

IV.—*A Plea for a Canadian Camden Society.*

By GEORGE BRYCE, LL.D., Professor of Literature, Manitoba College, Winnipeg.

(Read May 24, 1884.)

The task of gathering the materials for a history of our Dominion is one of the greatest difficulty. Leaving out of account the work of minute investigation, and the additional labour of classification required by the historian in order to gain the true perspective of events, the mere physical labour of collecting facts from so wide an area, and from such a variety of sources as our Canadian history embraces, is overwhelming. Mr. Parkman, excelled by few in his truthful appreciation of the scenes he describes, in laborious investigation of the sources whence he draws his information, and in the clear and beautiful diction employed by him, finds it possible, in his most successful works, merely to select here and there a "coigne of vantage," and to give a study of some picturesque combination of events in the early day's of Canada's military *régime*. His works, absorbing as they are, are rather monographs than histories. It is true, as belonging to a foreign country, Mr. Parkman can scarcely be expected to have the sympathy and patient appreciation necessary to gather up the elements of our social, intellectual, and material life.

That life has originated at many different points in the northern half of this continent, and has grown into ever stronger vital currents; while these have increased and deepened, have come together, and are now beginning to assume something like a unity of flow. The historian who would seek to follow this growing, though yet feeble, stream of national life, be he never so earnest, so able, or so willing, will encounter a task of almost unexampled difficulty. The nomadic life of our aborigines implies a state of things of which there is scarcely a trace remaining; the early life of the new settler, struggling for existence, is proverbially uninteresting and unlikely to attract the attention of any one likely to record it; the scattered character of the settlements places obstacles in the way of a presentation of the facts. Of the conflicting statements made in letters, pamphlets, and newspapers, the want of a public opinion of any force at the time makes it impossible to find a criterion of correct judgment; while, owing to the recent period of many of the events, it is difficult to give them a faithful treatment without creating animosity on the part of friends of the actors still living. Moreover, the strong political bias, apparently indigenous to our Canadian soil, renders it most difficult for the historian to treat his subject dispassionately, without arousing the susceptibilities of the philosophers who go about subjecting everything in art, science, sociology, and history to the minute inspection of their party microscope.

Wide and difficult of comprehensive treatment as the subject of Canadian history is, the clue to the earliest history of Canada, in almost all the points where Europeans first approached it, lies in its being in northern latitudes. The fur trade was the first attraction that induced Old World peoples to undertake settlement in

the different parts of Canada then occupied. It is by no mere chance that the beaver finds its place on our Canadian escutcheon. Cartier, almost exactly three centuries and a half ago, came with his commission authorizing him to open up this trade with the natives. Captain Chauvin, in 1600, built his trading house at Tadousac to cultivate the fur trade. Champlain returned on his first voyage home in a ship laden down with furs; and the Huguenot, de Monts, hastening, under the protection of the monopoly granted him, to take the virgin catch of Nova Scotia, found, in the first harbour which he entered on the Acadian shore, that he was forestalled by a fur-trading vessel, whose cargo of furs, however, he promptly seized for his own advantage. Within fifty years from the time of Champlain's arrival in Canada the shores of straits and bays by scores, to the extremities of the great lakes, were occupied by the posts of the fur-trader. Michillimackinac, Sault Ste. Marie and Nipigon, on Lake Superior, were already centres of trade. It was about the end of that century that Lahontan wrote his amusing and extravagant account of the castor. Indeed, to such an extent had the trade grown that in 1700, in Montreal, three-fourths of the furs were burnt to obtain a market for those that remained. The *raison d'être* of the settlement of New France was the fur trade.

While France, with all the force and glory of her more prosperous days, was pushing her explorations and trade to the far West, England sought a share of the treasures of the wilderness, and in 1670 laid within Hudson Strait the foundation of her great fur company. Free-handed Charles II gave over with lavish thoughtlessness a vast extent of country to the fur-traders represented by the brave Prince Rupert, General Monk, the king-maker, and the versatile Lord Ashley. The fur trade was the sole department of trade of the Hudson's Bay Company for a hundred years. On the borders of the Bay, shut up in their forts, the company treated with wandering tribes coming 600 and 800 miles from the interior, justifying, in the keenness of their trade, their motto, "*Pro pelle cutem.*" There is a picturesque interest in these Argonauts of this century of Hudson Bay adventure, as they returned with the Golden Fleece and engaged in the somewhat unromantic, but nevertheless consoling, work of paying large dividends to the shareholders. It is true that their retreat was invaded by the dashing sailor, d'Iberville, and their forts were taken to be restored by the Treaty of Ryswick; but this was only an episode in a hundred years of successful trade.

