

SESSIONAL PAPER No. 18

In the course of an examination by a Select Committee of the British House of Commons many years ago, the chairman put the following question to a well known author, "Do you think that owing to those causes a work so inaccurate as Hume's *History of England*, would find the currency in the present day that it did at the time it was published?" The answer given, was:—"I do not think it would. I wish to speak with the highest respect of Robertson and Hume, two most eminent men. I have heard that the demand for their works is much diminished, and I believe the fact is so, but I think that it is to be ascribed, not to there being no demand for higher historical literature, but to these authors not having gone to the best sources from which historical truth was to be drawn: these sources were not opened to them, at least not so open that they could easily consult them, and therefore I do not mean to say, they are to be blamed. Hume, I have heard, was shown the stores in the State paper Office, or some other of the great Record Offices after he had gained a great reputation by the publication of his first volumes. He was in London, and about to continue his work, but his time was limited; he looked on the uncatalogued array of manuscripts in despair and contented himself with those printed materials which were accessible."

In most instances, I suppose, we derive our knowledge of the past through the medium of printed books; but if the books were written with an imperfect knowledge of the facts, we are, of course, only imperfectly informed of what has gone before. It is no longer possible to leave research entirely in the hands of the individual, since this task has for a long time been accepted by great countries as the duty of the State. In France and the United States large series of papers are published annually which aid the cause of historical literature. The Provincial Governments have from time to time printed valuable collections of papers. In the Dominion Archives, to which students should naturally turn, we have only calendars, many of which refer to papers not yet transcribed. These volumes are undoubtedly useful, although the student has often to seek abroad for what he might reasonably suppose would be found in our custody. Our literary men, for the most part, are able to devote only a portion of their time to building up a national literature, and the least that we should do is to furnish them with documents of a public character. In the Archives building there are about four thousand volumes of manuscripts, originals and transcripts, and when the papers now deposited in various buildings are arranged, there will be probably ten thousand volumes. Of these ten thousand volumes there will not be possibly more than five hundred which relate exclusively to the French régime. In my previous report I have referred to what I consider the mistaken policy of expending large sums on the preparation of calendars abroad. The persons directing our copying in foreign countries are capable of determining what papers are of interest to Canada; and moreover the calendars which we now possess of French documents, do not exhaust the papers of value to us, in the volumes from which they have been drawn. In calendars published twenty years ago papers have been referred to which have not yet been copied. When we have transcribed the whole of the documents, not selections, from any given collection relating to Canada, a summary can be prepared for publication much more expeditiously from fair copies here, than from the originals, which are often difficult to decipher. There is now an accumulation of documents to be copied in France, a large portion of which were calendared years ago. I therefore beg to suggest that means be provided to increase our work in this respect. In the city of Quebec, in Three Rivers