

ALL CANADIANS SHOULD READ THE DIARY OF MRS. SIMCOE

Contains Early Pictures of Canadian Towns and
Cities of the Present—Letters Undiscovered
for Many Years.

The majority of Canadians have little or no appreciation of the diary that awaits them in the perusal of the early history of the Dominion. Most boys are brought up on the sapless pages of school histories of Canada, and it is no wonder that they are not interested in the very early history of the country when they choose their own reading. As a rule formal history is wearisome to the flesh, but the memoirs and diaries that are being rescued from oblivion these days provide just as entrancing pages as a reader can happen upon anywhere. "The Life of Father LaBouchere" is such a book, a new treasure just added to the Canadian library, and another work that takes its place beside it in point of absorbing interest is "The Diary of Mrs. Simcoe," by Mr. J. Ross Robertson, of Toronto. In these two books issued by the same fortunate publisher, Wm. Briggs, we have volumes of which Canada may well be proud. The former is an historical romance of the west, the latter a fascinating revelation of the first years of settlement in Upper Canada.

Before proceeding with an examination of the contents of the book a word concerning the author may not be amiss. Mr. J. Ross Robertson is a man of many interests. He is the proprietor of one of the leading newspapers in Canada, the Evening Telegram of Toronto. He is a well-known philanthropist, and a distinguished authority and exponent of Freemasonry, but in spite of his many activities he has always had a leaning to historical research. He has done more than any other Canadian to investigate the early history of Toronto, and his "Landmarks of Toronto" is a monument to indefatigable industry, preserving facts and reminiscences

that but for him would have perished. The present volume, however, is even more valuable as a work of painstaking research, because it will attract not only the residents of Toronto, but all those Canadians who are interested in their country's early days.

It seems almost incredible that such important documents as the letters which Mrs. Simcoe, wife of Governor Simcoe, sent home from Upper Canada during her five years there, between 1791 and 1796, should have remained undiscovered for so long a time, but Mr. Robertson has had the good fortune to rescue them from their quiet resting place in a Devonian manor house. He has now given them to the world, and before long, we believe, he will follow this work with a biography of Upper Canada's first governor which will also be an authority. And not only has Mr. Robertson obtained new historical material, but he has presented it to the public in the clearest and most readable form. His volume is one of the finest specimens of book-making that has ever been produced in this country. Its value from an artistic point of view may be surmised when it is stated that it contains 237 illustrations, including 90 reproductions of interesting sketches made by Mrs. Simcoe, and 147 of the original letters. As an artist, we have faithful pictures of places and scenes in Upper and Lower Canada which would otherwise have been called up only by the imagination. "We are not for her work," says Mr. Robertson, "we would not have views of Toronto harbor at the end of the eighteenth century. We would not be able to contrast the quiet of the harbor and its surroundings in 1791, when it was the home of the aborigine and the haunt of the wild fowl, with the commercial activities of today. We would not have a picture of the Mohawk village on the Grand River near Brantford, which, with the exception of the Mohawk church, has passed away, nor of the early days of the Niagara and Kingston settlements that were then and are now important places in the history of the province of Upper Canada."

In addition to the sketches and paintings by Mrs. Simcoe there are many other illustrations, the volume being very rich in portraits of the innumerable persons whose names are mentioned in Mrs. Simcoe's pages. The labor of finding pictures of all these worthies, forgotten even to many antiquarians, must have been enormous. None but the author and his publisher had any idea of the toll that lies behind this beautiful and valuable book.

Mrs. Simcoe was not only an artist, but had quite a Peppysian gift as a terse chronicler of passing events. What charms me most as I read her entries in the weekly diary which she forwarded regularly to a lady friend in England, is their healthy, pungent humanity. The wife of the governor was aristocratic in manners, and usually stood on her dignity; but you find no painful stiffness in her style. Keen observer that she was, nothing was alien to her, the dress or dancing of a stray Indian, the best cure for the ague, or the sting of the rattlesnake, the arrival of the first mosquito of the season, and the mosquitoes had much in common, but Lady Simcoe, who lived in the pre-microbe age was unaware of it, or the prospects of a war with the United States—she touched on all these topics with easy grace.

