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From Newfoundland TO THE Rocky Mountains.

A Lecture by M. Benjamin Sulte, of Ottawa, before the Royal Geographical Society of Quebec,* on April 15th, 1880.

(TRANSLATED BY COLIN CAMPBELL.)

FROM THE OTTAWA FREE PRESS, SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 6TH, 1880.

The Canadian Confederation covering today nearly all the northern territory of this continent between the Pacific and the Atlantic, it will not be out of place to trace the beginning and progress of its geographical knowledge.

We will necessarily proceed in the order of its discovery—going from East to West. By the aid of our various historical narratives, it will be easy to sketch the advance of the white race in its march from the St. Lawrence Gulf to the foot of the Rocky Mountains.

We must not forget that Christopher Columbus and the discoverers who followed him sought to reach China and Japan. Some forty years after the first brilliant triumph of the great navigator, the French tried to penetrate by a northern route into these new regions. Newfoundland and the banks, where Bretons, Basques, and Normans fished for cod, had not attracted the attention of the civilized world. But in this direction the King of France turned his eyes. He sent Jacques Cartier, in 1534, to find for him a passage by which he might open relations with the Asiatic continent without troubling explorers from Spain.

The map of the world was then limited enough. Some vague notions were held among the learned men of the period; but it would have been hard to find what we call, now-a-days, a public interest in these new questions. The old world very carefully let alone the great problems of geography. Barely a few of the wise men, the deep thinkers, had dared to attack the old theories of the extent and true configuration of our earth. True, the search for unknown lands commenced to prove attractive to the monarchs of Europe; but whenever they were drawn into enterprises of that nature, it was for the purpose of gratifying personal ambitions, not scientific tastes. Not until three centuries after Cartier's day can a dawning be noticed of true geographical enquiry.

Commerce, the pioneer of nearly all enterprises, has furnished a great number

of explorers. The Catholic religion, also, which, by its missionaries, has everywhere reached the farthest bounds of new countries, has given much valuable evidence. And the governors and administrators of colonies have contributed, in a great measure, towards fixing the attention of the powers and of leading men upon unknown regions susceptible of being thrown open to civilization.

After Cartier, who found other French navigators already in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and who ventured as far as Montreal, we remain for sixty years without an advance in the knowledge of Canadian geography.

Champlain (1613) wished to reconnoitre the country up to Hudson's Bay; but instead of following the course of the St. Maurice river, which he had remarked, (1610,) he tried the passage by the Ottawa. On running up to the Allumettes Island, the Indians convinced him of the uselessness of the attempt, and of the fact that the Bay was much too distant to admit of regular connection between it and the St. Lawrence. So slight was the acquaintance of the whites with the North and West at this period, that they imagined they could reach the Pacific, or could catch a glimpse of it almost as easily as Balboa had gazed upon it from the mountain-heights of Darien. They little guessed that, instead of an isthmus, they had to deal with a stretch of nine hundred leagues!

Champlain's genius reminded him that if the North proved difficult of access, the South might open itself to his designs. Consequently, he turned in that direction, and after coasting along the Georgian Bay he traversed Lake Ontario and passed through some parts of the present State of New York. Thus, less than eight years after Quebec was founded, Lower and Upper Canada were known. Champlain would seem to have perceived that there existed, this side of the great lakes, a water-shed, whose corresponding dip beyond must extend very far. His own efforts stopped short of testing the correctness of the theory; but

* This society, incorporated in 1879 by Act of the Dominion Parliament, has for its object—1st. "To popularize and extend the study of geographical science, and of all the pursuits subsidiary to its advancement; 2nd. To study and make known our country in relation to its productive forces, with a view to augment its riches and the well-being of its population; 3rd. To study our means of communication and those of other countries, with a view to facilitate and extend commercial relations; 4th. To prosecute every kind of scientific study comprehended in geographical science; 5th. To open communication with the geographical societies of other countries, and to secure their co-operation," etc., etc. The roll of members includes the Premier of Canada, and leading public men of all parties in the Province, the Roman Catholic and Anglican Bishops of Quebec, as well as many names distinguished in the brilliant field of French-Canadian literature, which—well-known and highly honored as it is in critical Paris—is literally a *terra incognita* to Englishmen, and even to most English-speaking Canadians! C. C.

we notice that on his return from France (in 1633-34) he availed himself of the knowledge gained twenty years before, and sent Jean Nicolet to the discovery of the region to-day called Wisconsin. Nicolet reported to him the existence of a great river, the Mississippi, flowing from beyond the country which he himself had travelled. This must have convinced him that the continent extended south-westwardly from the lakes. Unfortunately, he did not live to see the fact established. The charts of Champlain show only the details gathered up to 1627, so that outlines of the great lakes hardly appear upon them.

