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Where Stands Canadian History? Presidential Address

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WHERE STANDS CANADIAN HISTORY?

Presidential Address by WALTER N. SAGE
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THE problem "Where Stands Canadian History?" is, or should be, omnipresent in the minds of Canadian historians, and of all those Canadians who are vitally interested in their country's story. With it is coupled another and even more pressing problem, "Where Stands Canada Today?"

We are now nearing the end of the second World War. The European phase is over and the Pacific phase is, we trust, well on its way towards completion. In this second World War Canada has assumed a position in world affairs which most of us in the dark depression days of the early nineteen-thirties hardly dreamed possible. Canada is now of her own right one of the World Powers. We are told that Canada is a power of the medium rank, far more important than her comparatively small population would seem to warrant. Canadians, as a people, are not much given to boasting about their own country. In fact on the whole we have tended to be a bit too apologetic for Canada. We have been, if anything, too conscious of the Great Neighbour to the south. Although since 1931 Canada has officially been recognized as a self-governing nation enjoying equality of status with all the other sister nations of the British Commonwealth, Canadians have been slow in recognizing the implications of that fact. There has been too much of what might be termed the "overhang of colonialism."¹ John McCormac in 1940 went on record as follows: "In Canada to be 'disloyal' means to be disloyal to Great Britain. Such a crime as disloyalty to Canada scarcely exists."²

This "overhang of colonialism" dies hard, especially in certain portions of English-speaking Canada. None the less Canadianism is growing from coast to coast and is noteworthy among the younger generation. It might even be hazarded that now "colonialism" is chiefly to be found in the older age groups and that the coming generation is even more devotedly Canadian than were their parents and grandparents. "Canada First" which in the early eighteen-seventies was a prophetic cry, has now become more and more of a pressing reality.

It is just possible that to Canada the second World War may be what the defeat of the Spanish Armada was to Elizabethan England, the letting loose of a genuine and all-embracing patriotism. It might and should be accompanied by a real advance in Canadian art, literature, and in the writing of Canadian history.

The "overhang of colonialism" has been very evident in the history of history in Canada. The three fields in which the most productive work was done up till a quarter of a century ago, viz. New France, the evolution of self-government to 1850, and Confederation, all lay definitely within the colonial period. In 1867 the new Dominion of Canada was still a colony.

¹By "colonialism" is meant the attitude of mind which emphasizes the larger loyalties to Mother Country and Empire, almost to the complete exclusion of loyalty to one's native colony, province, or country.

²John McCormac, *Canada, America's Problem* (New York, 1940), 127.

In 1897 at the time of the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria Canadians sang:

Far from the Motherland
Nobly we'll fall or stand
By England's Queen.³

Canadians were still colonials at the time of the South African War, although perhaps some faint stirrings of national feeling might be found not only in the opposition to the sending of troops from Canada to fight the Boers, but also in the rejoicings in the Land of the Maple over the gallant charge of the Canadians at Paardeburg. It was not, however, till the first World War that Canada really became conscious of her nationality.

This slow growth of national feeling had a profound effect upon the study and writing of Canadian history. To be sure Garneau founded the French-speaking school of Canadian historians as a reaction to the taunts of his English-speaking fellow Canadians who demonstrated their British colonialism by their slurs at the "people with no history and no literature." It was inevitable that the early historians of the British North American provinces should deal with colonial history. They were colonials, some of whom did not live to see Confederation. The noteworthy feature of the situation is, however, that for nearly half a century after federation the writers of Canadian history were in the main still colonial in their outlook. An exception must be made, no doubt, in the case of the French-Canadian historians, but their "*nationalisme*" was somewhat provincial, and possibly, in essence, just as "colonial" as the colonialism of the English-speaking historians. J. C. Dent and William Kingsford were as colonial in their outlook as were Beamish Murdock and Robert Christie. It may be that a century from now writers on Canadian historiography may catch a nationalistic note before 1900, but to us today this is rather doubtful.

