

Book Reviews — Revue des Livres

RED LIGHTS ON THE PRAIRIES

By James H. Gray; (Macmillan, Toronto) 1971; xiii, 207 (including appendix and index)

This book should prove to be interesting and worthwhile to anyone who is particularly interested in the history of western Canada. It is largely a chronicle of the germination and development of whoring¹ in Winnipeg, Brandon, Regina, Moose Jaw, Saskatoon, Edmonton, Calgary, Lethbridge and Drumheller during the period beginning around 1880 and extending up to the Second World War, with particular emphasis on the period around the turn, and the early years, of this century; the book also deals with the related problem of alcohol, and to some extent with their individual and combined effects upon the social and political fabric of prairie community life. Often the reading of such a book proves profitable for the unexpected tidbits of information across which one comes; I would put into this category, inter alia, the references to the incidence rowdiness and drunkenness on the part of members of the N.W.M.P.,² Nicholas Flood Davin's feud with the N.W.M.P.³ and to the career of Joe Clarke,⁴ who is remembered today at least in the name of Edmonton's football stadium and whose career, similar to that of Dr. John Schultz of Manitoba fame, had its good and bad aspects.

In the Preface, and the opening chapter, which contain a general exposition of the subject,⁵ Mr. Gray ascribes to the "booze-Brothel" syndrome a significance with which I cannot agree:

"In many ways the twenty-five year campaign of the forces of righteousness against the forces of evil was the most exciting chapter in the history of the prairie provinces . . .⁶

The social upheaval engendered by the booze and the broads was surely of greater continuing interest to the pioneer communities than all the other issues put together. Yet historians have managed to create the illusion that the West was settled by monks, eunuchs and vestal virgins, interested only in debating such ethereal issues as free trade,⁷ the Manitoba Schools question and discriminatory freight rates"

1. On page x of the Preface the author indicates that "where" is "pronounced hoo-er always"; this may have been the case on the prairies (although I doubt that this could be so firmly established), however. The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 4th ed., and The Random House Dictionary indicate another pronunciation, namely "hore" as in "more". The author mentions on p. 14 that newspapers of the day made use of a wide variety of delicate synonyms for (to avoid using) the term "whore"; it is educational in itself to note the terms that the author himself used throughout the book, which include ladies of ill repute, women of the streets, (moon light ma) donnas, Jezebels, fallen-women, streetwalkers, harlots, doxies, inmates of houses of ill fame, members of the sisterhood, bawds, filles de joie, residents of the lupanars or of bordellos or bagnios, and lovely Nells.

2. Pp. 3-5, 65-66, and 100.

3. Pp. 64-66.

4. Chp. 5.

5. It is followed by chapters dealing with particular prairie communities and a final concluding chapter.

6. P. xi.

7. Pp. 11-12.

True enough, the historians have largely ignored the phenomenon of prostitution on the prairies; however, it seems to me that they have done so with some justification, for it was only a minor player in the orchestra, if I may use that figure of speech to describe the historical development of the prairies. This is borne out by Mr. Gray's accounts in several places throughout the book of the general apathy of the citizens towards the campaigns of the clergy and other "moral uplifters" in connection with the "social evil" of prostitution.⁸ On the other hand, the essence of the debate involved in the Manitoba Schools question was and remains today of very vital concern to many Manitobans, not to mention the government of the day.

From the technical point of view, I found the book to be journalistic in style and a trifle overloaded with clichés.⁹ As well, it could be said that the author was guilty of using technical terms very loosely at times.¹⁰ The chapters devoted to the various prairie communities become slightly tedious due to close similarity in the metamorphosis of the prostitution situation in most of them; inescapably I came to muse for a few moments as to whether it might have been possible to have written one almost universally applicable chapter. A few more photographs would have been of considerable interest, however, I suppose that this was a matter of cost in the publishing of the book.

Before I bring this review to a close, I wish to enlarge upon a topic to which Mr. Gray makes a reference in the opening chapter, namely the oft-stated comparison between the lawlessness which prevailed in the early settlement and development of the West in the United States of America and the law abiding manner in which the pioneering of the Canadian West took place.¹¹ I think that we Canadians tend to over-generalize. Typical of the statements that one finds on this subject are the following:

"Our West never went through a riotous youth; it has few memories to be forgotten. From the first, life has been held sacred and respect has been paid to the law as rigidly as in the East . . ."¹²

"The American West of the early days was the 'wild west' in a very impressive sense. The Canadian West was not."¹³

I do not suggest that the type and scale of the lawlessness in our early

8. For e.g., pp. 30-31, 36-37, 63, and 110.

9. For e.g., on p. 2, The coming of the immigrants between 1900-1915 "ushered in the bawdiest, brawlingest, drunkenest and backbreakingist era in prairie history"; on p. 34, "There, smack in the middle of nowhere . . ."; on p. 54, ". . . the civic election campaign of 1910 moved into high gear"; on p. 56, "Winnipeg, however, had beaten Judge Robson to the punch".

