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# 12

## THE WAR AD ITS MORAL.

### CHAPTER I.

#### Preamble.

12—like the characters on the labarum of Constantine\*—is a sign of solemn import to the people of Canada. It carries with it the virtue of an incantation. Like the magic numerals of the Arabian sage, these words, in their utterance, quicken the pulse, and vibrate through the frame, summoning, from the pregnant past, memories of suffering and endurance and of honorable exertion. They are inscribed on the banner and stamped on the hearts of the Canadian people—a watchword, rather than a war-cry. With these words upon his lips, the loyal Canadian, as a vigilant sentinel, looks forth into the gloom, ready with his challenge, hopeful for a friendly response, but prepared for any other.

The people of Canada are proud of the men, and of the deeds, and of the recollections of those days. They feel that the war of 1812 is an episode in the story of a young people, glorious in itself and full of promise. They believe that the infant which, in its very cradle, could strangle invasion, struggle, and endure, bravely and without repining—is capable of a nobler development, if God wills further trial.

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\* Vide Gibbon, Vol. II, pp. 259, 260.

It is impossible for this people to ignore the portents of the time. The blast of war hurtles around them ; Its sights are in their eyes, and the sounds in their ears. They feel that they are within the edge of the fatal circle, and await the stroke of the cyclone. It is natural that, at such a time, the popular mind should revert to the experience of the past, and that the war of 1812 should be constantly invoked as an example and as a warning.

Thus, the story of the war has suddenly become a subject of interest which it is difficult to satisfy. Fifty years have come and gone, and of the thousands who survived the contest, how few remain to tell the tale or point the moral ! Within the last few months, three honoured men, heroes of 1812, and who emphatically deserve the title,—Sir Allan MacNab, Sir John Beverley Robinson, and Major-General Evans,—have gone to their rest, full of years and well-earned distinction. The voices of those who could animate by eloquent experience, and guide by their counsels, become daily, fewer, fainter, and more indistinct ; and we turn with sorrowful respect from the living witnesses of the time, to those who bear record to the gallantry of their deeds and the nobleness of their motives.

The story of the war has been told by eminent writers on both sides of the Atlantic. We have British and American histories ; we have biography ; and the pages of periodical literature have been, in turn, alike devoted to the events of an epoch when the world was a-glow with arms, and war seemed to be the main vocation of mankind ; but the works of the general historian are voluminous and inaccessible to the masses, and the part yielded to Canada is unavoidably small, on an arena occupied by the embattled nations of the earth. The Canadian authorities, faithful and reliable guides so far as they go, are, mostly, out of print and scarce ; and they have been succeeded, and their places usurped at our own firesides, by a flood of American publications, sensa-

tional as they are termed, written for show, designed for sale, and, to this end, pandering to the worst passions of a morbid nationality. Writers of this class run, frantically, full tilt at Britain, her institutions and her colonies, with death's-head and marrow-bones for device ; and the bones are broiled, devilled, and seasoned to suit a literary taste prurient and craving as the appetite of the hungry ogre in the nursery tale, who snuffs the wind and mutters—

Fe, fi, fo, fum,  
I smell the blood of an Englishman:  
Be he alive, or be he dead,  
I'll grind his bones to make my bread.

The present is therefore deemed to be an opportune moment to place the following pages before the Canadian public. A new book on an old subject may offer the attraction of novelty, and, in the present instance, will possess the advantage of an anxious desire for truth. One great object will have been obtained, if it provides an antidote to the American literature of the day ; if it counteracts its influence, while it eschews its example. Nothing will be extenuated for the solace of British pride or to palliate British shortcomings ; and most assuredly nothing shall be maliciously charged to their adversaries. It will be the endeavor of this narration to invest the story told, as far as possible, with a Canadian character ; to present the war in Canada in a Canadian point of view ; and, while giving all honor to those to whom honor is justly due, still to impart, as far as can be rightly done, a Canadian individuality to this Canadian Chronicle of the War. •

This design has been greatly aided by the kindness of some few of the survivors of the warlike scenes of " fifty years since," who have embellished by the light of their reminiscences a work which has no other claim to originality. In justice to these venerable contributors, their names will be given in proper time and place, in gentle violation of the reluctant modesty inseparable from