In this enquiry we must omit the operations of the English colonists, whose field was then confined to the sea-coast, and who did not seek to penetrate into the interior. We shall therefore only follow the French explorers, in our examination of the development of geographical knowledge respecting the north of this continent.

After the death of Champlain, the Government does not seem to have concerned itself about the new territories. To the Jesuit missionaries belongs the honor of having been conversant with the country of the great lakes from 1635 to 1670. It would take a volume to tell of this curious epoch. I will make mention *en passant* of two men who, from 1645 to 1660, advanced to the Missouri and knew the Sioux country. These were Médard Chouard des Groseillers and Pierre-Esprit de Radisson, his brother-in-law, both settled in Lower Canada. The dream which Champlain had entertained in 1613, and even earlier, of penetrating to Hudson's Bay, Chouard afterwards sought for twenty years to realize. He made acquaintance with the tribes who trafficked with those parts, and for a time believed it possible to establish communications between Lake Superior (Jesuit mission) and the Kilistinons Indians. Being disappointed by the indifference of the Governors, he fell back upon the enterprising spirit of the traders on the shores of the St. Lawrence, and urged them to form a company which should monopolize the trade of the "Bay of the North." Unsuccessful in this quarter, on account of the small number of the Canadians (2,000 souls at that time) he ventured to offer his services to England, and was the actual founder of that famous Hudson's Bay Company (1645 and 1666), which ceased not to prosper during two centuries, until it became a power in the State.

Geographical knowledge, in the year 1670, extended therefore from Newfoundland to the mouth of the Saguenay, from there to James' Bay, and thence to the north shore of Lake Superior. We must also take into account what Chouard and the missionaries had done in the direction

of the Sioux country (Missouri) and bear in mind the exploration by Nicolet of Green Bay and the river Wisconsin, discoveries reaching the very heart of America. The native nations of these vast territories had not been slow to establish trade relations with the St. Lawrence. Henceforth French genius was to dominate this portion of the New World. To advance further, men were now required who comprehended the westward march of civilization. Upon this path the missionaries and their interpreters had entered. It was not enough for the little Quebec colony to have inspired the founding of Three Rivers and Montreal; it had now to push up the courses of the waters, to surmount the heights of land northward and westward and to spread itself into the unknown regions.

Nothing in the history of discovery can excel in boldness and sagacity the conceptions that our fathers brought to bear upon this peaceful invasion, which should give them possession of the lands of the setting sun.

To secure the alliance of the Indian tribes was an indispensable condition. The New England colonies, were commencing to negotiate with the peoples towards the lakes. The interest of France was to incline to her side the influence of such of the Indian nations as, for the ends of commerce or war, were able to secure for her the domination over nearly all the continent. In this view, in 1670, there was at Sault Ste. Marie a solemn ceremony—the possession-taking of all the country about the lakes. Many personages assisted at this ceremonial, of whom Nicholas Perrot seems to stand in the front rank. He it was who drew to the side of France the nations on whose friendship depended the right of way to the unknown country. If our flag—the flag, at that time, of France in America—floated for a century (1670-1760) without opposition over the greater part of this continent, it is to the energy and enterprise of a few humble traders of his stripe that we owe it.

Hardly had the great lakes come to be rightly designated French, when Joliet and Marquette descended the Mississippi, "adding at one stroke to the map of the world those vast regions, the future granary of the human race." (L. H. Fréchet.) Louisiana was revealed to the eyes of the Canadians, as Canada had, a century before, been found by the French. Only, this time, the march of civilization was much more rapid.

