

CANADIAN LITERATURE AND THE CENTENNIAL

THE CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION is an historical festival commemorating a political event, and it might well be asked what interest it can have for a literary magazine. After all, if one discounts mere polemics, the literature that emerged from the event itself was negligible. Indeed, by 1867 very few books that can now be given serious critical consideration had been produced in any of the provinces which then became Canada. Even the so-called Confederation Poets came many years afterwards and had nothing to do with Confederation considered as mere political event.

Yet political events often have their social and cultural consequences — sometimes, as in the case of the Restoration of Charles II, or the First World War, of profound importance in the re-shaping of literatures. And if, as we believe, a distinguishable literature which can be called Canadian has appeared by the 1960's, it has inevitably been shaped and conditioned by the circumstances which followed from Confederation. It is obviously different from the kind of literature we should have had if the territory which is now called Canada had been absorbed into the United States, or if the constituent colonies had followed separate existences and had emerged into the twentieth century as a mosaic of little nations like the former colonial territories of West Africa.

By now critics have begun to define with growing sharpness many of the elements that do — as a result of Confederation — condition our outlook as a people and hence the way we write. The vertical social mosaic, and the horizontal ethnic mosaic polarized by the duality of English and French cultures; the tenuous strip of human existence along the borderlands, with the nodules of increasingly cosmopolitan cities and the growing lonelinesses of prairie and coastal villages; beyond human settlement, the vast solitude, bearing down from the north, of the

great cold empty land, and pressing up from the south the aggressive world power whose force we repel, because we must, with the small insistence of the limpet shaped to resist the breakers. All these factors have become component elements in our consciousness, and hence in our works of literature and art.

But, however closely linked the building of a nation and the growth of a literature may appear to be, it is the literature that concerns us, not the political event, and during the coming year we shall discuss informally, rather than celebrate, the writing which has taken place in Canada during the past century. Our plans do not mean that we shall ignore that running examination of current and contemporary writing which is perhaps the most important of our functions. Nevertheless, we shall devote more space than usual to broader surveys considering from various viewpoints the past and future of Canadian literature. The first of these, Ronald Sutherland's "Twin Solitudes", dealing with parallels between English and French Canadian fiction, appears in this issue. Others, putting different historical points of view on Canadian literature, by such writers as Desmond Pacey, Ralph Gustafson and Warren Tallman, will follow in later issues. Some past Canadian writers, like John Sutherland, Frederick Niven, Sara Jeannette Duncan and Isabella Valancy Crawford, will be considered for the first time in *Canadian Literature*, and Ralph Connor, whom F. W. Watt examined in our first issue, will be re-viewed by Roy Daniells. One special issue will be devoted to considering the past and present of publishing in Canada.

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The subject of publishing leads us to end with a note of congratulation for the remarkable example of book production provided by McClelland & Stewart in *Birds of the Northern Forests* (\$20.00), with paintings by J. F. Lansdowne and text by John A. Livingston. Mr. Lansdowne's excellent colour plates and monochrome sketches show that representational art still has its uses; photographs can rarely present such recognizable or such evocative images of birds, or, for that matter, flowers or insects, as the craftsman of Mr. Lansdowne's proficiency. Mr. Livingston's text is modest but informative, intelligently partisan on the issue of conservation, and written with that spare clarity which still makes the narratives of the great nineteenth-century naturalists such enjoyable reading. For bird-lovers, as distinct from bird-killers who get short shrift, this will be a pleasant book to possess, particularly as it is presented as the first of a series covering the various natural regions of Canada; for those who are interested in the craft of publishing, it reaches a standard that could and should be achieved more often.