



# THE ROYAL BANK OF CANADA MONTHLY LETTER

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## PAMPHLET LITERATURE

OLIVER TWIST wondered in Mr. Brownlow's study where the people could be found to read such a great number of books as seemed to be written to make the world wiser. It is still a marvel to more experienced people than Oliver Twist.

When pamphlets and booklets are considered in addition to books, even a brain-endowed electronic calculator might be puzzled to equate readers and printed matter. But while some persons feel snowed under, others clamour for more.

Answering a question about pamphlets, a Halifax housewife said baldly: "I do not like pamphlets," but a woman active in Home and School Association work said she looks upon pamphlets as a major aid in planning programmes and helping study groups.

Getting the right pamphlets into the right hands is a major problem. In fact, the Joint Planning Commission of the Canadian Association for Adult Education is currently conducting a study of ways to improve the distribution of programme material, which includes pamphlet literature.

Miss Harriet Parsons, conducting the survey, has found that the value of pamphlets is not sufficiently appreciated among programme planners. In her report, *Where and When — a Study of the Distribution of Programme Materials*, she mentions the importance of pamphlets in these rapidly changing times as a means of keeping up to date on vital current issues; their low cost, their convenient size, and their adaptability to varying needs.

It seems to be a pity that people do not know what is available for the asking. A few newspapers review pamphlet literature; there are advertisements of pamphlets in education journals; business concerns try to make up mailing lists of persons they believe will be interested in the booklets they produce: but there is no place to go for a list of, for example, all the pamphlet literature bearing on office filing, or on family budgets, or on Canada's world relations.

People are interested in the facts of life, and in their interpretation. Matters which were formerly thought

to be of purely economic, biological, technological, religious or in-some-way-professional interest, are now seen to have important implications for everyone socially and politically. Pamphlets are published regularly, or from time to time, in all these fields of knowledge. It is the objective of this Monthly Letter to discuss briefly what are pamphlets, when are they useful to the reader and to the producer, why are they frequently more useful than other means of communication, what are the cardinal rules for composing them, and what use can be made of them.

### *What is a Pamphlet?*

A great variety of printed matter that differs widely in character, size and purpose may be included under the name "pamphlet." At one extreme is a little leaflet, and at the other is the carefully prepared and illustrated treatise that finds a place on the library shelf.

An authority, the Harmsworth Encyclopedia, says the name is derived from a Latin poem called *Pamphilus seu de Amore*, which was a great success in the 12th century. The New Oxford dictionary defines pamphlet as "A small treatise occupying fewer pages than would make a book . . . issued as a separate work . . . with or without paper covers."

The subjects treated in pamphlets cannot be listed, because there are so many as to defy description. John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* and many of Carlyle's works were pamphlets in spirit, says Chambers Encyclopedia. Every year sees a flood of theses and inaugural dissertations from universities, most of which rank as pamphlets. It can be set down as a fairly stable part of the definition that a pamphlet presents only one subject or one line of argument.

Technicalities of name belong to professional people like printers and librarians. In the New York public library a booklet may be simultaneously a book, a volume and a pamphlet. In the British Museum no attempt is made to count volumes and pamphlets separately. For everyday purposes no better definition is needed than that of an executive, quoted in *A Pamphlet about Pamphlets* by Lester Condit. The executive was asked to distinguish between a book and



a pamphlet. "Do you see this booklet?" he asked, taking a small unbound publication from a shelf. "In this office, if I call this a book, it's a book; if I call it a pamphlet, it's a pamphlet."

### *The Uses of Pamphlets*

A pamphlet, being of small bulk and of no great price, is adaptable to many uses. It can be written for a small or a large audience, and directed in its thought and language toward the special people who will be interested in the topic it discusses. It may be distributed free at meetings, on street corners or through the mail, or it may be sold on book stalls or by mail.

The pamphlet can be up-to-the-minute. Very often the earliest written information available on a subject is in a pamphlet. Even periodicals can be beaten in point of time by a pamphlet dealing with, for example, a new product or a new manufacturing process.

