazines. But it would not tend to strengthen them definitely, and the possibility is contingent on other possibilities, which leaves the whole suggestion vague and conjectural.

Other suggestions of a more or less obvious character have been made, however, and one or two of them merit consideration. The first is that the legislation, in tending to diminish the circulations of foreign magazines, is tending to diminish the promotional advertising of foreign book-publishers. In this way, it is greatly enabling Canadian books to compete with foreign books—which, in this instance, is another way of saying English and United States books, with the latter preponderating—on a more favourable basis, because less regard will be had for author's reputation, foreign circulation, book-club recommendation, sensational format, and so forth. It is also suggested that the legislation, in lessening the quantity of book-club advertisements, is discouraging subscribers to book clubs. This will be a great boon to Canadian writers, it is pointed out, because there are from five thousand to ten thousand Canadians who are fully paid-up members of United States book-clubs. Being released from their club obligations, they will constitute a most welcome influx to Canada's meagre list of potential buyers of books. And it will be especially welcomed by unrecognized Canadian writers. Very often the obtaining of a few hundred

additional sales is all that is necessary, not for success, but for a guarantee of one more chance.

In regard to benefits from the second result, it can be said of them that they appear the most real. The plight of Canadian publishers has been such that even the most trivial remedial measure would have been sure to have offered some help. The cost of publishing in Canada needed to be balanced with the cost of publishing in foreign countries, especially the United States, and the present legislation is probably achieving this end, though it is acting negatively. It is not removing the duties that appear to have so militated against Canadian magazines; it is extending them to include foreign magazines and, in so doing, is removing their hostile quality. The particular group especially benefiting is the Canadian general magazines. They are profiting from the largest duty, the five-cents-a-copy impost on magazines in which more than thirty per cent. of space is assigned to advertising.

Finally, there is the view that the legislation is enabling greater opportunities to be provided for the exercise of Canadian talent. Its advocates point out that the enforcement of the legislation so far, inasmuch as it is promoting the expansion of already existing magazines and stimulating the appearance of others, many of the latter to take the place of those magazines that have found the fifteen-cents-a-pound clause prohibitive, is meaning or necessarily will mean a solicitation and employment of more work of Canadian writers. It is added, however, that this does not imply that foreign magazines with circulations in Canada were accustomed maliciously to forestall or remove such opportunities, but that they could not provide them. The *Saturday Evening Post*, which recently had a circulation in Canada of 130,000 copies, could not have lent one-tenth of its pages to Canadian writers and interpretations of the Canadian scene, and still have remained the *Saturday Evening Post*. The same holds to an equal or greater extent for most of the other magazines. The *American Magazine*, for instance, is quoted by the Canadian Writer's Market Survey as explicitly preferring "American characters against an American back-ground." If "American" is meant to be synonymous with "United States," say these theorists, then the *American Magazine* can claim individuality; if it has been meant in this sense for some length of time, the *American Magazine* can claim individuality and respect for custom, too, but not the kind of either that is exactly conducive to Canadian authorship, inasmuch as the *American Magazine* has always enjoyed a wide circulation in Canada.

This proposition is a legitimate and perhaps even acceptable one, but it could have been rendered more acceptable, had it dis-

established the possibility of two things. First, United States editors, when they contemplate diminishing or diminished Canadian circulations, might feel more and more disinclined to accept the work of Canadian writers. The thought is not pleasantly entertained; for there is a feeling among Canadian writers, and it has on occasion found public expression, that they are the debtors of United States editors. The latter have not only been courteous and expeditious in their treatment, but they have been generous in their remuneration, paying two, three, and four times as much as was customarily obtainable in Canada. Secondly, publishers of those magazines that are adversely affected by the fifteen-cents-a-pound tariff might decide to print permanently in Toronto. So far there has been no enactment to proscribe this. They would be perfectly within the law in importing their printing plates and might, under the circumstances, retain part of their Canadian circulations, though at a slightly increased operating cost.

This scheme, then, does not possess very evident justification, probably not the justification of the first two, but it might be realizing fulfilment. If it is, if Canadian literature is being accorded greater expression, then it is easy to think of at least one important consequence. There will be a paucity of Naturalistic material. Canadian writers have never looked on the Naturalistic experiment favourably, or at least one is prompted to conclude so after a consultation of their works. They seem possessed of a naturally conservative disposition; but, far from being a disparagement of them as writers, this fact might greatly commend them. The history of the literatures of every nation contains the warning that, though they may violently swing, even literary pendulums come to rest in the centre.

Summing up, then, one might conclude that, though it was incapable of radical effects and probably is having less than it led many at first to expect it would have, the legislation, so long as it has existed, has accomplished something. It was designed to provide for Canadian literature a fostering influence, such as generally provided for the literatures of other countries, but which, in the case of Canada, was unnaturally lacking. It is probably doing as much as that. As already suggested, it seems to be offering opportunities,—footholds, as it were, by which Canada is being enabled not to occupy an exalted literary position after having made little or no effort to get there, but to climb towards such a position, or at least towards a position higher than she has occupied.