

bitter diatribe against his ex-wife, humanize the narrative, as does his anger at being called "Jakey" on a picket line, the only point in the book where he alludes to the anti-Semitism which almost certainly was a factor in his being denied advancement on several occasions. The book proves surprisingly difficult to put down; even at the end of his life Jake Geller proves that he knows what readers want.

All four titles repay reading, but good biography requires greater skill than either Stowe or Scrivener can bring to their works. Christopher Moore, in both *Louisbourg Portraits* and *The Loyalists*, has set a masterful standard for popular biography, and J. Murray Beck's two-volume study of Joseph Howe, while perhaps too much a work of finished scholarship to have a direct appeal to younger or more general readers, illustrates the depth of understanding a writer must have of a figure before undertaking a truly satisfactory biography. Autobiographies, on the other hand, are judged by a different standard, for they reveal information even as they seek to conceal it. They take us, perhaps unintentionally, beyond "clothes and buttons", and when people such as Dillon Wallace or Jake Geller talk about themselves — as when our parents or grandparents do — we not only come to know them and their times better than any textbook can teach, but we better understand ourselves.

Robert Nicholas Bérard is an historian and Co-ordinator of the B. Ed. Programme in the Department of Education at Dalhousie University in Halifax, and he is the author of several articles in the areas of history, historiography, and education.

LEADERS OF CANADA — CELEBRATED AND UNSUNG

Matthew Baillie Begbie, David Ricardo Williams; *Adam Beck*, James Sturgis; *Alexander Graham Bell*, A. Roy Petrie; *Henri Bourassa*, A. Roy Petrie; *Timothy Eaton*, John M. Bassett; *Samuel de Champlain*, Stan Garrod; *Thomas Keefer*, Larry Murphy; *W.L. Mackenzie King*, J.L. Granatstein. *Wilfrid Laurier*, Martin Spigelman; *Paul-Emile Leger*, James Duggan; *Aimee Semple McPherson*, Alwyn Austin; *Louis St. Laurent*, J.W. Pickersgill; *Clifford Sifton*, D.J. Hall; *Thomas Carbide Willson*, Carole Precious, Fitzhenry & Whiteside "The Canadians" Series. 63 pp. \$2.75 paper. ISBN 0-88902-2186, 246-1, 209-7, 208-9, 210-0, 683-1, 227-7, 228-3, 245-3, 655-6, 657-2, 687-4, 223-2, 681-5.

Here is a crowd of "new Canadians" to join Fitzhenry & Whiteside's fold. Covering many subjects and categories, these biographies are hard to compare, except in their virtually unvarying format. The format works well and if the books

are used as intended (as a classroom set), the students might be forgiven in seeing a certain sameness in their rôle-models, heroes and heroines. More problematic is the length. Can all Canadian personalities be reduced to 60-75 pages for biography, social significance, photographs, a short index or bibliography, and a cute line drawing or photograph on an identical cover? Some Canadians have plenty of elbow-room in their 60-75 pages while the biographers of others must gallop at high speeds through lives and times and works in order to squeeze it all in. Nevertheless, the series fills a definite lack in reading material on Canadians that is within the reach of readers of grade six and up. The Bibliographies and Indices have improved over the years as has the quality of the photography. The annoyingly coy marginalia have been avoided in the more recent publications.

Issue might be taken with Fitzhenry & Whiteside on the categories used, the first of which is Arts & Recreation. Aimee Semple McPherson might well be considered "Recreation" if not "Art", but I doubt Cardinal Leger considers himself as either. The Art and Recreation category really ought to "spin off" into another category: Religious Leaders. There are a host of early religious leaders, often female and French-Canadian, on whom there is little readily accessible material.

We move from Art and Recreation to Commerce & Industry, with *Adam Beck*, *Timothy Eaton* and *Thomas Carbide Willson*. Beck was a strange mixture of a perfectionist, upper class "hunting horsey type" and a hard driving, hard working visionary in business and commerce. Beck does not win our hearts in this short biography, but he had enormous effect on the public power and transportation systems in Ontario. *Timothy Eaton*, by John Bassett, has been with us for about ten years and so we are very familiar with its usefulness. Eaton is a perennial favourite for projects and/or reading assignments; its simplistic style works well for poorer readers and the book appeals because of the familiarity of the subject. *Thomas Carbide Willson* is neither such a familiar person, nor is the biography for such juvenile readers as the previous book, since it requires a certain basic scientific knowledge in order to understand Willson's fascination with the innovations of his age. The Canadian inventor of calcium carbide and acetylene gas production, Willson is one of many Canadians who might well be missed by young readers were it not for the *Canadians series*.

Development of the West category includes *Clifford Sifton*, by D.J. Hall, and *Mathew Begbie*, by David Ricardo Williams. Mr. Hall has written more than one in the series and writes a careful, but curiously unsatisfying, biography of Clifford Sifton, the "Voice from the West" in the cabinet of Wilfrid Laurier. Sifton's name is linked with the immigration policies, the Manitoba Settlement, the Indian Affairs, the Yukon Gold Rush and the development of the railways; he resigned when the school issue came back to haunt him. So close to so many major issues, Sifton is one of those who need more space to bring him to life.

