

Quill and Quire (March, 1975)

**LESTER PEARSON: Diplomat and Politician.**  
Bruce Thordarson, Oxford, \$4.95 paper ISBN  
0-19-540225-1, 245 pp. illus.

In a previous work (*Trudeau and Foreign Policy*) the author showed his ability to examine a single question in great detail. In this book, Bruce Thordarson proves he is equally adept at the even more difficult task of synthesizing a mass of information into a short, concise and highly readable account of the former Prime Minister's life. He has not tried to write a definitive biography, choosing instead to illustrate the character and personality of Pearson. Both well-known and original anecdotes are derived from his familiarity with appropriate secondary works and experience as one of Pearson's students at Carleton University.

However, like many reporters who hated to write anything bad about someone as nice as Mike Pearson the author sees him as that modest, likeable, slightly sloppy character who somehow managed to represent to many people the essence of Canada and Canadianism. The author does not explain how this unassuming fellow worked his way up the ladder as civil servant, diplomat, politician and Prime Minister. Or, how he always managed to land on his feet despite fundamental policy disagreements with MacKenzie King and others over which many men would have resigned in a huff.

Although most of the book deals with Pearson the politician—his tangles with Diefenbaker, the flag debate, the scandals, the Centennial, the Canada Pension Plan, the unification of the armed forces, etc.—the author concludes that Pearson's place in history will rest mainly on his work as an architect of the West's collective security system and his reputation as a dedicated internationalist. This may be a valid conclusion but perhaps it reflects not so much the contents of the book as the author's view, shared by many Canadian foreign affairs specialists: that Canada is really a hub of the international community and not just an appendage to the U.S. Gary Levy