The wife of the first governor of Upper Canada was familiar with the difficulties of life in the wilderness. Her letters from England usually carried by Indians from Montreal were frequently singed or burned along the back or edges from hanging too near the camp fire. After they went to the Niagara in 1791, the governor and Mrs. Simcoe had to live in a tent. The violent thunderstorms, which seemed to be alarmingly frequent in those

days, made tenting a disagreeable kind of life. The governor was obliged sometimes to hold the ropes fast to the tent should be blown away. One day, after being out driving and after a threatened runaway, the horse being frightened by the blinding lightning, Mrs. Simcoe came home to find things very dreary.

"We were so cold and wet," she says, "that we were glad to drink tea. It was quite dark and too windy to allow of our burning candles, and when the forked flashes of lightning enlightened the air I was able to drink tea. I wrapped myself up in two or three great coats and intended, if the tent was blown down, to take shelter under the great dinner-table. The rain and wind did not cease for two hours, and we had no means of drying our clothes and were obliged to sleep in a tent. However, we have not caught cold." But there were plenty of occasions in traveling when this doughty lady did get very wet and caught cold. She travelled off, as may be supposed, to Kingston, to Quebec, and back again to Niagara, or York. There are other entries here which tell how she and the governor sailed across the lake to York or went around by land. The most dismal journey that Mrs. Simcoe records was from Quebec to Upper Canada in February, 1795. She was going back to rejoin her husband and nothing daunted her, but she suffered many things from the poor sleeping accommodation and the fact that she had to put up with the long trip. On Sunday, Feb. 8, she arrived with her party in Champlain. "The house at Champlain," she writes, "was wretched, and the people said that travellers never slept in it, but on my repeated request for a room, they gave up their sitting-room, which appeared so dismal that I could not sleep, though I lay down on a board. In the night a great dog crept in from under the stove and people were talking continually. The people looked as if they belonged to the cave dwellers." Mrs. Simcoe, however, was lucky to escape the perils of such a journey. The following entry is characteristic.

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Since then the corporation has, in addition, spent £6,000 to £8,000 per annum on purposes associated with the upkeep of the Mansion House, such as rates, taxes, maintenance, repairs, etc. It is common knowledge that as long as the lord mayor's salary is, few, if any, chief magistrates have been able to discharge their duties without a more or less important contribution from their personal incomes. One lord mayor is reported to have spent £30,000 out of his own pocket in a year of no special importance, while the average is from £8,000 to £12,000. Carl Hentschel's motion invites the corporation to inquire and decide if £10,000 is enough for the lord mayor of the present day. If it is, the corporation, he argues, ought not to bear some of the Mansion House charges; if not, the allowance ought to be increased. The second part of Hentschel's resolution deals with the sanitary condition of the Mansion House, especially in the domestic and kitchen departments.

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Since then the corporation has, in addition, spent £6,000 to £8,000 per annum on purposes associated with the upkeep of the Mansion House, such as rates, taxes, maintenance, repairs, etc. It is common knowledge that as long as the lord mayor's salary is, few, if any, chief magistrates have been able to discharge their duties without a more or less important contribution from their personal incomes. One lord mayor is reported to have spent £30,000 out of his own pocket in a year of no special importance, while the average is from £8,000 to £12,000. Carl Hentschel's motion invites the corporation to inquire and decide if £10,000 is enough for the lord mayor of the present day. If it is, the corporation, he argues, ought not to bear some of the Mansion House charges; if not, the allowance ought to be increased. The second part of Hentschel's resolution deals with the sanitary condition of the Mansion House, especially in the domestic and kitchen departments.

Some of the most interesting pages in the book tell of the choice and surveying of Toronto as a new settlement. Governor Simcoe and his wife are responsible for many of the place names of Ontario. Mr. Robertson has made this diary doubly valuable by including on my repeated request for a room, they gave up their sitting-room, which appeared so dismal that I could not sleep, though I lay down on a board. In the night a great dog crept in from under the stove and people were talking continually. The people looked as if they belonged to the cave dwellers." Mrs. Simcoe, however, was lucky to escape the perils of such a journey. The following entry is characteristic.

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