Book Reviews


Someone has recently remarked that in 1492, Columbus discovered America, while in 1942, America discovered Canada. Allowing for the figurative language, it must be conceded that this observation contains considerable truth. During the past few months innumerable books and articles have appeared in this country relating to Canada and its history. This awakening of interest in our northern neighbor was long overdue. Canadian historians have been diligent in research into their past and the results of their labors have been available in many scholarly, if rather formidable, works. It was high time, however, that Canada's story should be made accessible to the public in somewhat more popular form.

A Short History of Canada for Americans has been written in response to this increasing interest south of the international boundary in Canadian affairs. Professor Burt was especially well qualified for the task because of his scholarship and his familiarity with both the American and the Canadian points of view. He is a Canadian by birth and has been for some years professor of history at the University of Minnesota.

The present volume is intended primarily for the general reader rather than as a textbook. It covers the entire range of Canadian history, from the early French explorations to the second World War, which means that at many points the narrative has had to be compressed within fairly narrow limits. Professor Burt writes in a lively and interesting style and he has given us the best brief introduction to Canadian history which has yet appeared. He has not limited himself to political and constitutional history but has devoted considerable space to social and cultural matters.

There are three excellent chapters dealing with the French regime, prior to 1763, in which the author stresses the influence of the frontier element upon Canadian life and emphasizes the essentially democratic outlook of the habitants. The American Revolution and the War of 1812, in so far as they affected Canada, are described at some length; and there is a good account of the evolution of responsible government and of the formation of the Confederation of 1867. One chapter contains an excellent description of the government of Canada, which will be of great value to American readers. There is a most interesting account of the expansion of Canada and of life in the West and Northwest. The compression which was unavoidable in a modest-sized volume is especially noticeable toward the end; and the treatment of political, economic, and imperial trends since 1867 is disappointingly brief and sketchy. The reviewer feels that American readers would gladly have known more of these matters.

Those who have read earlier books by Professor Burt will recognize in this volume points of view which are unconventional and with which they may not always agree. He refuses to concede that
concern for the fur trade had much, if anything, to do with Great Britain's retention of the Northwest posts following the Revolution. In describing the causes of the War of 1812 he chooses to ignore the expansionist tendencies of the American frontiersmen and the demand for the conquest of Canada. This factor may have been over-stressed in the past, but should it be omitted altogether? In commenting on the motives which led to the founding of New France, Professor Burt says that no English colony was established with an idea that it would control a water passage through the continent to the Orient, "or with any thought of discovering such a passage." Some such purpose was certainly present in the minds of the Virginia patentees. The reviewer feels that in a volume intended for American readers, a little more space should have been devoted to Canadian-American diplomatic and economic relations. The Reciprocity Treaty of 1854, for example, is summarized in one brief sentence. On the other hand, the volume contains brief but vivid pen portraits of many of Canada's leaders, such as Sir Wilfrid Laurier, Sir John A. Macdonald, and Joseph Howe, which make lively reading.

The book is published in an unusually attractive format. The typography and printing are excellent and there are end papers of most attractive design. An outstanding feature of the volume consists of almost one hundred half-tone illustrations, made from historical prints, drawings, and portraits, and from modern photographs. Together they serve to illustrate almost every aspect of Canadian life and history. There are also a number of maps to illustrate the text. Professor Burt deserves the highest praise for a work which should go a long way toward making Canada better known to Americans. The one real regret of the reviewer is that this survey could not have been twice as long. There is still room for a similar book containing considerably more material, which might be used as a text in the increasing number of courses in Canadian history being offered in American colleges and universities.

Wayne E. Stevens.


By birth and experience the author of The Upper Mississippi in the Rivers of America Series and such novels as The Quiet Shore and Pier 17 is admirably prepared to tell what he terms "the story of the Great Lakes." He writes with enthusiasm and most readers will come to share his feelings, even though they may not care to finish the book at one sitting. It consists essentially of a series of sketches on such topics as the explorations of the French, the founding of the Lake cities, the coming of the immigrants, the development of lumbering and mining—all loosely joined together by a history of transportation. Mr. Havighurst has found time as a professor of English at Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, to supplement his earlier activities as seaman and longshoreman by diligent research. Thus competently, but on a popular level, he revives many dramatic episodes, such as