

sarily subjective — I myself find the public Pattullo far more engaging a man than the public Bennett, for example — there may perhaps be some objective evidence as well. W. J. (Bill) Asselstine, who served in Pattullo's (and Hart's) cabinets and later sat as a Social Crediter during part of W. A. C. Bennett's premiership, once explained to me that, in his opinion, the two men shared a similar imaginative vision for transforming the provincial economy and the important role that public works should play in that process. The difference between them, Asselstine concluded, was that post-war prosperity provided Bennett with substantial means by which he might implement the vision. If having a vision together with the political will, the financial means, and the public support necessary to put it into place are measures of "significance," then Bennett must take first place and a Pattullo a respectable second.

Such concerns do not obscure the substantial merits of *Duff Pattullo of British Columbia*. Robin Fisher has provided us with a detailed, insightful, well-written and well-illustrated account of the life of an important Canadian. All can read it with pleasure, while those much in need of a more balanced perspective on the concerns of the "west beyond the west" can read it with both pleasure and profit.

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Sherwood Lett: His Life and Times, by Reginald H. Roy. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Alumni Association; distributed by University of British Columbia Press. xvi, 180 pp. Illus. \$29.95 cloth.

Well-meaning efforts to write the life of a worthy man do not always make a good biography. The way to this one was paved with good intentions: a widow who wished her brave husband to be remembered, and offered papers, memories, and money to effect it. Perhaps it can be said that men and women can only be what is in the archives they leave behind them, either their own or those of others. In the absence of bibliographical information (other than end-notes), the archives for a life of Sherwood Lett would seem to be a diary he kept from 1915 to 1922, a fair run of letters to his wife Evelyn, and some few other papers. It is possible that the author has done the best he could from what he had available.

A good biography was not made any easier by Sherwood Lett's own writing, the major source, which is prosy and surprisingly naive. Lett was B.C. Rhodes Scholar in November 1919; but despite two years at Oxford,

his writing lacks intellectual vigour, humour, or wit. Even his letters to his wife are flat; though some of the incidents Lett recounts from the First or Second World Wars, or from Saigon, are remarkable, the eyes and mind through which they are seen and recorded seem incapable of rendering them memorably. They all appear to have the same absence of colour and vivacity. Perhaps, indeed, courageous men don't write brave prose; rather they may have a Stoic cast of manner and thought. A sensitive poet might well be overwhelmed by a desperate fight when the Gatling's jammed and the Colonel's dead. One thinks of the bluff, decent, hearty, shallow Rev. James Morell in Shaw's *Candida*, and of the rival for his wife Candida's affections, the poet Eugene Marchbanks, sensitive, shrinking, shy, and perceptible. Rare indeed are soldier-poets, good at both!

If this be so, then the more weight falls upon the author to make something of the man whose pedestrian prose conceals rather than illuminates a brave soldier. Unfortunately, the author was too faithful to his sources; what he cites from Lett's diaries and letters is of course real; what he fails to do is to lift the citations out of the monotony from which they came, and put in the real landscape, explain their context and conflicts, envelop the sources with a range of information that explains them — and justifies this book.

Nor is there enough comment on Lett himself, of criticism, of analysis. One closes the book without much insight into the sort of man Lett really was other than being friendly, brave, well liked, a devoted husband, and well thought of by higher-ups in Ottawa. One does not even know much of his role as Chief Justice on the Supreme Court of British Columbia, which he was from 1955 until his death in 1964. The B.C. Electric case is analyzed, but there is nothing about his other decisions, or his dissents. How far did his fellow judges agree with him? What were his decisions in other civil cases? In criminal cases?

Lett survived the Western Front in the First World War, Dieppe and Normandy in the Second, but he does not survive very well here. One wishes it were otherwise. The sources were a light that failed, and the author, too faithful by half, could not sufficiently dispel the darkness.