

*Companions of the Peace:
Diaries and Letters of Monica Storrs, 1931-1939*

Vera K. Fast, editor

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999.

246 pp. Illus., map. \$19.95 paper.

By Neil Sutherland

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THE great merits of Monica Storrs's valuable account of her first decade in the Peace River District of British Columbia have been overshadowed by an unfortunate temptation to alliteration on the part of the editors of the first, earlier volume drawn from Storrs's manuscripts. The title *God's Galloping Girl: The Peace River Diaries of Monica Storrs, 1929-1931* (1979) conjures up the image of an evangelical circuit rider. It does not convey that its author was, as her present editor explains, "a cultured English gentlewoman," the daughter of the dean of an English cathedral, who was drawn to church and social service on a frontier of the Empire (3). In 1929, "middle-sized, middle-aged, and fatally English," as she described herself, Storrs arrived in the Fort St. John area of the Peace River District (6). There, what began as a missionary sojourn designed to help "Anglicanize" the frontier gradually became a permanent commitment to the "physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of women and children in the area" (24). In this work Storrs was joined by other like-minded Englishwomen, whom she called *Companions of the Peace*.

On her arrival Storrs began what became an extensive diary, written to circulate to family and friends in Britain and elsewhere. In it, Storrs described her wide-ranging travels in the district

making friends, organizing women's groups, and setting up activities for children and young people. Occasionally she became involved in the wider affairs of the area, but she avoided politics. Storrs provided her readers then and now with a sympathetic account of the conditions of the settlers and, especially, of the women and children in their midst. Since Storrs stayed in the area over the years covered in this and the previous collection, we see not the snapshot views of a casual visitor but an unfolding understanding emerging over time.

Representing, as it does, but a quarter of the total manuscript, we are less able in this than in the first volume to follow through on Storrs's relationship with an individual person or family. Nonetheless, in Storrs's various mentions of the Middleton family and other settlers one sees much of the role that she played in the community and something of her attitude towards its people. One evening in June 1932, Storrs is invited to have supper with Mrs. Middleton and her seven children. "Before supper they all washed in turns without being told, waited for grace, passed the food round spontaneously, talked politely, and asked to be excused before rising from the table — and Oh My! you would hardly understand how this nearly took my breath

away." Mr. Middleton lived "a mile or two away and never comes near them or takes the smallest interest in his children" (69). Mrs. Middleton appears again in June 1934, when she travelled south of the Peace to attend a meeting of Anglican women. There, Storrs reported, "for about a half an hour she talked to me with her broad Sheffield accent ... I was amazed at her understanding; for she is not at all an educated woman; but I have never been so deeply impressed as by her simple and utterly sincere expressions of faith and love and thankfulness." The meeting began with "a Sung Eucharist, not good music or well sung; but it was all right for all of us, and for her it was the Gate of Heaven" (125).

In her story of Leila we glimpse another aspect of Storrs's work. Some of Storrs's friends in England contributed to her Samaritan Fund, which she employed to help some of those for whom no other assistance was available. One life-saving case in 1938 involved

a little girl of 13 in my Sunday School who was suffering from acute ophthalmic goitre, with frightful nerve and heart symptoms. Nothing could be done for her at Fort St John; so I visited her mother, a woman separated from her husband and in wretched circumstances, and offered to send the child to Edmonton if she would give permission for an operation to be performed ... The operation was completely successful and Leila is rapidly returning to perfectly normal health ... But the Samaritan Fund is BROKE. (189)

Storrs's relations with the large non-English-speaking element in the population were necessarily less

intimate than were her relations with the English-speaking element, but they were, nonetheless, sympathetic. In May 1936, during the course of her visits, Storrs reported: "I saw two nice glimpses of rather primitive life ... The first was a man scraping an immense bear hide." The other was Mrs. Joe Selinka "thrashing with a hand flail." She was a "Bohemian with very little English but lovely manners and welcome. They can't get a thrashing machine across the Halfway River, so Mrs Selinka thrashes for most of her neighbours in the true Biblical way" (160). Two years later, Storrs arranged for an ailing Mrs. Selinka to go to Fort St. John to have all her teeth removed.

Over the two volumes we see Storrs shift from being a detached and sometimes critical outside observer to being someone who increasingly identifies herself with the community. The transition is never complete; her class and her means sharply differentiated Storrs both from those permanently settled in the Peace and those others who left with little assurance that they were moving to a better life. Storrs could, and did, occasionally free herself from the frontier and re-enter her life at "Home." As she wrote in England in 1938:

And so I came Home
But I've got two Homes now
Which is very puzzling. (197)

Storrs eventually retired to her English home in 1950 but visited her Canadian home twice more before her death in 1967.

Vera K. Fast and Mary Kinnear have provided an excellent introduction to Storrs's text. It succinctly describes and characterizes Storrs. It introduces each of her friends who became Companions, summarizes Storrs's relationships with the Anglican esta-

blishment, and portrays a Peace River District harder hit by the Depression than most other parts of Canada. While one wishes that one had the whole of Storrs's text to read, this and

its companion volume provide a rich evocation of a way of life and of an era not long gone but now completely disappeared.

First Son: Portraits by C.D. Hoy

Faith Moosang

Vancouver/North Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp/Presentation House,
1999. 159 pp. Illus. \$27.95 paper.

By Carol Williams

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THE curvaceous lace-up boots worn by the unidentified elderly Chinese gentleman who is the subject of the photograph reproduced on the cover of Faith Moosang's volume *First Son: Portraits by CD Hoy* are compelling, as is the range of finery worn by Hoy's subjects: midi skirts secured by buttons and safety pins, fringed gloves, woolly chaps, suspenders, ornate buckles, cabled cardigans, pearl-buttoned blouses, silk umbrellas, embroidered wraps, gold pocket watches. In the background are the incidental and intentional, mass and hand-produced consumer goods – calendars, lithographs, and wrinkled drop cloths. These details, like the debris underfoot, pique curiosity. Access to goods signals the status or occupation of the subject(s), and we marvel at the means by which such items were acquired on remote frontiers. Quesnel-based photographer Chow Dong Hoy (1883-1973) adopted few commercially produced studio props, ubiquitous in urban studios, but the accoutrements Hoy included were significant: suspended



C.D.Hoy, self-portrait, P2064.

chrysanthemum-laden cloths and small tables set with books, potted plants, and clocks conveyed cultural messages such as good luck and longevity (133).