David Ricardo Williams, author of *Mathew Begbie*, is a practising lawyer and the author of a larger work on Begbie, a scholarly lawyer sent out from England during the gold rush to take on the rough and ready British Columbia region. Though a good friend to the Indians and their own laws, Begbie handed down capital decisions based on English law. A hanging judge, he often berated juries with whom he disagreed. *Begbie* is a lively and interesting book from a personal, legal and historical point of view, and contains some magnificent photos of the early west, even though the reproductions do not do them justice.

Samuel de Champlain is the sole representative here of the Exploration and Settlement category and the biography, by Stan Garrod, is superb insofar as its 62 pages might go. Garrod manages to inject a gentle humour and real pathos into the story of the life, marriages and times of a gentle Canadian.

Fitzhenry & Whiteside's fifth category, Politics and Government, is well represented in this group of books. *W.L. Mackenzie King*, by J.L. Granatstein is already eight years old and still has the simpler jacket and the coy marginalia. It is dated since newer books have revealed Mackenzie King's night walks, his relationships with American Presidents and his "racist" immigration policies. It is, however, a fair outline of his life and times and gives an easy to read picture of the kind of person and prime-minister he was. Like others in the early series, it lacks an index. *Wilfrid Laurier*, by Martin Spigelman, is not a new book either; it was published in 1978. Reflecting the man, it is a warmer portrait than that of Mackenzie King. Laurier was a small "l" liberal, in the European mold, and the book admirably points out the stature and statesmanship of the man. *Henri Bourassa*, by A. Roy Petrie, is a warm portrait of this difficult, handsome, well born Québécois. Bourassa's career often paralleled that of Laurier, yet he chose the provincial rather than the national path. He influenced the conscription crises, the Manitoba School Question and the Naval Service Bill. Finally, as the founder of *Le Devoir*, in 1910, he became one of the most influential voices of French Canadian society and had a major influence in the recent era of separatism. J.W. Pickersgill, author of *Louis St. Laurent*, was a member of St. Laurent's cabinet and obviously retains warm feelings towards his mentor. This well written biography presents an admirable and likable St. Laurent, a man of intelligence and grave good sense and humour, who was to father the St. Lawrence Seaway, the Trans-Canada Highway and the natural gas pipeline, and to preside over the appointment of the first Canadian Governor General.

The Science & Technology category is represented by *Alexander Graham Bell*, by A. Roy Petrie, and *Thomas Keefer*, by Larry Murphy. Petrie wisely concentrates on Bell's work rather than the life story, though the earlier years of struggle are given their full weight. Petrie brings out fully Bell's importance to the deaf world as well as concentrating on some of the flying and marine experiments that took up so much of Bell's later years. Lastly, *Thomas Keefer*, by Larry Murphy, introduces to young readers Canada's first major engineer.

Keefer's life was dramatic only in relation to his work and Murphy concentrates on that. There is one fascinating chapter on the Keefer family and their engineering contributions.

Fitzhenry & Whiteside is to be commended for this series and this particular crop of fourteen titles. They are attractive, easy to read, do not in general "talk down" to the younger reader and attempt to give a balanced view of the often controversial characters. They are generally reference works rather than straight "fun reading" but some of them transcend the limits of the standard format to become just that!

Sandy Lessner is a Librarian at Central High School of Commerce in Toronto.

FLAWED BIOGRAPHIES

Laura: a portrait of Laura Secord, Helen Caister Robinson. Dundurn Press, 1981. 240 pp. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 0-919670-53-9; ***Emma Albani: Victorian Diva***, Cheryl MacDonald. Dundurn Press, 1984. 205 pp. \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-919670-74-1.

The story biography may offer readers a judicious mixture of narrative and exposition to help clarify events and interpret character. Carefully balancing fact and fiction is an art. However, this artistic licence is dangerously susceptible to abuse by biographers.

Laura strays too far from fact in its attempts to create a lively picture of a famous person in her historical setting. Added to this licence is a style verging on the overly romantic and coy. An example of Laura's conversation with her husband-to-be is typical of the book's style:

He folded her in his arms and kissed her again. "Can we be married soon, my darling? We need each other, you and I". Laura's smile was shyly mischievous as she let her fingers caress his black hair. "That, Mr. Secord, is a matter you must settle with my father", she said with mock primness.

Laura's famous walk to Beaver Dam to alert the British to an impending attack from American troops during the War of 1812 seems almost anticlimactic after fourteen long, wordy chapters. Laura Secord's place in history seems diminished by the writer's unsuccessful attempts to reveal other aspects of her nature and her family life.

With the failure of this story biography to present a many faceted portrait of Laura Secord or to capture the era's atmosphere one turns with respect to the well-known Canadian Series' *Laura Secord* for an honest and not uncolorful biography.