In the writing of Canadian history, as in the evolution of our country, it is impossible to draw any fixed and definite line of demarcation between the colonial and the national periods. One is conscious of "colonialism" in the writings of the early twentieth-century historians, but one is conscious also of a stirring of genuine Canadianism in many of these historians. The fact would seem to be that most of us English-speaking Canadians who can remember the Diamond Jubilee and the South African War are quite aware that we were born colonials but at some uncertain point of time during the first two decades of the present century we became Canadians. Probably with most of us this change was practically unconscious, and we cannot tell when it actually occurred. The year 1905 when Alberta and Saskatchewan were created out of the old North-West Territories might be taken as a possible date. The opening up of the Prairies gave Canada new hope and a sense of her destiny. Did not Sir Wilfrid Laurier claim that the twentieth century belonged to Canada?⁴

³From a special version of "God Save the Queen" sung at services held in Canadian churches on June 20, 1897.

⁴The growth of Canadian nationalism during this period may be illustrated by a comparison of the Jubilee stamps of 1897 which all bore the 1837 and 1897 portraits of Queen Victoria with the Tercentenary stamps of 1908 which were issued in French and portrayed persons and scenes from early Canadian history.

The three great co-operative ventures in Canadian historical writing which appeared shortly before and during the first World War, and which paralleled similar ventures in the United States—"The Makers of Canada," "The Chronicles of Canada," and *Canada and Its Provinces*, probably mark a transition stage from the colonialism of the eighteen-eighties and eighteen-nineties to the nationalism of the nineteen-twenties, thirties, and forties. These three noteworthy sets of volumes written in English, have unfortunately as yet no French counterpart. That does not mean that French-speaking Canadians did not contribute to the three ventures. Far from it, but they wrote in English and thereby secured a wider audience. The first of the series, "The Makers of Canada," followed, in the main, conventional lines. It paid some attention to the Maritime Provinces and deigned to notice the West, but the bulk of the "Makers of Canada" had lived and worked in "Old Canada," or, if you prefer the term, "Canada Proper." The themes discussed were well-known and well-worn; discovery and exploration—with some attention to the West including the Pacific Slope—the French Régime, the struggle for responsible government and Confederation. The pre-publication announcement stated that the series was "From Cartier to Laurier" and it is amusing that in some places in Ontario adverse comment was passed that the series began and ended with a Frenchman! The index volume was a valuable dictionary of Canadian history. On the whole the series although to some extent forward-looking, was rather conventional in outlook, form, and treatment. Nor was the revised edition which came out in 1926 much of an improvement.

The second venture, "The Chronicles of Canada," contained several new and striking features. The whole series was made up of "interesting little books,"⁵ for popular reading, well-written, and easily read. The publisher, Mr. Robert Glasgow, and the editors, Professor G. M. Wrong and Mr. H. H. Langton, did an excellent piece of planning when they laid out the series. Of the nine "parts" five followed along traditional lines but the other four blazed new trails. These were: "The Red Man in Canada," "Pioneers of the North and West," "The Growth of Nationality," and "National Highways." Colonel William Wood in his bibliographical note on *All Afloat* recorded that this volume seemed "to be the only book of its kind" and that no other book had been written "on the special subject of any one of its eleven chapters."⁶ Dr. O. D. Skelton's *The Railway Builders* was, and remains, a masterpiece.

Canada and Its Provinces, edited by Dr. Adam Shortt and Sir Arthur Doughty, was by far the most ambitious of the three great series. Although now thirty years old, it is still the most comprehensive history of Canada extant. It was also planned by Mr. Glasgow and published by Glasgow, Brook, and Company. New features of this series were the volumes given to the industrial expansion of the Dominion, to missions, arts and letters, and to the various provinces. The nationalistic note is sounded in the series, but the colonial period is adequately treated.

No survey of Canadian historical writing in Canada in the early years of the twentieth century could be complete without reference to the *Review*

⁵The phrase is that of Professor Herbert E. Bolton of the University of California, who made great use of these volumes in his class on the history of the Americas.

