



# THE ROYAL BANK OF CANADA MONTHLY LETTER

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## OUR PERIODICAL PRESS

CANADA needs magazines which will interpret world events, give information and entertainment, and help to bind together the people of this far-flung nation.

Our civilization, and our Canadian culture, are the result of ideas and the communication of ideas from person to person. The magazine is a splendid medium for conveying ideas. Its pages are not filled with "quickies" to be read on the run, but with considered and thoughtful discussions.

One could divide the contents of most magazines into three broad classes: fiction, fact and discussion. The periodical which is published weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, or quarterly is not a purveyor of spot news. It has articles, stories, essays, sketches and editorials. Its function is to elaborate, explain and interpret. Its editorials try to fashion opinion with respect to the contemporary world. Its serious articles provide supplementary or enriching information which enable us to understand news and events. Its fiction entertains us and its advertising informs us. The bound copies of magazines kept by libraries have become an important part of the written record of Canada's growth, culture, and prospects.

We are a critical audience, not easily deluded, and we are not satisfied with colourless writing about vital subjects. Our standards are rising with our education. Magazines have to be alert and enterprising to keep a step ahead of us.

### *What Magazines Do*

Magazines deal with national affairs, thus helping to build up a Canadian point of view; they inspire community enterprises, and they build a social mind. Their pictures showing beautification of parks, streets and houses; their articles on playgrounds, hobbies and clubs; their campaigns for tolerance: all these contribute to the improvement of living everywhere in Canada. Their autobiographical and biographical articles, usually of the inspirational kind, set standards of achievement and of culture.

Politically, too, their influence is strong, though they may be neutral in politics. They have attained their present position in an atmosphere of democracy, free speech and a free press. It is natural that they should be the upholders of the freedom of the individual within the framework of a parliamentary system as free as that of any government on earth.

There are some black sheep in the flock. Damage is done the generally good reputation of magazines by a few which publish irresponsible material or pictures and articles that are immoral.

Communities everywhere in Canada have found it necessary to invoke laws against smutty magazines. These flimsy publications possess no literary or artistic merit. They tend to lower the cultural values of those who read them, and they create inferior standards of morals.

There is a wealth of wholesome periodical literature available, appealing to everyone from small tykes to millionaire tycoons. More than 600 periodicals are distributed regularly by Canadian publishers, including general magazines, women's magazines, trade journals, and weekly, monthly or quarterly publications dealing with the interests of farmers, churches, schools, labour organizations, artists, writers, professional people, and a score of other special classes.

In addition there are some weekly publications in newspaper style which have practically the same kind of reading matter and illustrations as the general magazines. These are not to be despised, because at their low price and with their universality of appeal they make themselves the art, letters and science of the common people.

### *Women's Magazines*

Among the magazines with broad appeal come those generally referred to as "women's". All topics that could conceivably appeal to women are covered, and they carry in addition much material that interests men and children. People's appetite for these magazines is insatiable.

Women's magazines, addressing themselves particularly to Mrs. Housewife, are built on the idea of service to women and to the home.

There is no gainsaying the fact that the general content of women's magazines, articles and pictures, has had a great influence on the culture and living standard of the nation, and on its health and good taste, and in addition there have been campaigns and crusades in women's magazines that have influenced Canada's homes and communities for good.

As a market-place, women's magazines are pre-eminent. They are studied and considered intensively, not merely read. Even those readers who cannot afford gowns, styles and beauty preparations designed for the well-to-do are helped in their choice of less expensive substitutes.

### *Farm Periodicals*

Farm periodicals have a long and honourable record. In pioneer days farming called for industry and perseverance, and the lore of agriculture was passed down from father to son. Nowadays, science and the need for skilled management combine to make farming an industry that requires constant study by its people.

Particular problems beset the farmer today. The Saskatchewan grain grower cannot sow an extra acre without taking into consideration what his opposite numbers are doing in Argentina and the United States. The depression, the war, and the disinclination of young people to stay on farms have all conspired to add to the difficulty of farming. These problems have been taken up by the farm journals.

Besides providing practical farm knowledge and explaining new methods, these magazines lead in the effort to bring about improvements in the rural way of life. They give world-wide information of interest to farmers, and their interpretation of world happenings in terms of farm interest makes them an important force in moulding public opinion.

### *Business and Trade Papers*

Business, merchandising, industrial and technical papers are regarded by executives as essential tools. They are worth many times their cost to men who study them and take advantage of the information they provide. No "true experience" story in a trade paper is printed with the thought that you can go and do exactly likewise with precisely the same success. But many a man has increased his business and boosted his assets by taking someone else's bright idea and giving it an original twist before applying it to his own needs.

These merchandising and technical periodicals are current text-books for the segments of business they serve. They present up-to-date "how to do it" material authoritatively. They crusade constantly for higher standards of business ethics and production performance. They provide a meeting place in print for discussion of methods and processes. They supply an advertising medium directed precisely at the specialized market they serve.

Of more than 200 business, trade and technical papers, at least twelve have flourished in Canada for over 60 years, and newly found wants are met from time to time by new ones.