New times had dawned. The seat of geographic science was no longer Paris but Quebec—that is, at the very gates of the zone to be studied. With us henceforth, in Canada itself, must be the starting point. Our fathers needed no spur to stimulate their efforts; they

doubled and tripled the field of the discoveries which they found before them. The Ohio was ascended to its source; the Missouri delivered up its secrets; Hudson's Bay became a Canadian lake. All that between 1675 and 1700. Famous epoch! of which we cannot sufficiently admire the *elan*.

Soon it became a question yet again of setting back the bounds of the known world. A blank still remained upon the American map, like that which there was in Central Africa 20 years ago. From Lake Superior to the western sea all was yet mysterious; it was not even known how far the land stretched over there. Then came a man who, trained to such adventures, was destined to carry the French name to the foot of the Rocky Mountains—Varenes de la Verendrye. Not content with discovery only, he was one who knew how to found and to give stability to his conquest. From the commencement he employed commerce, that formidable wedge before which new continents open up for the free passage of civilized man. Year after year, from 1731 to 1743, La Verendrye† went on pressing forward into the west, while protecting his rear by the forts and factories with which he staked out his route. His works, continued by his sons, remained standing long after the conquest. To meet, in these territories, the advance-guard of the Anglo-Saxon race, we must go to the year 1780, and even later. At that time our people (French-Canadian *coureurs de bois* and half-breed settlers) already counted numerous families, and held twenty important posts, where a great trade in furs was carried on.

Thus, two distinct phases mark the history of geographical knowledge in Canada. In the first, it is Jacques Cartier, Champlain—say rather France—who seeks and who finds; in the second, the Canadians, from their little colony, furnish the material for the most marvelous of continental discoveries.

Look at the New England settlers, who, surpassing us many times in population, did not dream of extending their possessions. With half their resources, we should have gone, at one bound, to Mexico and California.

Turn to Australia and you find a similar backwardness. The colonists stuck to the coast. The continent's interior is in its wild state. And what is to be said of Africa, harboring upon her borders groups of pioneers who, with all their strength, dare not trust themselves out of sight of their village clocks? Suppose upon these continents a colony of Canadians—forthwith, without awaiting a mother country's aid, without weighing the chances of the struggle, you will see

explorers plunging into the depths of the inmost regions, and opening up communication with them. Yes, I repeat it, never has work been done to compare with that of our "*voyageurs*."

And see this miracle. In a time when the greatest minds of Europe but groped for a way of pushing out the limbs of a science of geography, our people had created that science. Yes, had created it entire; and more than that, they brought it into active and practical operation.

Is it not true that everywhere in Europe, in the colonies, the most extended notion of geography two centuries ago was about limited to the knowledge of the surrounding country of one's native town or hamlet? What think you, then of a people who, starting from that time, stretched their influence over some hundreds of leagues of country, and who aimed to do still more? Yet that is what Canadians did. And mark well, that not only was it the administrators, the higher classes, the savants, who possessed this faculty, this passion for discovery,—it was each family and every man. What was the surprise of British officers and functionaries, when they wished to become acquainted with the new regions, to perceive that the humblest *voyageur* of their escort possessed more accurate knowledge than the boasted science of Europe or America. Never could they advance far enough to pass the limit of Canadian habitations. A little more and our *voyageurs* would have penetrated China!

We are, then, a race eminently gifted for geographical studies. They are our very instincts. To-day we have but to follow them as naturally as of yore.

We now turn to the modern state of affairs. It is very different from that of which we have been speaking. The domain of study has greatly changed in a hundred years. It has become hardly recognizable. New wants seem to have surged over humanity: at any rate people no longer live as they lived then.

Steam, the telegraph, gold mines, have upset the ancient order of things. With greater distances and instantaneous communication, with the abundance of manufactures, with a general desire to overrun the globe and to possess it, the world of other days exists no longer.

As, then, we must march with the age, our enquiring eyes turn towards the yet unexplored regions of our planet—and thus was geographical science first conceived—a science which, rooted truly in the past, dates, more strictly speaking, from twenty, or perhaps fifteen years ago.

