

and felt and experienced during the war” (p. 13). Those looking for how children experienced or dealt with loss, or what their domestic situation consisted of when their fathers’ were fighting abroad, will be disappointed. To the author’s credit, much of the book’s limitations stem simply from a lack of source material. Fisher is well aware of these evidential limitations, stressing when necessary that it is simply impossible to know for sure what impact literature had on readers’ perception and understanding of the Great War (pp. 174–175). In the few cases where the evidence is available, the author does provide some children’s commentaries on the books in question (p. 17).

These limitations should not detract from the otherwise exceptional qualities of the book. The content as provided in the educational material, children’s literature, and those letters that have survived, do suggest that the noble and sacrificial qualities of the war were abundant in children’s surroundings. It is certainly probable but far from certain that children were to view the war and their own personal losses within these parameters. The limits of the analysis and the fascinating findings should encourage historians of the First World War to consider the child’s perspective and draw attention to any newfound evidence on the subject.

There is little disputing that the messages about the First World War that contemporary authors provide to children are substantially different than those of the period, and unlikely to have found their way into those classrooms. These findings raise important questions as to how the war should be taught to new generations of Canadians. On the one hand Fisher certainly does not want us to return to the glorification or trivialization of war found in the various children’s stories of the period (p. 258). On the other hand, the proper historical perspectives make sense of the nation’s response to war. In addition to being an important book for anyone interested in the Great War’s memory or homefront studies, the conclusions are significant to novelists and educators. They stress the importance of fostering proper skills such as historical perspective in our students.

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Boundless Optimism: Richard McBride’s British Columbia. Patricia Roy. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2012. Pp. 411.

That great proponent of biography, Sir Leslie Stephen, explained that a biographer should not only be able to master all details of the circumstances in which the subject of the biography found himself but should treat the subject with empathy, warts and all. Given these essentials, even principles, this biography, on British Columbia's famed native son, Sir Richard McBride, is less than satisfying. Whereas it may well be that the absence of insider information and even tattletale gossip is missing from the corpus of documentation, it is also fair to say that little or no creative attempt is made to fill in the gaps and to imagine the state of mind and the circumstances in which McBride found himself. The age in which British Columbia's famed son flourished was truly the gilded age, with little restraints placed on freedom exercised by capitalists and politicians. Even the press of the day lived rather free from constraint. McBride stood as a colossus in the political economy of the age, and was at the centre of power. He knew how to employ supporters such as William Bowser, H.E. Young, and Fred Fulton to effect, and indeed they were strong men in power. They did much of the heavy lifting of political office, giving the impression that McBride may have been a bit of a lightweight, though this seems improbable and unconvincing. After all, he held the portfolio as Minister of Mines. The years of McBride's undoubted power and influence coincided with the last years of *Pax Britannica* and the early years of the Great War. An immense dark cloud had fallen over the fortunes of the British Empire. British Columbia was bound to be affected.

McBride was a mere thirty-three when, on 1 June 1903, he became premier. He was returned to power in the elections of 1907, 1909, and 1912. "It was he," writes the mini-biography of the man in *British Columbia from the Earliest Times to the Present, Volume IV, 1914*, "who won for the conservative party such a glorious victory in this province." Later he formed a Liberal-Conservative alliance. Like many another head of a province in Canada he called for "better terms," and in 1906 he walked out of the Dominion-Provincial conference. Typical of his times, he was disinterested in Aboriginal issues. He was hugely involved in patronage. He was a self-proclaimed "Britisher" to the core, and no apology need be made on that score inasmuch as British Columbia is one of the legacies of the British Empire and its political affiliation much more closely connected to London than to Ottawa in McBride's time (and long afterwards). McBride and the fellow British Columbians of the age fit the parameters laid down by

Sir Charles Dilke in the Victorian classic *Greater Britain*, and to some degree he has an affinity with Australian state premiers or the Prime Minister of New Zealand or the Dominion of Newfoundland. But if political affinity brought ties of empire so, too, did financial links. Here the theories and practice of “gentlemanly capitalism,” so ably developed by historians Peter Cain and A.G. Hopkins in their new theory of imperialism, would have provided scholarly ballast. What was the financial link between the City of London and British Columbia’s capitalists, banks and entrepreneurs? The stability of British Columbia’s economy, the emergent resource industries, the burgeoning transportation systems of steam navigation and railways, and the marine resources of this economy (notably canned salmon, minerals and lumber) made the province an attractive location for secure investment. American investors were also making inroads in mining and railways particularly. Above all, shipping and railways, both capital intensive in their needs, fitted well into the prevailing ethos of empire—and the technological developments of the age.

