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OUR ARCHIVES AND THE NATIONAL SPIRIT

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I SUPPOSE that we in Canada have a national spirit. But I would be timorous of putting forward the claim that that national spirit was, to use one of Carlyle's pet words, articulate. As a people we have reached the stage of self-consciousness, but it is the self-consciousness of childhood. We have made up our minds, in a hazy sort of way, that we are going to be something. But we are by no means sure what we are going to be.

There is plenty of room for a great deal of theorising as to the sources of national spirit. Race, language, and religion have their champions. There is a school that finds the explanation in "blood baptism"; while a rival academy will find the all-sufficient solution in geography; and common political or constitutional ideals are sometimes dowered with the fusing power. But whatever the theory, all schools assume a common history and a saturation of the popular mind with the meaning of that history.

Now it is quite true that the history of Canada is taught in our schools and colleges. But I fancy the cases are rare where the teacher or lecturer teaches or lectures with understanding. I was fortunate in receiving my first lessons in the history of my country from one of these exceptional teachers, but subsequently I found the whole subject generously neglected. For the most part, I am afraid that our teachers and professors of history have not themselves a lively vision of Canada's past, and it is, therefore, hardly to be expected that they would give to their students a vital conception of our national story. Certainly the impression is widespread in our institutions of learning, both elementary and higher, that Canadian history is dryas dust and uninteresting, while among the adult population it is to be apprehended that, in spite of the excellent work of a few enthusiasts in our historical societies, the same attitude of mind is largely prevalent. We are all but "chill-er-