

the reluctant S. F. Tolmie to set a date for a general election. Perhaps these political interventions were exceptional. Only a careful scrutiny of various premier's papers can demonstrate their uniqueness. There is no sign in this book that this scrutiny took place.

Dr. Jackman also evades the central question of the whole book. Why were these particular men chosen for this particular office? It may be impossible to answer this question with any accuracy. Yet the Provincial Archives does contain some material from the papers of Wilfred Laurier and R. L. Borden. In these collections, information relevant to certain appointments may be found. Since the book contains no bibliography, one can not know whether these sources were consulted and to what extent the generalizations stated by the author are valid.

The preceding criticisms lead inexorably to a final question. Why was this book on this topic written and published? The obvious answer has already been given. It is a logical companion piece to the *Portraits of the Premiers*. It is also meant to entertain and instruct the lay reader. Yet, for all his literary skill, Dr. Jackman has been unable to surmount the handicaps of his reliance on secondary sources and the innate lack of importance of his subject. One can only wonder why, when writing in a field so lacking in scholarly works of insight and original perspective, an author would waste time and effort on such a routine approach to a barren topic.

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*Queen Charlotte Islands, a Narrative of Discovery and Adventure in the North Pacific*, by Francis Poole. Reprinted with an introduction by Susan Davidson. Vancouver: J. J. Douglas Ltd., 1972. 347 pp. \$8.95.

In 1862 Francis Poole, a mining engineer, went to the Queen Charlotte Islands to prospect for copper on behalf of the Queen Charlotte Mining Company. He was accompanied by eight miners whom he had employed to provide the necessary labour, and he stayed there for almost two years, inevitably in almost daily contact with the Haida Indians. He claims at one point in his *Queen Charlotte Islands* (now reprinted after more than a century as No. 2 in the Northwest Library) to have been "the first white man who had dared to go and live amongst the hostile Indians of Queen Charlotte Islands . . ." Here, of course, Poole is indulging in the bragging that forms a tediously persistent element in his

narrative. He forgets the eight miners who worked with him; he ignores the groups of gold prospectors who had preceded him in 1852 and 1859 and lived, even if for short periods, in contact with the Haidas. He perhaps did not know of the man whom Captain Gray of the *Hancock* left in the Queen Charlottes as early as 1790 to live among the Indians and to collect furs.

There are times when the brags blossom into positive lies. For example, briefly describing an expedition in the Coast Mountains before he went to the Queen Charlottes, Poole talks of shivering "on a mountain-top, 16,000 feet above sea-level"; but Mount Waddington, the tallest on the British Columbian coast, is in the 13,000 feet range, and I doubt if Poole climbed it. One can only assume that to measure the height of mountains he used the method he recommends for measuring the height of trees, which is "to walk away from the tree till you can sight its topmost branch when looking backwards between your legs. You have then got the tree's height in the distance between the spot where you stand and the base of the tree itself."

A whopper or two of this kind, where his statements can be checked, make one suspect all of the more sensational episodes which Poole narrates and regarding which there is no independent evidence. Is it really true, one wonders, that a Haida chief's daughter "once . . . had the courage to bid defiance to all her tribe, and even to her own father, a chief, in order to save my life, when I was alone and unarmed in the presence of a dozen Indians, dancing round me with drawn knives and thirsting for my blood." Or did he steal the tale from Captain John Smith's account of Pocahontas? And that journey by Haida canoe down to Victoria which Poole boasts of as being "the greatest canoe voyage ever known in the North Pacific" and second only in the whole Pacific ocean to Bligh's famous open boat voyage? Apart from the great Polynesian canoe expeditions from Samoa to Hawaii and New Zealand, all far longer than the trip from the Queen Charlottes to Victoria, the Haidas themselves had been raiding with their great canoes down to the Gulf of Georgia even before the white men came, and after 1858 many parties of them went down to Fort Victoria, attracted by the lure of the Gold Rush centre; indeed, it was through such voyages that the smallpox which Poole found so rampant on the Coast and the islands in 1862 was actually spread. Since Poole's claims to the uniqueness of his achievement are obviously faulty, may he not also have been somewhat excessive in his sensational recounting of the perils of a journey which so many undertook at that time?

Nevertheless, braggart or not, Poole was undoubtedly in the Queen Charlottes for almost two years and, as John Lyndon who introduced *Queen Charlotte Islands* when it was published in 1871 more guardedly remarked, he was up to that time "the only educated Englishman" who had lived in the group. But this fact only aggravate's one's exasperation at the thought of such an opportunity having been almost completely wasted. Poole was in the presence of one of the most remarkable of North American cultures at the vital transition point before the influences of traders and of missionaries transformed and finally destroyed it. The Haida were at the height of their numbers, and all the villages we now know only as sites of rotting poles in the bush were still inhabited and flourishing. Yet Poole was so set in his English Victorian superiority that he constantly talked of "savages," of the "poor Indians," even of "poor Blacky," without any evident consciousness of the sophisticated techniques which the Haida had developed for extracting a rich and prosperous existence out of their environment, or any sense of their complex social and ritual life.

