

increasing interest. In the more important documents of state we may find the expression of the voice of the people ; but from local records and semi-private papers, we may construct a vivid picture of the temper, habits and aspirations of the people, and may follow, stage by stage, the evolutions which have brought about movements of political and economic change. By the collection of these records in organized centres substantial additions are constantly being made to our storehouse of knowledge. The barrier so long opposed to the revelation of truth has been broken down, and we have been admitted behind the scenes. Throughout the civilized world the past is being studied from the records of the men who made its history, rather than in the lives of those whom accident or choice may have identified with the prominence of the country. This wider field of inquiry has imposed new responsibilities upon Governments as the custodians of national archives. Papers are gathered and preserved at the public expense, which at one time would have been left to private enterprise ; and facilities of access are now demanded where they would once have been accorded solely as a favour.

To the modern historian this change presents many difficulties. Canada is still a young country, hardly conscious of its strength, or of the brilliant future towards which it is pressing. In the three centuries of its activity it has passed through many vicissitudes ; has emerged from violent struggles, has suffered severe shocks. The history of these three centuries is crowded with detail ; its course has run in widely divergent directions, and the issue of its warfare has had such far-reaching effects, that it forms an absorbing study. Innumerable influences have left their impress upon the features of our national life. Justice demands that the progress of each should be defined, in order that their mutual action may be faithfully appreciated. At the threshold of his subject, therefore, the historian is confronted with a mass of detail which he finds it impossible to co-ordinate in one comprehensive work, whatever may be the range of his intellect or the length of his years. Selection is open to him ; but, in order to work out his scheme intelligently he is forced to attribute to certain influences or tendencies, a prominence to which they have no claim. And when the defects of his work are discovered by the specialist or critic, the author is accused of ignorance or of partiality ; when, in reality, he has simply attempted an impossible task. Specialization, therefore, becomes imperative, and to meet this requirement of the age the enquirer turns naturally towards those institutions from which he can draw the information desired. Oft times by the light of new evidence he will be able to show how far opinions have supplied the place of facts, whilst documents which would have permitted the age to speak for itself have been buried in obscurity ; or, in sympathy with a spirit which has fostered the suppression of truth, jealously guarded from the touch of profane hands. The desirability of collecting our archives, and of rendering them available to the public with all reasonable promptitude, should, I think, commend itself to the people of the Dominion, since an accurate knowledge of its past may become an important factor in its future development. All those who have studied our written history closely, and are at all familiar with the amount of unassimilated material concerning every age, will, I believe, frankly admit that it is unsatisfactory. Written from so many standpoints, and necessarily based upon insufficient evidence, no uniformity exists or is possible. And yet it is upon this imperfect, and oft times narrow view of the past, that our text books are formed and our youth are examined for academic honours. Much sterling work has been accomplished by Canadian historians which will forever remain as a monument to them. The cardinal points of our history may