

by the motor-car or the truck, let alone the aeroplane; an age when most decent people in English-speaking Canada were coming to look on alcohol as a danger rather than a god; an age in which freedom, across the whole world, seemed to be slowly broadening down from precedent to precedent, and when the march of "progress" and "civilization" seemed to be irresistible and destined to go on forever. This is the age Mr. Diefenbaker re-creates for us in his first 125 pages.

### Inimitable Diefenbaker

Even these pages are liberally (I hope Mr. Diefenbaker will forgive the adverb!) sprinkled with shrewd judgments of public men of those and later years, and the inimitable Diefenbaker jokes and the rich store of Diefenbaker stories. Many of these some readers will have heard before but, for me at least, they never pall; and to have them in print means not only that later generations will be able to share in the fun we have enjoyed but, what is more important, will have a better understanding of Mr. Diefenbaker's political successes and his abiding popularity.

With Chapter 8, the pace quickens. The tale of the Saskatchewan Liberal machine is a lurid one. Of course Mr. Diefenbaker is not an impartial witness, but there is plenty of evidence from other sources, including academic, to substantiate most of what he says; and, judging by what he has recounted to me in conversation, "the half hath not been told". One story that does appear here — of the planting of bootleg liquor in Mr. Diefenbaker's car during the 1926 election — comes in a very brief and expurgated version. The version I have heard in conversation was enough to cause "each particular hair to stand on end like quills upon the fretful porpentine". Another yarn of this period, less political, which I have heard in great and lively detail, and whose substance cannot be doubted, does not get into the book at all.

### Constitutional crisis

For me, perhaps I need hardly say, one of the most interesting parts of this book

---

*Senator Forsey is recognized as the leading authority on the Canadian Constitution. He is a specialist on labour questions and has been a member of the Senate of Canada since 1970. Senator Forsey reviewed the third volume of the Pearson Memoirs in the November/December 1975 issue of International Perspectives. The views expressed are those of the author.*

is the account of the 1926 constitutional crisis. It is brief and devastating. But the statement that Mr. King, on his resignation, "refused to debate the issue" of Lord Byng's refusal of dissolution is rather a summary. He certainly did not say much about it in the House; what he did say was, characteristically, not unambiguous and perhaps hardly deserved to be called "debate". But he certainly said plenty of the hustings, in speeches that Mr. Diefenbaker sums up in terse, nervous English.

All Mr. Meighen's lieutenants, Mr. Diefenbaker says, were against his taking office. Presumably he got this from the men themselves, and I have no reason to doubt its accuracy. He also says that Meighen took office on the advice of "an Ottawa publicist, whose influence over him was greater than the combined experience and knowledge of the Conservative front benchers of the day". Who this may have been I do not know. I can think of two possibilities. But, from what Meighen told me, the decisive factors were two: the opinion of Sir Robert Borden, and his and Borden's conviction that no other course would be consistent with honour and duty. Even the present Government, in 1969 explicitly said that the Governor General's power to refuse a dissolution of Parliament existed, and should continue to exist. Lord Byng had used that power, "rightly and properly", as Mr. Diefenbaker says, to protect the Constitution, as Lord Aberdeen had used another "reserve" power in 1896. Had Meighen refused to take office the Governor's power to protect the rights of Parliament would have been disastrously, perhaps fatally, weakened. To refuse office would have been a dereliction of constitutional duty. In honour and conscience, the risk of misunderstanding and defeat had to be faced. "There must," as Meighen was to say later, "be something better than an ambition to be re-elected, or democracy will fall, even in this Dominion."

Besides, it is sometimes overlooked that there was good reason to believe that Meighen could secure the confidence of the House of Commons; he won four decisive votes there after he took office, and was defeated only by a broken pair, on a motion based on two propositions, mutually contradictory, and both demonstrably false. Who in the world could have predicted such a concatenation of circumstances?

Mr. Diefenbaker says that Meighen "treated King's synthetic arguments" (the central one he correctly calls a "transparent falsehood") "with contempt, refusing even to mention them". He did

*Lurid tale  
of Saskatchewan  
Liberal machine*