

The University of Victoria Social Sciences Research Centre is to be congratulated on the "completion" of their ambitious and much-needed project. However, the job is not finished. Many areas were excluded from each volume, with more excluded from the third volume than was included, making it that much less useful. With the ten-year time-span of the project, much has appeared about the pre-1900 period which could be included in a supplement. It would have been preferable, perhaps, to have divided the 1900-1950 period into two 25-year periods and included more categories. Lowther says (p. viii):

As the Provincial Archives planned to publish its own list, no attempt was made to include newspapers, except for those government gazettes which began in the colonial period. . . . It was originally planned to list other serials — more general ones having occasional articles on British Columbia. The length of the serial entries, their number and their complexity weighed against their inclusion in this volume.

No list of B.C. newspapers, or of B.C. periodicals, has appeared. Publication of the *Dictionary Catalogue of the Library of the Provincial Archives of British Columbia*<sup>4</sup> in 1971 has helped fill in some of the gaps, but much remains to be done to complete the bibliographical record of British Columbia up to 1950. And what about the twenty-five years since 1950? In the meantime, for those unable to afford the eight-volume Archives catalogue, the three volumes of *A Bibliography of British Columbia* are valuable reference tools which should be in every library in the province.

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<sup>4</sup> Boston, G. K. Hall, 1971. 8 v. \$610.

*The Reminiscences of Doctor John Sebastian Helmcken*. Edited by Dorothy Blakey Smith with an introduction by W. Kaye Lamb. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1975. \$18.95.

On May 27, 1892, at the age of 68, the venerable John Sebastian Helmcken sat down and began to write with these words: "Well here goes." The result, five substantial volumes in manuscript, have provided historians of colonial British Columbia with one of the best extant accounts of that time and place. Helmcken's colourful characterizations of Europeans and Indians on Vancouver Island and his vivid descriptions of the many significant events in which he was involved establish his

memoirs as an invaluable source — delightful to read and authoritative to consult.

This book brings this valuable text into a definitive edition. Hitherto unpublished, Helmcken's *Reminiscences* are now available to students and general readers in a most pleasing format. But the reproduction of a manuscript is not enough; to make it useful it must bear appropriate textual apparatus, a satisfactory introduction and, of course, ancillary material including an index. On all counts this project has been superbly done. Dr. Dorothy Blakey Smith, already well known for her editions of Arthur Thomas Bushby's *Journal*, James Douglas' visit to California in 1841 and Susan Cracroft's letters, has painstakingly added textual notes which amply testify to the fact that Helmcken, then entering his later years, still had an incisive mind and an excellent memory. Only on a few cases was Helmcken forgetful of the details of the actual course of events. These errors notwithstanding, Dr. Smith has demonstrated beyond a shadow of doubt the authenticity and reliability of this excellent source. I would quarrel with only one editorial interpretation: the Cowichan expedition referred to on pages 129-30 occurred in 1856, not 1853. Though an expedition was mounted in the former year (as the editor's footnote correctly relates) there was a second expedition to Cowichan three years later in order to apprehend the murderer of a European living there; collaborative material for this important episode in white-Indian relations is to be found in Douglas material in the Provincial Archives in Victoria. This is a small blemish to an otherwise superb edition.

Dr. Lamb's introduction provides us with a concise account of Helmcken's life, and he includes in his narrative interesting perspectives of Helmcken as given by such different persons as Hubert Howe Bancroft and Emily Carr. R. E. Gosnell, a distinguished civil servant in various capacities and an able historian in his own right, wrote of Helmcken in 1910 that "If old men could remember everything, he is the only man living who could sit down and write the whole history of British Columbia from personal knowledge." Though Gosnell did not know that eighteen years earlier the doctor had written a manuscript that just about met Gosnell's requirements, this only serves to show the value of the end product and the quality of its author.

