

Historical Papers Communications historiques



The Edge of the Forest*

Peter B. Waite

Toronto 1969

Volume 4, Number 1, 1969

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/030703ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/030703ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0068-8878 (print)

1712-9109 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Waite, P. B. (1969). The Edge of the Forest*. *Historical Papers / Communications historiques*, 4(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.7202/030703ar>

All rights reserved © The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada, 1969

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

THE EDGE OF THE FOREST*

PETER B. WAITE
Dalhousie University

The Presidency of the Canadian Historical Association this year, ladies and gentlemen, is the product of a distrust of old fashioned methods now affecting the institutions of this country. This distrust is now incorporated in the constitution of our Association, requiring, as it does, that our Presidents be actually elected by the members. Now it might have been thought that this new system would produce a new style of president : a president who was, if not a *vast* improvement on the old style, at least able to make it clear, in not too circumspect a fashion, that there was a very distinct change for the better.

Here I cannot refrain from telling MacGregor Dawson's story from a meeting of the Canadian Bar Association in Regina. The speaker at the grand finale, the annual dinner, was the Lord Chief Justice of England. The Lord Chief Justice did not spare flattery; he was generous to a fault; he praised Saskatchewan, he praised Regina, especially did he praise the physical beauty of the Saskatchewan people, which last encomiums he pitched into with cheerful and indiscriminate enthusiasm. Now a prominent member of the Saskatchewan Bar had been given the honour of thanking the Lord Chief Justice. He was a man so exceptionally, so remarkably homely, that he was known locally as Andy Gump. Amid the last echoes of the applause for the Chief Justice, Andy Gump slowly rose; he looked painfully around the room, without saying a word; and gradually the awfulness of the contrast between the Chief Justice's words and the reality of Andy Gump became unmistakable. At last Andy Gump said, "It isn't often given to a humble member of the Bar, simply by virtue of getting to his feet, to overthrow a judgement of the Lord Chief Justice of England."

I am required by the exigencies of my office to offer encomiums upon history to men and women, many of whom have taught me, by books or lectures or talks, what I know. There is some irony in that, irony perhaps unsuspected by our reformers who wanted to bring the making of a C.H.A. President out of the back rooms.

What must it have been like, that wicked old system? One is tempted to conceive a Hotel Blackstone – Room 209 is it? – smoke-filled no doubt, in which some sinister cabal, constituted God knows

* Presidential Address, read before the Canadian Historical Association, York University, Toronto, June 6, 1969.

how, manipulated the Presidency of this Association for all these wicked forty-seven years. Over the past six or seven years I have been in on three or four such enterprises: and perhaps one or two corrections to this picture might be allowed. For a smoke-filled hotel room, luxurious with cigars and whisky, substitute more often than not a steam infested cafeteria; for rotund and corrupt politicians substitute not perhaps less rotund, but, hopefully, less corruptible academics; for scotch whisky, read milk; for rich and lavish dinners, read chicken à la king and pie à la mode. The locus varied sometimes; one meeting I remember took place in an obscure but perfectly well-ventilated corner behind a large and quite unumbrageous potted palm.

You might have expected that this system would have produced a series of Warren Harding-like figures based upon the apt principle, "Gee, he'd make a good looking president." Well, on the contrary the old system has produced, over many years, a series of remarkable presidents, many of whose addresses are graceful and stimulating, which are still read — one at least I know being handed out on occasion to first year history students. They were delivered often with a sense of occasion the old system could muster; especially was this so in the days before dinners and presidential addresses were mixed up together to the profit of neither. I would like to pay tribute to those former presidents; some of whom are here tonight, and who are doubtless wondering just what they are in for. I think of one former president at least, the first C.H.A. President I ever heard, George Wilson, just after I had been appointed lecturer at Dalhousie in June 1951. I am not going to talk about him here tonight; but he has just finished the last of fifty years of teaching at Dalhousie; he has been my teacher ever since I have known him and I want to say here how sorry I am to see him leave.

