

BOOK REVIEWS

Sir James Douglas and British Columbia. By WALTER N. SAGE.
(Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1930. Pp. 308.)

This study of the life and times of Sir James Douglas, which is a thesis for a doctorate, is the first attempt to deal with him as a man rather than an administrator. It is proverbially difficult to separate the man from the official. The earlier lives and sketches of Douglas's career have buried the man under his work—have treated him merely as a peg on which to hang forty years of Pacific Coast history.

Our author settles definitely the date and place of Douglas's birth as being June 5, 1803, in Lanarkshire, Scotland, and not, as has been frequently stated, August 14, 1803 in either British Guiana or Jamaica. He shows us the little Douglas attending school in Lanark, and, later, as a boy in his teens sailing for Canada to enter the service of the North West Company.

There is a great paucity of biographical material for the first sixteen years (1819-1835) of Douglas's life in *les pays d'en haut*. All that can at present be found has been carefully sought out, brought together, and pieced out with tradition or family report, gathered from the lips of his descendants. It is doubtful if the information given by Dr. Sage or his conclusions thereon will ever be materially altered or supplemented, unless contemporary records of the two companies or letters of his early associates come to light—a possibility of annually diminishing probability. In these circumstances Dr. Sage has followed the justifiable—in fact, the only—course, of indicating what was the condition as shown by the journals of other fur-traders, and what, in consequence were probably Douglas's surroundings, occupations, and interests. If any criticism can be made of this section it is that sometimes our author has yielded to the temptation of travelling rather far afield.

Dr. Sage points out the natural division of Douglas's life into quinquennial periods: 1820-1825, at Isle a la Crosse; 1825-1830, in New Caledonia; 1830-1835, on the Columbia as a subordinate; 1835-1840 and 1840-1845, in the same region, first as Chief Trader and, later, as Chief Factor with Dr. McLoughlin. His rise in the service, it is clearly shown, was due to his own abilities and not to his being the son-in-law of Chief Factor William Connolly. He had early learned that "obedience is the bond of rule." In this connection we

catch a glimpse, through some extracts from his letters, of the way in which he carried his principles into the service: always demanding what he, himself had always given—implicit, immediate, complete, and unquestioning obedience and proper respect to superiors.

Then our author gives us a fine picture of the two giants of the Columbia—McLoughlin and Douglas—markedly different both in nature and in disposition, yet mutually supplementary. Even at this time it is only now and again that anything can be seen of the real Douglas—the man, Douglas. Visitors to Fort Vancouver fill their diaries and letters with descriptions of the Great White Eagle, but of the stalwart Scot, his nominal first lieutenant but in reality his equal, they leave us but brief mention. Our author makes it eminently clear that, as the years went by and McLoughlin's quarrel with Sir George Simpson became more bitter, and his troubles with the settlers grew more acrimonious, McLoughlin learned to consult with Douglas, to rely upon, and to be guided by his cool comprehensive judgment. In this period we see Douglas trying his 'prentice hand at diplomacy, arranging the terms of trade with Alvarado, and coquetting with the possibility of taking up his residence in California, then a part of Mexico. We see him, too, steering a careful course in relation to the Provisional Government of Oregon, and effecting an understanding with that body, as the best means of protecting the interests of the Hudson's Bay Company.

After the resignation of Dr. McLoughlin, Douglas becomes the actual head of the company on the Pacific Coast. On the formation of the Colony of Vancouver Island and, later, of the Colony of British Columbia he, as the man of the hour, rises to the governorship—the short regime of Blanshard in the former colony being of no real moment. In this portion, Dr. Sage has been able to add but little to our knowledge of the man, though he gives a full and accurate view of the early days of those colonies.

The work shows in each chapter meticulous search for and use of every scrap of information to be found in the letters, diaries, entries and journals of the time. In the opinion of this reviewer it must be regarded as the definitive life of Douglas, at any rate until such time as the records of the Hudson's Bay Company are made available to the public. The concise list of authorities in the appendix scarcely does justice to the great amount of material that has been examined and used. The book is well printed, free from grave typographical errors, and contains a real index.

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