

INFLUENCE OF THE WAR OF 1812 UPON THE SETTLEMENT  
OF THE CANADIAN WEST.

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At first sight one would be inclined to say that the War of 1812 had had no influence, could have had no influence, one way or the other, upon the settlement of what is to-day known as Western Canada—that is to say, that part of Canada lying west of the Great Lakes. The immense territory now constituting the provinces of Manitoba, Sackatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia, lay as completely outside the field of conflict as if it had been in South America. One may safely say that it did not enter into the calculations of the contestants on either side. It contained nothing for the one to attack or the other to defend. Believed at that time, and for many years thereafter, to be a wilderness unfit for civilized habitation, it was not valued by Canada nor coveted by the United States. In any event, it was much too remote from the centres of population on either side of the line to become an element in the conflict. The most westerly military station on the Canadian side was at St. Joseph's Island, near Sault Ste. Marie, and on the American side, the outpost of Michilimackinac, captured by the British soon after the declaration of war.

Nevertheless, although its rays were feeble enough, the dawn of the era of settlement in Western America was already breaking. At the very moment when Madison issued his Proclamation announcing that a state of war existed between the two countries, the pioneers of the Selkirk Settlement were on their way inland from York Factory to the Red River. The origin of that settlement is too well known to need any introduction here. It will be sufficient to note that Lord Selkirk sent out the first party of colonists from Scotland in 1811. They wintered at York Factory, and spent most of the summer of 1812 in making their painful way inland to Red River. A second party followed that year, reaching their destination in 1813. A third party sailed from the Orkneys in 1813, arriving at the Selkirk Settlement in 1814; finally a fourth contingent came out, in charge of Robert Semple, in 1815. Thus through-