He taught me to distrust theories and look for the man instead. I recall a dinner at that ancient den of Wilson's on Morris Street, Halifax. We were talking about Harold Laski, and Wilson remarked he had worked for Laski when Laski was at Harvard in 1917. A young and rather brash political scientist (L.S.E.) was there and said, "Oh, you knew Laski, did you? Was he as much a Marxist in 1917 as he was in 1937?" "I don't know about that," said Wilson, "but he was just as conceited." George Wilson had little patience with vanity I remember, and was always struck afresh and disagreeably by its pervasiveness.

I suppose he reinforced the distrust of theory that is alleged to be inheritance of the Anglo-Saxon mind. Bentham's question, "What use is it?" makes the point and serves as introduction to my

theme this evening. This can be construed broadly as a materialist view of Canadian history, or if you prefer it metaphorically, the edge of the forest.

For in the beginning was the forest. It came down to the sea; it was the first thing the explorers and settlers met; and it was the first object of their attack. Necessarily, the first problems were material ones, tools, food, shelter, land. What is the best kind of axe? how do you "make" land? how do you get out stumps? (Some of us, I am sure, can add some heart-breaking, or to put it more accurately, back-breaking, experiences under rubric "stumps.") What kind of crops do you plant, and when do you plant them? This is the sense, surely, where *Maria Chapdelaine* is timeless. And always there is the forest:

Mais toujours derrière les champs nus la lisière des bois apparaissait et suivait comme une ombre, interminable bande sombre entre la blancheur du sol et le ciel gris¹

"What struck me most," said Lord Dufferin when he arrived in 1872, "were the primeval woods and forests which covered the hills at Gaspé, and for miles and miles through the interior. One felt one saw what Adam and Eve first opened their eyes upon."² There were rude shocks in this Canadian environment. The climate was the first. Why should the latitude 45° N be so dissimilar to that of 45° N in France? The climate was at first a disaster. The mosquitoes and black flies were only slightly less.

And who came to Canada? What were the incentives that made people cross that awful Atlantic? Was there any other besides making a better living? Who were the people that would pick up their lives and voluntarily transfer them (itself a highly risky business) to a new and horrifyingly uncertain environment? Not the rich as a rule; not the very poor as a rule either; the people who came here were the restless and the acquisitive, or occasionally, as in the Irish immigration of the 1840's, the utterly desperate. Canada was a place to make a living or to make money. Often the expectation of the first included fond hopes for the second. Frontenac was one characteristic type: spendthrift, greedy, impecunious, out to recoup his fortune as best he might.

The first quick way to hard cash — short of embezzlement (and that too was to come) — was beaver. There was little of the romantic in the beaver trade: it was hard work for usually fat returns. The canoe was a business instrument, however beautiful a thing it may have

¹ Louis Hémon, *Maria Chapdelaine* (Paris, 1924), 23.

² Sir A. C. Lyall, *The Life of the Marquis of Dufferin and Ava* (London, 1905), 2 vols., I, 204.

been. The songs of the voyageur accompanied a more brutal refrain of spastic backs, hernias, and a hard life. And who would have operated an enterprise that ran from Athabaska, and later the upper Fraser, to Montreal but for the incentive of hard cash? Business men are not as a rule patriots; nor are they romantic. Their romance lies in figures. And who would sit in Fort Chipewyan for years at a time, but for a balance piling up on the North-west books at Montreal? Alexander Mackenzie's famous explorations, and those of Simon Fraser, were designed to solve an economic problem: that of getting furs expeditiously to market. Time was money. Capital tied up for one year, or even two, was acceptable; for three years it was too expensive, a fact which goes a long way to explain the amalgamation of 1821 with the Hudson's Bay Company.

The settlement and the development of Canada was the meeting and the solving of material problems, whether these were in beaver, pine, or farming. And the Canadian population inevitably reflected this, much to the disgust of some. That impoverished member of the gentry, Susannah Moody, complains continually about the noxiousness of her neighbours, boorish, unlettered and crude. Few cultivated people found Canada, or Canadians, remarkably pleasant. Few Canadians had come here for those kinds of reasons. The time and the leisure required for the cultivated life would, broadly speaking, have to come indigenously, from the profits of the North-West Company, from Molson's Brewery (of blessed name), Ogilvie's flour mills, from Eddy's matches, or from railways. Even so, many of these men went home with their cash, like the merchants of St. John's who made their money in Newfoundland, and went to England to live off it. Why not? Money was what they had come here for.