One hundred years of the company's life had not passed before the covetous eyes of rival traders fell upon their operations. It was stated that the company was avaricious, tyrannical, selfish, and revengeful; and repeated efforts at length obtained a parliamentary investigation in 1749. The company defended itself with vigor, and its antagonists, though not silenced, were overborne.

Another movement in the opening up of the interior by way of Canada took place at the same time as this fierce onslaught on the Hudson's Bay Company, though entirely independent of it. The French explorers had reached the limits of Lake Superior, and heard from Indian sources of vast regions beyond. In the stockade of Michillimackinac was laid the plan for exploring the districts further west. Verandrye, a French officer, who had distinguished himself at Malplaquet, with the advice of a Jesuit priest named Father Gonor, undertook the task. In 1731 Verandrye left the shores of Lake Superior; he and his sons were the first to thread the Red, Assiniboine, and Souris rivers, to cross by a portage to the Missouri, and after ascending it to reach the Rocky Mountains. The same

adventurer or his party explored the Saskatchewan, and his immediate successor, St. Pierre, in 1752 reached the Rocky Mountains at the very point where the Canadian Pacific Railway now enters the pass to cross the Rockies.

As so often happens to pioneers, the adventurous French explorers did not enjoy the fruit of their labours. In 1759, the conquest of Canada by the British cut the connection with the new Northwest. But the field for enterprise was too tempting to be left long unvisited. British merchants from Montreal, in 1766 and following years, took up the unused canoe and paddle; and traders, named Curry and Finlay, pushed over Verandrye's route, reached the source of the fur-supplies of the Hudson's Bay Company and intercepted the Indian trappers, who had before gone down the streams to Hudson Bay. The intruders were now taking the trade down Lake Superior to Montreal. Like a sleeping giant roused to action, the English fur company left the shores of Hudson Bay, penetrated to the interior, and the first meeting of the Montreal and English traders took place, it is said, in 1774, at Fort Cumberland on the Saskatchewan. Here began the conflict which for nearly fifty years was maintained between the Northwest Company and that of Hudson Bay, resulting in the depletion of both, and their final coalescence in 1821.

The Northwest Company had been most energetic in its efforts to dot the whole country with posts. It followed in the wake of one of its illustrious partners, Sir Alex. Mackenzie, and crossed the Rocky Mountains, becoming the forerunner of British occupation on the Pacific slope. Beyond the Rocky Mountains this enterprising company, uniting the perseverance of its hardy Scottish leaders (many of them Jacobite refugees to Canada, or their descendants) with the love of adventure of their French Canadian *voyageurs*, met another band of fur-traders, the Astor Fur Company of New York, formed in 1809 to trade upon the Columbia River. Washington Irving has made the story of the Astor Company familiar to us all.

I have merely drawn a bare sketch of the leading lines by which our country was first reached, and shown how the stimulus of the fur trade led to the early occupation of almost every part of Canada. It will be observed that I leave out of notice in this paper the remarkable and, I trust, by Canadians never to be forgotten movement of the United Empire Loyalists; also that part of it—the transference of the loyal Indians to Canada, as well as the subsequent influx of an immense British immigration to our shores—as not included so directly under the head of exploration. My main object in this paper is to give some account of the literature of these several movements originating in the peltry trade, and to recommend some plan for its preservation.

The several lines of exploration of which I have spoken seem to divide themselves up as follows:—

1. The military colonization of New France.
2. The English occupation of Hudson Bay.
3. The penetration to the new Northwest by Verandrye.
4. The growth of the Northwest Company of Montreal.
5. The inland movement of the Hudson's Bay Company.
6. The formation of the Astor Company; and the expedition of Lewis and Clarke up the Missouri and over the Rocky Mountains.
7. The conflict of the fur companies; the establishment of Selkirk colony; and the coalescence of the rival companies.

I.

The well-known name of Champlain is connected in the minds of very few with the perusal of his own writings. Yet his works, published in quarto form in Quebec in 1870, are interesting memorials of the life and habits of the Indians and of his own valour as an explorer. In 1697, the Recollet priest, Louis Hennepin, published at Utrecht the record of his journeys. Among the rare books of this period is the amusing account of travels published by Baron Lahontan, at Amsterdam in 1705, and The Hague in 1715. Who can fail to feel the highest admiration for the six-volume edition of Father Charlevoix, published in Paris in 1744. The "Jesuit Relations," issued by the Canadian Government, contains a vast amount of information. The twelve large quarto volumes of the documentary history of the State of New York are a treasury of information about the early history of Canada, as well as of the state to which they belong. The events connected with the early voyage to Hudson Bay are discussed by M. de Bacqueville de la Potherie and M. Jérémie, while the names of Lafiteau, Sagard, and others, speak of interesting memorials of this, the heroic period of Canadian history.

