

IV.—A Plea for a Canadian Camden Society.

By GEORGE BRYCE, LL.D., Professor of Literature, Manitoba College, Winnipeg.

(Read May 24, 1884.)

The task of gathering the materials for a history of our Dominion is one of the greatest difficulty. Leaving out of account the work of minute investigation, and the additional labour of classification required by the historian in order to gain the true perspective of events, the mere physical labour of collecting facts from so wide an area, and from such a variety of sources as our Canadian history embraces, is overwhelming. Mr. Parkman, excelled by few in his truthful appreciation of the scenes he describes, in laborious investigation of the sources whence he draws his information, and in the clear and beautiful diction employed by him, finds it possible, in his most successful works, merely to select here and there a "cointer of vantage," and to give a study of some picturesque combination of events in the early days of Canada's military régime. His works, absorbing as they are, are rather monographs than histories. It is true, as belonging to a foreign country, Mr. Parkman can scarcely be expected to have the sympathy and patient appreciation necessary to gather up the elements of our social, intellectual, and material life.

That life has originated at many different points in the northern half of this continent, and has grown into ever stronger vital currents; while these have increased and deepened, have come together, and are now beginning to assume something like a unity of flow. The historian who would seek to follow this growing, though yet feeble, stream of national life, be he never so earnest, so able, or so willing, will encounter a task of almost unexampled difficulty. The nomadic life of our aborigines implies a state of things of which there is scarcely a trace remaining; the early life of the new settler, struggling for existence, is proverbially uninteresting and unlikely to attract the attention of any one likely to record it; the scattered character of the settlements places obstacles in the way of a presentation of the facts. Of the conflicting statements made in letters, pamphlets, and newspapers, the want of a public opinion of any force at the time makes it impossible to find a criterion of correct judgment; while, owing to the recent period of many of the events, it is difficult to give them a faithful treatment without creating animosity on the part of friends of the actors still living. Moreover, the strong political bias, apparently indigenous to our Canadian soil, renders it most difficult for the historian to treat his subject dispassionately, without arousing the susceptibilities of the philosophers who go about subjecting everything in art, science, sociology, and history to the minute inspection of their party microscope.

Wide and difficult of comprehensive treatment as the subject of Canadian history is, the clue to the earliest history of Canada, in almost all the points where Europeans first approached it, lies in its being in northern latitudes. The fur trade was the first attraction that induced Old World peoples to undertake settlement in