Many of the land questions, too, boil down to the North American love for unearned increment. How could you make money the fastest out of land? Not by farming: indeed, every farmer was a potential speculator. The problem of the clergy reserves, the problem of absentee landlords, every aspect of land settlement shows how impossible it was to overcome the inveterate habits of people who had come to Canada for hard material reasons. Lillian Gates' book, *The land policies of Upper Canada*, published last year, reveals strikingly how difficult it was, even when there was agreement between executive and legislature, to legislate effectively against abuses in land. Numerous expedients were tried: human beings were too clever. The wild land tax, for example, was designed to prevent, or at least to weaken absentee ownership of unimproved land. When these lands became delinquent for taxes they were therefore sold; but they were then bought by a few men who had a sharp eye for a good in-

vestment, and knew they had eight years to speculate with the land before the land had again to be forfeited for taxes. And it was nearly impossible to get lands adequately administered, for the administrators themselves were trafficking in them.

The Canadian west was an outlet for eastern land hunger; but this hunger for the acquisition of land was deployed not so much by settlers as by people who hoped to make money in the buying and the selling. One wonders if Sir Richard Cartwright's continued jeremiads were not the result of his disappointed hopes over his extensive investments in western lands. The Galts were luckier; they got hold of the coal at Lethbridge, and made money, partly because Galt's sons went out there and worked at it, while Galt operated the financial expertise in England. Speculation in the west was endemic in Parliament; J. C. Rykert's notorious timber transaction in the Cypress Hills was probably, as Cartwright remarked (perhaps enviously), just the top of a vast iceberg of undetermined rascality. "Where is the Canadian," asked the *London Evening Advertiser* in 1865, "who will not sell out if only he gets his price?"³ This could be the text for an essay on Canadians from that day to this. J. S. Helmcken's famous remark in the British Columbia Legislative Council in 1870 is only an echo of the same thing: love of Canada will only come, he said, from "the material advantage of the country and the pecuniary benefit of the inhabitants."⁴ "Material advantage"; "pecuniary benefit"; there is a world in those words.

The question of responsible government that so agitated the 1830's and 1840's, and so excited our colleagues in the 1920's and 1930's was not just a question of political destiny, though it was often made to look like that. T. C. Haliburton, in *Sam Slick*, was contemptuous of talk of that kind:

Don't come down here to Halifax with lockrums about politics making a great touse about nothin'; but open the country, foster agricultur', encourage trade, incorporate companies, make bridges. . . . One such work as the Windsor Bridge is worth all your laws, votes, speeches and resolutions, for the last ten years if tied up and put in a meal-bag together.⁵

At the bottom of the movement for responsible government was a ruthless preoccupation with jobs and salaries, and those to whom they should go. No doubt there were highminded Canadians, like Robert Baldwin, whose income precluded any question of his own personal aggrandizement; but he had too good a political sense not to

³ *London Evening Advertiser*, Sept. 6, 1865.

⁴ British Columbia, Legislative Council, *Debates on Confederation*, 1870, 11 (March 9, 1870).

⁵ T. C. Haliburton, *The Clockmaker* (1836), McClelland and Stewart edition, 154.

be aware that jobs were vital to his party. His resignation in 1843 on the issue of patronage was not quixotic: it was a fundamental issue. The administration of the country simply could not be carried on other than through devoted partisans. Devoted partisans existed because of party: and party existed because of them. No adequate appreciation of Canadian politics is possible unless it be remembered that most people could not afford to be in politics without regard to their pockets. This made politics a seamy business; which it was, and long before railways came on the scene to make it even more lush. R. B. Sullivan took a judgeship because he hated the chicanery of Canadian political life; so did his cousin, Robert Baldwin; so did Louis LaFontaine. Howe wanted to be a governor, and fretted about not being one, especially since Francis Hincks had been made Governor of Barbados. Lord Elgin's comment in 1848 is hard, but true:

