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# From Newfoundland TO THE Rocky Mountains.

A Lecture by M. Benjamin Sulte, of Ottawa, before the Royal Geographical Society of Quebec,\* on April 15th, 1880.

(TRANSLATED BY COLIN CAMPBELL.)

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The Canadian Confederation covering today nearly all the northern territory of this continent between the Pacific and the Atlantic, it will not be out of place to trace the beginning and progress of its geographical knowledge.

We will necessarily proceed in the order of its discovery—going from East to West. By the aid of our various historical narratives, it will be easy to sketch the advance of the white race in its march from the St. Lawrence Gulf to the foot of the Rocky Mountains.

We must not forget that Christopher Columbus and the discoverers who followed him sought to reach China and Japan. Some forty years after the first brilliant triumph of the great navigator, the French tried to penetrate by a northern route into these new regions. Newfoundland and the banks, where Bretons, Basques, and Normans fished for cod, had not attracted the attention of the civilized world. But in this direction the King of France turned his eyes. He sent Jacques Cartier, in 1534, to find for him a passage by which he might open relations with the Asiatic continent without troubling explorers from Spain.

The map of the world was then limited enough. Some vague notions were held among the learned men of the period; but it would have been hard to find what we call, now-a-days, a public interest in these new questions. The old world very carefully let alone the great problems of geography. Barely a few of the wise men, the deep thinkers, had dared to attack the old theories of the extent and true configuration of our earth. True, the search for unknown lands commenced to prove attractive to the monarchs of Europe; but whenever they were drawn into enterprises of that nature, it was for the purpose of gratifying personal ambitions, not scientific tastes. Not until three centuries after Cartier's day can a dawning be noticed of true geographical enquiry.

Commerce, the pioneer of nearly all enterprises, has furnished a great number

of explorers. The Catholic religion, also, which, by its missionaries, has everywhere reached the farthest bounds of new countries, has given much valuable evidence. And the governors and administrators of colonies have contributed, in a great measure, towards fixing the attention of the powers and of leading men upon unknown regions susceptible of being thrown open to civilization.

After Cartier, who found other French navigators already in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and who ventured as far as Montreal, we remain for sixty years without an advance in the knowledge of Canadian geography.

Champlain (1613) wished to reconnoitre the country up to Hudson's Bay; but instead of following the course of the St. Maurice river, which he had remarked, (1610,) he tried the passage by the Ottawa. On running up to the Allumettes Island, the Indians convinced him of the uselessness of the attempt, and of the fact that the Bay was much too distant to admit of regular connection between it and the St. Lawrence. So slight was the acquaintance of the whites with the North and West at this period, that they imagined they could reach the Pacific, or could catch a glimpse of it almost as easily as Balboa had gazed upon it from the mountain-heights of Darien. They little guessed that, instead of an isthmus, they had to deal with a stretch of nine hundred leagues!

Champlain's genius reminded him that if the North proved difficult of access, the South might open itself to his designs. Consequently, he turned in that direction, and after coasting along the Georgian Bay he traversed Lake Ontario and passed through some parts of the present State of New York. Thus, less than eight years after Quebec was founded, Lower and Upper Canada were known. Champlain would seem to have perceived that there existed, this side of the great lakes, a water-shed, whose corresponding dip beyond must extend very far. His own efforts stopped short of testing the correctness of the theory; but

\* This society, incorporated in 1879 by Act of the Dominion Parliament, has for its object—1st. "To popularize and extend the study of geographical science, and of all the pursuits subsidiary to its advancement; 2nd. To study and make known our country in relation to its productive forces, ..... with a view to augment its riches and the well-being of its population; 3rd. To study our means of communication ..... and those of other countries, with a view to facilitate and extend commercial relations; 4th. To prosecute every kind of scientific study comprehended in geographical science; ..... 5th. To open communication with the geographical societies of other countries, ..... and to secure their co-operation," etc., etc. The roll of members includes the Premier of Canada, and leading public men of all parties in the Province, the Roman Catholic and Anglican Bishops of Quebec, as well as many names distinguished in the brilliant field of French-Canadian literature, which—well-known and highly honored as it is in critical Paris—is literally a *terra incognita* to Englishmen, and even to most English-speaking Canadians! C. C.