CANADIAN NOTES AND QUERIES:
A PROPOSAL AND AN APPEAL

At some time or another most Canadian researchers in the humanities, when assembling the results of their investigations, have found some piece of the jigsaw puzzle to be missing. Even after the most diligent examination of the printed and manuscript sources available, essential elements of information may continue to elude the scholar. At this point, he may prefer to set aside his work in the hope that the interlocking piece may come to light in the course of other inquiries. Or, if his investment of time is considerable, he may choose to proceed by an immediate canvass of the specialists in his field, or by writing to repositories of source materials, or even by soliciting help from the public at large, in order to find the information he requires. Bibliographical investigation is a case in point, for here the physical objects under consideration may be scattered all across Canada and the United States, and even further afield.

The customary means of resolving the dilemma, this pursuit of fugitive information, is to publish inquiries in "Notes and Queries" columns. The well-known British Notes and Queries, begun by William John Thoms in 1849, continues to serve "readers and writers, collectors and librarians" to this day. A few issues of the similar American Notes and Queries were published in Philadelphia in 1857, succeeded by a work of the same title from 1888 to 1892, and finally by the current revival in the 1960's of Lee Ash's AN&Q. Canada, however, in 1967, does not yet possess a journal devoted to general notes and queries in the humanities.

Perhaps it is unfair to say "yet", for there have been Canadian attempts to publish such journals in the past. Canadiana, A Collection of Canadian Notes (1889-1890), launched in Montreal by W. J. White, was announced in its Prospectus as being "a means of communicating the results of original research and preserving interesting discoveries" (this recording of notes too brief for publication elsewhere is an important aspect of the "Notes and Queries" idea); Canadiana also included, besides its "Notes", a section called "Queries and Replies." This journal was chiefly historical in its interests, but North American Notes and Queries (1900-1901) was more ambitious; it began publication in Quebec City, with "every possible subject of legitimate inquiry" as its sphere of interest. I quote from the Prospectus opening the first of the nine issues:

It will fill the place in North America of the English Notes and Queries, the French Intermédiaire des chercheurs et curieux [Paris, 1864-1940], and L'Echo du public [Paris, 1896-?], the Italian Giornale di erudizione [Florence, 1886, 1889-1898], and the French-Canadian Bulletin des recherches historiques [Lévis, 1895 to date].

The "Notes and Queries" section of the first issue comprised seventeen numbered inquiries, and both this journal and Canadiana were published monthly.

These general media of scholarly exchange, in North America and in England, have almost from the beginning been supplemented by journals and columns offering a like service to those concerned with individual disciplines. In Canada, for example, Acadiensis (1901-1909) found a corner for bibliographical, literary, historical and other inquiries, the Bulletin des recherches historiques, already mentioned, includes questions in history, archaeology and biography, while the Mémoires of the Société généalogique canadienne-française (1944 to date) are primarily genealogical. Since December 1966 Ontario History has included a "Notes and Queries" department, but here the scope is limited by region as well as by subject.

The Proposal

From this brief review it is clear that the need for a medium of brief exchange between scholars is not new, even in Canada. The question is, how much longer will Canadian scholars deny themselves the inestimable advantage and convenience of a journal of this kind, a Canadian Notes and Queries? Dr. W. Kaye Lamb, Dominion Archivist and National Librarian, raised the question for historians almost ten years ago, in his Presidential Address before the 1958 meeting of the Canadian Historical Association. At that time he urged his colleagues to:

... consider the great need for brief studies—most of them perhaps little more than research reports—on many of the innumerable smaller problems in Canadian history that remain obscure. Publication may present a difficulty to begin with; at present, if a point cannot be blown up at least to article length, it is apt to languish in someone's memory or notebook. In the course of their research, historians clear up scores of small mysteries in our history every year; what is needed is a means of recording and sharing these discoveries—an historical Notes and Queries of some kind which, if properly indexed, would make its contents readily available to anyone interested. Something of the kind might be practicable in the Canadian Historical Review, and I commend the idea to its editors.

Nothing has so far come of Dr. Lamb's suggestion, but I would now advocate that other areas of endeavour also be given consideration. The need for inter-disciplinary exchanges is perhaps greater in Canada than in the countries already publishing such a journal, for in this country subjects such as history, literature and politics seem more often to be interconnected. It is the founding of a Canadian Notes and Queries, to serve the needs of all the humanities, which is now seriously proposed. It seems appropriate that the idea should be broadcast through the Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada, for its readers represent many branches of knowledge; indeed, bibliography serves many disciplines, and has been called the handmaiden of all scholarly inquiry. Moreover, bibliographers of Canadiana would become special beneficiaries of the Queries section, used as an outlet for their unending questions, and doubtless they would find many Notes to contribute, resulting from their multifarious inquiries.

The ground has been well beaten, so there will be few problems as to the form a Canadian Notes and Queries should take; the difficulties lie in the direction of sponsorship, editorship, and means of publication. At the suggestion of Dr. Kaye Lamb, the idea was presented to Professor H. Pearson Gundy that the proposed journal be issued, to begin with at least, as a part of Queen's Quarterly, of which Professor Gundy is now the Editor. The suggestion was favourably received, but its further consideration by the Quarterly committee must rest upon the expressed support of interested persons. It is to be hoped that a CN&Q, once launched, would eventually be able to stand on its own feet as an independent journal.

An Appeal

The next step is to measure the extent of interest in the proposal, in Canada and elsewhere. Readers who feel the idea of a Canadian Notes and Queries is worth supporting are, therefore, earnestly requested to send their comments and constructive criticisms, or, if time presses, simply the encouragement of a postcard to the undersigned at Douglas Library, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario. With your strong support, the publication of this indispensable tool of reference and research could see the light of day in Canada's Centennial Year of Confederation.

William F. E. Morley