... political life is ruin to men in these Countries & the best will not remain in it a day longer than they can help. Land-jobbers, swindlers, young men who wish to make a name when starting into life, may find in public life here or in the States a compensation for the sacrifices it entails, but with honest men who are doing well in their own line of business, & who have not private fortunes to fall back upon, it is otherwise.⁶

By the 1850's most politicians were either businessmen or lawyers; and politics was for many of them only a part-time occupation, and often a fleeting one at that. Moreover, the private careers of many heavily coloured their political interests. No list is needed here, but one could begin with Francis Hincks, Allan MacNab, George Cartier, J. J. C. Abbott, and even add George Brown. A history of the Senate of Canada in the light of the business interests represented there would be most revealing. Senator McMaster was President of the Canadian Bank of Commerce for twenty years, from 1867 to 1886; he did probably more than anyone else to resist John Rose's attempt in 1869 to bring in the American banking system; and in 1871 he, and Francis Hincks, were largely responsible for establishing the present framework of our banking.

From the 1870's on the influence of Canadian industry on Canadian politics has been continuous and profound. It is instructive to watch these influences developing in the 1870's. Alexander Mackenzie II, perhaps because of his working class background, had antennae too insensitive to pick up the signals. One of the principal elements in the prosperity of central Canadian industry was the successful conquest of the market in the Maritime provinces between 1867 and 1874. The evidence given to the Wood Committee of 1874

⁶ Elgin to Grey, Aug. 24, 1848 (private), in A. G. Doughty (ed.), *Elgin-Grey Papers* (Ottawa, 1937), 228.

and to the Mills Committee of 1876 reveals the toughness and perhaps even the competence of these central Canadian businessmen. One agricultural implement manufacturer in Ontario said before the Wood Committee that seven-eighths of the farm tools used in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick came from Ontario and Quebec. An Oshawa manufacturer said the figure was only one-half. But even that meant a revolution. The evidence before the Mills Committee of 1876 confirmed the existence of this revolution. It also showed clearly that some central Canadian manufacturers were able to drive not only the Maritimers out of business, but the Americans out of the Maritime market. F. T. Frost, who made agricultural implements in Smith's Falls, described the process :

... wherever we have gone the American manufacturers have retired from the field simply for the reason that we can undersell them. They make a very nice machine; it is the same [type of] machine... that we sell... there was one firm at Worcester, Mass., which took machines into Nova Scotia, to Halifax from Boston. They sold them there for \$95 to \$100 gold. We sent our machines of the class down by Gulf Port steamers to Pictou and sold them for \$75.⁷

One MP said to a Guelph manufacturer of woollen knit goods, "Confederation has practically given you the market of the Maritime Provinces?" The answer was short and to the point: "Yes."⁸

There is good evidence that some manufacturers in Canada were strong enough to ignore competition from the United States, and operate as businessmen everywhere try to do: on the plain principle of dollars and cents, and where is the best value for the money. F. T. Frost, when buying cutting knives for his reapers, said simply, "I seek the best article either in the United States or Canada; there is no patriotism about me in this respect."⁹ Frost and his fellows were also strong enough that in 1876 at least, a protective tariff did not interest them. C. A. Massey, of Newcastle Ontario, was even ready to accept a lower tariff, though he found the 1876 tariff perfectly satisfactory. (It was, by the way, to be a different story in the 1890's.)

Broadly speaking, however, most Canadian manufacturers felt the pinch of American competition in the mid-1870's, especially since in a number of areas it was quite obvious that American manufacturers were using Canada as a slaughter market. It was inevitable they should be listened to, and listened to increasingly as their power developed. The day after Cartwright's 1876 hold-the-line budget, a

⁷ Canada, House of Commons, *Journals*, 1876, Appendix 3, "Report of the Select Committee on the causes of the present depression of the Manufacturing, Mining, Commercial, Shipping, Lumber and Fishing interest", 118-21 (March 22, 1876).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 197 (March 30, 1876).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 118 (March 22, 1876).