The pamphlet is convenient and handy. The price does not include extraneous matter, but only that dealing with the pamphlet's subject. The reader is not diverted by advertisements, but may concentrate on reading straight through. He seldom finds room for complaint about excessive verbiage; in fact he may feel at times that pamphlet literature of certain sorts is so closely condensed that he requires to read it more thoughtfully and more slowly than he would a periodical article.

### *The Old Pamphlet Age*

The peculiarities and special features of pamphlets belong to them by legitimate heritage. It has been said that in pamphlets lies the soul of the past, the articulate voice of the past speaking at the time.

Even before the invention of printing, many of the short English tracts written by Wycliffe had all the characteristics of pamphlet literature. It is uncertain just when printed notices made their appearance, but one printed by Caxton before 1480 has been found.

When pamphleteering reached its height, rigid censorship became a handicap. Not a pamphlet was supposed to be printed during the first half of the seventeenth century unless licensed by high court authority. But bootleg editions appeared occasionally, usually dealing with subjects of current interest.

The great era of propagandist pamphlets began in 1640, and the flood of tracts swept away the machinery of censorship. Its volume, says Chambers Encyclopedia, may be judged from the invaluable collection of nearly 15,000 pamphlets printed during 1640-61, which was made by the bookseller George Thomason, a friend of Milton.

It might be thought that the American Revolution would have called forth a stirring array of broadsides in Canada, but Miss Marie Tremaine records in her pamphlet *A Half-Century of Canadian Life and Print* that only about two-score publications in the years 1775-1783 concerned the revolution. Two have been found calling for redress of grievances, the only ones

we know of expressing popular protest from the northernmost colonies against colonial maladministration.

There have been pamphlets issued which have become part of English literature. In 1558, when both Scotland and England were ruled by women, John Knox wrote his *First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*. Pamphlets were used by Voltaire to arouse the French people against Louis XV, by Tom Paine to carry on propaganda for the Federal Constitution, and Defoe, author of *Robinson Crusoe*, went to the pillory and to prison for his pamphlet *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters*. Paine's first sentence in his pamphlet *The American Crisis* became a battle-cry: "These are the times that try men's souls." And John Milton's noblest prose work, *Areopagitica*, remains today at the centre of people's thinking about freedom, with its exhortation "to redress willingly and speedily what hath been erred."

The first use of a pamphlet to build goodwill for a corporation that we know of was in 1601. The great mercantile company of England, the Merchants Adventurers, was in disfavour with the public. It issued a pamphlet written by its secretary, John Wheeler, which seems to have been successful in restoring the company to the good graces of the Queen and the people.

Collections of the early pamphlets were made. Dr. Johnson contributed an introductory *Essay on the Origin and Importance of Small Tracts and Fugitive Pieces* to the first collection, which had eight volumes and ran into several editions.

On this side of the Atlantic Ocean there are few pamphlet collections for which catalogues have been printed, but the Canadian Archives has made a good start.

### *The New Pamphlet Age*

This seems to be a new age of pamphlets. Despite the competition of many other sorts of printed matter, the radio, the television and the moving pictures, there seem to be occasions when nothing but a pamphlet will serve.

In these swiftly-moving times the public lives in a turmoil of news and ready-made opinions, offered for mass consumption. Many thousands of men and women in the democracies feel sharply the need for more than summary information. They want facts and guides upon which to base their contemplation and thinking.

To such people the pamphlet serves as a thought-stirrer. It has some of the immediacy of the newspaper, but it penetrates to the deeper layers of problems and of philosophy. It speaks from person to person, and it enjoys the freedom of style and emphasis of an independent work of art.

In addition to the several continuing series of pamphlets, such as those of the Public Affairs Committee in the United States, the *Behind the Headline* series, and the Monthly Letter of The Royal Bank of



Canada, there are many occasional pamphlets issued by corporations, by government departments, by educational institutions, and by societies. Those dealing with family and personality problems have seemed to attract greatest attention during the past few years.

It would be a mistake to suppose that the latest word written is always the more correct, but pamphlets give a new look to what appears in books and a deeper penetration than is found in popular periodicals. They give us an opportunity to extend our thoughts, to compare and to do constructive thinking.