We perceive that, to rule in unknown lands, we must first discover what they are, and that to discover them the old means hardly sufficed. Thus, we have no more such frontiersmen to slowly com-

† M. Sube-Ene written the lives Nicolet, Chouard, and La Verendrye C. C.

mence operations, no more privileged trading companies, no more such settlements, and no more lost children, sacrificed upon the outskirts of civilization. What we want now is to occupy territory by utilizing modern science; to sound the rivers and launch steam-boats upon them, and to join the landmarks of nature by the iron rails. Inspired by this idea, the Europeans have done wonders these ten or twelve years past; they have discovered, studied and published the knowledge of a quarter of the African continent. It now but remains to send dry goods out there—a matter that should be hastened. The negroes are yearning for the civilization of calico and cheap looking-glasses.

By us, who are at once a young people, and one blest with rich resources, all that cannot be looked upon with indifferent gaze. We are better off than Europe; our manufactures are not yet numerous, and no useless class, like the *proletariat* of Europe, exists among us; like Europe, we have need of an outlet for the products of our industries in the measure of their development; unlike her, in place of sending afar off to find a market for our merchandise, we have it at our doors. The North-west awaits us.

But who, to-day, knows anything of the North-west? Almost no one. The old memories of it are lost. For the last twenty years, a letter coming from Red River would have been looked upon as coming from China, or thereabouts. At any rate, the prairies visited by our fathers and where so many Canadians settled, no longer appealed to our imagination. Ten years ago, under the pressure of political events, a sort of awakening took place. Public attention was drawn to the Red River colony, to the extent even of giving it a constitution, which erected it into a Federal Province, and that was all. People no longer cared to know anything about it. They were quite indifferent regarding the immense territories to the west of Manitoba, as well as the belt of land to be taken possession of, which stretches away to the North, between Hudson's Bay and the St. Lawrence. Here we are; the owners, the *seigneurs*, the administrators, paying the expenses of these new countries, while knowing so little of them, failing to comprehend that their future is relatively to us as that of Africa and Australia to Europe.

Around the simple questions of geography, then, other great branches of study gather. In truth, geography, in this order of ideas—ideas springing from modern requirements—is the pivot upon which at this moment turn the destinies of races. I will dare even to say that Canada is more than any other nation in danger of perishing if she fails to take account of passing events,

and if she does not look to take her share of action in the general movement which, by thirty years hence, perhaps, will have changed the face of all that remains under the sun of colonizable country. Needless, I think, to insist upon this; nevertheless, if any one doubt me, one simple question will decide it: Where are the men who thoroughly understand our marine, our fisheries, the steps necessary to improve the St. Lawrence Gulf and create industries upon its shores—where are they who know the northern parts of Ontario and Quebec—where the writers, the orators who can popularize the knowledge of our North-west? Doubtless there are some, but isolated, unknown, unable to make themselves heard except by accident, or as a momentary novelty—like the speaking machine and learned dogs. This does not prevent our paying, however, for the placing of our name upon those great spaces, from which, even now, we ought to be deriving some profit. Of course, we want the Newfoundland and other fisheries, we want the Hudson's Bay, we want the Saskatchewan, *but what do we know about them all?* About as much as we know about the moon. Then why not want the moon as well? This reminds me of that famous cry of the French Chambers before 1870: "We must have the Rhine!" An impatient member brusquely put the question: "Do you know what this Rhine is, or where it's to be found?" We need be at no greater loss than that at any rate.

Let us look at things carefully. What the countries of Europe lack we have at our doors; territory, room, the resources of a fertile soil. It remains for us to define its "geography," in all the points of view embraced by, or in any way related to that science, history, agriculture, mines, lines of communication, climate, &c. That is a good deal. Yes, it is indeed a good deal when one thinks that it has been found necessary to expend four millions of dollars to trace upon the map the route which a railway may take from Old Canada to the Rocky Mountains; and there has not been found in Parliament a man able to light the snuff of a candle—to show even a taper's light of his own, to illumine the Ministers of two Administrations in their labors amidst this darkness! And so we remain in our shell, and comprehend not what is this country called Canada. Our voyageurs of the past were truly greater *savants* than that! They could have drawn for us, from memory, the chart of the Confederation from ocean to ocean, without omitting that which our engineers are at such pains to re-discover to-day. Surely I had reason, in speaking of our French-Canadian ancestors, to take for the title of my lecture: "From Newfoundland to the Rocky Mountains!"