Helmcken, born in 1824 in Whitechapel of German parentage, raised himself from humble beginnings (his father was a sometime sugar refinery worker and pubkeeper). His account of his youth, an important contribution in itself to Victorian studies, tells of his interesting boyhood in this London borough, his fascination with gunpowder, his interest in trains,

and his debt to his mother who "God bless her, was everything and everybody." Young Helmcken early won the confidence of Dr. William Henry Graves under whom he apprenticed as chemist and druggist. His subsequent medical training at Guy's Hospital is extensively detailed here. In March 1848, Helmcken was admitted as a Member of the Royal College of Surgeons. Casting around for employment, and bearing a desire to see the world, he first considered the Royal Navy and then the Hudson's Bay Company. But as it turned out Helmcken went in a merchantman to Bombay, Singapore, Canton and elsewhere in eastern seas and then home, where he was engaged by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1847 as ship's surgeon for a voyage in the *Prince Rupert* to York Factory. Helmcken gives an extensive impression of that place and some of its inhabitants.

In October 1849 Helmcken sailed on his last voyage from Gravesend, this time in the *Norman Morison* bound on a five-month voyage to the new colony of Vancouver Island. "A good deal of fuss was made about this first voyage to a new colony," he wrote, "and some grandees were on board drinking wine and speaking good wishes &c. &c." All told 80 emigrants sailed in the ship, endured gales, smallpox and the tedious voyage, and reached the shores of Vancouver Island, wondering how the wooded, mountainous country could ever be cultivated.

Helmcken, who apparently was to serve as a secretary to Governor Richard Blanshard, was immediately thrown into the vortex of colonial affairs. At that time the major crisis facing the executive and the Company was the situation at Fort Rupert on the island's northeastern shore where Scottish miners had struck for due cause and three deserters from the *Norman Morison* had been murdered by the Newitty of the Kwakiutl. Blanshard sent young Helmcken there as magistrate. This self-admitted greenhorn did his best to control the seething feelings within the fort and to prevent conflict with the Indians without, but in the end resigned from his office because of conflict of interest with the Hudson's Bay Company thereby leaving Blanshard, the Royal Navy, Company officers and the Newitty to resolve "this miserable affair," as Helmcken called it. The surgeon magistrate's definitive account of the Fort Rupert troubles, first printed in the *Victoria Colonist* in 1890, is published in full here in the appendix. This makes available the most important memoir of this significant event on that distant frontier.

Helmcken found Fort Victoria much more to his liking. The men and women of that colonial society he found enjoyable, and he developed an extensive medical practice in the Company's employ. He knew all the

notables of the place including, of course, Blanchard's successor as governor, James Douglas, his father-in-law, to whom he had to provide two testimonials of good character before he could marry Cecilia Douglas. The governor gave Helmcken an acre of land on which was built a small log house. (Later this structure was covered with clapboard siding and today Helmcken House, an excellent museum, stands on its original site near the Provincial Archives.)

Thenceforth the narrative describes the difficulties and development of the infant colony: the problems and politics of colonization, the crisis facing Victoria at the time of the Fraser River gold rush, the difficulties over San Juan Island, the divisiveness among Americans during the Civil War, the problem as to whether the island and mainland colonies should be united and if so where the capital should be, and so on. During much of this time Helmcken was Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Vancouver Island. The climax of the book is clearly the debate over British Columbia's *union* (the then current term) with Canada and the delegation to Ottawa of which Helmcken was, almost against his wishes, a member. A long-time opponent of Confederation, in the end he was won to the cause mainly because he thought population and finances from and communications with "the East" would provide stability and opportunity for British Columbia. An opponent of responsible government, he nonetheless was significant, along with Dr. R. W. W. Carrall and Joseph Trutch, his fellow delegates, in bringing about a transcontinental scheme which he had thought impossible. His diary of the Confederation negotiations, previously published and edited by Willard Ireland, is conveniently printed as an appendix.

Helmcken was a colonial. An unusual Victorian boyhood behind him, he set off to see the world. Like so many others he found a new home and contributed to its health, politics and prosperity. He was frequently at the centre of things — at Fort Rupert, in Victoria, during the debate over the colonial capital, and in the negotiations with Ottawa. That he left such an excellent account of his youth and early years is significant in itself; but that it should have reached print in such a splendid form is a matter of great moment for the study and enjoyment of British Columbia history in colonial times.