⁶William Wood, *All Afloat* (Toronto, 1914), 289.

of *Historical Publications Relating to Canada* and to the work of the Public Archives. The *Review* was founded by Professor George M. Wrong in 1896. The Public Archives dates back to the work of Dr. Douglas Brymner, commencing in 1871, but taking a new lease on life when Sir Arthur Doughty was appointed Archivist in 1904, and the new Archives Building was erected in 1906. The Public Archives soon became the recognized centre for research in Canadian history. Sir Arthur Doughty was a great collector of materials and to him the Archives owed the securing of some of its greatest treasures. Dr. Adam Shortt and Sir Arthur Doughty co-operated in bringing out their great collection of *Canadian Constitutional Documents, 1759-1791*, in 1907.⁷ This volume was followed by Doughty and McArthur, *Canadian Constitutional Documents, 1791-1818*, published in 1914, and Doughty and Storey, *Canadian Constitutional Documents, 1819-1828* in 1935.

The *Review of Historical Publications* did much to raise the level of historical scholarship in Canada. At first the polemic tone of some of the reviews caused rather severe repercussions but steadily the editors and reviewers achieved their objectives. The *Review* called attention to what was being actually written in the Canadian history field. Writing in 1936, Mr. Wrong modestly recorded in retrospect: "Within the limits of decent courtesy, we let our reviewers say what they liked even when they chose to be both anonymous and severe. It was all in the day's work, and now, in the evening, we may hope that we and our contributors did something to aid in Canada the fair and adequate interpretation of its history."⁸

In the early nineteen-twenties two events of importance in the history of Canadian history occurred. These were the launching of the *Canadian Historical Review* in 1920 and the formation of the Canadian Historical Association in 1922. The *Canadian Historical Review*, published by the University of Toronto Press and edited by Mr. W. S. Wallace and later by Professor George W. Brown, was a continuation of the *Review of Historical Publications Relating to Canada*, but it was also much more. It contained articles on various phases of Canadian history and provided a means of publication for the group of younger historians who, after the first World War, had turned their attention to the Canadian field. The Canadian Historical Association stemmed from the Historic Landmarks Association of Canada which had come into existence in 1905. At the sixteenth annual meeting of the Historic Landmarks Association held in the Victoria Memorial Museum, Ottawa, on May 18, 1921, His Honour Judge F. W. Howay moved, seconded by the Reverend E. H. Oliver—"That the Historic Landmarks Association of Canada be merged in the Canadian Historical Association hereby constituted and that the draft constitution submitted by the Council be adopted provisionally as the Constitution of the Canadian Historical Association."⁹ Dr. Lawrence J. Burpee, former president of the Historic Landmarks Association, was elected the first president of the Canadian Historical Association and Dr. C. Marius Barbeau, former secretary of the Historic Landmarks Association, the first secretary of the new Association.

⁷Second edition in 2 vols., 1918.

⁸Quoted in R. Flenley (ed.), *Essays in Canadian History* (Toronto, 1939), 14.

⁹*Canadian Historical Association Report, 1922* (Ottawa, 1923), 18.

In his last address as president of the Historic Landmarks Association, Dr. Burpee thus described the work of that organization: "The Historic Landmarks Association has to its credit a number of years of faithful and useful work. It has laboured quietly yet persistently for the promotion of a public sentiment that would not permit the historic landmarks of Canada to remain neglected and forgotten. It may also claim at least some of the credit for the establishment of the Quebec Battlefields Commission, the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, and the new Quebec Historic Monuments Commission."¹⁰

The *Canadian Historical Review* has now completed its twenty-fifth year, and the Canadian Historical Association will celebrate its Silver Jubilee in 1947. Although the *Review* and the annual *Report* of the Association have been published in the English language—the *Report* does print papers in French as well—both these publications have paid adequate attention to French Canada. Mention, however, should here be made of the valuable *Bulletin des Recherches Historiques* which has now completed its fiftieth year and is thus the senior historical publication in Canada.