### *Other Special Magazines*

Specialized in a different way are the scholarly, or "highbrow", magazines. With comparatively little circulation, they give expression to the wisdom of scholars and philosophers, and remain periodicals for the elect and the select. But they do add in one important way to the culture of Canada. It is not enough for the scholarly magazine to report that a condition exists, and it does not content itself with praising or condemning; the scholarly magazine must inquire into the why, the how, and the effect of the new condition. It must ascertain the function of the event in the scheme of life, and it seeks to appraise the effects in terms of Canada's future.

In the same class, so far as circulation and accomplishment are concerned, are the "little magazines". They perform a service not given by any other kind of publication: the opportunity for new writers with innovations of style or material, to get into print.

Some of these little magazines are snobbish. Some delight in parading their eccentricities. Often they are annoying to the lay reader. But they have a record of reputable accomplishment.

Three investigators looked into these little magazines in 1946, and reported, according to James Playsted Wood in his *Magazines in the United States*, that these unsung periodicals had discovered and sponsored about 80 per cent of the important novelists, poets and critics who began to write after 1912.

### *What do People Want?*

It is most difficult to ascertain what people want in a magazine. Most surveys have been made by commercial interests, and do not contribute to social inferences.

Probably the reasons for having magazines in the house would surprise us. Some are there because they were given us for Christmas; others because we just wouldn't be without the inspiration their contents give us. Some may be tastefully disposed on end tables to impress visitors; others are on bedside tables for the restful pre-sleep hour. And now they have started to appeal through perfume: the American Museum of Natural History recently printed a magazine with specially prepared ink which gave off a piney odour.

Editors' opinions about readers' wants differ widely. All are trying to provide a general menu that will satisfy the desires and tastes of a multitude of subscribers. If circulation increases, the editor may take it as a sign that the magazine is on the right track; if it falls, the readers are not satisfied, and it is time for a shakeup.

That is, for the general magazine, stating a problem in too easy terms. The general magazine is noted for the variety of its contents, as well as the quality and

quantity, so the editor must ask: what class of item is not pleasing readers? Is the factual reporting not competent? Is the fiction section in a rut? Are the departments living up to their service objective? Does the editorial section lag behind public opinion, or is it too far ahead? Is the magazine generally too soothing, or too startling?

These are just some of the headaches of the magazine editor. In addition he has the inescapable danger of being caught out on a limb by swiftly changing conditions. The magazine goes to press weeks or even months ahead of its date. Its articles must anticipate what is likely to happen, and they must be written so that they appear as if written on the day of publication.

### *About Fiction and Science*

Fiction is a magazine standby. It takes the reader out of the familiar and sometimes drab actualities of life into more romantic and alluring scenes. In this fiction world the good end happily and the bad have a rough time; all women are beautiful and all men handsome.

Fiction is important socially. It would be difficult for any of us to say how many of our beliefs, opinions and sentiments and how much of our general knowledge we have imbibed from fiction. Our whole approach to human relationships and our appraisals of our fellow men may be based on impressions formed in reading novels.

A great deal of the fiction that has appeared in general and women's magazines in Canada has been noteworthy for its excellence.

Many articles in general magazines have to do with science. We are a science-minded people, conscious of the significant and sometimes startling changes that are being wrought in our lives by scientific advance. But just what is science? Is it the record of achievement, or does it include prediction?

It is said of Jules Verne that he was incensed at the American public because it insisted on classing his stories as tales of adventure. He desired them to be recognized as prophetic stories based on scientific facts, as, indeed, they were. This may justify much that is printed in current magazines, fantastic though it may appear. After all, the absurdities of the comic strips in past years are today's commonplace gadgets.

The magazine can give a discovery background, colour and significance. Trained writers who are specialists in the handling of science news explain the event, and industrialists, medical men, engineers and academic people tell what it will mean in everyday life.

It has become the fashion to classify the pages of magazines under headings that refer to the reader's professional or leisure-time interests. Usually each department has its own specially qualified editor, a person who realizes that the power of his page lies more securely behind the print than in it. The most scrupulous attention is paid to correspondence.

It is this personal service that gives many magazines and farm journals their outstanding hold on their readers. Hundreds of persons who have tried to diagnose the appeal of a magazine from its printed pages have remained baffled by the remarkable confidence displayed by readers. The secret of these magazines is that they help personally thousands of readers; they are not inanimate printed sheets, but vital forces in the lives of people.

### *Writing for Magazines*

It is easier to write in some ages than in others. In a dark and ignorant period, moderate knowledge will entitle its possessor to a considerable share of fame, but to be distinguished in an age like the present requires striking qualities of mind and exceptional knowledge.

Nearly everyone has a finger that just itches to write something that will appear in print. Some have a rage for saying something when they have nothing significant to say, but it must be recognized, on the other hand, that many persons who could contribute acceptably to our knowledge and thinking refrain from doing so.

If you are a moderately-well educated person with something significant seeking expression your first task is research for facts. You can find the needed detail in thousands of magazines and books available in school, church, public and private libraries.

Having gathered the information, relate it and your philosophy about it to the needs and interests of those you hope will form your audience. Don't try to copy anybody's style; read widely and let your own style develop. Say what you have to say just as simply as you can, without being long-winded.