In two years Poole appears to have learnt nothing about the Haida winter ceremonials, about their shamanic rites, about the function of the potlatch, about the systems of lineage, or about the social system, which accounts for his constant astonishment when one chief or another turned out to have very little authority over his fellow villagers. He mentions Haida carving once, but only in connection with an early argillite flute he acquired, but he has nothing to say about their methods of house construction, their ways of building canoes, their methods of fishing and the ceremonies associated with it. Nor does he once mention a carved pole of any kind. This may be an indication that in 1862 there was still nothing so striking as the groves of poles that decorated the Haida villages by the 1880's; yet Mackenzie had described such poles among the Bella Coola in 1793, and it is unlikely that Poole failed to see them among the Haida. Obviously, he thought them of no importance or interest.

The fact is that this great field of observation was lost on a man who seems to have lacked even an average share of curiosity regarding anything outside his own narrow interests. Poole was, in fact, so inflated by his own importance, and so blinded by his prejudices, that what he really produced in *Queen Charlotte Islands* was not a true travel book but rather the self-portrait of a disagreeable man whose attention was centred on his own pursuit of the ignis fatuus of mineral wealth. He hated Americans so bitterly that he refused to see any good in them, and as his miners

were mostly Americans it is hardly surprising that the venture ended with the men refusing to work; Poole eventually left them to their own resources, making his much-bragged-of canoe voyage southward in order to resign his position because work has virtually ceased on the claims. One feels a distinct sympathy for the men, first bullied and then maligned by Poole.

His attitude towards the Indians was no better. He talked of their life and their beliefs with a nauseatingly facetious superiority: e.g. "The Queen Charlotte Islands Indians hold views, on the subject of their aboriginal ancestry, decidedly in advance of the Darwinian theory; for their descent from the crows is quite gravely affirmed and steadily maintained." (Need one add that such a man inevitably refers to a bear as Bruin?) Nevertheless, Indians — "those poor savages" — are better than Americans; yet they cannot be left to follow their own way of life, which Poole finds merely despicable. The Indian "must be continuously guided, watched and controlled, that too by exceptional teaching and legislation. . . ." How unpleasant to meet Mr. Poole!

The reprinting of such a book calls into question certain aspects of the recent flood of new editions of long out-of-print or forgotten books about Canada. There are already several series. Mel Hurtig in Edmonton has by now reissued the obvious classics of Canadian exploration; Coles Canadian Collection has given us a wide selection of good and bad pioneer books; the Carleton Library has specialized in reprinting works of political and sociological interest; the University of Toronto Press's Social History of Canada is rapidly reprinting the more important texts from the earlier twentieth century. We are coming near the point when everything that is likely to be interesting or useful to the general reader or even to the student of Canadian history will have become available.

Is it necessary to go beyond these limits of interest and usefulness merely to reprint lost books? *Queen Charlotte Islands* raises that point very clearly. It is a bad piece of writing, factually shaky, projecting a self-complacent but fundamentally uninteresting personality, and telling us amazingly little that we cannot gather from other sources about the Haida culture and the general aspects of the Queen Charlotte Islands 111 years ago. The student seeking hard information will merely be confused by it; the addict of adventure tales will do much better to stick to Rider Haggard; the historically inclined general reader will be amused by Poole's idiosyncracies when he begins and bored with his vanities when he finishes the book — if he does; the libraries are of necessity shortening their purchase lists.

There is also the question of introductions to historical reprints. To my mind they should either be non-existent — as in Coles Canadiana Collection — or essays in condensed research, packed with background information about the times and the author, like the introductions to the *Social History of Canada*. *Queen Charlotte Islands* does have an introduction, but it is precisely the kind of limp and lukewarm production that gives the reader very little help, since it brings in almost no information that cannot be gathered from reading the book, and is almost entirely devoted to a descriptive paraphrase of Poole's narrative which at no point resolutely denounces his atrocities of outlook, his insufferably bombastic style, or his inexcusable failings as an observer.

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*Wesbrook and His University*, by William C. Gibson. Vancouver: The Library of the University of British Columbia, 1973. xii & 204 pp. \$7.00.

Among the abiding puzzles of the historical development of Canadian higher education is the failure of the Province of British Columbia to establish a university until 1915. A second is the failure of the University, when at long last established, to develop into a major institution until the late 1940's. There is no doubt that U.B.C. has been since about 1950 one of the half-dozen most important Canadian universities, both in quantitative and qualitative terms, i.e., in terms not only of numbers of students, staff, buildings, etc. but of range and quality of teaching programme and research performance. The question is one which is not simply of antiquarian interest; universities do have roots, and their position at any time is conditioned by the structures, the traditions and the style which have evolved from the time of their establishment. George Grant continues to cast his shadow over Queen's, Dawson, Rutherford and Leacock over McGill, Bishop Bourget, Edouard Montpetit and Maurice Duplessis over Montreal. The present strengths — and the weaknesses — of Toronto, Dalhousie, Manitoba can not fully be explained without reference to events which occurred as much as a century ago. The University of British Columbia is no exception to this rule. What happened and, as important, what did not happen in 1871, in 1890, in 1908, and particularly between 1911 and 1918 remains highly relevant to the kind of institution it is today.