Review Articles & Reviews/*Une Revue de critiques et de comptes rendus*

THE NATIVE VOICE

Defeathering the Indian, Emma LaRoque. Book Society, 1975. 82 pp., $3.25 paper; ***First people first voices,*** Penny Petrone. University Toronto Press, 1983. 221 pp., $19.95 cloth. ISBN 0-8020-25l5-3.

In the midst of the babble of commentators speaking for, about, and around Native people, the Native voice itself has often been characteristically silent. Eight years ago Emma LaRoque, a Métis from Alberta, asked quietly and sanely for a new recognition of Native realities. *Defeathering the Indian* is addressed to social studies teachers in the public school system, and it suggests to them some methods by which respect and understanding for contemporary Native people can be developed in a non-Native class room. The writer's chief desire is that we should learn to distinguish between Indian heritage and Indian culture. She comments on the way in which the Indian has been defined from outside himself, by experts of various kinds. Social studies classes have learned about the Native life of the past, mainly seen through its artifacts, such as masks and headdresses. Little understanding has been shown for Native language, world view, or religion. As a result of this focus on the past, many white children believe that Indian people still live mainly in tipis, make their living by hunting, and dress in skins. Indians are seen as a frozen people, held in the past, who cannot change or adapt.

Emma LaRoque knows from her own experience that while her heritage comes from the past, her culture is changing. She speaks movingly of the way in which her childhood perception of the warmth, comfort and protection of her family in its log cabin was flawed by the urban values that she learned at school. This was a loss for her, but she recognizes that modern life has affected us all, and that the Indian, like the white man, has a changing history. In white class rooms this history needs to be taught, preferably by Native people. She gives a clear outline of the history of settlement, discussing life styles, treaties, the Indian Act, Non-treaty Natives and Métis, poverty, and the urban dilemma. She stresses that along with the problems there are many success stories, many Native people who live happily in the modern world without sacrificing their distinctive heritage, artistic perceptions, or religious beliefs. She asks for a move away from the stereotypes, both of the noble red man and of the savage. The Indian is not simply a Nature lover, though a sense

of unity with the earth was and is a major part of his view of life. Neither is he a "dirty Indian," though poverty, welfare, and city living are destroying traditional ways and leaving many Native people in despair. White men and Indians have looked differently on such things as work, saving, and the role of the individual. The white man has measured his value by his work and his wealth; the Indian has seen himself as serving his family and his community. In the past the white man saw the Americas as God's gift to him, and believed that the red man and his culture were doomed to extinction; and he didn't hesitate to help the process along. This presumption of white superiority still leads to stereotyping of the Native in print, films, and even in sociological jargon, so that Indians are seen as "culturally deprived." In fact there is much that the white person can learn both from the Native culture and the Native heritage. Emma LaRoque concludes with a plea that we all question the pressure towards uniformity in our lives. She asks us to acknowledge and value our diversity.

In *First people first voices*, Penny Petrone has gathered a wide collection of Native voices ranging from the earliest days of contact with the white man up to the present day. For any teacher hoping to put Emma LaRoque's ideas into practice in the class room. *First people first voices* is an essential text. Here we can listen first to the earliest reactions to white arrival ("There is bad meat upon our lands"). In the first speeches of Native leaders, mainly taken from the *Jesuit Relations*, the tone is that of powerful and free men, observing, often with amazement or amusement, the hairy ugliness of the Europeans, and the illogicality of their religion. It is the white man who is pitied at this time; "There is no Indian who does not consider himself infinitely more happy and more powerful than the French."

As white settlement increases, however, the red man speaks of his losses. His ancient common heritage, the land, is broken up for farming; the buffalo herds disappear; poverty and disease increase; and the tone changes to one of sadness and a terrible sense of deprivation and betrayal. Native speakers point out how a civilization which stresses "the splendour of empire" often means misery for poor people, whether red or white. Great Indian leaders such as Crowfoot speak elegiacally, using natural metaphors to show the evanescence of Native life; their people are melting like snow beneath the April sun; life is "the little shadow that runs across the grass and loses itself in the sunset." The white trader who came as a friend has become the white thief, who not only steals the land given to the red man by the Great Spirit, but gradually destroys his language, his hunting skills, his tribal life, and his great religious ceremonies. Now "my people are poor. No Hunting Grounds — no Beaver — no Otter — no nothing."

