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THE
CANADIAN HISTORICAL EXHIBITION.

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(From the Canadian Magazine, June, 1896.)

THE CANADIAN HISTORICAL EXHIBITION, 1897.

BY O. A. HOWLAND, M.P.P.

IN the course of a very able report which the City Treasurer lately presented to the Mayor and the newly constituted Board of Control of Toronto, occurs a reference to a project of more than usual interest, not merely from a civic but from a wider point of view.

It very justly foreshadows that if proper advantage is taken of the opportunities, the coming year 1897 may be made a great year, attended by temporary and perhaps permanent advantages. I quote Mr. Cody's words as to next year's events in Canada.

He says: "In addition to the enlargement of the Industrial Exhibition into a Dominion Exhibition, which has been announced, and the meeting of the British Association, energetic steps have been taken by the Committee of the Canadian Institute and the Universities to prepare for the holding of a general Canadian Historical Exhibition, and otherwise to celebrate and commemorate that year, as the anniversary of the discovery of Canada in June, 1497. The programme of the Canadian Historical Exhibition Committee has appeared in the press from time to time, and was pretty fully reported on at a recent public meeting of the Committee on the 16th of April.

"Perhaps one of the most important consequences of the success of the efforts of this Committee will be the inducing of the Duke and Duchess of York to visit Toronto in connection with the proposed commemoration.

"It also seems probable that it needs the special inducement, or reason, of the holding of a national celebration, and a special exhibition of a high and commemorative character, such as the committee proposes, to ensure the desired visit from a Prince so near the

throne, and so full of important engagements as the Duke of York must be.

"The Historical Exhibition will be entirely distinct in character from the Industrial, and, from the programme presented by the committee, is one that is likely to attract an entirely different class of visitors, both from Europe and the cities of the United States."

It is surely a great honor that so comparatively young a city should be selected, by general agreement of those who have interested themselves in the subject, in all parts of the Dominion, to become the scene of the chief demonstration in honour of a man and an event interesting to students of history in every part of this New World.

The Canadian Historical Exhibition movement ought not to be a strange subject to the readers of THE CANADIAN MAGAZINE.

The duty of Canadians to commemorate in some manner the first discovery on what is now Canadian soil, had been urged by the Royal Society of Canada. The first small seed of a definite project had been sown, as it were, by the wayside, in resolutions at a union meeting of the Ontario Historical Associations, held by the courtesy of the York Pioneers in the log cabin, erected by the latter body on the site of old Fort Rouille, now included in the Toronto Industrial Exhibition Grounds.

The next step towards the successful inception of the project was an article which appeared in THE CANADIAN MAGAZINE of January, 1895, entitled "The Fourth Century of Canadian History." The historical reasons for initiating such a celebration in Canada were there fully set forth.

The publication of this article evoked manifestations of interest and approval from many important, and from some unexpected quarters. Prominent among these was a letter received by the author from Mr. DeLèry Macdonald, of Montreal, Secretary of the Antiquarian and Numismatological Society of that city. The Society of which Mr. Macdonald is an ornament, on subsequent occasion, fully and in the most generous manner, ratified his offer of assistance. It is fair to state that the cordial and liberal expression of opinion by this gentleman, from a distant and presumably somewhat rival quarter, had a great deal to do with the resolution to set the project actively on foot.

The Council of the Canadian Institute took a practical step in the matter by appointing a committee, which has formed the nucleus of the existing organization.

This active central committee, which was naturally of a somewhat local character, was from time to time enlarged, so as to contain such members as Principal Grant, of Queen's University, Dr. Sandford Fleming, C. M.G., of Ottawa, Prof. Bryce of Manitoba, and Mr. Gosnell, Parliamentary Librarian of British Columbia, in addition to distinguished professors representing the Canadian Institute and the Toronto Universities. The necessary space was at once promised it in public buildings by the Ontario Government and the Toronto Universities.

Further encouragement was immediately given from a highly important quarter, representative of all Canada. At the suggestion of Dr. Bourinot, C.M.G., the matter was made the subject of a paper read by the chairman of the Canadian Institute Committee before the Royal Society of Canada, at its meeting at Ottawa in May, 1895, and a confirmatory resolution was thereupon passed by that learned and representative body. Interviews were soon had, with the assistance of Mr. Macdonald, with the

authorities of the French Universities and Societies in Quebec and Montreal; and one and all, commencing with Abbè Gagnon, the Secretary of the Archiepiscopate, and the Rector of Laval University, gave their countenance and cordial adhesion to the project.

At this stage the Governor-General of Canada graciously acceded to the request of the committee to accept the office of Honorary President. The committee then proceeded to procure a bill providing for the incorporation of a public Commission, authorized by the Legislature of Ontario, and recognized by the Dominion Government, for the purpose of carrying the Exhibition into effect. The Provincial Government and other authorities have provided for the exhibition Commission taking possession of all the accommodation required for its purposes in the Ontario Parliament Buildings and the Universities adjoining it. A financial scheme has been developed with the approval of leading members of the Dominion Government, looking to an issue of a large sum of debentures, based upon the expected receipts of the exhibition. It is proposed to ask the Dominion and Provincial Governments, and the City of Toronto, to guarantee altogether \$75,000, divided in equal sums between them, applying the guarantee to postponed debentures.

