

Book review

Author chronicles friendship between 'Mitch and Mike'

By CYNTHIA M. SMITH
Journalist Peter Stursberg, master of the oral history tradition, has produced another brisk biography that compliments his lively volumes on Diefenbaker and Pearson. His 10th book provides a fitting description of what Stursberg describes as the Damon and Pythias relationship of two of Canada's most prominent public men, Roland Michener and Mike Pearson.

Stursberg's latest work, Roland Michener: The Last Viceroy (McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 237 pages, \$27.50), might be more appropriately subtitled "Mitch and Mike," for it is, in essence, the chronicle of a long and loyal friendship that began on the Oxford University hockey team where the two young scholarship winners from Canada, both sons of Methodist clergymen, forged a lifelong friendship that crossed political party lines. Lester (Mike) Pearson chose academe, the diplomatic corps and was recruited to the Liberal Party; Roland Michener chose law, Bay Street and a cabinet post in the Ontario legislature under Tory premier George Drew, whom he later followed to the federal House.

After a somewhat confusing and disjointed introduction, the book swings into high gear and is as interesting for its description of Ontario and federal politics as it is for its portrayal of Michener.

We are given a sympathetic portrait of an optimistic man whose prominence as a Bay Street lawyer and an Ontario Tory cabinet minister was not to be continued in Ottawa where he languished as a backbencher and, in his own words, did "nothing spectacular..." The hoped for cabinet post never came, mainly due to John Diefenbaker's strong antipathy to the patrician Michener, who had remained quiet during the Tory leadership campaign. Diefenbaker assumed (correctly in this case) that those who were not enthusiastically for him were against him. Rescued from the ignominy of the back bench, Michener served for five years as Speaker of the House of Commons.

He and his ambitious, bilingual wife Norah tried their best to elevate the Speakership from being considered a consolation prize for those who didn't quite make cabinet to a post of distinction. As Speaker, he enjoyed the respect of all parties but less from the press.

Norah Michener was as keen on the post as was her husband and was so often in the House that she was given the malicious sobriquet of "Madame Speaker" by the press corps. In between her elegant entertainments, she found time to write books of protocol for the wives of MPs. Had the discussions of creating a permanent Speakership ever come to fruition, Michener would have sought it. His years as Speaker were those he cherished most.

RESCUED

The Tories slid to minority government in 1962, then the Liberals, under Pearson, won the 1963 election. Mitch was rescued by his good friend Mike. He was offered the post of High Commissioner to India, which both Michener and Pearson saw as a good neutral position from which to rise to the governor generalship. After Georges Vanier's death in 1967, Michener was appointed governor general and the last third of the book is devoted to these years in which pomp and protocol rendered the position akin to that of viceroy.

It is alleged that Mitchell Sharp resented the attention being paid the vice regal couple on their famous grand tour of the Benelux countries, which overshadowed his own role as Minister of External Affairs. He pressured Pierre Trudeau, who succeeded Pearson as prime minister, to lower the profile of the position. The Micheners last major overseas extravaganza was a trip to Iran.

After that, official visits were confined to Canada.

As governor general, Michener faced three major political crises, including the fatal Monday night in February, 1968, when, with Pearson relaxing on a Caribbean beach, the Liberals failed to maintain sufficient attendance to keep a majority in the House and were defeated by the Tories on a tax bill (Pearson's rage and Tory leader Robert Stanfield's honor, which put the economic stability of the country ahead of politics, led to the avoidance of an election and the continuance of the government). Another was the October Crisis of 1970 when Michener was forced to invoke the War Measures Act. The third and most trying involved the formation of the Trudeau minority government, elected on Oct. 30, 1972, when Stanfield was but two seats away from asking to form a Tory minority government.

Liberally sprinkled with anecdotes, quotations and personal reminiscences, Stursberg's book warmly portrays Canada's most famous jogger (although it is much less kind to his wife). Few men can claim to have a mountain in the Rockies named after them. Fewer still could climb that mountain at the age of 80. This is an important addition to the shelf of political books about the Diefenbaker, Pearson and early Trudeau years. Political buffs will enjoy it.

—Cynthia M. Smith was the editor of Sir John A: An Anecdotal Life of John A. Macdonald, and associate editor of the Oxford Book of Canadian Political Anecdotes.

OUR LANGUAGE

Step up increases or raises, as in "step up production." If anyone tries to use step up incorrectly, put your foot down.

The highest point or summit is the acme. This spelling clue just came to me: reverse the first two letters of came for acme.

Something dappled is marked with small spots of a different color than the background. Here's a juicy clue: the middle of dappled is apple.

Forfend wards off or prevents. To fend off any misspelling of this verb, note that forfend ends with fend.

OUR LANGUAGE AD-VICE: Sometimes you can win an Ad-Vice Award without using a word. Take, for example, the menu of a carryout restaurant that offers onion sandwiches for an extra "\$.10¢" per slice. That's one symbol too many. The dollar sign with a decimal point shows that "10 cents" is meant; the symbol ¢ for "cents" is therefore redundant. Choose one way to make "cents," or your merchandise may seem overpriced.

Q. I keep seeing "greatful." Is that acceptable now as a spelling of grateful?

A. No, it isn't. The adjective grateful, meaning "thankful" or "appreciative," has been around for four centuries. "Greatful," however, exists only as a mistake. There used to be other variant spellings, including greatfull, but we can all be grateful that there's only one correct spelling now: grateful.

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