II.

Through not very numerous, the books connected with the early days of the English occupancy of Hudson Bay are of great value. "An Account of Hudson Bay, 1744," by Arthur Dobbs, is one of the rarest and most valuable of these. "A Voyage to Hudson's Bay," by Henry Ellis, published in 1748, is worthy of note; and an "Account of Six Years' Residence in Hudson's Bay, ending in 1747," by Joseph Robson, bristles with opposition to the great company of fur-traders. There is the work known as "The American Traveller, 1770;" while the Blue-book, containing the investigations by the British House of Commons, gives an account of the fur trade and the unsuccessful efforts of its rivals to overturn the great monopoly.

III.

A French period comes next: it is full of the adventurous exploits of the discoverer of Lake Winnipeg and its tributaries. The fact that Verandrye's discoveries, extending from 1731 to 1745, preceded by so short a time the loss of Canada to France, no doubt explains why so little is known of that era, now springing into greater prominence as the historian strives to trace the pathway of early adventure in the Canadian Northwest. We are indebted to the researches, in the documents of the archives of the Department of Marine and the Colonies at Paris, made by their former custodian, M. Pierre Margry, for almost all we know of it.

IV.

The Scoto-French movement from Montreal, resulting in the Northwest Company, has a considerable literature from its beginning, about the time of the Treaty of Paris, 1763, to the union of the rival fur companies in 1821. Among the most noticeable books of travel relating to this period is the now rare book of Jonathan Carver, published in 1778, of a long

journey to the interior taken by him some ten years before. Between the years, 1760 and 1776, a traveller named Alexander Henry, in company with Frobisher, one of the leading founders of the Northwest Company, took a journey as far into the interior as Lake Athabasca. Of this extended expedition the traveller published an account in 1809. A leading work of the period is that published by the great traveller, Alexander Mackenzie, afterwards knighted for his discoveries by George III. In the service of the Northwest Company he first descended the river which bears his name. He, first of white men, crossed the Rocky Mountains north of Mexico, and inscribed in vermilion letters, on a rock on the Pacific coast, the following words, "Alex. Mackenzie, from Canada by land, 22nd July, 1793." Another Northwest trader, Daniel W. Harmon, who, in 1800, penetrated the interior and lived successively on the Assiniboine River in the southern, and on Lake Athabasca in the northern department, and who even crossed the Rocky Mountains in the Peace River district, has left us a most absorbing volume published in 1820.

V.

Leaving for a time the inward movement by the great lakes and the water-ways of the northwest country, we must notice a series of expeditions from Montreal, and a current of trade, no doubt induced by this Montreal stream, but counter to it. This was the movement to the interior made by the great English fur company from Hudson Bay. The Indians, from the whole Northern Department, who had formerly come by the line of connected lakes and rivers all the way from Athabasca down the Churchill River, and even from Lake Winnipeg by way of the Nelson, with their furs, were, as already mentioned, intercepted by the interlopers, as they were considered, from Montreal between the years, 1760 and 1770. To carry out their inland movement, to regain their diminishing trade, the Hudson's Bay Company selected Samuel Hearne, not only an intrepid officer, but a clever writer. His first expedition was to discover the Coppermine River, of which the Indians had told. His daring explorations have gained him the name of "the Canadian Park." In 1774 he established posts far inland,—one of them being Fort Cumberland, on the Saskatchewan. Hearne's book was published in 1795. Another adventurer, who, under the direction of the Hudson's Bay Company, carried on this aggressive work was Edward Umfreville, who has given us a work, "Present State of Hudson's Bay Company," which was published in 1790. The archives of the Hudson's Bay Company would undoubtedly afford ampler details of this period, which was a turning-point in the history of the monopoly.

VI.

The discovery of the Pacific coast of America belongs to the later years of last century. The unfortunate French navigator, La Perouse, who, having left France in 1785, was never heard of after departure from Botany Bay on his homeward voyage, has a double interest for us. In the account of his travels, published by M. Millet-Mureau, in four volumes, at Paris in 1798, these points are given. The first is found in the introduction to the first volume, where there is a description of the attack upon the forts of Hudson Bay by the French in 1782. La Perouse, again, is said to have discovered a portion of the coast of

British Columbia. To this day our Pacific coast preserves the name of Captain Vancouver, who, during the years, 1790-'95, explored our western limits, and returning westward circumnavigated the globe. The account of his voyages, edited by his brother, was published in six volumes, in London, 1801.

