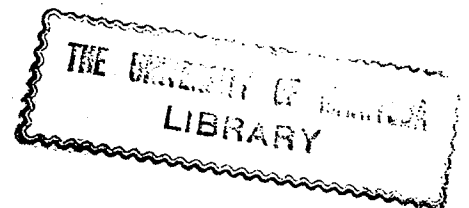


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EVOLUTION OF CANADIAN POETRY.

M.A. 1914



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EVOLUTION OF CANADIAN POETRY

BY

LILLIAN R. BROWN.

M.A. 1914

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## Preface.

There is a remarkable paucity of explanatory material on Canadian Literature on our library shelves. There is also a remarkable lack of appreciation shown for our literary production. The cause we can seek in one of two sources: either there is nothing in Canadian Literature to warrant the study of it, or else men are too busy along some other line of activity to devote time to such a subject as the one under discussion.

It is the purpose, then, of this work, not to enter into a study of the work of every Canadian poet, but rather to choose a few who are typical of the epoch in which they wrote, and by the study of their work, endeavor to point out that despite all seeming evidence to the contrary, there is something essentially worthy in our Canadian Poetry. We cannot claim, as yet, a National Literature, but every loyal Canadian believes that the day is not far distant when that goal will be reached. It will be the aim then of this work to trace the development of our poetry towards that goal - and this I have been pleased to call "The Evolution of Canadian Literature".

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

## INTRODUCTION.

"It is impossible to gain an intelligible appreciation of a national Literature without an acquaintance of the conditions under which it originated. The three leading factors which determine its character are, race, epoch, and environment. Each race has its fundamental traits which give it individuality in the world. Again, every age has its peculiar interests and tendencies from which Literature, as a reflexion of life, cannot divorce itself. Lastly, environment, or physical and social conditions, constitutes a great formative principle in the making of a literature".<sup>1</sup>

A brief discussion relative to these three formative principles as regards things Canadian would not be amiss then, if we are to appreciate fully the development of Canadian Literature.

### (a) Race.

Before the whiteman put foot on Canadian soil the savage Indian roamed our prairies, and paddled our lakes and rivers. Gradually as the white invader advanced, the native was pushed Westward and Northward - even as the early Britons were driven West and North by the early Saxon - until now, only from remote regions do there come to us echoes of that early Indian race. Ever and anon as the traveller penetrates into strange places, he comes upon a mound, still unopened, that still holds relics of that early habitation of our land. Or, at times, especially in the West, he will wonder at the strange names given to our Cities, our rivers, or our mountains, and, on inquiring, learns that the name is Indian.

So saturated is our country still with the essence of the primal owner of the soil, so many tales have we of the early struggle of the white and Indian, so thrilling an age was that when the native and invader struggled for possession of the soil, that we feel assured that our Literature will be bound to reflect this phase of Canadian history. And so, a recognition of the Indian and his history is essential to a complete appreciation of the story of Canadian life, and as a result, Canadian Literature.

But while the Indian to all purposes has passed away, the other great race that played so important a part in our early

<sup>1</sup> Painter - Introduction to "English Literature".

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history, still remains, and still exerts a great influence on Canadian life. The French are so indissolubly fused in our history, that we must consider them very carefully. That early age in our development when French and English both fought against the Indian for existence, and when French fought English for the possession of the soil. More interesting still are the stories of the life of the voyageur, the intrepid trapper, and the coureur-de-bois. Most interesting is the story of Court life at Quebec, where the resident Governors attempted to imitate the Court of the Louis. This age is one of the most exciting in our annals; it is the age of the French ascendancy in Canada, and although, in this work, we are dealing with Anglo-Canadian literature, still a recognition of the French is an invaluable factor in a full appreciation of our history.