deputation of Montreal manufacturers arrived in Ottawa. "There is the devil to pay among the Montreal manufacturers," wrote the Ottawa correspondent of the *Toronto Mail* in a private letter. "They had an interview with Sir John today and left greatly pleased with him. They go down to Montreal tonight to hold indignation meetings."¹⁰ Here was the provenance of the Conservative marriage to Canadian manufacturers. From 1876 on Canadian manufacturers joined Canadian railway men in influencing Canadian elections. Sir John Willison many years later remarked that ever since 1878 Canadian industry influenced every Canadian election.¹¹ Unrestricted reciprocity was anathema to them, and Edward Blake was close enough to them to know it. They helped to defeat Laurier in 1891, and again in 1911. As for Liberal manufacturers, in 1891 they simply opted out. J. F. Fairbank, a leading producer of crude oil in Canada, had been a Liberal backbencher under Blake; he said in February, 1891, "Many of us Grits 'will take to the woods.' I am a political orphan."¹²

To take politicians at their face value is always a mistake, and to take Canadian politics as if it were an end in itself is just as much a mistake. Instead of listening to the lamentations of Jeremiah Cartwright, and reading the book of Job David Mills, or the prophet Isaiah Laurier, about the history of the nineteenth century, we would be as well off to read the histories of Molson's Brewery, Steel of Canada, Massey-Harris, or John Northway of Toronto. The chapter headings in Alan Wilson's book on Northway contradict almost every preconception of the period: "Steady growth in a depression, 1873-1888"; "Anticipating the Laurier boom, 1889-1895."¹³ John Northway made money and grew bigger all the time. Massey, and Harris, and Frost, and other agricultural implement manufacturers are much the same. Merrill Denison's words in his history of Massey-Harris are suggestive: "The depression [of 1874-79]... seems to have had little or no effect..."¹⁴ William Kilbourn's history of the Steel Company of Canada makes the same point the others do, if anything more forcefully.¹⁵

¹⁰ Public Archives of Ontario, T. C. Patterson Papers, Charles Belford to Patterson, Feb. 26 [1876.]

¹¹ PAC, Minto Papers, J. S. Willison to Minto, July 18, 1903.

¹² University of Western Ontario, Fairbank Papers, J. H. Fairbank to C. O. Fairbank (his son), Feb. 11, 1891. See Edward Phelps, "A Liberal backbencher in the Macdonald régime: the political career of John Henry Fairbank of Petrolia," *Western Ontario Historical Notes*, University of Western Ontario Library, XXII, No. 1, March, 1966, 1-45.

¹³ Alan Wilson, *John Northway: blue serge Canadian* (Toronto, 1963).

¹⁴ Merrill Denison, *Harvest triumphant: the story of Massey-Harris* (Toronto, 1948), 63.

¹⁵ William Kilbourn, *The elements combined: a history of the Steel Company of Canada* (Toronto, 1960), 15.

To deal adequately with the history of Canada from the 1850's on to the present we have to come to grips with that subject horrifying to many and interesting only to the initiated, balance sheets. To take just one subject, banks and banking: the superb essay of Bray Hammond's on Canadian banking before Confederation opens up a host of questions.¹⁶ I am of course urging more business history by good historians, and the acquisition of more expertise in the handling of it; but more than that I am trying to suggest that the very grubbiness of much of our political history and of the preoccupations of our politicians, only illustrate the nature of Canadian society, grubbing for a living as best it could. In politics it is seen in a dozen ways: the hunger for unearned increment; the way patronage took the place of more disinterested forms of loyalty; the open buying of votes; the poverty of politicians' minds and the squalid and cliché-ridden vocabulary they often used to clothe their meagre thoughts. The strength of the ultramontane movement in Quebec lay not only in its clerical and ecclesiastical connections, but in a pronounced disgust among Quebec intellectuals with the venality of Quebec politics. The Canada First movement reflected something of the same in Ontario. The truly honest members of the Canadian political community have almost invariably been gentlemen of sufficient means who could afford the luxury of disinterestedness.

But when all that is said, let us remember that it is the edge of the forest that we began from; to grow the leisure that true civilization demands has taken the energies and the capital of several generations. It is not to be wondered at that the tissue of Canadian history has been the hard business of making a living.