Having got so far in its Parliamentary organization and programme, the time has come to lay before the public a sketch of the aims and general programme of the exhibition. It may be stated that the general object of the exhibition is first to duly celebrate the memory of that enterprising discoverer, John Cabot, and to signalize the fact that by his first sighting the continent of North America, under a commission from an English King, the way was opened for the whole subsequent course of discovery by the route of the St. Lawrence: leading to the interior of the continent as far as the

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mouth of the Mississippi, to the south and the Rocky Mountains on the west. Cabot's discovery was also the cause of these favoured regions becoming the scene of colonization by two of the great northern nations of Europe, France and England.

In the whole length of Canada, whose existence and whose British nationality may be ascribed to John Cabot, there is not to be found the most insignificant monument erected, to commemorate the fact or to honor his adventurous memory.

Never, indeed, before, did circumstances so favour such a commemoration as is now proposed to be held. One hundred years ago the times were out of joint. The descendants of the original English colonists, that had followed Cabot's track across the ocean to New England, were too much occupied in glorification over their still recent separation from the flag which he had planted, too deep in constitution making and the vexations of a turbulent young nationality, to turn aside to honor the memories of a distant past. At the same moment English speaking Canada was too much occupied in providing new homes in the wilderness for the refugees from the great schism, to indulge in celebrations. It has been reserved, therefore, for 1897, the close of perhaps the most significant century in the world's history, to take up the task which preceding centuries left undone; and it is only fitting that it should have been undertaken by Canada.

The time is, moreover, fitting to make this historical anniversary the occasion of recording, for the observation of the world, the long consecutive history of Canada, and also the position which she has, by quiet, persistent effort, industrial and political, already gained for herself in the brotherhood of the British Empire, if not in the family of nations.

The occasion in this respect is most inspiring, and the committee which initiated the project have every reason

to feel confident that a broad and vigorous response will be forthcoming, both from the large number of literary men who have made history and the sciences a subject of study, and particularly from the young men of Canada, who will rejoice in the opportunity of contributing, in every form in their power, to this first great national demonstration.

To give effect to these aims the work before the Exhibition Committee may be divided into several classes. First among these will naturally be those of a purely historical character. They will tend towards creating a visible object lesson, from which foreigners and also our own people will carry away, as a result of the Exhibition, a distinct and comprehensive idea of the successive periods and courses of events which have led, in what now seems a natural and preordained progression, towards the present existence of Canada, as a people of various origins but united destiny.

There will be sought to be brought together an assemblage of loan collections from all parts of Canada, and it is hoped elsewhere. The logical initiation of the series will be such as will exhibit first the traditions, arts and modes of life of the native tribes, the palimpsest upon which European colonization has written the later histories.

Next will follow an arrangement in a series of rooms, of the portraits, relics and records of the long series of discoverers. First the tradition of the Norsemen. Then their more historic followers; from Cabot, who made known the North American shores, to Jacques Cartier and his successors, down to the intrepid La Salle, the discoverer of the Mississippi. Cook, Vancouver and Mackenzie will also have their place, as the explorers of the Pacific coast of the continent. These should be followed by the long list of adventurous voyagers in the forbidding regions of the North, including Frobisher, Hudson and Franklin, down

to the latest of their successors of all nations. It is expected that beside the Norseman's undecked shallop and the quaint caravels of Columbus (loaned as there is reason to hope by the authorities of the Field Columbian Exhibition) there may float in the waters of Toronto Bay a reproduction of the little Matthew, in which Cabot, commissioned by Henry VII. and equipped by the merchants of Bristol, first ventured the tempestuous waters of the North Atlantic.

Next will be loan collections of portraits and pictures, clothing, weapons, models and works of art, arranged also in rooms or divisions according to periods, which will bring back to life as nearly as possible, before modern eyes, the presences and ways of life of the great personages who directed the political events of four centuries and also those who contributed as advisers and subjects to the gradual development of modern civilization, scientific, religious, industrial and social, of which we inherit the latest fruits.

In a distinct and honored series will appear memorials of the men and measures which have built up the present constitution of Canada: from the great soldiers of France and England who beat the first rude shape with stirring clash of steel, to the latest of the native or adopted Canadian statesmen, to whose genius and persistence Canada owes her glorious liberties, as one of many free nations constituting the British Empire.

Canadian Natural History will also have a place.

An effort will be made to assemble and arrange for inspection in a series, existing collections from all parts of the country, illustrating at one consecutive glance the geology, flora and fauna of the Dominion; showing its varied climes and regions, from the mild Pacific provinces, to those rugged but richly endowed shores that confront the breakers of the Atlantic.