No discussion of the development of the history of history in Canada is in any way possible without an adequate appreciation of the work of the French-speaking historians. In his presidential address to this Association delivered in Kingston in 1941, the Archivist of Canada, Dr. Gustave Lanctot, dealt with "Les Historiens d'hier et l'histoire d'aujourd'hui." In it Dr. Lanctot gave a most valuable summary of the works of the early historians of Canada, both French and English. There is no need here to retrace this well-covered ground except to point out that from the days of Michel Bibaud and François-Xavier Garneau to those of Senator Thomas Chapais, and Canon Groulx, there have been two distinct schools of historical writing in Canada, the French-speaking and the English-speaking. Unfortunately the liaison between these two groups has been far from complete. In fact at times there has seemed to be little or no attempt at liaison between them at all. The language bar has been a reality. Far too few English-speaking historians have any fluency in French. Most of them have a reading knowledge of that language but many of them have paid too little attention to what was being written by their French-speaking compatriots. On their part French-speaking historians have perhaps been slow in seeking a liaison with their English-speaking colleagues. Now that Canadians seem to be realizing their national and international position it would be well for us all to work for a closer co-operation, or *bonne entente*, between the historians of both languages. In this connection special mention should be made of the excellent work in both languages of the Abbé Arthur Maheux. The Canadian Historical Association is itself attempting to provide means for better understanding, but perhaps a greater space on our programmes might be given to papers in the French language. It is possible that thereby more French-speaking members could be secured.

In French Canada, the work of Canon Lionel Groulx has been outstanding. He is a doughty champion of the rights of the *Québécois* and is the advocate of a realistic policy towards the rest of Canada:

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 7.

For collaboration without return or without profit we should substitute a collaboration based on interest, on give and take. Note well: I do not suggest a policy of unnecessary stiffness, even less of violence. I do not ask for war and I do not urge war. I propose the only course left to us, the course of legitimate defence. I do not preach an attitude of defeat: I want a policy of being present whenever there is need of being present, but only on a footing of equality and dignity. We do not need to show that we want national peace in Canada more than anyone else, since we have made more sacrifices for it than anyone else. We always keep our hand open and outstretched, but we no longer hold out a soft hand to be crushed. We cease to beg for union as if guilty of disunion, or as if the problem of understanding were not at least ninety-five per cent an English-Canadian rather than a French-Canadian problem. To sum up, we do not refuse to collaborate but it must be two-sided collaboration.¹¹

This rather lengthy quotation sets forth the views of the Abbé Groulx, whose works are, on the whole, far too little read by English-speaking Canadians. Canon Groulx is a real force in the Province of Quebec. As Mr. Rothney has well said in the foreword to his translation of the Abbé's speech of November 29, 1943, from which this quotation has been taken: "He has a way of turning his students into disciples fired with a burning zeal."¹² No student of present trends in Canadian historical writing and teaching can afford to neglect Canon Groulx, Professor of Canadian History at the University of Montreal, any more than he can neglect the Abbé Maheux, Professor of History at Laval University. These two champions of opposite schools of thought clearly set forth the divergent views of our historical brethren in French Canada. The French Canadian recognizes only one homeland—Canada, and one loyalty—to his native land. He differs from the majority of English-speaking Canadians in language and religion. His cultural background is not ours but he will yield to none of us in his devotion to the land of his birth.

In surveying the achievements of Canadian historians since 1920 one is struck by the diversity of the subjects treated. We are getting off the beaten paths and blazing new trails into our historical wilderness. A few of these trails call for special mention.

First has been the emphasis on economic history, and the faint beginning of an interest in social history. Although the economic history of Canada had received the attention of some historians of the first two decades of the present century, e.g. Dr. Shortt and Dr. O. D. Skelton, the greatest work in this field dates from the early nineteen-twenties. Practically every phase of the economic life of Canada is being, or has been, investigated. In this field the name of Dr. Harold Innis stands foremost. Most attention has been paid in all probability in the economic sphere to the history of the "staples," fur, fish, lumber, wheat, minerals, and to the story of transportation. On the statistical side great progress has been made, but so far no definitive history of statistics in Canada has yet appeared. One great series has dealt with "Canadian Frontiers of Settlement," a

¹¹Canon Lionel Groulx, *Why We Are Divided* (Montreal, n.d.), 21. Translated by G. O. Rothney.

