

Mount Allison University

Book Report

Donald Creighton
Canada's First Century

Submitted to:

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By

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Donald Creighton's book, *Canada's First Century*, is an informative glimpse at Canada's first one hundred years as a nation. He discusses the political and economical events that had occurred both within Canada itself and international events that effected the nation. The book causes you wonder if Canada's first century will in fact be its last.

Creighton was educated at the University of Toronto and at Oxford. He would eventually return to the University of Toronto where he taught in the History Department. He has completed several works in Canadian History including; *The Empire of the St. Lawrence*, *Dominion of the North*, the award-winning, two volume biography on John A. Macdonald (which captured a Governor General's Award for each volume), *The Story of Canada*, and *The Road to Confederation*. Creighton has received numerous award for his work. He has earned three internationally renowned fellowships; a Guggenheim, a Rockefeller, and a Nuffield. He has accepted eight honorary degrees and other awards including the first Molson Prize from the Canadian Council. He has also received the Tyrrell Medal for Historical Research of the Royal Society of Canada and was made a Companion of the Order of Canada.

Creighton begins with a description of Ottawa, the capital of the new Dominion of Canada, in 1867, "A small, northern frontier town, set at the edge of a vast expanse of territory that still awaited occupation and development, it was in many respects a miniature of the new nation as a whole."(pg. 1) A new country rising up from a group of British colonies, a chain of small communities spreading from the Nova Scotia into Ontario, waiting to expand into a huge nation from sea to sea. Ottawa is described as being much like Canada, a community in its infancy, situated at the edge of the wilderness. Creighton in the first few pages of his book gives the reader the aura of a new beginning. A new nation, separate from long-time British influence and with the ability to make it's own mistakes. Creighton included three sections in the book of photographs and political cartoons from throughout the century. These added greatly to the book giving faces to go with the names of the political leaders and showing us how the public felt with the political cartoons. The first of these describes the beginning of the nation in a cartoonist's interpretation entitled, "Child Canada Takes Her First Steps". The cartoon is that of Mother Britannia and Uncle Sam watching a child with a rifle. Mother Britannia say, "Take care my child!" While Uncle Sam responds by saying, "Oh! Never mind, if she falls I'll catch her!"(first photo section between pp. 68 and 69) Canada was formed for many reasons, and this cartoon gives us two of them. Britain realized that it was losing money in the British North American colonies and getting them to united as a nation with responsibility for such things as defense being their own. The United States of America also had a hand in the formation of Canada. Their influence has been strong in Canada since pre-confederation. The government to the south was trying to stake claims to the western part of the territory and Canada had to race to bring this land into the union to save it from the Americans.

Several times, he discusses the Americans to the south and their influences in the country. The United States, in Creighton's opinion, forced Canada into the role as a secondary nation in the North American realm with the investments that they made in the 'Great White North'. "This huge investment of American funds was the final and conclusive sign of Canada's increasing subordination in a North American empire".(pg.285) Creighton attempts to express the notion that the Americans have slowly been taking control of the country and it will only be a short time

before the Americans take total control of the economy of Canada.

Prime Minister William Lyon MacKenzie King "was essentially a North American, rather than a Canadian, citizen."(pg.182) He spent most of his life in the United States before he assumed the office of Prime Minister of Canada. He was educated at the University of Chicago and Harvard and then worked in labour relations for the Rockefeller Corporation. Due to the time that he spent in the United States he was more absorbed in American political issues. King, however, became one of Canada's greatest Prime Ministers. He was one of the key elements in "independent sovereignty"(pg.276) for Canada. King, along with Louis St. Laurent "both wanted a Canadian Governor General, a distinctive Canadian Flag, and a separate Canadian citizenship."(pg.276) King's views of Canada were almost of a northern America, he envisioned a nation completely separate from Great Britain. A country that stood independent from any outside administration, with the national government possessing complete control over Canadian issues. Creighton tells us that the United States wanted to control the North American continent. They want to have claim to the north and had to have Canada for this. Is this Canada first major step to becoming a part of the United States?

The railways were an important part of Canada from confederation up until recent years when they have fallen to the transportation and communication developments of present day. Creighton holds the railway as a constant theme throughout the book. The political controversy and scandal that was involved in the railways' construction and maintenance were intriguing. Sir Hugh Allan, a businessman involved in trans-atlantic shipping, started the Canadian Pacific Railway Company. "He contributed lavishly to the Conservative campaign fund in the general election of 1872, in the vain hope of gaining special favours." (pg. 31) This was a huge blow to the Conservatives and John A. MacDonald's career nearly ended as the Liberals took office.

Canada's First Century was skillfully written and gave the reader an incomparable view of the history of this dominion. The book was a very informative view of a period of one hundred years of history and did not get absorbing in any one specific area. Creighton covered the first century of Canadian history without leaving out any important events and still managed to complete the book within 400 pages. The book, as mentioned above, included three sections of photographs and cartoons which gave the reader a visual element to the information that it accompanied. These graphics covered a wide verity of people and events. They were well chosen and gave a refreshing insight into the views of the public with a significant amount of political cartoons. Creighton generated an outstanding publication that was not only educating but also captivating as it took the reader on a journey through Canadian History.

Creighton takes us through the first century of the country giving us a view of the problems that we faced, and there were many problems that opposed the people of early Canadian History. Canada survived each one and moved on, from two World Wars in which Canada played major roles and through internal struggles like the constant problems in Quebec with their culture and language believed to be in danger. He depicts every struggle and success the country achieved from induction into the League of Nations after the First World War and the economical disaster that was a world-wide problem with the crash of the stock market and the Great Depression. Creighton's book was an insight into the glory years of Canada, the years when we worked

together to solve our problems, unlike today's divisions in the political and the social spheres of the country.

Canada has struggled desperately through its first one hundred years and what will happen in the next century. Will this great nation collapse or will we become stronger? Will Quebec leave the federation? Will Canada become a part of the giant to the south, the United States of America? In my opinion, we will get through our troubles and strive forward to once again recapture the glory that Canada once possessed. However, that is one person's opinion and only time will show us what is to become of the Dominion of Canada.