

Canadian science to move towards becoming the unique force referred to in the editors' preface.

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HUGH A. DEMPSEY, ed. — *The Best of Bob Edwards*. Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1975.

Bob Edwards merited rescue. For too long he has been regarded only as a teller of bawdy stories and an amusing alcoholic. Though the citizens of Calgary saw fit to name a school after him, I suspect that this reputation — not his lucid prose, not his crusades for social justice — won him the singular honour. The book is thus a rehabilitative undertaking, something Edwards himself would have appreciated. Like any collection of six hundred quotable items from a storyteller's repertoire, Dempsey's volume is not likely to be read from beginning to end, but it does provide entertaining browsing and, with the editor's excellent biographical sketch, will help to make a new image for Eye-opener Bob.

Although I enjoyed the book, Dempsey's editorial decisions left me with one complaint. The selections are organized by topic — the fair sex, politics, religion, the famous Mr. McGonigle, show business — and, within these categories, apparently by balance and rhythm. Inevitably a matter of personal preference, the latter decisions raise problems. The quotations are identified only by number in the text; the date of the newspaper issue, unaccompanied by an explanatory note on the circumstances, appears at the back of the book. Nowhere is chronological order deemed appropriate nor is an index provided. Thus, the evolution of Edward's opinions on such topics as prohibition can be reconstructed only with difficulty. Statements which might be seen to advantage within the context of a particular election campaign or reform crusade are not so placed.

The choice of topics for inclusion is, again, partly a matter of personal preference. The editor has included many references to superficially "popular" issues like relations between the sexes and political corruption. In my opinion he might have devoted more space to some of the specific political issues about which Edwards wrote. He was a strong defender of Alberta interests, for example, and, like present-day boosters, campaigned for changes in national economic policy and especially on behalf of secondary manufacturing in the West. His attitude to the World War was most interesting because he defended the "little guy" in the trenches in the early months, was sympathetic to labour opponents of registration in late 1916, but by 1918 strongly supported the war effort and opposed the admission to Canada of Mennonites who would not fight to defend the nation.

By his editorial decisions, then, Dempsey has given us less than the whole of Edwards' concerns, and has provided a book more suited to the needs of students of literature than students of social thought. Edwards is depicted as an independent Conservative, a problem drinker, a crusader for honesty in public life, a defender of the "ordinary Joe," and one who found the opposite sex inexplicable but fascinating. His stand on specific public issues, it is implied, was less important. I suggest that, though Edwards never enjoyed the political influence of a Dafoe or a Bourassa, his writing belongs to the campaigns and excitements of that era. Moreover, his prose was no less sprightly when the topic was some weighty issue like freight rates or tariffs.

Despite this one complaint, which merely illustrates the reviewer's bias, the volume is a valuable addition to the library of prairie literature. Edwards writes with originality, wit, and style. Though the corpus of his work, (he would enjoy that idea), is too small and fragmented to place him on the level of Haliburton or Leacock, his humour and satire deserve to be discussed in that context.

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RICHARD ARTHUR PRESTON, ed. — *For Friends at Home. A Scottish Emigrant's Letters from Canada, California and the Cariboo, 1844-1864.* Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1974.

For Friends at Home is a highly valuable collection of letters. Its value stems mainly from the personal characteristics of the principal author of the letters, James Thomson. Thomson, a young Scottish baker who emigrated to Canada in 1844, was both sensible and curious. He also had a passion for factual information and a talent for conveying it correctly to others. As a result his letters are a social historian's (and in places even a quantitative historian's) delight. Unlike most letter writers who take the ordinary details of life for granted, Thomson gives us the facts. One of his first letters analyses the occupational composition of his fellow passengers bound for Quebec. In addition to the majority who were farmers and farm labourers there were "four of five blacksmiths, three bakers, half a dozen wrights and joiners and a tailor... We also had two fiddlers and a poet". He recorded, always in exact terms, his wages, the cost of his board and his laundry bill, and the amount he could save in the circumstances. He told friends at home the various steam boat fares between Quebec and Hamilton, the price of flour, the number of square yards of rock and clay to be taken out of a section of the St. Laurence canal, the height and number of poles per mile on the new Montreal-Toronto telegraph, the precise size of the newly subdivided building lots in embryo Cardinal, Ontario. He explained at length the passenger regulations on an immigrant ship in the year 1853. There is much, much more not only about life in Upper Canada but also about Chicago and the California and Cariboo gold fields, where Thomson also worked for varying periods of time.

And he noticed things. In Montreal in 1844 he was struck by "the want of tall chimneys there being no factories here. Instead of manufacturers we have importers." He noted too a lack of distinction in dress among the urban "classes" of Montreal though he found the country people easily identifiable by their "uniform" homemade clothes. In 1846 he told his Scottish relatives of an outbreak in Upper Canada of the Irish potato blight and that many of the Irish labourers employed on the canals spoke no English at all. This list of insightful observations also could be extended a long way.

The volume has been capably edited by Professor Preston. His introduction is helpful, filling in most of the background and family gaps that the letters themselves do not. There are almost enough footnotes. There is however, one central interpretative section of his introduction with which it is difficult to agree. He sees Thomson's letters as a rare example of the writings of a "literate" member of "the lower order" and sees Thomson's life as "the making of a typical Canadian." But Thomson began not as a labourer from the "lower order" but as a skilled tradesman, who had some means when he arrived. Did a typical Canadian go off to the California gold rush and amass enough wealth to take a holiday in