Does this presume a Marxian analysis? I think not. At least, I am not a Marxist, or the son of a Marxist. I suppose I reveal my point of view better by saying that I am the son of a banker. I have even worked in a bank. Right now I am an historian looking for what happened; I am ready to use Marx, or anyone else, in that search. All must be grist to our mill. I like the approach to history suggested by Thomas Huxley:

Sit down before fact as a little child, be prepared to give up every preconceived notion, follow humbly wherever and to what abysses nature leads, or you shall learn nothing.¹⁷

Here intention is everything. That prickly Archbishop of Dublin, Richard Whateley, once said, "It makes all the difference in the

¹⁶ Bray Hammond, *Banks and politics in America: from the revolution to the civil war* (Princeton, 1957), 631-70; reprinted in Easterbrook and Watkins, *Approaches to Canadian economic history* (Toronto, 1967), 127-68.

¹⁷ Leonard Huxley, ed., *The life and letters of Thomas Henry Huxley* (London, 1900), 2 vols., I. 219, Huxley to Kingsley, Sept. 23, 1860.

world whether we put truth in the first place or in the second place.”¹⁸ The more weight one puts on that remark the stronger it gets.

And there are no impersonal “forces.” Men make history. They may act differently in groups than they do alone (or they may not) but they are still men. Nothing human is alien to history : everything human informs history.

I am not urging this materialist view of Canadian history *à tout prix*; here a cautionary note from J. A. Froude is germane :

In perusing modern histories, the present writer has been struck dumb with wonder at the facility with which men will fill in chasms in their information with conjecture; will guess at the motives which have prompted actions; will pass their censures, as if all the secrets of the past lay an open scroll before them. He is obliged to say for himself that, whenever he has been fortunate enough to discover authentic explanations of English historical difficulties, it is rare indeed that he has found any conjecture, either of his own or of any other modern writer confirmed. The true motive has almost invariably been of a kind which no modern experience could have suggested.¹⁹

Here is a cogent argument against easy inferences made about the past from modern business experience; and while it is a pity that Froude did not always observe his own sage advice, his good sense comes home even when the juxtaposition is only between 1969 and 1882. Take the question of child labour. This has been condemned out of hand by every historian I know of; doubtless in many respects it was damnable : but it was a practice not wholly devoid of sense or reason. A line in a Canadian Royal Commission report of 1882 leaps to the eye, and suddenly illuminates the whole problem; the Commissioners’ view was that children might very well be better off “spending a portion at least of their time at work rather than wasting it on the public streets.”²⁰ For this was at a time when even in Ontario, the 1874 Education Act only enjoined parents to have their children in school *four* months a year, and that Act was not only not well enforced, but probably unenforceable. In other words, was the factory any worse than the streets? Probably sometimes it was, sometimes it wasn’t. This may be obvious. I know that the naive greet the obvious as if it were a discovery : but this view of child labour was a discovery to me.

¹⁸ John Morley, *On Compromise* (London, 1923). Frontispiece.

¹⁹ J. A. Froude, *Short studies on great subjects* (London, 1888), 2 vols., I, 408. “On the dissolution of the monasteries.”

²⁰ Canada, *Sessional Papers*, 1882, No. 42. “Report of Commissioners appointed to enquire into the working of Mills and Factories of the Dominion and the labor employed therein,” 3.

This history that I have been talking about, perhaps naively enough, does not preclude transcending one's own time, or losing, or trying to lose, one's own penchants and prejudices in the majesty of the subject itself; this history I have been talking of is a chemistry of work and thought not easily accomplished: politics, literature, economics and geography. It is consistent with the materialist view I have been suggesting to urge the last. "Geography without history is a carcase without life: history without geography is a wanderer without a home." A good map is worth a thousand words. It is not a little curious that the best wall map of Canada I know of is by Westermann in Braunschweig, the same publishers who have done that superb *Atlas zur Weltgeschichte*. I cannot elaborate this point here; I simply confess to finding the economic geography of this country, indeed of any country, fascinating, and to my pedestrian mind, relevant.

