

and former members of these communities have stored under their beds, and donate it to libraries so that future histories can go deeper.

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LYMAN TOWER SARGENT

The Eternal Forest, by George Godwin. Introduction by George Woodcock. Vancouver: Godwin Books, 1994 (first published in 1929). xxxii, 318 pp. Photos. \$19.95 paper, \$32.95 cloth.

This new edition of a book, published originally by Appletons of New York in 1929, provides a rare glimpse into life in the Lower Fraser Valley immediately prior to the First World War. It is, in fact, much more than a reissued novel. Robert Thompson, an academic-turned-publisher, and the nephew of George Godwin, has added greatly to the value of the original text by providing extracts from the author's journal, recent and period photographs, and a series of notes. Passages from Godwin's journal enable us to understand more fully the significance of particular sections of the text — connecting the voices of his characters to his own political views, or the emotions of the central figure in the novel to the intimate details of his own personal life. Taken together, the journal extracts and the notes offer the reader an unusual degree of assurance that *The Eternal Forest* can be appreciated not simply for its aesthetic qualities but also as a source of historical understanding.

Godwin and his wife, Dorothy, exchanged the comfort of their middle-class milieu in England for the romance of the pioneer life. In 1912 they arrived in the Fraser Valley and sank their 500 pounds sterling into a house and a few acres of bush in Whonnock (Ferguson's Landing in the novel). *The Eternal Forest* describes the society they encountered. There are the resourceful Olsens — farmers, fishers, miners, and carpenters — who have all the skills to endure and prosper in the wilderness, and the patient, humble Swede, Johansson, who sweats and suffers but who eventually owns a fine farm and the first Ford in the district. Old Man Dunn, the self-educated Yorkshireman, is the local sage whose socialist and cooperative views help shape the collective critique of Vancouver realtors, provincial politicians, and all kinds of promoters and boosters whose schemes bring ruin to the gullible or desperate. There is the voluptuous Mrs. Armstrong, who takes in loggers and "serve[s] her boarders' fare out with the sauce of sex" (60), and whose house resounds with disorderly delights throughout the winter months. The Church of England vicar, Mr. Corley, disapproves of Mrs. Armstrong, but then he despises most of the citizens of Ferguson's Landing, for few accord him any respect and fewer still attend his services. He longs for the certainty, hierarchy, and decorum that he left. There is Blanchard, the storekeeper dispensing provisions and gossip and mail, playing postmaster, thanks to Bob England, an old-timer and political broker who has secured Blanchard's

appointment through his connections in the provincial capital. Such little acts of patronage tie hamlets like the Landing to the webs of influence being woven in the cities. And on the margins of this society are others, identified as Red Men, Orientals, Japs, and Hindus, viewed by the settlers with condescension, but also with fear.

Enter a couple referred to simply as the 'Newcomers' whose experiences and responses are essentially those of George and Dorothy Godwin. Leaving the new arrivals nameless is a curious device in the novel, interposing a screen of privacy between these characters and the rest of the cast, and between them and the reader. It is as though the author cannot quite decide whether the Newcomers should really be the central characters or relegated to more marginal positions from which they can play the detached observers or chorus. There is not much interaction between the Newcomers and the locals, and at the end of it all, Newcomer (and, even more markedly, his wife) remain, in some important ways, unrevealed. There seems to be some artistic uncertainty here.

But that aside, there is much to enjoy and admire in this work. Godwin writes lyrically about the landscape and especially about the forest, mixing the townsman's newly discovered joy in physical labour and naive desire to discipline and tame the bush with an appreciation of the immense resilience of nature and the enduring spiritual value of woods and wilderness. *The Eternal Forest* tells of struggle and failure, despair and defeat, but it also records moments of profound self-discovery. Newcomer was unsure what he was seeking when he left England. Specifying what he was escaping was easy enough — the stultifying rigidities of a class society — but what was he looking for and what did he find? In the wilderness, for the first time, he is able to think clearly about life. Here it is reduced to stark simplicity and that which is truly important becomes plain. Towards the end of the book though, there is a more profound answer: Newcomer experiences an epiphany.

Godwin's novel documents an individual's failure and moments of revelation, but it also records collective experience, and through it we can see how there emerged in this province different economies and different cultures — the metropolitan and the rural — and how their opposed interests became the bases for a political order that survived until very recently. Exhausted by the effort of clearing the land, unable to produce enough from their small enterprises to survive, some settlers were easy targets for the promoters of get-rich-quick schemes — buying land where a railroad might stop, purchasing shares in never-to-be-realized oil fields in the valley. They and others were often forced to sell the plots in which they had invested so much, and when they did, they found targets for their frustration — the Chinese, who (they claimed) had taken over Lulu Island and now dominated the market for produce, or the Japanese, who were buying up the farms. Old Man Dunn explained: "It's the Jap's purpose to get this Province by peaceful penetration" (p. 92).

In this book we begin to appreciate how the Fraser Valley became such a fertile place for conservative populism and even for outright racism. Godwin

puts the observations about the Japanese into the mouth of his least conservative character. Old Dunn is not trying to incite racial antipathy. But the same cannot be said for articles that appeared in *Maclean's* while Godwin (back in England) was polishing the manuscript. On 15 October 1921, in the first of two articles, "Will Canada Go Yellow?" we find statistics for the very area in which Ferguson's Landing (Whonnock) lies, charting the growth of Japanese ownership and reporting, without challenge, the popular theory that this was part of an invasion being orchestrated from Tokyo.

But this is not a political novel. It is fiction woven from personal experience containing acute and verifiable observation of an emerging society. It reflects, naturally, many views that are today regarded as outmoded, a few even reprehensible. The reader can have fun exploring Godwin's own sympathies not only by inferring them from the text, but also by checking them against the journal extracts. Taken as a whole, this book gives us a very good sociological understanding of the early struggles of settlers, the colonial culture they inhabited, and the social relations that nurtured their suspicion of the city, corporate capitalism, and distant government.

Robert Thompson is to be congratulated for republishing this book. It deserves a broad readership.

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The Geology of Southern Vancouver Island: a field guide, by C.J. Yorath and H.W. Nasmith, Victoria.: Orca Book Publishers, 1995. 172 pp. Illus., maps. \$14.95 paper.

Geology of the Kelowna Area and Origin of the Okanagan Valley British Columbia, by Murray A. Roed, with contributions from Don A. Dobson et al. Kelowna: Kelowna Geology Committee, Geology Department, Okanagan University College, 1995. 183 pp. Illus., maps. \$19.95 paper.

There are two types of geological field guides. One is intended to inform groups of professional geologists on specialized field trips through a region, and the other is for the intelligent layperson with little background in geology. The two books here are successful examples of the latter type, engendered by the same process: as the teaching of earth science at an institution of tertiary education in a particular region intensifies, those teaching it first construct field-trips for students, then see the need for a comprehensive guidebook to the region, with input from local earth scientists and engineers. Each of the resultant guides informs both the student and the intelligent citizen of the geology of an important region of British Columbia, and each concentrates on describing sites close to a major regional centre of population.