Lastly we come to the third and greatest racial factor in our history - the Anglo-Saxon. We are essentially an Anglo-Saxon race, imbued with all the qualities that the term connotes. We stand for the Briton's love of freedom, love of right, and hatred of everything despotic. These fundamental characteristics have remained unchanged, but the local characteristics of the inhabitants of the British Isles have been washed away by the waves of Canadian environment, and while we still lay claim to the Old Land, the home of our forefathers, yet, should we visit the ancestral seats across the water, we would be recognized at once as "Canadians". Thus, while our fundamental traits are based on the stalwart foundations of Anglo-Saxon tradition, nevertheless we have characteristics of our own which brand us the world over as "Canadians". The true Canadian no more considers class or "caste" than the Hindoo overlooks it. The Canadian has a profound respect for education to all through Public Schools. The Canadian recognizes a man by his merit and by no other standard, and, above all, the Canadian carries with him that clean, fearless, self-unconscious atmosphere that can be born only of wide prairies, limitless forests, and towering mountains.

(b) Epoch.

The second formative principle to be considered in the making of a national literature is that of "epoch". By this we mean a study of the various distinct periods into which the history of the nation naturally falls. For convenience's sake we shall divide Canadian history into four

periods: (a) 1500 - 1763; (b) 1763 - 1867; (c) 1867 - 1900;  
(d) 1900 - 1914.

(a) 1500 - 1763. The period embraces the time which elapsed between the discovery of Canada by the French, and the conquest of Canada by the English. The period teems with excitement. The French settled along the St. Lawrence river and digressed little from its banks. For a number of years the settlers were harassed by the native Indian, who naturally objected to this foreign invasion of his territory. However, the French settlement thrived and the fur business assumed gigantic proportions.

But a new obstacle lay in the path of the French regime, namely, England, who, loathe to allow her rival, France, to accrue all the benefits from the new found land, had been gradually opening up settlements in Eastern Canada, and the New England States. Finally strife arose between these two rival powers, and it was soon evident that two nations, such as France and England, could not exist peacefully side by side in Canada. The strife was brought to a head in 1755, and settled in 1759 when Quebec fell before Wolfe. In 1763 Canada passed under British rule after a century and a half under the French Regime.

This brief review of the period will give the reader an idea of the continual struggle that the settlers went through in trying to maintain an existence; a struggle first with the Indian, then between French and English. Such a period was not conducive to the production of literature - and none was produced, unless we take into consideration the histories and biographies written in French at the time - but it was a period which produced the material for future literature, and, as such, it is a period about which it is well to know much.

(b) 1763 - 1867. While the previous period is marked by a struggle for territory and for existence, this period is characterized by a struggle for peaceful government, a government that would at once satisfy both French and English. Up to this time the French population had far exceeded the English, but now, with Canada under British rule, settlers from the old land came to make new homes in the new colony. Trouble now arose in changing the laws to suit the French majority and English minority. The American War of



Independence threatened Canada, and only England's diplomacy saved the allegiance of the French. Finally the strife between England and United States came to a head, and in 1812, 1813, 1814, Canada, as England's vulnerable point, was attacked, and for three years progress was at a standstill in Canada. However, Canada managed to check the invasion of the States without Britain's help, and this achievement resulted in the birth of a confidence in being able to look after herself. Her next step was a demand for Responsible government, and for twenty years she struggled, only gaining the goal after open rebellion in 1837. For the next thirty years the country underwent a series of constitutional climaxes which were finally merged into the solution of the problem: Confederation 1867.

Like the previous period, this age was also not conducive to the production of literature. It was a pioneer era, when our forefathers first came and toiled hard from morning till night, blazing trails, hewing the forests, and clearing the land. Men were too much occupied in settling the country to devote much time to literature. Like the first period, it was, from the standpoint of literature, a "Material-producing age".

Nevertheless, considering the conditions, much good literature was produced in this period, and, while much of it was descriptive of pioneer life and conditions, nevertheless, there was produced much that prophesied of greater work to come. In dealing with this period we shall term it the "Pre-Confederation" or the "Pioneer Age".