I have begun tonight with the edge of the forest, and have ended with the map of Canada, and in the process have tried to argue that many of the problems we have encountered since the sixteenth century have been at bottom material ones; that the mastery of these problems has, broadly speaking, determined much of our social and political climate. Are we now therefore to turn to economic history as the only way of getting at the real substance of the history of Canada? I am not really saying that. I am saying that we cannot avoid the material considerations which from the very first moment the first settler set his foot upon Canadian soil have dominated his life.

But I have also to say that the existence of Canada, first as an identifiable group of British colonies, then as a Confederation, is a political and military achievement, rather than an economic one. We have triumphed — I trust that is the right verb — over the power of economic geography. Confederation in 1867 was a political achievement: was, and still is. Perhaps this fact explains our preoccupations with politics and with issues that have threatened to weaken, or to rend, our political fabric.

For the really difficult questions of Canadian history have been those that fell outside of the community of acquisition, that is they have been questions of race and religion, which, broadly speaking, Canadian politicians have often tried to shy away from. No one would find it easy to solve the Manitoba School Question; probably it was insoluble in any case; but it was not susceptible either to any of the ordinary solutions of pragmatic-minded politicians. Not even money would solve it, although Sir Mackenzie Bowell, characteristically, seems to have felt that money, rightly applied, could solve it.

One consequence of this, so it seems to me, is that we must exhibit a certain tenderness for the immense variations of our country. For example, regionalism is still very much alive, and if a recent study of marketing in Canada is correct, regionalism distinguishes us from the United States. I should like our historians, especially our younger ones, to be in a position to experience this regionalism directly. This was, indeed, the great achievement of the Centennial seminars. After all, seeing Canada is more than half way to believing its history. For the physical features of a country are not just an abstraction we can get from books or maps, and still less the characteristics of its society. One cannot make a history book just from a desk. One can hardly conceive writing a history of British Columbia without the experience of having been in, and having to a degree absorbed, the physical and social being of British Columbia. The presence of a country is a spring for one's whole historical sense; and without this *élan vital* our history book is dead.

This raises my last point, one last way in which the obsessive concreteness exhibited here tonight has relevance, and in a way it is more personal than anything I have said before. It has been worked into my being from years with Baedeker. I cannot make history into an abstract subject. History happened. I can never quite get over that. Socrates lived. Napoleon existed. Montaigne was — indeed, such is the marvel of his *Essays*, he seems still to be. History is life; no doubt it is life in a highly selected, and inevitably strenuous form, since human beings are not given to marking quiescence or boredom. (The happiest nations, said George Eliot, have no history.) Nevertheless, history is life; and it is past my understanding how one can do history without trying to see it. No doubt this seeing is through glasses invariably blurred; but it still remains a magic of sense and mind.

In an eighteenth century garden behind the Mozarteum in Salzburg, late on a summer evening, a little man comes out and gravely lights three candles, each in its glass chimney, against a stray evening breeze; there are three chairs and three music stands; the pines in the garden are still; the sky grows gradually dark; three musicians come quietly out, and without a word sit down; arrange themselves; and play Mozart's E flat trio. To stand at the beach at Marathon and watch the Greek sea; to wander in the hot sun at the lonely limestone temple of Bassae, in the company of the lizards and the olive trees; to sit above Delphi on the ridge and listen to the goats come home on the road far below; to watch the sunset over Constantinople; to listen to vespers in Reims or Chartres; to feel the wind that rolls the heather like a sea across the moors of Wuthering Heights; to walk the Roman wall in Northumbria, or through the

silent birches of Yasnaya Polyana : this is history made visible. It stops the heart. I remember Batoche in late October, the poplars and alders still yellow in the steep runs and coulees near the river; around the great horizon of central Saskatchewan the bluffs of cottonwood were already bare to the mighty wind, the wind that rolls the tumbleweed across the road, that banks in shuddering gusts up from the river, a wind to lean on, a primeval wind, the friction between a vast, wheeling earth and a vast, immobile sky. There at the end of the little cemetery, looking out over the river he knew, and I think loved, lies Gabriel Dumont. What shadows we are, and what shadows we pursue ! These are the times when the ground of the present suddenly gives way before one's very eyes, when one can suddenly say, "a whole ocean of truth lies all undiscovered before me."