

obsolete. Fertile imaginations and patient industry, especially among the most inventive, perceptive and literate of Canada's younger historians will soon ensure that both Gagan's and Katz's work, like the first Royal Navy Dreadnaughts, are themselves soon outdated. It is part of the excitement of current historical writing in Canada.

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D. J. HALL. — *Clifford Sifton. Volume I, The Young Napoleon, 1861-1900.* Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1981. Pp. xii, 361.

It is both a strength and frustration of a good historian that he can only write as much about the past as the evidence before him permits. Unlike the creative writer he cannot try to re-create events or circumstances for which he has no reliable evidence. As a result, historical writing tends to be rather uneven in its coverage of the past. Those who created and kept extensive documentary evidence get much more adequate treatment at the hands of the historians than those for whom little documentary evidence exists, and within documentary collections themselves, some aspects of the past are much more fully covered than others. Indeed some very important things may not be mentioned at all in the surviving documentary materials available to the historian. Such is certainly the case with the surviving documentation relating to the life of Sir Clifford Sifton. Professor Hall informs us that when the Sifton papers were deposited in the Public Archives of Canada they had been stripped of all personal and most business correspondence. Clearly this creates serious problems for the historian and biographer, and for his readers, particularly for those readers interested in social history and therefore the personal and business affairs of men like Clifford Sifton.

Professor Hall has written his biography in the only way open to an honest and competent historian. He has discussed those aspects of Sifton's life for which documentation exists, and he remains silent where the evidence is lacking or inadequate. He acknowledges in his preface that his work is of necessity a political biography. One might quibble about the fact that the exact nature of the work should be more clearly indicated in the title as well as in the preface. But the subtitle Professor Hall has chosen clearly refers only to a political reality of Sifton's career.

As a political biography this work has many admirable features and makes important contributions to our understanding of the political history of Western Canada. Professor Hall has meticulously gathered relevant evidence from many collections to provide an excellent and convincing account of Sifton's rather devious methods in acquiring the Manitoba Free Press. Similarly Sifton's role in the highly controversial Manitoba school question, his work in reorganizing the department of the Interior, his organization of the government of the Yukon Territory and of the Liberal Party in Western Canada, are discussed in authoritative detail. No radically new and different interpretations are offered, with the possible exception of the Manitoba Grain Act which Professor Hall has already discussed elsewhere, but a great deal of new and sometimes surprising detail is added. On

all these issues the book makes important contributions towards a better understanding of what actually happened.

The subtitle, "The Young Napoleon", was bestowed on Sifton after the electoral campaign of 1899 in Manitoba and the federal campaign of 1900. This was a not altogether flattering recognition of the fact that Sifton had put together an effective political organization (his critics denounced it as a corrupt political machine) which had won important political victories. This, however, raises several basic questions. In adopting this sobriquet as the subtitle of his book Professor Hall seems to be suggesting that political organization, machine politics, and political combat are the most important aspects of Sifton's early career. That certainly is a continuing theme throughout the volume, but is that really the core of Sifton's well-known and monumental ambition? Did he not have a more coherent and long-term ideal than the winning of elections? Napoleon had some very ambitious long-term objectives for his country and for Europe. Did Sifton entertain higher ideals for his country than those of a political street fighter? If so they need to be defined more clearly and convincingly. On the basis of the information Dr Hall presents the essence or *leitmotif* of Sifton's career remains elusive. The Young Napoleon does not completely capture the spirit, the dynamism and the larger aspirations of the man.

The logistics of political warfare, despite much of the detailed information provided, also remain remarkably murky. In particular the whole subject of Western Canadian party finances is treated in only vague descriptions, doubtless because more specific and detailed information is no longer available. The sources of Sifton's own wealth, his financial relations with the party, and the relations with other contributors to the party war-chest are not and probably cannot be determined. This, nevertheless, leaves open a whole host of questions, particularly with regard to motivation and influence. Many a general has won battles because of his supply lines and logistics rather than his brilliant battlefield manoeuvres. It is difficult to avoid the suspicion that this may have been the case in Sifton's political battles, although it is the battlefield manoeuvres which get most of the attention.

It is probably unfair to dwell on matters Dr Hall did not do and, because of the lack of reliable evidence, could not do in this biography. He has certainly done an admirable job in using the extensive documentation available to him to write an authoritative and interesting biography. The work done is excellent, and yet it is apt to leave the reader with nagging doubts and questions. That, however, is where the responsible historian must leave the matter unless some hitherto undiscovered evidence is found and provides new information and new insights.

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