Then send your manuscript to the magazine you choose. There is no more powerful lever to open the magazine door than a manuscript that says something of interest to readers of that magazine. No influence is needed to bring it to attention of the editor: he is looking for it.

Payment for magazine articles has been steadily rising in Canada. In twelve months recently the editorial departments of eight leading Canadian magazines spent \$581,600 in purchasing material from Canadian authors, writers, artists and photographers. One Toronto publishing house spent a million dollars in 1949 to edit its group of magazines and business papers.

### *Press Associations*

There are 121 magazines, farm papers and business newspapers in the Periodical Press Association, with circulations totalling more than 12½ million. This Association grew out of the old Canadian Press Association Inc., founded in 1858. It is divided into the Agricultural Press Association of Canada, the Business Newspaper Association of Canada and the Magazine Publishers Association of Canada. All of these report an increased demand by Canadians for their own

wholly-owned Canadian periodical literature, and recognition by advertisers of the high quality of readership of Canadian periodicals.

The object of the press associations is to strengthen the service to the nation of the periodicals of Canada. They subscribe to standards of practice designed to improve the quality, service and ethics of all the publications.

Both the number of magazines and the amount of circulation have made phenomenal strides in the past 30 years. There are 85 consumer magazines read by all classes, with a combined circulation of 4,672,660. Forty-seven farm papers exceed 2,330,000 copies per issue. The business press, numbering 260, has a circulation of 1,280,000 copies. Religious periodicals, 35 in number, with circulation totalling 765,000, and labour and political publications numbering 20, with circulation of 269,000, bring the grand total circulation to nearly 9½ million.

One virtue claimed by magazine publishers is that their periodicals are kept for reasonable lengths of time, and are read by all members of a family. A survey showed that 66 per cent of subscribers keep their copies for a month or more. They are picked up and read again and again before being passed on or destroyed.

This has an effect on advertising. Most leading magazines depend on advertising for the greater part of their revenue. National advertising in magazines is an important social and economic force.

Total advertising revenue accruing to Canadian consumer magazines, business papers and farm papers in a year is estimated at \$20¼ million. Some representative costs may be interesting. A black-and-white page advertisement in a popular magazine with a circulation of 400,000, selling at 10 cents a copy, costs \$2,380 per issue. A specialized-content home magazine selling at 25 cents a copy, with a circulation of 50,000, offers a page advertisement for \$500 on a "six times" basis.

### *Foreign Competition*

Canada is a young country whose domestic magazine press provides a strong nationalizing influence, the mucilage to help our ten provinces to stick together, but we have been deluged with United States periodicals.

We are not an insular people, we are catholic in our taste and broad in our wants. We demand the right to choose the best we can find. These traits make it exceedingly difficult for our magazine press. With a population of only 13 million persons from which to draw subscribers, it must compete in quantity and quality with a press that has a potential audience twelve times as big.

The Brief of the Periodical Press Association presented to the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, said this: "So far as Periodical Press Association is concerned, Canadian publishers have no desire to impede the

exchange of ideas, the flow of international information and entertainment. They feel they are capable of standing on their own feet, of playing their part in the development of Canadianism. All they have asked at any time is that they should have an even break in their own land with competing publications; that they should, in such matters as excise and other taxes, enjoy precisely the same freedom as that enjoyed by competing imported publications."

Against foreign competition, Canadian magazines are making splendid progress, and their proportion of total magazine sales in their home market has doubled in 20 years.

### *Magazine Influence*

Magazines are looked upon as reflectors of every human interest; it would be well if they were also to a still greater extent dispellers of ignorance and prejudice. They do not need to be crusaders after the style of certain magazines in the United States which earned the term "muckrakers" — although those magazines started movements which society now approves. But Canadian magazines can influence public opinion by the direct discussion of significant public affairs.

They are important, not only as sources of information and entertainment and advertising, but, in a phrase used by Mr. Floyd S. Chalmers in his address as President of the Periodical Press Association last year: "As moulders of the national destiny." He went on to say: "The primary purpose of our Canadian magazines, business papers and farm papers is to increase the efficiency of our people as producers and traders; and to add to the richness and colour of their lives; and above all to promote among our people a spirit of Canadianism."

An institution is only the lengthened shadow of a man, and a magazine is the lengthened shadow of its editor. Great editors have not been obsessed with giving the public "what it wants". They have taken strong, and sometimes daring, ventures; they see in their high post an opportunity to illuminate affairs; they make no bones about being the staunch supporters of every righteous cause and the implacable enemies of things that degrade and corrupt.

Not all that these editors select for publication is of equal worth by any standard of judgment; not all of it has significance in our time or for the future; not always is the social force of the magazine usefully applied. But Canadian magazines do, on the whole, discharge their responsibilities within their means. It is in the national interest to encourage and support them.

We live in two worlds. One is the world of reality, the world of hard economic and political fact. The other is our mental world, in which we paint idealized pictures of the real world, and make decisions on the basis of these pictures.

Our magazines, by bringing together the two worlds for us, can help us achieve more logical thought, arrive at sensible conclusions, and live happier lives.