10. For e.g., the term "metropolises"; on p. 15, "outlaws"; on p. 21; and "posse" on p. 28.

11. Pp. 2-3. Mr. Gray and I have carried on a discussion on this topic to some extent already: see The Letters to the Editor in The Winnipeg Tribune for May 20, June 10 and July 24, 1971.

12. From an address of Sir Robert Falconer, as recorded by G. H. Locke in Builders of the Canadian Commonwealth, 1923.

13. From the first of J. A. Corry's Massey Lectures, 1971, entitled The Power of the Law.

West was anywhere nearly equal to that of the "wild west" of the United States; but there is too much evidence to deny the fact that our early West¹⁴ was at times quite violent and lawless.

Where is the evidence of this lawlessness? Meager as the writings are on our early West, the evidence abounds if you simply look for it. Here are some of the host of facts and sources:

(i) The Red River Settlement between 1812 - 1821 was the scene of open warfare between the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company; indeed, the situation deteriorated so badly that a royal commission was appointed in 1817 specifically to investigate lawlessness in the North West following

- the burning of the Red River Settlement in 1815
- the burning of Fort Gibraltar in the spring of 1816
- the Seven Oaks Massacre in June, 1816
- the seizure of Fort William by Lord Selkirk in the fall of 1816
- the refusal by Lord Selkirk to obey warrants for his arrest sworn out at the behest of the North West Company

On this period see, J. M. Gray, *Lord Selkirk of Red River*; A. S. Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870* - 71 (the chapter on this period is entitled, *A Period of Violence 1800 - 21*); *A Source Book of Canadian History*, edited by McNaught, Reid and Crowe, revised edition 1964, at pp. 160-62; Governor Bulger's descriptions, contained in E.H. Oliver, *The Canadian North-West, Its Early Development and Legislative Records*, at p. 224; Alexander Ross, *Red River Settlement*, at p. 186; the preamble to *An Act for regulating the Fur Trade and establishing a Criminal and Civil Jurisdiction within certain parts of America*, 1 & 2 Geo. 4 (1821), c. 66 (Imp.).

(ii) Apparently, the law and order situation prior to 1803 had not been entirely satisfactory, if some substance can be given to the preamble of *The Canada Jurisdiction Act*, 43 Geo. 3 (1803), c. 138 (Imp.).

(iii) In the 1860's and early 1870's in the Red River Settlement law and order, and the machinery for administering justice, gradually broke down entirely. On this period see, some of the works mentioned earlier, as well as works on the Riel interlude, as well as Roy St. G. Stubbs, *Four Recorders of Rupertsland* and M. S. Donnelly, *The Government of Manitoba*, at p. 152. The situation in the North West Territories in the

14. I am using the term "early West" advisedly to indicate the period up to approximately the creation and establishment of the N.W.M.P. in the 1870's, for I agree that from this period in time onwards, whether attributable particularly to the N.W.M.P. or not, our West was generally peaceful and law abiding.

early 1870's was also fairly lawless, judging from W. F. Butler's Report in 1870 to the Hon. Adams Archibald.

(iv) Illicit liquor traffic throughout the West, and particularly the outposts of this illegal traffic such as Fort Whoop-up, were a constant problem: See for example a letter of the Rev. G. A. McDougall of Edmonton, in 1874, to the Hon. D. A. Smith (Manitoba Archives).

(v) The Cypress Hills Massacre of 1873 was similar to the illicit liquor traffic in that it involved primarily Americans; however, the fact remained that it took place on Canadian soil largely due to the ungoverned situation which prevailed.

What is my point? It is simply that, rather than perpetrating myths, in the interest of instilling Canadians with a strong sense of their own worthy identity as distinct from that of the violent Americans, we ought to face up to the fact that our past has known some periods and incidents of violence and injustice. The stupidity of vulnerable myths is that once they are punctured, a credibility gap may develop, and thus from this point of view it should be obvious that the dissemination of a misleading or abridged version of our history, that ignores some of the conditions and incidents which we might wish to forget, is shortsighted.

In concluding this review, I leave you with one question and one summary remark. I wonder who was the "son of one of Calgary's most prominent lawyers",¹⁵ with whom Pearl Miller established a liaison, who is incongruously left unnamed? And finally, while this book is not a gem, such as for example Pierre Burton's book *Klondike*, which I could recommend without any reservation, I feel that I can recommend this book to devotees of Western Canadian history.

CAMERON HARVEY*

THE PRICE OF INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE

By Philip C. Jessup; (Columbia University Press), 1971; viii, 82 pp.

In embarking upon a review of the printed record of a series of specially-commissioned lectures, the reviewer immediately meets a literary dilemma. Does he treat his subject matter primarily as a printed text, or rather as a set of lectures? Upon his resolution of this problem, much will turn. In choosing the first course, the reviewer risks committing injustice to the author; credit due for the orator's art—an inflection, a

15. P. 153.

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