

- BOOK REVIEWS -

MACKENZIE KING OF CANADA

H. Reginald Hardy

Toronto,

Oxford University Press, 1949

(390 pp.)

In November 1948 the man who had been the leader of Canada's Liberal Party for twenty nine years, and her Prime Minister for more than twenty-one of them resigned from office. So ended what has often been called "The Reign of MacKenzie King."

During this time William Lyon MacKenzie King dominated both his party and the Canadian political scene. He not only witnessed, but played an important part in, the country's attainment of nationhood, unparalleled expansion on all sides, and assumption of self-direction in matters of defence and external affairs. It was a period which saw the prosperity of the twenties on whose heels followed the worst depression in history, followed by World War Two, and its immediate and uncertain aftermath. Can it be said that through these years anyone exercised a greater influence on Canada's development than Mr. King did, or that his life and work are not worthy of detailed and critical examination?

Herein lies the reason for the book. It is, as the author states, "a very simple one. Here was a great story waiting to be told."

To his task H. Reginald Hardy brings the experience gained in over twenty eight years as a newspaper man and free lance writer. From the vantage point of the Parliamentary Press Gallery, of which he is currently the president, he has been an eye witness of MacKenzie King's public career. He knows Mr. King personally, has interviewed him frequently, and has watched him in action both on the floor of the House of Commons and on tours across Canada. Mr. Hardy won, in 1939 and again in 1941, the Ottawa Press Club annual award for outstanding news stories.

Mr. Hardy offers this biography "not", as he says in the foreward, "as a studied and detailed critique of a particular era. It is intended essentially as the life story of a great Canadian, of one who

has played a unique role, as civil servant, politician and statesman in the development of the Dominion . . . presented against the background of an unusually vital and important period in the country's political history." The author tells us that he is a sincere admirer of Mr. King's, and in attempting to present both sides of the story, he has perhaps, in his desire "to attain complete objectivity . . . tended to over accentuate the less imposing side of the medal."

Hardy has given us a portrait of the man and personality in this book. To many is revealed for the first time the mischievous and playful, yet serious minded and studious, youth of Berlin, now Kitchener, Ontario, whose lawyer father and cultured mother, the daughter of the great Canadian rebel, William Lyon MacKenzie, passed on to him their intense political inclinations. In the political and intellectual atmosphere of the King home young Billie King received instructions in the field of political history while still in grade school.

As a college student at the University of Toronto, he spent his Sunday afternoons telling stories to the patients at the Sick Children's Hospital, training himself to think and speak on his feet. Hardy tells us of Mr. King, the student of social work, who lived among the poor in the slums of Chicago in order to gain an insight into their unhappy lot. It gave him a first class background for his book **INDUSTRY AND HUMANITY**. All his training was to stand him in good stead in later years.

In Chapter Three, entitled **A CALL TO OTTAWA**. Mr. King makes his choice and enters the civil service as the first editor of the **LABOUR GAZETTE**. The other chapters in the first of the three sections in the book discuss his career till the eve of World War Two. The last chapter of this section discusses "The King Legend", and in so doing sheds some light on his character. He always sought to draw a line of demarcation between what he considered to be public affairs and his own personal affairs, and because of this a legend sprung up about him.

At the outbreak of war in 1939 Mr. King was approaching his sixty-fifth birthday. Of his leadership during the first war waged by Canada, the nation, the author treats in the second part of the book. By far the most important issue faced by the government during the war was that of conscription. In the chapter entitled **THE ISSUE FACED** the author discusses it from the viewpoint of "national unity", the preservation and furthering of which was

always the chief aim throughout Mr. King's career. He shows that Mr. King's early experience in conciliation of labour disputes stood him in good stead on this occasion. Hardy states that "the successful handling of a situation fraught with the gravest consequences must ever stand as the crowning achievement of King's career."

In addition to discussing his post war leadership and problems, beginning with the Russian spy probe, the final section of the book throws more light on Mr. King, the man. Such chapters as **BILLIE KING GOES HOME, THE KILBASCO LETTERS,** and **MR. KING AT HOME** do much to give us an insight into the truly remarkable personality of Mr. King.

An evaluation of the book is difficult, for, in the first place, it seems reasonable to state that it will be some time before the place of its subject in history will be determined. It cannot be said that Mr. Hardy has written a critical biography of Mr. King, nor has he dealt with him in a manner which has achieved "complete objectivity." Commenting on this point, **TIME** Magazine makes the following observation. "Instead of a critical biography with an objective and historical appraisal of the former Prime Minister, the book is a sort of extended eulogy guaranteed to please King and the admirers who voted him into office again and again." It belongs "on the same shelf with all the other disappointing attempts by Canadian writers to produce biographies of their country's statesmen."

Yet the book is valuable, because it does reveal, in a fairly interesting way, so much about Mr. King that has hitherto been largely a matter of conjecture, and because it is an honest attempt to shed light on this great man. Someday a first class biography of Mr. King and Canada's other great leaders may appear.

—ARTHUR F. McINNIS '50

THE GREATEST STORY EVER TOLD

Fulton Oursler

New York, Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1949 (299 pp.)

The Greatest Story Ever Told is a story of the greatest life ever lived—the life of Christ. It is a chronology of events from the time of Mary's betrothal to Joseph until the time of the Ascension. The story is written in simple language, and is made easy to read by the interesting and imaginative dialogue used by the author. Although much of the dialogue is the author's own version of what is contained between the lines of the gospels, yet it all seems to be

reasonably chosen in view of what has been recorded by early writers in the Church. The episodes and what there is of the original dialogue has been adapted almost entirely from the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Although the author of this book is a Catholic, he does not seem to give a truly Catholic interpretation of the life of Christ. The life of Christ is presented objectively, with no attempt being made to clarify or explain any of Christ's teachings. Any events of a controversial nature, and any statement that might cause controversy, are carefully omitted. For instance, the ending of the Lord's Prayer, one small point of difference on the part of Catholics and non-Catholics, reads thus, according to the author; "... and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil..." One would expect a Catholic to append "Amen". By refraining from writing a completely Catholic version of the life of Christ, the author received for his book the approval of a committee of Catholic Priests, Protestant Ministers, and Jewish Rabbis. A life of Christ that is acceptable to groups differing so greatly in principle cannot contain too much relating to principle. For the Catholic, the book is of interest chiefly from a historical point of view.

Aside from the weaknesses mentioned above, the book gives an interesting and accurate account of the activities of Christ. It begins with the events leading up to His birth; the story of Joseph of Nazareth; his meeting with and betrothal to Mary, the daughter of Anna and Joachim; the Miraculous Conception; the marriage of Joseph and Mary. The book gives an imaginative history of Jesus' days in Nazareth before he left His mother to preach to the world. It faithfully relates the activities of Christ in the world, the miracles He worked, His founding of His Church on earth. The story concludes with an account of the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, and the Ascension of Jesus into Heaven.

It is difficult to see how an objective account of the life of Christ can be of sufficient value to the Catholic to make it worthwhile for him to read this book, especially when there are so many other truly Catholic treatments of the same theme. Among the more note-worthy of these are the Jesuit Father Goodier's **Public Life of Christ**, Father F. J. Meuller's, **Christ**, or probably a better book by the same author for us to begin with is, **The Human Christ**, and the excellent treatise by Rev. Giuseppe Ricciotti, **The Life of Christ**. There are many, many others, but these, I am sure, will hold your attention as well as **The Greatest Story Ever Told**, and will give you much more for your trouble.

—FRED COYLE '51