McBride was manager and fixer in these scenarios, and perhaps far from McBride having to be a booster for the BC economy perhaps he was on the receiving end of pressures for development. What gifts and favours came his way? How did the local fit in with the global? How did being British advantage British Columbians? Did loyalty to Empire have special economic benefit such as preferred bond rates in the City of London? By the time McBride seized the reins, the influence of the Hudson’s Bay Company had long since passed, and the new corporate world had been thrown wide open. Robert Dunsmuir’s empire attests to this. McBride resisted free trade with the United States; he stood for Canadian protectionism and east-west trade. McBride represented his class, and he was visible and vocal in proclaiming it. That he was opposed to Asians and illegal immigration placed him naturally at the centre of opinion that counted, and it must always be remembered that attempts at Asian exclusion were fundamentally based not necessarily in terms of race but in the protection of jobs, and driving the agenda was whites seeking jobs in the face of cheaper labour. McBride, probably more than any other Canadian premier, understood the “naval question.” Across the Pacific lay Von Spee’s East Asiatic Squadron. The British had left the Esquimalt base in Canadian hands, and they had brought to an end the Pacific Station and withdrawn the cruisers, which had been the first line of defence for the Pacific Province since the 1840s.

While the Laurier Liberals dithered and the Borden Conservatives were hamstrung by the Liberal-dominated Senate, McBride acted in concert with Sir Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, to provide a modicum of security in the form of two submarines. The whole would seem like a comedy had not the circumstances been so close to the visceral mark, and Von Spee left British Columbia alone, destroyed British naval units at Coronel, and went down in his flagship at the Battle of the Falkland Islands. These were great days, with great events, and somehow the perils of the moment seem absent here.

Perhaps the foremost statesmen for Western Canada, McBride attended the coronation of King George V and Queen Mary. In 1912 he was created a Knight of the Cross of St. Michael and St. George. The University of California conferred the degree of LL.D upon him in 1913. He had risen to the pinnacle of acclaim. But could he sustain his powerful state? Ottawa offered no attraction to him. Perhaps tedium and boredom set in, with human distractions social and medical. London gave him an out.

Resigning as Premier, he became Agent General for British Columbia in London, duly advancing the commercial links of empire and pulling the strings of commerce (of which we crave to know more). He became an adornment in England, and was knighted—an advancement that his native province rejoiced in. He rubbed shoulders with the great and the good at the centre of Empire while the war waged in France and Flanders. He supervised the construction of British Columbia House, Lower Regent Street. He lived last years in London, perhaps appropriately. The author has mined the newspapers of the age. Various family papers and thin-entry diaries that were made available almost too late for the author to use evidently proved arid and ineffectual sources. Medical records, unavailable or unsought for, might have yielded a greater knowledge of the forces influencing the premier. Here David Owen, *In Sickness and In Power: Illness in Heads of Government during the last 100 Years* (2008) shows what might be done. Last years of British Columbia's great son ended in a whimper rather than a bang. Frail health haunted last months, and he died in 1917 in London. He was cremated at Golders Green but when his ashes were interred at Victoria's Ross Bay Cemetery, Lady McBride failed to make an appearance. Why? The research demonstrated in this book will guide future biographers and students of history. The inner McBride is far from portrayed in this book thus

making all the events and developments of the age in which he played such an essential part seem far more trivial than in fact they were. McBride had control of a vast empire, and we need to see him as a functioning and visionary emperor. To this reviewer, at least, it seems as if a grand opportunity has been lost.

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Verdun: The Longest Battle Of The Great War. Paul Jankowski. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. Pp. 324.

War presents historians with an array of unique challenges. Indeed, Michael Howard described how the study of war evokes a complexity that supersedes simple recounting of battles: “War has been part of a totality of human experience, the parts of which can be understood only in relation to one another. One cannot adequately describe how wars were fought without giving some idea of what they were fought about.”² In *Verdun*, Paul Jankowski, a professor of history at Brandeis University, seeks to investigate this totality of human experience by balancing military, social, and cultural history to reframe the enigmatic and bloody battle that unfolded through the majority of 1916.

Through the book’s eleven chapters, Jankowski investigates a sound and fundamental question about Verdun: “Why attack a place of uncertain strategic and imaginary symbolic significance, and attack it so fiercely?” (p. 15) To explicate this inquiry, he mixes the “old history with the new, the cold calculus of terrain gained and shells expended and lives lost with the depths of human experience on both sides” (p. 8). He also attempts to place Verdun in the larger social and cultural context of the First World War in order to explain how Verdun gained such an important and symbolic status.

At the time, combatants and civilians from Germany and France did not recognize the specific importance of Verdun when fighting began on 21 February 1916. The Chiefs of Staff, Falkenhayn of Germany and Joffre of France, regarded the Verdun area of operations as of secondary importance and possibly a diversion from some important

² Michael Howard, *War in European History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), ix.