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**Review of *The Loner: Three Sketches of the Personal Life and Ideas of R. B. Bennett, 1870-1947* By P. B. Waite**

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*The Loner: Three Sketches of the Personal Life and Ideas of R. B. Bennett, 1870-1947.* By P. B. Waite. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992. Foreword, preface, introduction, black and white photographs, illustration credits, notes, index. xiv + 110 pp. \$30.00 cloth, \$15.95 paper.

The task of rehabilitating the reputation of former Canadian Prime Minister R. B. Bennett is a formidable one. Nevertheless, that is P. B. Waite's goal in *The Loner*, a set of three "sketches" of Bennett's life. Originally given as the Joanne Goodman Lectures at the University of Western Ontario in 1991, these sketches encompass Bennett's earliest years at Hopewell Cape and the Miramichi, his years as a lawyer and rising politician in Calgary, and his years in Ottawa. *The Loner* is not, however, another biography of R. B. Bennett, according to Waite, but an attempt to explain "the personal side of R. B.'s life, his character, his ideas, and, where I can, what went into the making of both. . . . I have taken R. B. himself as centre, and left the rest for the time being." Given the dearth of papers that Bennett left, such a task is, at best, extremely difficult.

The book's three sketches present a driven and ambitious man preoccupied with success to the exclusion of all else. Waite contends that Bennett was a product of his early environment as both his mother and the Methodist Church inculcated him with ambition and a strong work ethic. What is notable in this early sketch is that we are presented with the environment of his youth: a combination of the Methodist Church doctrine of the period and an approximation of what his mother, the Wesleyan Methodist Henrietta Stiles Bennett, might have been like. From this patchwork construction of early influences, Waite goes on to argue that Bennett's subsequent single-minded ambition caused him to be terminally lonely, a theme reiterated throughout, from his days as a child at Hopewell Cape to his final retirement in England.

Waite also explores Bennett's commitment to those he thought were being victimized by

authority, in discussions of such topics as Workmen's Compensation, Unemployment Insurance, and the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act, and attempts to soften the traditional view of Bennett by showing the "scrupulousness" of his money making activities. These discussions, combined with the portrait of loneliness that is encompassed by the book as a whole, stand as Waite's attempt to rehabilitate the image of R. B. Bennett. Ultimately, however, the text is founded not in Bennett, but in the circumstances surrounding him. What we come away with after reading *The Loner* is not an empathetic sense of Bennett, or even a sense of Bennett as a fully developed person, but a series of sketches that are both hazy and unsatisfying.

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