The chief librarian of the New York public library is credited with saying "Give me a library of pamphlets and I can answer any reference question." Perhaps this may be a mild exaggeration, but it is quite true to say that if there is any reference question that cannot be answered by a pamphlet already in print, another pamphlet may be made readily.

In personal libraries of professional and scientific and business men, pamphlets are kept alongside books on the same subject. As the frontiers of knowledge are daily pushed forward, there are few chapters to be found in textbooks or encyclopedias that cannot be added to profitably and brought up to date by pamphlet literature. Every once in a while we come upon a pamphlet which makes no pretense at originality, but contents itself with gathering together in readable form a synthesis of the knowledge about a subject.

Today's pamphlets are not for frivolous reading, but because they are written in more or less homespun style they touch the imagination. They fill an intellectual need.

### *Advertising Pamphlets*

The pamphlet recommends itself to those who have things to sell because it provides an opportunity to tell possible purchasers interestingly and in some detail about the goods offered. More than any other form of advertising, says George B. Hotchkiss in *An Outline of Advertising*, it is capable of doing a complete selling job and of paving the way for a personal salesman.

However, the composition and use of pamphlets has been sadly neglected by the authors of textbooks. Perhaps this explains in some part the number of mediocre or worse pamphlets in our mail.

Some of them contain statements which it is difficult to resist the temptation to correct. Their authors seem to be trying to make up by a superabundance of adjectives for lack of basic data.

Others are filled to the extreme margins with small print, given over wholly to technical descriptions, or at the other extreme they give a glamorous picture and no information.

Pamphlets of whatever sort which fail to attract attention and provoke interest do so because of one or more basic faults. They may spurn the real purpose of the pamphlet, which is to inform interestingly, to

show the reader either how to enjoy life or how to endure it. They may be all right as to the matter they contain, but all wrong in the manner of its presentation. People of today want clear type, easy to read and attractive to the eye. Pamphlets may be both interesting and well printed, but fail because they are sent to the wrong people. To have a mailing list of persons likely to be good readers is a benefit beyond price.

It is easy to over-rate an advertising medium. Pamphlet literature can well stand on its own feet as a medium for building the goodwill of a business venture, if the matter and presentation are right. But it must be remembered that an unknown but still great proportion of mailed literature is "filed" in wastebaskets, often at mail desks, and never reaches the person to whom it is addressed.

There are some special places where pamphlet advertising fits particularly well. When a customer has been won, the forwarding to him of occasional pamphlets may hold him permanently. When an inquiry is received as the result of another form of advertising an attractive pamphlet, giving enough information to convince the prospect that further investigation is warranted, will be an effective medium.

And, more important every passing year, there are pamphlets which are not designed to sell merchandise but to make friends. Little essays having nothing whatever to do with over-the-counter sales have been found to be builders of good public relations, and that is a state in which it is easy to gain customers.

### *Pamphlets in Education*

There is an increasing use being made of pamphlets by educational institutions, and business people are contributing more and more to fill this need. Some pamphlet literature provided by business is especially useful for the education of growing children whose span of attention is limited; some is exceedingly useful as supplementary matter for high school classes such as those in home economics, social studies, and technical subjects; while others come in fittingly for adult study groups.

Anyone interested in vocational guidance, in teaching or learning such skills as the writing of essays, the making of speeches, the planning of community programmes, and the running of junior or adult groups, will find in pamphlets a wealth of assistance, a background of knowledge, and much inspiration. All that is required is a seeing eye and an understanding mind — plus the energy to write asking for what is wanted.

There are many thousands of pamphlets of general or particular interest, and it is impossible to list them. Just as being typical, however, it may be said that the American Hospital Association is reported by Mr. Condit to have pamphlets covering more than 600 subjects related to hospital service ready to be despatched to any post office in the world. Our government departments, both at Ottawa and in the provinces, provide free or at a small charge pamphlets on practically all phases of life and its activities. The



United Nations Association in Canada, the Canadian Association for Adult Education, the Health League of Canada, and many others like them, are eager to distribute educational pamphlet literature to interested people.

### *Preparing a Pamphlet*

There is nothing very mysterious about the way in which skilled writers secure their data and write pamphlets.