The discovery of the western coast of the continent drew attention to it on the part of the United States Government. Accordingly, a detachment of the United States Army was fitted out to ascend the Missouri River and cross the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific. This was accomplished by the expedition under Captains Lewis and Clarke during the years, 1804-'05-'06. The party journeyed some 9000 miles. The account of the expedition was published in the United States, and afterwards in London, 1815. In 1805 an exploration of the Upper Mississippi was undertaken, at the instance of the Government of the United States, by Lieut. Pike. The object of the party was successfully accomplished, and the account of it forms an interesting volume, published in London, 1811. In 1823, a journey to Lake Winnipeg and Lake of the Woods was undertaken by a party under Major Long, of which an account is given by Professor Keating. We should mention also, in company with this, the work of J. C. Beltrami, published in two volumes in London in 1828, and entitled "A Pilgrimage to Europe and America, leading to the Discovery of the Sources of the Mississippi and Bloody River," (*i. e.*, the Red River.)

Stimulated alike by the struggle between the Hudson's Bay Company and the Northwest Company, and by these successful explorations of the country towards the Pacific on United States territory, John Jacob Astor pushed on his fur-traders to the far West. Not only does Irving's "Astoria" give us, as has been said, an account of this, but we are fortunate in possessing important narratives by a number of the traders themselves, who passed through the turmoil of the Oregon fur trade. Among the traders belonging to the Astor Company was one Alex. Ross, well-known afterwards as sheriff of the district of Assiniboia, on Red River. Sent out to the Pacific coast in 1811, he remained there until the year 1825, when he returned over the Rocky Mountains, and with his Indian wife came to reside in the Selkirk colony on Red River. One of his works, published in 1839, is an account of the early settlement of the Columbia River in the period with which we are dealing.

Another of Astor's companions, a Frenchman from Montreal, named Gabriel Franchère, has left us a most valuable book in his own tongue. In it he relates the incidents of his return home overland, in 1814, by crossing the Rocky Mountains, floating down the Saskatchewan, journeying over the "Grand Portage" to Fort William, and passing down the lakes to Montreal. In 1854, an English translation of Franchère's work appeared in New York. The Astor fur-traders seem to have had a taste for writing, for, of the same party as the preceding, another, named Ross Cox, published in 1832 an account of his journey around Cape Horn, his residence for six years on the Columbia River, and his return, in 1817, by a route nearly the same as that of Franchère.

VII.

The settlement of the colony by Lord Selkirk, in the valley of Red River, was an event of the greatest importance in the history of British America. It saved for Britain, as it appears to the writer, the fertile plains of the Northwest. That philanthropic nobleman

succeeded, in the furtherance of his great schemes of colonization, in gaining a controlling interest in the Hudson's Bay Company. The appearance of his colony on the Red River was the signal for a bitter contest, resulting well nigh in the destruction of the colony, while the ruin of the rival fur companies was only averted by their union in 1821. A considerable literature grew out of this emigration movement and its troublesome consequences. In 1805, the Earl of Selkirk published an able work on Highland emigration ; for he had before that time sent 800 Highland peasants to Prince Edward Island. In connection with the emigration scheme by way of Hudson Bay and Rupert Land, there appeared "The Narrative of the Destruction of the Settlement of Red River in 1815," a *brochure* against the Earl of Selkirk by Bishop Strachan in 1816 ; "Narrative of Occurrences in the Indian Country in 1817 ;" a letter of the Earl of Selkirk to Lord Liverpool in 1819 ; "Report of the Selkirk Trials," in two versions, in 1820 ; "The Red River Settlement Blue-book," published by House of Commons in 1819 ; and a "Book of Observations," upon the preceding published in 1820, of which only one copy is known to be in existence.

VIII.

Covering portions of time in all these different eras, there remains to notice one department, most interesting in the present connection, viz., manuscripts or unpublished narratives known to be in existence. The following may be given as examples of these :—"Travels of Pierre Esprit Radisson, 1682 ;" "John Adamson's Voyages, 1746 ;" "David Thompson's Journal, 1796-'98 ;" "Henry's Journal, 1800-'16 ;" "Peter Fidler's Journey to Athabaska ;" "Foundation of the Forts in the Yukon Country," by an officer in the employment of the Hudson's Bay Company. The Hudson's Bay Company in London has also given to the Society of which the writer is a representative the privilege of examining any papers, at their forts or offices in Canada, belonging to the period antecedent to 1821.