By the middle of the nineteenth century there are many Indian people who have adopted white customs and white religion. A range of Native missionaries, speaking with wit, skill, and evangelical zeal, urge their people to "give up

the chase of the deer and the beaver . . . leave the bush . . . exchange the gun and the spear for the axe and the plow." They are not naive about white life, however. Peter Jones, on a visit to London, notes the British lust for money and social status, and compares Londoners to swarming mosquitoes, "biting one another to get a living." George Copway remembers the beauty of his birthplace in the Ontario forest, and the fluid syllables of his language, modeled on the sounds of Nature. All the missionaries, though, reject the destructiveness of the old warlike ways, and advise their followers to turn to Christianity and a peaceful farming life.

As Native life styles change, the languages, history and legends start to disappear. Part IV of *First people first voices* records the speakers of the more recent past as they try to preserve their heritage. Natives who are beginning to think of themselves as second class citizens recall the rigorous training of their youth, when they fasted, bathed in ice-cold streams, and saw visions. We are told of the Six Nations political system, with its symbolic Tree of Peace standing for unity among the tribes. We read some of the verse of Emily Johnson, and the much more impressive "Beginning of the World," an ancient sacred song of the Chilliwacks, which shows the earth and its people being formed as a result of passionate love, from the union of the sun and the moon. We hear more modern voices as the first Native people to fight on foreign soil speak of their World War I experiences. A radio talk given in 1925 tells us of the sense of dispossession and defeat which a once proud people so often feels. His people, says the speaker, "have lived the lives of your forefathers, the ancient Britons," and have now, as it were, awakened after a thousand years' sleep, to find the world transformed. In "The Death Chant of the Last Blackfoot" the poet asks" "Where are my meadows of flowers?"

In the last section of this anthology we hear the more hopeful voices of today. Walter Moore stresses the distinction between the ethos of the hunter and that of the peasant, and shows how the education system has failed to recognise these differences. Other writers take a lyrical approach, notably Dan George in "My Heart Soars" and Duke Redbird in "I am an Indian," which concludes: "I look at you White Brother/And I ask you/Save not me from sin and evil/Save yourself." But the anthology also gives us Redbird's "I am a Canadian," showing the Native person as part of a spectrum of Canadian life styles and perceptions. Harold Cardinal talks of the rebirth of culture which is now taking place, and stresses the importance of the current rediscovery of Native religious beliefs and rituals. Basil Johnston's "Cowboys and Indians" is a highly comic and satiric story about a Hollywood attempt to produce a stereotyped film in Montana, with today's Native people deliberately making fools of the directors. The final song in the anthology tells us to "Listen to the new world come."

Both of these books are a pleasure and an education to read. They provide essential material, not only for the classroom, but for anyone who wants to

learn more about our Native culture and heritage.

Glenys Stow *is one of the editors of* Canadian Children's Literature. *She teaches Canadian, British and Children's Literature for the University of Western Ontario.*

THE INDIAN BOY AND THE BEARS

The Indian boy and the bears, Nancy Cleaver and Rosemary Knight. Illus. Shirley Day. Highway Book Shop, 1981. 30 pp. $3.95 paper. ISBN 0-88954-225-2.

The book is reminiscent of the story "Goldilocks and the Three Bears." The beginning of the story takes the listener or reader right into the story as if it were really happening. I feel that the tale is faithful culturally in that it states that the early Indian hunters never took an animal's life unless they needed it for food and fur.

The story line, where so many animals take a turn trying to free the boy when he was imprisoned inside the cave, keeps the reader almost frantic as to which animal will be successful. As we read this section of the book, we tend to read a bit faster as if in a hurry to find the hero. The whole story is full of appealing adjectives that bring it alive. It ends in a way that leaves the reader wondering how the father would react upon returning to find his son. I like this uncertain ending because it could be used as a literature assignment or in a Native study project — e.g. — "Complete the story as you would imagine or want it to end."

The theme of the story is to remember with pride the value and importance of our wild animals. It encourages the reader to learn more about them. The story tends to bring a message to our older group of people and also to many who are now young parents. The message is that mothers — regardless of species — are loving, protective, faithful and wise.

I thoroughly enjoyed this story, as did my family. The book is small, contains pictures on almost every page and possesses a good satisfying print. The story appeals to both young and old and could be used from grades 4-6 as a Native study text, so I recommend that it be used in all Native schools. I hope to be able to find one on the shelf in our library at Peguis in the near future. If it is not, it will certainly be ordered.

Doreen McPherson *is presently enrolled in the Brandon University Indian Leadership Training Program, and taught at Peguis Indian School, grades five and six, for five years. She is Public Relations Chairperson at Peguis Central High School, and a graduate of the Buntep program in '78. She is mother to a family of six.*