Of congresses and ceremonies it is not necessary to speak at length at

this stage, with one important exception.

As soon as the Commission is constituted, it will be asked to consider steps towards convening an Imperial Constitutional Conference, which is foreshadowed in the Act obtained from the legislature.

The elements of that important and successful Colonial Conference which took place at Ottawa, may be once more reassembled, together with an even broader representation of the historical and constitutional learning and thought of the self-governing provinces and colonies of the Empire. The time is ripe for the holding of such a conference, to take advantage of the increased disposition to confirm and develop the unity of the Empire; and the assemblage, while most interesting in itself, may possibly be one that will take its place amongst the the great Constitutional congresses of history.

Now as to the method by which all these plans may be set in motion.

It is to be hoped that the local field of Canada may be rapidly and effectively covered by a wide-spread co-operation of individual zeal, so that the committee may be able to announce to foreign Governments that sufficient material is coming forward to form the basis of an important exhibition. With an established nucleus of attraction, we may hope to have it complemented by loan exhibits from foreign countries, which must exist in quantity and value largely surpassing what is obtainable in Canada. England alone, from its National Portrait Gallery, and the treasures of its innumerable country mansions, will prove a mine of vast wealth, for the purposes of this illustrative exhibition of the history of the past four centuries. A section of the committee in London has already been commissioned to initiate efforts in this direction.

Local Exhibits of pictorial and other materials, towards a successful demonstration of Canadian history and

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science, may be expected to come primarily from the museums and collections, existing under the auspices of Governments, Universities and Historical Associations throughout the Dominion of Canada. It is hoped by the kindness of these authorities to obtain such catalogues as exist of their collections of all kinds. These the Central Committee will be able to collate deliberately and form an idea of their place in the scheme, as long as possible in advance.

The exhibits will thus ultimately arrive at the appointed moment, already classified, to be put together so as to make each branch consecutive and complete.

Families throughout the Dominion may be the possessors of valuable collections, or of individual books, portraits, clothing, weapons, medals and other objects, descended to them from historic ancestors or by choice or chance fallen into their hands. It is earnestly hoped that every person who has a patriotic desire to contribute to the accomplishment of this exhibition of Canadian history, into whose hands this paper may fall, will give some attention to the subject. He will help the committee by forwarding to the secretary at Toronto a list of any articles which he thinks may be of interest, either in his own possession or which he may know to be obtainable in his neighborhood.

To perfect the research for such materials, and to facilitate the process of selecting and arranging them, it will be necessary for the Committee to possess volunteer local secretaries, in every city and county, throughout the Dominion. The Local Universities and Historical Societies are earnestly relied on to give the benefit of their advice in the selection of these local officers. Individual ladies and gentlemen who have the object at heart, and have a few hours of leisure in the week which they could devote to it, are invited to forward their names to the Secretary.

Amongst the readers of the CANADIAN MAGAZINE, probably the best audience to which the plan of operations for the Canadian Historical Exhibition can be addressed, are numbers who have become subscribers from patriotic interest in Canadian literature, and in the expression of independent Canadian opinions apart from the purely literary attraction of the contents of the MAGAZINE. They have faith in Canada, and therefore they have hopes for Canadian literature, and support the media which are necessary for its expression.

To precisely the same motive, the programme of the Canadian Historical Exhibition will appeal. Imagination is the necessary element, entering into everything which is worthy to be called literature. The latent seeds of genius, in every nation, have come to life under the influence of certain circumstances which stimulate. Such an influence is required, to act like sunlight upon the cold clay of a purely industrial community, before it can be covered with the glow and fragrance of a period of intellectual bloom. Not seldom, in the past, the struggle of a war period, the alternating tension and triumph, have been found to produce this effect. Fortunately the human mind can also be made to respond to less cruel agitations. We can conceive no event, of a peaceful character, so likely to evoke the germination of the imaginative element, in this country, as an effective celebration of this fourth century of our history, now planned for the coming year. It will act on many converging lines. A motive in itself will be the awakening it will produce to the fact that Canada has a history, of such length and interest as will be called to mind. Numberless reminders of stirring times and incidents will be presented to notice. Perhaps the most potent of all influences will come from the mere common presence of so many thousands of loyal Canadians, crowding simultaneously from all the Provinces to one point, as a kind of national Mecca,

daily during the period of the Exhibition. Every one will see reflected in others' faces the marks of enthusiasm, the signs of the faith and hope which they themselves cherish. They will witness historical spectacles, and they will join in numerous patriotic demonstrations. They will return to their various homes with a developed instinct of unity, and with a sense of

pride and confidence in the past, present and future of their country, which they never before felt in so high a measure. Hence it is hoped that the Canadian Historical Exhibition of 1897 will be justified in its children, the afterthoughts, labors and deeds of which it may prove the provoking cause.

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