

Book Reviews

In the Sea of Sterile Mountains, The Chinese in British Columbia, by James Morton. Vancouver: J. J. Douglas, 1973. 280 pp. \$12.50.

In 1874, Edward Blake, the Member of Parliament from South Bruce, Ontario, told his constituents that British Columbia was "an inhospitable country, a sea of sterile mountains." In choosing this epithet as title for his book, Dr. Morton leaves the reader wondering whether he himself thinks of British Columbia as "an inhospitable place," whether he believes the Chinese saw it so, or whether he has simply been so taken with the phrase as to ignore its total irrelevance to his book. One suspects the last, for the book is full of irrelevant or extravagant *bons mots* that may enhance it for the aspiring middle-brow. The introduction also seems aimed in that direction and tells us nothing about the book or why it was written. Indeed, after finishing the book, I am still wondering why.

Is this book intended to be of interest to the layman or the scholar? Surely not the layman, for the organization is designed to bore. In chapters that cut the century into arbitrary chronological chunks, the book brings together extracts from two of the four Royal Commissions relevant to the subject with over a hundred years of clippings from the *Colonist*, *Gazette*, *News*, *British Columbian*, *Cariboo Sentinel*, and the *Herald*. One suspects, indeed, that it contains every single reference to Chinese in any of these papers, during the nineteenth century at least, for Morton manages to work in such irrelevant details as Amor De Cosmos' remark (1862?) that a new sewer being dug on Bastion Street, Victoria, smelled "worse than a Chinese stink-pot" (p. 14). The citizen interested in finding out something about the Chinese and their relations with the "Europeans" in British Columbia must search for the interesting facts buried in a mass of details.

Such meticulous scholarship, which must have involved long hours of diligent searching through the entire file of several newspapers, is work for an historian, and Dr. Morton will be the first to admit he is not one.

Historians will remain indebted to Dr. Morton for this labour of love, but its usefulness to them is sadly and unnecessarily marred by the lack of any scholarly apparatus whatsoever. Nowhere in the book is there any indication of how the research was done. There is no list of newspapers consulted or their dates, so any historian starting in the field would have to duplicate Dr. Morton's work, a sad waste indeed. The short list of "Sources Other than Newspapers" (p. 269) includes five titles, two of them trivial. The exact sources of the numerous details Dr. Morton has collected are seldom noted. For instance, when Dr. Morton states (p. 144) that "In 1884, the Chinese population of Burrard Inlet consisted of . . . a total of 114," and that they "had settled largely in wooden shacks around the shore of False Creek," the reader would like to know where these figures and locations came from so that he could compare them to information available from other sources. As a reference book for further research, it is therefore disappointingly limited.

Although he nowhere states it clearly, it is evident from the nature of his source material that Dr. Morton did not set out to write a book about the Chinese in British Columbia, but only about white reactions to them. Nevertheless, with a little prior reading on his part, the author could have used his sources to provide a richer story of the Chinese community itself and avoided some mistakes. The trivial references to the Chinese Benevolent Association (pp. 123, 180, 253) suggest the author had not read David Lai's useful articles on its origins and early activities (*BC Studies* nos. 15, 18.) He mistakenly describes the Chinese Empire Reform Association as anti-Manchu, thereby missing entirely the political struggles that have split the Chinese community, which appears in this book as a faceless, monolithic blob to which the real people in history (i.e., whites) react in various outlandish ways.

Good scholarship and readability are not incompatible — quite the opposite: a thoroughly documented, well argued scholarly thesis makes much more interesting reading for everyone than does a compendium. Scholarly judgment is at the heart of the difference, something this book sorely lacks. A trivial example of this is the inconsistency in spellings due to simply copying from different newspaper articles (e.g. Tai-Soong on p. 13, Ty-Soon on p. 29). More serious is the absence of any discussion Chinese immigration and industry might reflect the positions of their owners. A vital image of nineteenth-century Victoria or New Westminster never emerges from the welter of details.

There is an index and a useful chronology. The book is well presented, with two sets of photographs and an attractive dust-jacket in three colours.

University of Canterbury
New Zealand.

W. E. WILLMOTT

Oil Pollution as an International Problem. A Study of Puget Sound and the Strait of Georgia, by William M. Ross. Western Geographical Series, Volume 6. University of Victoria, pp. 279. \$4.00.

In the preface to this book, the author takes the unusual step of laying bare his "environmental conscience" and of proclaiming his biases and his beliefs about environmental problems, and thus leads one to fear that what follows will be merely special pleading in support of preconceived ideas. Fortunately, this fear is not realized. Although the book is in a sense a piece of advocacy, it is on the whole a balanced and well argued treatment of the problems of dealing with international pollution of the sea caused mainly by spills of persistent oil from large tankers.

Having described the nature and scope of the dangers from oil pollution in general and outlined the economic aspects of the problem (chapters 1 and 2), the author goes on to consider oil pollution in Puget Sound and the Strait of Georgia, describing in particular the American and Canadian laws that are applicable to oil pollution in this area (chapter 3). He then proceeds to examine the relevant international laws and institutions (chapter 4), and to set forth his own recommendations and conclusions on how the matter should be dealt with (chapters 5 and 6). He ends with a postscript bringing his story up-to-date to near the end of 1972. He attaches a lengthy bibliography which should be useful to those who wish to go more deeply into the subject.

The main contribution of this work is perhaps its focusing attention on the danger of marine pollution by oil and bringing to bear on the problem the learning drawn from several disciplines. Preventing and controlling marine pollution is a complex matter involving in particular shipping technology and seamanship, national and international law and institutions, and large economic questions. The author has discussed these aspects lucidly, so that the general reader can get a good understanding of the issues and the steps that have been taken by the United States and Canada by the international community to deal with them.

While the book provides an overall picture of the subject that is inform-