(c) 1867 - 1900. After Confederation, affairs in Canada assumed a more settled state: The East rapidly developed along all lines. The West commenced to claim the attention of settlers and the pioneer life of the East was repeated in the West. Railways were soon built, which opened up for settlement the vast areas of the West and North, and soon the farm and homestead dotted our prairies, while Cities grew and flourished.

As in the East during the pioneer period little was produced in literature, so was it true of the West during this period. But in the settled East, men now found time to drop axe and spade and revel in the beauties of their land. It is only a step from the contemplation of outward

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nature to a contemplation of the serious things of life and the great emotions that stir the human soul. And so during this period, when for the first time in a hundred years, "the gates" *"The Gates of War were closed"* men devoted time to the pursuit of literature. Such an outburst had not yet been experienced in Canadian history, and has not yet been excelled. We shall call it "The Golden Age".

(d) 1900 - 1914. This period deals with the present age. For the last fifteen years we have been giving ourselves up to a mad rush for wealth. It has been essentially a commercial age, and we have rushed into it, blinded by material inducements. Now we have about exhausted the material supply. We have to look only at real estate conditions: a year ago how many eager hearts madly invested their all in a few acres of land; to-day how many sorrowful ones find their bank account overdrawn and more money to be paid out. Look again at the farmer. For fifteen years he had been drawing crop after crop from his soil and reaping material profits from his harvests. Look at him to-day as he gazes on his exhausted fields and depleted bank account. Everywhere the same condition is evident. We have lived from a commercial standpoint for the last fifteen years and now we have drained our resources dry. What will the future be?

And our literature has not escaped the taint of this age, which we shall deal with later on, under the title of "The Commercial Age".

Finally we come to a contemplation of the future. We can only predict, but if we can judge by the history of other countries and by the nature of Canadianism, we shall have little to fear as to the outcome.

(e) Environment.

"Such is the patriot's boast where'er we roam  
His first best country ever is his home".

We may be overassured in the delights of our Canadian land when we boast of her incomparable beauty - but where in any one country could you find such a galaxy of natural beauty? Broad rivers, towering mountains and smiling valleys, forests of densest elm and maple, prairies of illimitable plain, mighty lakes to North and South, and, guarding her Western coast, the towering Rockies that rival the Alps in their magnificence.

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Natural resources in abundance - no crowd or crush of humanity, but broad areas, over which the yet untainted air breathes in nature's fulness. A climate that varies from everlasting summer to never-dying winter. Well might we quote Goldsmith:

"Could nature's bounty satisfy the breast  
The sons of 'Canada' were surely blest  
Whatever fruits in different climes are found  
That proudly rise or humbly court the ground;  
Whatever blooms in florid tracts appear  
Whose bright succession decks the varied year.  
Whatever sweets salute the Northern sky  
With vernal lives that blossom but to die  
These here disporting own the kindred soil  
Nor ask luxuriance from the planter's toil  
While sea-born gales their gelid wings expand  
To winnow fragrance round the smiling land."<sup>1</sup>

Surely no muse could rest uninspired in the midst of such beauty.

In the following study then it will be well to bear in mind these foregoing statements.

. . . . .

One more point we must take into consideration before we enter into a sympathetic and appreciative study of Canadian Poetry, and that is, the fact that we are dealing with Anglo-Canadian Poetry only. Now, as Anglo-Saxons, we have two rivals in the field of Literature, Great Britain and the Republic to the South of us, both of which countries have produced a great literature. But their language and ours is the same, and dependent on this is the fact that our literature will always stand in comparison with theirs. Someone has said that had we had a language different from any other in the world, we would long ago have achieved fame in the realm of literature. But shadowed as we are by the great products of English Literature, we suffer much in comparison.

It is well to bear this fact in mind and give it due consideration as we trace the development of Canadian Literature, particularly poetry, towards the goal of a national Literature.

<sup>1</sup>Goldsmith's "Traveller".

CHAPTER II.

PIONEER AGE.