Enough has now been said to show that we have in Canada an indigenous early literature, most of it now very rare, and yet not deserving the oblivion to which it is fast hastening. Connoisseurs have their choice cabinets of these books, which they guard with miserly care, and some of our public libraries have a number of them ; scarcely is there in Canada a complete collection. The writer has referred largely to works belonging to the field of the Society which he has the honor to represent here—the Historical and Scientific Society of Manitoba,—that field being the "country north and west of Lake Superior." No doubt other gentlemen could have found a considerable earlier literature for the Maritime Provinces, French Canada, and the more recent Province of Ontario. The study of this early literature is very important. We complain that so few devote themselves to the study and preservation of our early history. Surely it is the duty of this section of the Royal Society of Canada to stimulate research and facilitate the study of the records referred to. The question is: How can this be done ?

I have the honor to propose one way, perhaps not the best, yet one having the promise of accomplishing something in this department. I propose that steps should be taken by which this Society, or some body associated with it, should undertake each year the publication of a number of books and manuscripts relating to the early portion of our

history. I say this without disparagement to the volumes published by Desbarats of Quebec, or to the publications of Shea of New York. The latter, however, are too expensive; and of the former many are already scarce, such as "Champlain," which is now quoted at Paris at eighty francs.

There is abundant precedent for such an undertaking as that proposed. It is hardly necessary to remind you of such an organization as the Roxburghe Club instituted in 1812 by Earl Spencer and a number of gentlemen in London, for the republication of rare books and hitherto unpublished manuscripts. The Bannatyne Club, called after George Bannatyne, was established in 1823, in Edinburgh, by Sir Walter Scott and others, for printing works illustrative of the history, antiquities, and literature of Scotland, and published some 113 volumes, of which the *Edinburgh Review*, in 1835, said: "They form a series of contributions to the stock of historical literature which a munificent government alone, or such a society as the Bannatyne Club, could or would produce." The Maitland Club also, established in Glasgow in 1828, did its share in "reprinting rare and forgotten editions, and thus rescuing these from that oblivion into which the unhappy distaste of the age for such productions would otherwise have allowed them to sink."

The Hakluyt Society was established in 1846 for the purpose of printing rare and unpublished voyages and travels. As to its special field we find it stated, that "it aims at opening by this means an easier access to sources of a branch of knowledge which yields to none in importance and is superior to most in variety." A late writer says: "The fifty-seven volumes published by the society since its formation have been edited with great discrimination and care, and have come to be regarded as the standard text-books upon their respective subjects." The latest volume published is a re-issue, in a new form, of "The Hawkins Voyages," the first work published by the society. The Hakluyt Society, now mentioned, was preceded in time by the Camden Society. This society was organized in London in 1838 for the publication of old manuscripts of antiquarian or historical interest, and called after old William Camden, buried in Westminster Abbey, the most distinguished antiquarian of the Elizabethan era. Of his great work, "Britannia,"—of which, by the way, there is a copy of the 1610 edition in the Manitoba Society's library—it was quaintly said "it was the common sun wherewith our modern writers have lighted all their little torches."

Following the example that these societies afford us, may we not, in the incipient stage of our historical researches, add an impetus to the work, by giving some assistance to the production of the means necessary for undertaking the study of our history. Let us suppose, as an instance of what might be done immediately, that a committee were appointed to select for issue, this or next year, three works. Let us choose a work dealing with the history of seaboard America, such as Oldmixon's "British Empire in America" with its curious maps, published in London in 1708, and now sold by dealers for \$10 for the two volumes: take as a second work, Hennepin's "Nouvelle Decouverte," in French, as representing, in an interesting way, the period of the French *régime*, now valued at from \$10 to \$20; and say, for a third, "Harmon's Journal of Northwestern Life," scarcely to be had at any price. Were these three, or others of a similar nature, taken, and a proposition made to some Canadian publisher as to the cost of publishing an edition of 500 or 1000 copies, there could be no risk in the matter. If, then, a prospectus were issued offering subscribers the three volumes this year, with the prospect of their being followed by a

similar number next year in uniform style, for an annual subscription of \$5 or \$6, no one can suppose that, with the influence of the Royal Society and its affiliated societies, there would be difficulty in obtaining a number sufficient to make the enterprise successful, and to give the subscribers a series of most valuable and, to many at present utterly unattainable, works at a minimum of cost.