¹²*Ibid.*, 3

careful examination into the development of the Canadian Prairies, with a final volume which discusses *Settlement and the Forest and Mining Frontier*. This series is typical of the historical research of the last quarter of a century. It is now, apparently, no longer possible to plan a large co-operative work dealing with the whole field of Canadian history. What is now attempted is a series of studies in one area, or around one central theme.

An example of the latter is, of course, the "Relations of the United States and Canada" series, sponsored by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, under the general editorship of Professor James T. Shotwell of Columbia University. This most important series, of which over twenty volumes have already been published, is an international undertaking. Canadian and American historians have co-operated—in some instances in the same volume—to study the peaceful relationships between the two countries which share North America north of the Rio Grande. The Americans have contributed studies on various periods and phases of Canadian-American relations and there is in their work rather more homogeneity than can be found in the Canadian volumes. Among the latter are certain regional studies, including one in the French language. It is to be regretted that the stirring events which succeeded Pearl Harbour have also interfered with the completion of this unique series.

From Canadian-American relations to international affairs would seem to be an easy transition. During the last decade the Canadian Institute of International Affairs has made possible the publication of many notable studies in the history of Canada's external relations. The historical purist may object that some of the volumes in question are sure to "date" and that they will tend to be ephemeral. To this criticism there is the obvious and valid answer that the extent to which they "date" will cause them to become important historical documents and source material for later studies of Canadian opinion.

The relations of Canada with the British Commonwealth, especially with the Mother Country, have also received considerable attention. None the less Canada's new position in world affairs necessitates a fresh evaluation of her position in the British Commonwealth.

Another old theme that has produced new harmonies—and possibly even discords—has been that of Dominion-Provincial relations. The Rowell-Sirois Report, with its voluminous appendices, has its place in Canadian historiography. Book 1 of the Report is one of the most valuable studies on certain financial and economic phases of Canada's development since 1867 which has yet appeared. The appendices also contain a wealth of historical material which no serious student of Canadian history can afford to ignore.

In this connection it may be observed that the period since 1867 is receiving more and more attention. By and large, Canadian historians have, in their researches, now reached and passed Confederation, and are engaged on problems of the post-Confederation period. Many of us are working in the eighteen-seventies, the eighteen-eighties, and the eighteen-nineties and some even later.

Provincial and local history is well to the fore. There has been an historical renaissance in the Maritimes and in British Columbia and there are signs that Ontario is now seriously tackling the problem of its local

history. Quebec is, as ever, faithful to her trust. She does not, will not, and cannot, neglect her storied past. The Prairie Provinces, too, are bestirring themselves. Here we must pause and do honour to one of our number who has so recently left us. Professor Arthur S. Morton was to the Prairies what Judge Howay was to British Columbia, the historian of pioneer days, the indefatigable searcher after the truth as he found it, the untiring writer, and the guide, philosopher, and friend to the younger historians.

There is only time for a fleeting reference to the work of the Public Archives, the provincial archives, especially those of Nova Scotia, British Columbia, and Quebec, and to the provincial and local historical societies, many of which are affiliated with our Association. Mention should also be made of the university and public libraries. Nor can one forget the learned societies, the Royal Society of Canada, the Champlain Society, the Hudson's Bay Records Society, the Canadian Social Science Research Council, and the recently formed Humanities Research Council. All these organizations are playing their part in stimulating historical studies in Canada.

Although, on the whole, Canadian historical writing is still and will remain in the monograph stage, there are already some attempts at synthesis. Volume vi of the *Cambridge History of the British Empire*, published in 1930, was in a sense the last of the old group of co-operative histories of Canada to which reference has earlier been made. But it was also a synthesis of Canadian historical scholarship at the beginning of the stormy nineteen-thirties. During the present war, two members of our Association have published one-volume histories of Canada, one of them is a Canadian now resident in the United States, and the other a member of the Department of History in the University of Toronto. Both books have enjoyed a well-deserved popularity. A western Canadian professor is now engaged on the second volume of what we trust will be a full-length history of our country.

