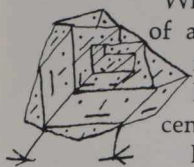


THE FAR SIDE OF THE STREET. Bruce Hutchison. Macmillan of Canada, 1976.



Why should you read these memoirs of a provincial Canadian newspaperman? Because they are an excellent group portrait of twentieth-century, English-speaking Canadians.

Mr. Hutchison writes with warm detachment of people and places, great and small. He is modest—an attribute as rare among newsmen as among politicians—and was a clear-eyed observer of many historic occasions.

His modesty is of first importance. Press men frequently exaggerate the significance of events and officeholders, since their own glory is a reflected light. Who could boast of intimacy with the dullest minds in Parliament? If Mr. Hutchison boasts at all, it is softly in the least self-assertive way, and he is always courteous. Only once does he let his distaste shine through, and then he does not name its object: "I spent what should have been a peaceful Sunday . . . listening to a peculiarly noxious fellow who laughed with contempt at Canada for playing at war."

Does this mean that he ignores the shortcomings, limitations, illusions, follies and con-

fusions of the mighty? No, not at all. Since he deflates his own accomplishments, he can be realistic in recounting those of others.

There are candid and intriguing pictures of prime ministers—Lester Pearson, John Diefenbaker, Mackenzie King, Pierre Trudeau; of heads and chiefs of state—FDR, Harry Truman, Queen Elizabeth, John Kennedy; and of the less celebrated, mostly Canadian, who are often as interesting as the renowned—the small-town people in British Columbia, newsmen in Winnipeg, politicians in Ottawa, wives and husbands in the prairies, rich men and poor men in the east, wise and foolish people coast to coast.

The great virtue of Mr. Hutchison's book is that it gives the reader a Brueghel-like picture of Canada in the twentieth century—crowded with small-scale, finely-drawn, brightly-coloured people, at work and play against a vivid, homey, cluttered background. This is not, probably, his primary intention, but he does it beautifully; and in doing so he defines the English-speaking Canadian with a definition as long as the book.

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*"Quebec is still small enough, and the Québécois still enough of a family, for the patriot to love all of it, to create sentimental songs about it, and to make emotional political speeches about it. It's very personal."* — PETER DESBARATS.

RENE: *A Canadian in Search of a Country*. Peter Desbarats. McClelland and Stewart, 1976.

RENE LEVESQUE: *Portrait of a Québécois*. Jean Provencher, translated by David Ellis. Gage Publishing Limited, 1975.

René Lévesque is Quebec's recently elected premier and the founder of the Parti Québécois—the political force dedicated to the peaceful separation of Quebec from the rest of Canada. Like Bruce Hutchison, Lévesque is a Canadian newsman past the first flush of youth, a kind of patriot and a kind of idealist. Like Hutchison, he is also an extraordinarily typical man. Otherwise they are not the least bit alike.

There are two essential kinds of newspeople. Hutchison is of the type born curious but detached.

There is a true story about another newspaperman who approached a friend one day, his face white with indignation. He had been on a

bus, when an old, obviously poor woman got on. She had only a nickel, and the fare was seven cents. "Not a single person on that bus stepped up and gave her two cents," he said. Asked why he hadn't done it himself, he was totally taken aback. By nature and profession, he had become the firmly detached observer. It did not occur to him that he was, as much as the others, one of the people on the bus.

René Lévesque is of the other kind, who is inevitably involved in the events he is reporting. Established as French Canada's most popular and influential television news commentator, he became, abruptly, a Liberal party minister and a policy shaper.