The art is to bring out in words worthy of the subject and sufficient for the readers, the thoughts which impress the writer as being important, and about which he has done some research.

A chapter one might write for a book, an essay on a topic of current interest, or a descriptive piece about a holiday, might make an acceptable pamphlet. Indeed, many books are but compilations of pamphlet literature.

In referring to the need for better pamphlets, Miss Parsons declares good appearance and readability to be important. Readability arises from interest. It does not include, in reference to pamphlet literature, flippancy or extravagance. It requires movement, and not static lecturing — movement of characters or of thought, according to the nature of the essay.

There is no substitute for a base of fact; however dressed up it may be by the art of the writer, it must remain fact still.

Nobody is under any obligation to read another man's book or pamphlet, and this places the writer under the necessity of making his production so attractive as to win readers. If he writes with sincerity about a subject in which his prospective readers have an interest and about which he has done sufficient study and research, and then adds a dash of human interest, he will have gone a long way toward acceptance as an author. And this is so whether he writes about business, about education, about science or in a philosophical vein.

### *Distributing Pamphlets*

There are many "publics" to be reached. The greatest problem is to put the pamphlet into the hands of people who will enjoy and profit by it.

It may be taken for granted that private industries which go to the expense of preparing a pamphlet will do their utmost to get it into the right hands. But how about government departments and voluntary organizations? We must confess that the former do not make it particularly easy to obtain pamphlets: one may write to three or more departments before obtaining the right piece of printed matter. A consolidated list of publications by governments, listed by subjects and liberally cross-indexed, would be a boon.

The survey being made in behalf of the Joint Planning Commission is seeking to find ways whereby information about available pamphlet literature may be conveyed regularly to officers of national and com-

munity organizations, to leaders of public opinion such as clergymen, teachers, librarians, writers and public speakers, to programme planning groups, such as those in churches, school associations, labour unions and service clubs, and to the general public.

A start has been made already through publication by the Joint Planning Commission for the past three years of a *Survey of Program Materials*, and, this year, the production of a 32-page booklet called *Program Aids*. The latter, compiled by The Canadian Association for Adult Education in co-operation with The Canadian Manufacturers' Association and The Canadian Chamber of Commerce, lists 480 publications by 89 Canadian business firms.

In his introduction to the catalogue, written as President of the C.A.A.E., the President of this Bank said: "I consider pamphlets of great importance in education — particularly in adult education. Pamphlets carrying news and ideas hot from the minds of qualified men and women directly to those who can use the thoughts in vital community work are valuable adjuncts to our and their printed material."

### *Pamphlets in Libraries*

Increasing use is being made of pamphlets in public libraries, where their worth as supplements to books is well known.

There was a spirit abroad a few years ago which condemned the pamphlet to banishment from among the intellectual stores of the library merely because it had no stiff cover. More practical is the objection by librarians that pamphlets are difficult to shelve, they crumple and fall and blow away. But their worth is enough to overcome many difficulties. "We couldn't exist without pamphlets for reference," said a Windsor librarian who found the capsule pamphlet sort of information ideal for busy people who haven't time to wade through heavy tomes.

Most libraries carry pamphlets both for reference and for loan. As to what sort of pamphlets, Canadian libraries responded in this way to a questionnaire: government documents, offered by 33 libraries; technical pamphlets, by 19; pamphlets for general and popular use, by 35. When it comes to telling their public what pamphlets are available, 26 libraries use displays, 15 use a catalogue, 9 use lists, and 8 use posters. At Kingston, the library uses a column in the newspaper twice a month to tell about pamphlets.

Everyone may have his own library of pamphlets for the asking. Coupons clipped from newspaper and magazine advertisements can bring in pamphlets of a wide range of interest, or a note written to an organization which publishes pamphlets will bring issues on particular subjects of special interest.

It is true that the author who expresses ideas clearly and succinctly in a little pamphlet is less esteemed than the author of a pretentious book, and yet pamphlets are the liveliest pictures of our time. They give expression to the hopes and outlook of humanity, and show the inward thoughts and philosophy of our society.