Nor have the older trails become overgrown. Canadian constitutional history is well to the fore. Several outstanding works have appeared in that field since 1920. What is even more important, research work in Canadian history is being done in more and more of our universities and already several well-known research schools exist. In them Canadian constitutional studies are not neglected.

Although much has been accomplished, no survey of the present status of Canadian historical writing can be complete without reference to several yawning gaps in our historical scholarship. Military and naval history has not yet received sufficient attention. With some notable exceptions, our generation of Canadian historians has neglected this important field. Much, however, has been done since the outbreak of the present war. Each of the armed services is working hard at its portion of the history of the present war. It is suggested that at the next annual meeting of this Association this subject should receive some attention.

The intellectual and cultural history of Canada has yet to be written. So too has our business history. Little has been done on the history of the professions, law, medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, and engineering. Recently medical history has received some attention. Let us hope that this is only a beginning. Literary history is now being written, but much remains

to be done. Religious history in the broadest sense, not the history of any one denomination, but the influence of religion upon the development of our country, has never been adequately studied. We have histories of various churches, but practically no estimate of the work of the Christian Church as a whole. A beginning has been made on the history of the fine arts in Canada, but it is only a beginning. The fascinating story of journalism, especially the influence of newspapers on our national life, is as yet untold. The themes for our new historians are manifold and varied.

And so we still face the twin problems of "Where Stands Canadian History?" and "Where Stands Canada Today?" Both are closely intertwined. No Canadian can understand our country unless he, or she, knows its history. But a superficial knowledge of that history is not enough. Nor is an antiquarian knowledge enough. That knowledge which will vary from individual to individual, from section to section, from culture to culture, must be deep, wide, and filled with wisdom. The Fathers of Confederation embarked on a huge experiment of nation building. We, their descendants, must carry on and add to the superstructure. Our country is no longer a colony, but a medium rank World Power. Out of our diverse peoples, our separate traditions and cultures we must forge a Canadian unity. It will not be a uniformity. Each part will make its contribution and preserve its identity. But the final result will be, we trust, *Canadian*.

DISCUSSION

Principal Wallace suggested that the time has now come for a careful study of the métis problem in Canada. A long enough period has elapsed since the mixing of the Indians with French and Scotch began to get scientific results. A study of dialects is already under way.

Professor Brebner pointed out that Mr. Giraud in Paris is about to publish the first volume of his *Histoire des Métis*.

Professor Underhill rose to call attention to two important omissions. The author of the paper did not ask why Canadian historians never write anything except about Canada. He also failed to mention Professor Cochrane's profound study of *Christianity and Classical Culture*. The productions of Canadian historians should be compared with the historical work appearing in the United States and Great Britain. *Professor Underhill* suggested the recently completed series, "History of American Life," as a possible basis of comparison.

Mr. Kenney said that not enough attention has been given to the Turner frontier thesis as applied to Canada. The growth of population, and of communities, and the integration of races should be studied with that in mind.

Professor Lower pointed out that the mixing of races and groups is a very old process in Canada. We should start to study "the subtler things" the various peoples have brought to Canada—their ideas, traditions, cultural background. The speaker went on to say that, although history writing in Canada has increased and improved, it has not succeeded in reaching the general public which in general does not read books. In this respect the French Canadians have done better than the English Canadians. Canadian historians have been too serious, have lacked imagination in their writing. They should try to reach the general public and try to bind the

various groups together. That will probably be the chief future task of the Canadian historian.

Professor Innis stated that Mr. Kenney's Irish bibliography should have been mentioned. He went on to say that Canadian publishers have been notoriously uninterested in Canadian history. The chief works on Canadian history have been published by American publishers or instigated by them. There is need for stronger support from Canadian publishers.

Dr. Talman remarked upon the number of Canadian students who have gone to the United States, and who are now working on other than Canadian subjects.

Principal Wallace thought that Canadian history might now be going through a stage similar to that being experienced by Canadian painting, i.e., "the structure is being peopled." He recommended the greater use of the sociological approach in history, and indicated Professor Innis's work as an example of what can be done in this way. He said the dryas dust, purely constitutional history is much criticized by students. He stated that present history is being written in a way suitable for the common reader.